A Comparative Study of Psychotic and Nonpsychotic Stalking

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A comparative analysis of psychotic versus nonpsychotic stalking is presented. Archival files of 25 forensic subjects whose alleged criminal offenses met a legal definition of stalking behavior were studied for demographic characteristics, stalking dynamics, psychosocial history, and current psychological variables. Although nearly one-third of all subjects had an Axis I psychotic disorder and were delusional, only one of these subjects had erotomanic delusions. The psychotic subjects' pursuit of victims was associated with other delusions and symptoms of psychosis. Nonpsychotic subjects tended to exhibit an Axis I disorder (usually major depression, adjustment disorder, or substance dependence) as well as a variety of Axis II personality disorders. The nonpsychotic subjects' pursuit of victims was influenced by various psychological factors, including anger and hostility, projection of blame, obsession, dependency, minimization and denial, and jealousy. Psychotic subjects visited the victims' homes significantly more often than nonpsychotic subjects. Nonpsychotic subjects made more verbal threats and "acted out" violently more often than psychotic subjects. While all subjects exhibited some similarities in stalking behaviors and demographic variables, including childhood attachment disruptions, no single profile of a "stalker" emerged. These findings provide information about factors contributing to stalking violence, as well as diagnostic issues that should be considered in the assessment and treatment of this criminal population.

In 1990 California became the first state to enact antistalking legislation. Criminal stalking is currently defined as "any person who willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows or harasses another person and who makes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for his or her safety, or the safety of his or her immediate family."[1] California's antistalking statute served as a precedent for the antistalking laws that were subsequently enacted throughout the United States and Canada. While antistalking statutes are alike in purpose, their

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definitions and components vary among jurisdictions.[2]

As a corollary to the legal definition of stalking, Meloy[3] coined the term "obsessional following" based on clinical studies completed by Zona *et al.*[4] and by Meloy and Gothard.[5] Both studies investigated forensic samples of individuals who engaged in "an obsessional, or abnormal long-term pattern of threat or harassment directed toward a specific individual" (p. 896).[4]

While there is no single definition of stalking, the common theme among both the legal and clinical descriptions of this behavior is a pattern of *repeated* unwanted pursuit that the victim perceives as harassing or threatening. Stalking behavior ranges from acts that would appear benign and nonthreatening if they occurred in a different context (e.g., sending gifts or letters) to acts that are overtly threatening (e.g., verbal threats to harm the victim) or violent (e.g., assault, rape, murder). Because stalking is defined as a pattern of harassing behavior that may take on many forms, one would expect that there is no single profile of a "stalker." Stalkers do exhibit a broad spectrum of behaviors and psychodiagnostic traits.[3]

Meloy and Gothard[5] compared the psychiatric diagnoses of a sample of "obsessional followers" with a random sample of offenders with mental disorders. Most obsessional followers (85%) had both an Axis I and Axis II diagnosis. Obsessional followers were not significantly different from mentally disordered offenders on Axis I, and the most common Axis I disorders in obsessional followers were substance abuse or dependence (35%) and mood disorders (25%). On Axis II, the mentally disordered offenders most often had an antisocial personality disorder, while the obsessional followers were more likely to have a narcissistic, borderline, or histrionic personality disorder. Passive-aggressive, schizoid, and obsessive-compulsive personality traits were also present in some obsessional followers.

Zona *et al.*[4] also found obsessional subjects to have a variety of Axis I and Axis II diagnoses. One notable finding among both of these studies[4, 5] was that only 10 percent of subjects had a primary diagnosis of delusional disorder, erotomanic type.

Harmon *et al.*[6] concluded that although the diagnosis of delusional disorder, erotomanic type, may be a factor in obsessional harassment, other types of mental illness can result in harassment of "loved ones," and other delusional disorders can result in "non-erotic" harassment (p. 196). *Harmon et al.*[6] classified obsessive, harassing subjects based on two types of attachment: (1) the affectionate/amorous type pursues the object for amorous reasons, but may become hostile or aggressive in reaction to perceived rejection; and 2) the persecutory/angry type pursues the object because of real or perceived injury, generally related to a professional relationship. Meloy also identified a nondelusional disorder of attachment that may occur in obsessional followers called "borderline erotomania."[7] After being rejected, the borderline erotomanic continues to pursue the unrequited love object because separation is viewed as abandonment, and rejection elicits abandonment rage.[7–9]

Despite the small proportion of stalkers who have a primary diagnosis of delusional disorder, erotomanic type, the psychiatric literature has focused on erotomania.[10–16] In a review of all studies in which subjects were clearly defined as criminal obsessional followers, Meloy[3] was able to identify only five studies[4–6, 9, 17] that did not focus exclusively on subjects who had a diagnosis of erotomania.

One would expect that psychotic stalkers who have lost contact with reality would exhibit clinical characteristics, behaviors, and motivations that are different from nonpsychotic stalkers. Given the absence of studies on the behavioral and psychosocial differences and similarities between psychotic stalkers (whether or not they had erotomanic delusions) and nonpsychotic stalkers, the current investigation is a comparative study of psychotic stalkers versus nonpsychotic stalkers.

Method

The study consisted of a nonrandom sample of convenience. Subjects were selected by requesting archival data of individuals who exhibited stalking behavior from 24 forensic examiners in the state of Missouri, two of whom were employed by the Department of Forensic Services at Western Missouri Mental Health Center, Kansas City, MO. The two forensic examiners at Western Missouri Mental Health Center provided 22 cases to the study and an additional three cases were provided by other forensic examiners in Missouri (N = 25). All of the examiners were blind to the methods and hypothesis of this study.

The forensic files of the 25 adult subjects were located and examined in detail. All of the subjects had been ordered by the Missouri circuit courts to undergo pretrial mental evaluations between March 1990 and July 1995. All of the subjects, except for one individual who was under a civil commitment as mentally ill, had been referred by the circuit courts for an assessment of competency to stand trial and criminal responsibility. With the exception of two subjects with incomplete examinations, all subjects had been evaluated by licensed clinical psychologists or board-certified psychiatrists who were also forensic examiners.

Case files were included in the study if subjects were facing criminal charges related to a pattern of behavior that met the Missouri statute for the crime of "stalking" or "aggravated stalking." The Missouri statute states that "any person who purposely and repeatedly harasses or follows with the intent of harassing another person commits the crime of stalking."[18] Under the Missouri statute, "harasses" means "to engage in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that serves no legitimate purpose, that would cause a reasonable person to suffer substantial emotional distress, and that actually causes substantial emotional distress to that person."[18] "Course of conduct" is defined as "a pattern of conduct composed of a series of acts over a period of time, however short, evidencing a continuity of purpose," excluding constitutionally protected activity such as picketing or organized protests.[18] The Missouri

statute also defined a more serious offense of "aggravated stalking," which encompasses the above definition of stalking as well as "a credible threat" with the intent to cause another person reasonable fear of death or serious physical injury.[18]

Most case files included a pretrial psychological evaluation, a forensic social work investigation, referral information from the circuit court, police investigative reports, and medical or psychiatric records. Because archival data were used, some social history and diagnostic information were not available in a few cases. Although two of the subjects had not completed the pretrial mental evaluation, their case files included a forensic social service assessment, court referral data, police investigative reports, and past psychiatric records.

Descriptive information regarding the subjects' stalking behavior, demographics, and psychosocial history was examined in detail. Initially, a small sample of case files was reviewed in order to evaluate prominent psychological themes, patterns, and interrelationships in the data. A code book was developed in an attempt to quantify the themes and patterns of stalking generated in the review of the cases. This code book was used with all case file information, and when inadequacies in the code book were revealed, it was modified as needed and the data were recorded. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and range of ages, as well as the frequencies and percentages of various psychosocial traits and behaviors, were computed. A Chi-square analysis compared stalking behaviors of psychotic and nonpsychotic subjects. Significance was set at $p \leq .05$. The independent variable, psychotic or nonpsychotic at the time of the stalking behavior, was determined by the forensic examiners' conclusions regarding the mental status of subjects at the time of the stalking related criminal offenses. Based on clinical evidence, the forensic examiners concluded that more than one-third (35%, n = 8) of the stalkers were psychotic and the remaining (65%, n = 15) stalkers were not psychotic at the time of the stalking behavior. Information utilized by the examiners in determining the mental status of subjects at the time of the stalking behavior included forensic interviews with subjects and descriptions of the subjects' behavior provided by collateral sources, including police reports and witnesses. Although diagnostic information was not available for two of the subjects, they are included in the nonpsychotic group because there was no indication in the record that they were psychotic or that psychotic symptoms contributed to their stalking behavior. These two subjects, however, were excluded when computing percentages.

Results

Demographics Because there were no significant differences in demographic information among the psychotic and nonpsychotic subjects, the following description of demographics refers to the overall group of subjects. Consistent with the observations of subject demographics in recent studies,[3–6] we found that stalkers tend to be older and well-educated men with a poor employment history. The overall sample ranged in age from 24 to

69 years old, with an average age of 38. Two older subjects (ages 61 and 69) skewed the mean age. The median age of subjects in this study was 34. The nonpsychotic subjects were older (M = 39) than the psychotic subjects (M = 35). The majority of subjects, 84 percent (n = 21), were men and 16 percent (n = 4) were women. There may have been more male stalkers in this sample because men are more prone to violent behavior than women and are subsequently encountered in a forensic context. Sixty-four percent (n = 16) were Caucasian, 32 percent (n = 8) African-American, and 4 percent (n = 1) Nigerian.

Most subjects in the overall sample (92%, n = 23) had at least a general equivalency diploma or high school education. The highest educational level achieved by 64 percent of the subjects was beyond high school: 16 percent had obtained technical training, 36 percent completed some college credits, 4 percent graduated from college, and 8 percent completed graduate or professional programs. The overall educational achievement of subjects suggests average or above average intellectual functioning in this population. As Meloy and Gothard[5] observed, the stalker has the "capability of being quite resourceful and manipulative" in his or her pursuit of the victim (p. 261). One subject in this study stated that he read books detailing how to "spy" on others so that he could use the techniques to monitor his victim's activities. For example, he said that he gave his telephone card to the victim and then visited every pay phone in a large city in order to map pay phone numbers so that when he received his calling card bill, he could determine the times and places where the victim had been.

Consistent with the Meloy and Gothard[5] finding that most obsessional followers had "very unstable work histories" (p. 259) and the Mullen and Pathé[17] finding that many (43%) stalkers were unemployed, 60 percent (n = 15) of the current sample of stalkers were unemployed at the time of the alleged offense and 56 percent (n = 14) had unstable work histories. Close to one-half of the overall sample (48%, n = 12) lost their jobs within seven months of the onset of their stalking behavior. More (88%, n = 7) of the psychotic stalkers had unstable work histories than did the nonpsychotic stalkers (41%, n = 7) ($\chi^2 = 4.74$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

Stalkers were also unsuccessful in establishing or maintaining intimate relationships. Similar to findings in previous studies[4-6] that most stalkers had never married or were not married at the time of the stalking behavior, we found that stalkers had an absence of significant intimate relationships. Only 8 percent (n = 2) of the stalkers were involved in an ongoing intimate relationship at the time of the evaluation. With regard to marital status, 52 percent (n = 13) of the overall sample of stalkers were never married, 12 percent (n = 3) were married but separated from their spouse, 32 percent (n = 8) were divorced, and 4 percent (n = 1) were widowed. Of those subjects who had married, 58 percent (n = 7) were married once, 33 percent (n = 4) were married twice, and 8 percent (n = 1) were married three times. Almost three-quarters

(72%, n = 18) of the subjects were separated or divorced from a spouse or recently separated from an intimate partner. Sixty-four percent (n = 16) had biological offspring.

Stalking Dynamics When considering the stalker's relationship to the victim, percentages are based on 26 victims because one subject stalked two victims, his mother and father. More than three-quarters (81%, n = 21) of the victims were female. All subjects pursued victims of the opposite sex, with the exception of the man who stalked his parents. Most of the victims (58%, n = 15) were either a spouse divorced or separated from the subject or a former intimate partner (no legal marriage); 23 percent (n = 6) of the victims were an estranged spouse and 35 percent (n = 9) were a former intimate partner of the subject. The remaining victims fell into four groups: five (20%) were a casual acquaintance, three (12%) were a parent, two (8%) were public figures, and one (4%) was a stranger (nonpublic figure) to the stalker. One notable finding of this study, which has not been demonstrated in previous stalking studies, was that two subjects stalked one or both parents. This difference may be an anomaly or the result of a selection bias because individuals harassing parents might not have been classified as stalkers in other studies. Both psychotic and nonpsychotic stalkers pursued casual acquaintances and parent(s); three psychotic and two nonpsychotic individuals stalked a casual acquaintance; and one psychotic and one nonpsychotic subject stalked his parent(s). Although no psychotic stalkers pursued public figures, two nonpsychotic stalkers pursued public figures (a mayor and a journalist). The only stranger stalked in this sample who was not a public figure was pursued by a psychotic individual.

Nonpsychotic stalkers pursued an estranged spouse or intimate partner more often (71%, n = 12) than psychotic stalkers (38%, n = 3). Although this finding was not statistically significant, the pattern clearly demonstrated that nonpsychotic subjects most often pursued former intimates and psychotic subjects most often pursued individuals with whom they never had intimate relations, such as a casual acquaintance or stranger.

The minimum number of harassing contacts made with the victim and the duration of stalking behavior are conservative estimates because records could not document the precise number of contacts or duration of the stalking behavior. Stalking contacts were grouped into four ranges: 16% (n = 4) of stalkers contacted victims less than ten times; 32 percent (n = 8) contacted victims 10 to 19 times; 32 percent (n = 8) contacted victims 20 to 49 times; and 20 percent (n = 5) contacted victims more than 80 times. One subject contacted the victim over 200 times, and another subject contacted the victim over 600 times. The total duration of stalking was less than one month for 24 percent (n = 6) of the subjects, one month to one year for 56 percent (n = 14) of the subjects, and more than one year for 20 percent (n = 5) of the subjects.

All stalkers made multiple and various contacts with their victims. Table 1 represents the types of contacts, along with the number and percentage of psychotic

Table 1
Stalking Contact Behavior

Contact	Total (N = 25) n	%	Psychotic (N = 8) n	%	Nonpsychotic (N = 17) n	%	χ^2
Person/person	21	84	6	75	15	88	
Contact third party	17	68	6	75	11	65	
Phone calls	17	68	6	75	11	65	
Visit to home	16	64	8	100	8	47	6.62*
Letters	13	52	3	38	10	59	
Watch/observing	12	48	3	38	9	53	
Visit to work/school	10	40	2	25	8	47	
Following	7	28	1	13	6	35	
Gifts/objects	6	24	1	13	5	29	
Vandalism	5	20	3	38	2	12	
Sexual proposition	4	16	1	13	3	18	
Verbal threats to:	19	76	4	50	15	88	4.36*
Harm victim	17	68	4	50	13	76	
Harm third party	5	20	1	13	4	24	
Vandalize	3	12	1	13	2	12	
Total physical violence	8	32	1	13	7	41	
Physical assault victim	6	24	1	13	5	29	
Physical assault third party	4	16	0	0	4	24	
Kidnapping	3	12	1	13	2	12	
Murder	2	8	0	0	2	12	
Sexual assault	1	4	0	0	1	6	
Weapon used	9	36	1	13	8	47	

*$p < .05$. All other chi-square comparisons were nonsignificant.

stalkers and nonpsychotic stalkers and the total sample of subjects who made the contacts. Chi-square tests were used to investigate the differences between the contact behaviors of psychotic and nonpsychotic subjects. The majority (84%, n = 21) of subjects made person-to-person contact with the victim. While all (n = 8) of the psychotic stalkers visited the victim's home, only 47 percent (n = 8) of the nonpsychotic stalkers visited the victim's home ($\chi^2 = 6.62$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Of the 16 subjects who visited the victim's home, half entered the home and two attempted entry.

More than three-quarters (76%) of the subjects made verbal threats toward the victim; 68% made threats to harm or to kill the victim; 20 percent made threats to a third party (e.g., relative, friend, or intimate partner of the victim); and 12 percent made threats to vandalize the victim's property. The nonpsychotic subjects made verbal threats significantly more often than the psychotic subjects ($\chi^2 = 4.36$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

Almost one-third (32%) of the subjects acted out violently by physically harming the stalking victim or a third party (an intimate partner or relative of the stalking victim). The overall base rate of violence in the current study was slightly higher than the violence rate of 25 percent reported in the Meloy and Gothard[5] study and the violence rate of 21 percent in the Harmon *et al.*[6] study. In a review of previous studies of obsessional following or stalking, Meloy[3] found only four subjects of a total 180 subjects (2%) who committed a homicide as a direct result of obsessional following. Two of the subjects in our study murdered their stalking victims, for a homicide incidence of eight percent.

The nonpsychotic group showed a nonsignificant trend to act out violently more often than the psychotic group. While only one psychotic subject physically assaulted the stalking victim, seven nonpsychotic subjects acted out violently, five of whom committed more than one violent offense. The violent acts of nonpsychotic stalkers included five physical assaults of stalking victims, four physical assaults of a third party (e.g., a relative or an intimate partner of the victim), two murders of victims, and one sexual assault of the victim. In addition, two nonpsychotic subjects and one psychotic subject kidnapped their victims. With the exception of one physical assault of a victim who was the subject's mother, all incidents of violence involved victims who previously had an intimate relationship with the subject.

More than one-third (36%, n = 9) of the overall group of stalkers had a weapon at the time of the alleged criminal offense. Only one psychotic stalker carried a weapon, a metal pipe, which was obtained in the course of property damage, suggesting that the weapon possession was unplanned. In contrast, close to one-half (47%, n = 8) of the nonpsychotic stalkers possessed weapons that were more lethal and required more calculation: seven had firearms and one had a knife. The finding that nonpsychotic stalkers had a weapon in their possession at the time of the alleged offense more often than psychotic stalkers approached significance ($\chi^2 = 2.82$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$).

Meloy[3] examined the frequency of threats and subsequent violence of obsessional followers in three large studies.[4–6] He found that while approximately one-half of the obsessional followers made threats, only one-fourth acted on their threats with violence, resulting in a false positive rate of 75 percent. In our study, more than three-quarter (76%) of the stalkers made threats and close to one-third (32%) of subjects acted on their threats, resulting in a false positive rate of 68 percent. The true-positive and false-positive rates of violence following threats in the current study exactly match the Harmon *et al.*[6] study, which found that 32 percent of subjects acted on their threats with violence and 68 percent of subjects did not follow through with their threats of violence. Five of the eight subjects who acted out violently in the current study used a weapon (one used a knife and four used firearms). The other three subjects used their hands to grab or hit the victim of the physical assault.

At the time of the stalking-related offense, 68 percent (n = 17) of the subjects

had been served a court order (e.g., order of protection or restraining order) prohibiting their contact with the victim. These findings suggest that these stalkers were persistent in their pursuit of the victim despite legal interventions. All of the victims who were former spouses or former intimate partners of the subject had obtained court orders prohibiting the subject's contact. Approximately one-third (32%, n = 8) of the stalking victims had obtained previous court orders prohibiting contact; more than one-third (36%, n = 9) of the stalkers had previously violated a court order prohibiting their contact with the victim. Thirty-two percent of the stalkers (two psychotic and six nonpsychotic) had a history of physically assaulting their estranged intimate partner or spouse and, in one case, a parent. However, information regarding stalkers' history of physical abuse of the victim may have been underreported by the subjects or collateral sources.

At the time of evaluation, subjects presented with a variety of formal criminal charges related to their stalking behavior. Almost one-third (32%) of the subjects were charged with either stalking (n = 2) or aggravated stalking (n = 6). Violent offenses were alleged in 28 percent of the cases: three subjects were charged with assault of the stalking victim, two with assault of an intimate partner or relative of the stalking victim, and two with murder of the victim. Only one psychotic subject was charged with a violent offense: assault. With the exception of this psychotic stalker, all subjects who were formally charged with assault or murder had previously threatened to harm or kill the victim or a significant other of the victim. Five subjects faced specific charges related to the use of a weapon. The remaining subjects had various charges related to stalking: harassment (20%, n = 5), violation of an order of protection (28%, n = 7), burglary (20%, n = 5), violation of an adult abuse order (8%, n = 2), felonious restraint (4%, n = 1); trespassing (4%, n = 1), tampering with a witness (4%, n = 1), and probation violation (4%, n = 1).

In summary, although the difference in the incidence of violence by psychotic stalkers and nonpsychotic stalkers was not statistically significant, the trend clearly suggests higher levels of threatening behavior, weapons possession, and violence in the nonpsychotic stalkers. The violence of the nonpsychotic stalkers was more organized and goal-directed; the violence of the psychotic stalkers was disorganized and unplanned.

Psychosocial History Meloy[3] theorized that obsessional following or stalking is a pathology of attachment. The current study is the first to empirically examine disturbances in early relationships or attachments that may contribute to the development of a disturbed pattern of attachment in adult stalking. Childhood experiences, such as separation from a primary caretaker, abuse by a parent, or emotional absence of a parent due to their mental illness or substance abuse, may contribute to a *preoccupied* pattern of attachment in adulthood.

Less than one-half (37%, n = 9) of the subjects were raised by both parents, and the majority (63%, n = 15) of the subjects experienced a change or loss of a

primary caretaker during childhood (based on 24 subjects). The same proportion (63%) of psychotic stalkers versus nonpsychotic stalkers experienced a change in primary caretakers. Close to one-half (42%, n = 10) of the subjects were six years or younger at the time of the change or loss of a primary caretaker (based on 24 subjects). Two of the subjects were between ages 7 and 12 years and three of the subjects were between ages 13 and 16 years at the time of the initial change or loss of a primary caretaker. Changes in caretakers occurred twice for three subjects and three times for one subject. A change or loss of primary caretakers most often (n = 11) was a result of a separation or divorce of biological parents, and in one case the separation of adoptive parents. After the separation of their parents, most subjects had infrequent or no contact with the parent who was not living in the home. Other reasons for a change or loss of a primary caretaker were the parent's or caretaker's death (n = 3) or incarceration in prison (n = 2) or the abandonment of the subject to a relative (n = 2). One subject lived in a residential treatment facility from ages 11 through 18, and one subject lived independently from age 14. Seven of the subjects had a primary caretaker, for part of their childhood, who was not a biological parent. Although family history of mental illness and chemical dependency may have been underreported in the data, five subjects had a parent who was mentally ill (based on 16 cases), and seven subjects had a parent with substance abuse or dependency issues.

Childhood behavioral problems were reported for more than one-half (52%, n = 13) of the subjects (based on 24 cases). Four subjects were described as socially withdrawn children. Information regarding childhood abuse was provided by subjects and may have been distorted. More than one-half (55%, n = 11) of the subjects reported that they experienced abuse as children (based on 20 subjects). A similar proportion of the nonpsychotic stalkers (53%, n = 8) and psychotic stalkers (60%, n = 3) experienced childhood abuse. All of the subjects with a history of abuse during childhood were victimized by a parent or primary caretaker and four subjects were also abused by other adults. Various types of childhood abuse were reported: nine subjects were physically abused, three were sexually abused, seven were verbally or emotionally abused, and one was neglected.

As might be expected with the intergenerational transmission of abuse, many (55%, n = 6) of the subjects who were abused during their childhood perpetrated abuse during adulthood. Additionally, 6 subjects who did not have a history of childhood abuse were the perpetrators of abuse during adulthood. Of the 12 subjects who had a history of abusive behavior, 11 were physically abusive, 3 were sexually abusive, and 4 were verbally or emotionally abusive. Information regarding the subject's abuse of others was obtained by the subject's report or collateral sources and may have been underreported.

While head injuries had been sustained by 41 percent (n = 7) of the nonpsychotic subjects, none of the psychotic subjects had experienced a head injury. Five non-

psychotic subjects sustained head injuries (four with loss of consciousness) as adults and two sustained head injuries with loss of consciousness as children. Although these findings suggest that organic deficits may contribute, to some extent, to the behavior of some nonpsychotic stalkers, this area needs to be investigated further.

More than one-half (63%, n = 15) of the stalkers had a criminal history prior to the current criminal charges (based on 24 cases). A similar proportion of nonpsychotic subjects (61%, n = 11) and psychotic subjects (57%, n = 4) had a criminal history. More than one-third (38%, n = 9) of the stalkers had a history of violent criminal offenses (based on 24 cases): seven subjects (five nonpsychotic and two psychotic) had previous convictions for assault and two nonpsychotic subjects had previous convictions for murder (based on 24 cases). These results suggest that although the overall group of stalkers tends to have a legal history, nonpsychotic stalkers are more likely to have a history of violent criminal offenses.

Most subjects (72%, n = 18) had been previously diagnosed with a DSM Axis I psychiatric diagnosis: 32% (n = 8) had a previous mood disorder, 28% (n = 7) had a previous psychotic disorder (two of these subjects are in the nonpsychotic group in this study), 28 percent (n = 7) had a previous situational or adjustment disorder, and 28 percent (n = 7) had a previous substance abuse or dependence diagnosis. Only three subjects had a previous diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. Other Axis II personality disorders previously assigned to subjects were borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, paranoid personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, personality disorder-not otherwise specified, passive-aggressive personality disorder, and organic personality disorder (frequencies were two subjects with borderline personality disorder and one subject with each of the other personality disorders).

Most (80%, n = 20) stalkers had either an outpatient or an inpatient psychiatric treatment history; 40 percent (n = 10) had received inpatient treatment and 56 percent (n = 14) received outpatient treatment. A slightly higher proportion of nonpsychotic subjects (82%, n = 14) than psychotic subjects (75%, n = 6) had a psychiatric treatment history. Most (72%, n = 18) stalkers had been previously treated with psychotropic medications in the past. Only four stalkers had a history of chemical dependency treatment.

Current Psychiatric and Psychological Variables Table 2 represents the psychiatric diagnoses which were assigned to subjects at the time of the forensic evaluation.

When considering the overall group of psychotic and nonpsychotic subjects, most (78%, n = 18) were diagnosed with a DSM-III-R Axis I psychiatric disorder (based on 23 subjects). Only one of the stalkers was diagnosed with a delusional disorder with erotomanic features, confirming the findings of Meloy and Gothard[5] and Zona *et al.*[4] that few stalkers are diagnosed with erotomania. None of the psychotic stalkers had a diagnosed Axis II personality disorder, but this may be due to a systematic bias among the diagnosticians.

Table 2
Psychiatric Diagnoses of Stalkers[a]

DSM III-R Psychiatric Disorders	Psychotic (N = 8)	Nonpsychotic (N = 17)
Axis I psychiatric disorders		
No diagnosis	0	5
Unknown diagnosis	0	2
Psychotic Disorders		
Psychotic disorder-NOS	4	0
Schizophrenia	2	0
Delusional disorder, unspecified type with erotomanic features	1	0
Mood disorders		
Major depression/not psychotic	0	2
Major depression/psychotic features	0	1
Bipolar disorder manic/psychotic features	1	0
Other disorders		
Illicit drug abuse or dependence	1	3
Alcohol abuse or dependence	1	1
Adjustment disorder	0	3
Intermittent explosive disorder	0	1
Axis II personality disorders		
Antisocial personality disorder	0	3
Dependent personality disorder	0	2
Borderline personality disorder	0	2
Narcissistic personality disorder	0	2
Personality disorder-NOS (with antisocial and narcissistic traits)	0	1
Personality disorder-NOS (with dependent and narcissistic traits)	0	1

[a] No tests of significance were done due to small sample sizes, increasing the probability of Type I error.

The majority (67%, n = 10) of the nonpsychotic stalkers had a DSM-III-R Axis I psychiatric diagnosis, usually major depression, adjustment disorder, or substance abuse/dependence. Although one subject from the nonpsychotic group had a diagnosis of major depression with psychotic features at the time of the forensic evaluation, he was not included in the psychotic group because the onset of his mental illness developed while he was incarcerated for the stalking offense. In contrast to the psychotic stalkers who had an absence of personality disorders, most (73%, n = 11) of the nonpsychotic stalkers were diagnosed with an Axis II personality disorder. The nonpsychotic stalkers were most often diagnosed with a cluster B or dependent personality disorder.

Although few of the psychotic and nonpsychotic subjects received a primary diagnosis of substance abuse or dependence, most (64%, n = 16) had a history of substance abuse or dependence. One-half (n = 4) of the psychotic subjects and 71 percent (n = 12) of the nonpsychotic subjects had a history of substance abuse or dependence. Immediately prior to the

criminal offense, five of the subjects had used alcohol and three of the subjects had used illicit drugs (one subject used phencyclidine and marijuana and two subjects used methamphetamine). The three subjects who used illicit drugs just prior to the criminal offenses acted out violently; two subjects who used illicit drugs were charged with assault and one was charged with murder.

Most of the stalkers (80%, n = 20) experienced psychosocial stressors within seven months prior to the onset of the stalking behavior: 11 subjects experienced psychosocial stressors less than two months prior to the onset of their stalking behavior; and 9 subjects experienced psychosocial stressors two to seven months prior to the onset of stalking. The most common psychosocial stressors experienced by stalkers were losses: one-half 48 percent (n = 12) experienced the breakup of an intimate relationship or marriage, and 48 percent (n = 12) faced the loss of employment. More than one-quarter (28%, n = 7) of the stalkers faced the potential loss of a child; two stalkers were involved in custody battles, three had restricted visitation of their children, one questioned his paternity of a child, and one discovered he had a child and retroactive child support payments. Two subjects were attempting to cope with the potential loss of a parent who was seriously ill. One subject was recently released from prison and had no job. Eleven subjects experienced more than one of the above psychosocial stressors prior to the onset of stalking. The above findings suggest that stalkers who have experienced a recent loss attempt to compensate through pursuit of the stalking victim. Others may experience intense feelings of anger toward the victim, whom they blame for the loss, and consequently harass or stalk the victim as a means of revenge.

While the pursuit of victims by psychotic stalkers appeared to be primarily associated with symptoms of psychosis, including delusions and disorganized behavior, the pursuit of victims by nonpsychotic stalkers was influenced by various maladaptive psychological factors. Table 3 shows the types of delusions exhibited by psychotic stalkers and the primary psychological factors presented by nonpsychotic stalkers.

Seven of the psychotic subjects were delusional at the time of the alleged offense and at the time of evaluation. While only one subject had delusions of an erotomanic nature, the remaining subjects had delusions of a persecutory and/or grandiose nature. In four of the cases, the subject's delusions involved the stalking victim. For example, one subject believed that the victim, his former girlfriend, practiced voodoo and cast a spell on him to make him infatuated with her. Interestingly, one delusional subject stalked a woman because he believed that she was his wife and her children were his children, a delusional misidentification syndrome. The victim actually had the same name as the subject's wife, who had left him one month prior to the onset of the stalking behavior. This subject also had ideas of reference supporting his beliefs that the mayor had kidnapped his wife and children. The only subject from the psychotic group who was not exhibiting delusions at the time of evaluation had a

Table 3
Psychological Factors and Delusions Influencing Stalkers[a]

	Psychotic (N = 8)		Nonpsychotic (N = 17)	
Psychological Factor or Delusion	n	%	n	%
Psychological factors				
Anger and hostility	0	0	11	65
Projection of blame	0	0	9	53
Obsession	1	13	8	47
Dependency	0	0	8	47
Minimization or denial	0	0	6	35
Jealousy	0	0	4	24
Fear of abandonment or loss	0	0	3	18
Mistrust	0	0	3	18
Sexual preoccupation	1	13	2	12
Need for power and control	0	0	2	12
Perceived mistreatment by public figure	0	0	2	12
Distress over custody battle	0	0	2	12
Delusion				
Total subjects with delusions	7	88	0	0
Delusions of persecution	4	50	0	0
Delusions of grandiosity	2	25	0	0
Delusions/erotomanic features	1	13	0	0

[a] No tests of significance were done due to small sample sizes, increasing the probability of Type I error.

diagnosis of schizophrenia, disorganized type. Due to this subject's disorganized thinking at the time of the evaluation, the examiners were unable to assess whether or not she was delusional at the time of the alleged offense. However, records suggest that this subject was preoccupied with pursuing a sexual relationship with the victim, who was her attorney several years prior to the onset of her stalking behavior.

The data in this study were qualitatively examined for recurrent themes surrounding the psychological or intrapsychic functioning of stalkers that contributed to their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and behaviors toward the victim. All of the nonpsychotic subjects exhibited one or more of the psychological themes presented in Table 3. Many of the nonpsychotic subjects (65%, n = 11) exhibited extreme anger and hostility toward the victim and projection of blame on to the victim (53%, n = 9). Obsession, defined as "persistent ideas, thoughts, impulses, or images"[3, 4] regarding the victim, while typically a characteristic of stalking, was evident in 47 percent (n = 8) of the nonpsychotic subjects. Close to one-half (47%, n = 8) of the nonpsychotic subjects evidenced themes of dependency on the stalking victim. More than one-third (35%, n = 6) of the nonpsychotic subjects minimized or denied their stalking behavior. Other prominent psychological factors influencing the stalker's behavior were jealousy of the victim's actual relationship with others or

the subject's perception of the victim's relationships (24%), fear of abandonment or loss (18%), mistrust of others (18%), sexual preoccupation with the victim (12%), need for power and control in relationships (12%), feelings of mistreatment by public figures (12%), and distress over a custody battle (12%).

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first comparative study of stalkers who were psychotic and not psychotic at the time of a stalking related criminal offense. A number of important differences between the two groups emerged. All psychotic stalkers were diagnosed with one of a variety of DSM-III-R, Axis I, psychotic disorders; nonpsychotic stalkers, in contrast, were most often diagnosed with major depression, adjustment disorder, or substance dependence on Axis I. Although the research on stalking has historically focused on the delusional disorder of erotomania, only one subject in the study had a delusional disorder with erotomanic features.

While there was an absence of personality disorders among the psychotic subjects, close to three-quarters of the nonpsychotic stalkers were diagnosed with a personality disorder. Consistent with the findings of Meloy and Gothard,[5] cluster B or dependent personality disorders were typically exhibited by stalkers. We also found empirical support for Meloy and Gothard's[5] hypothesis that obsessional followers or stalkers are less likely to exhibit antisocial personality disorder than other criminal offenders, since only three subjects in the current study were diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder (12%), a finding almost identical to the 10 percent of subjects with antisocial personality disorder in their sample of obsessional followers. Meloy and Gothard interpreted this difference from an attachment perspective, explaining that obsessional followers are less likely to exhibit an antisocial personality disorder, a disorder of "chronic emotional detachment" (p. 261). On the contrary, an obsessional follower is "more likely to have an intense and pathological attachment to his object of pursuit, particularly in the face of continuous rejection" (p. 152).[3]

The pursuit of victims by psychotic stalkers was primarily related to psychotic symptomatology such as delusional beliefs or disorganization. With one exception, all psychotic stalkers were delusional at the time of the alleged offense and at the time of evaluation. While one of the subjects had delusions of an erotomanic nature, the remaining subjects had delusions of a persecutory or grandiose nature. One notable finding is that one-half of the psychotic stalkers did not incorporate the stalking victims into their delusions; the stalking behavior of these psychotic subjects appeared primarily related to their disorganized thinking and behavior. In contrast to Harmon *et al.*[6] who found many subjects to have persecutory delusions involving a real or imagined injury related to a professional relationship, only one of the psychotic subjects in the current study had a previous professional relationship with the victim (an attorney who represented her several years earlier), and this subject's

pursuit was motivated by a desire for an intimate relationship with the victim.

The nonpsychotic subjects exhibited a variety of psychological or intrapsychic factors accompanied by intense affect (often hostility toward the victim) that contributed to their relentless pursuit of the victim. Meloy[3] suggested that obsessional followers with pathological narcissism may experience intense anger or rage as a defense against feelings of shame, humiliation, or sadness. The current study found that most stalkers experienced one or more psychosocial stressors involving a significant loss (i.e., breakup of an intimate relationship, custody battle, seriously ill parent, unemployment). Such losses may have challenged the stalker's sense of self-worth and led to the use of anger as a defense against feelings of sadness, grief, or shame. The stalker's anger and hostility toward the victim or others are likely to have inflamed or escalated the harassment or stalking. One subject related that his "pride was hurt" when the victim broke off her relationship with him and began dating another man. Regarding the offensive and threatening letters that he sent to the stalking victim, he stated, "I took my humiliation, anger, and hate onto a piece of paper. I wanted to get rid of it." Another subject exhibited splitting and "went from loving her (the victim) and wanting to be with her . . . to hating her and wanting to kill her." This subject's thoughts were dominated with obsessions regarding the victim and her new boyfriend. He was obsessed with seeking revenge and eventually murdered the victim.

Consistent with Meloy and Gothard's[5] finding that obsessional followers tended to use projection and attributed aggression to the victim, many of the nonpsychotic subjects in the current study clearly projected blame onto the victim. The overt irrationality of the projected blame was exemplified by one stalker in the current study who murdered the victim and blamed her for the incident because she angered him by obtaining a restraining order prohibiting his contact. Meloy and Gothard[5] also found that projective identification was evident in subjects who reported feeling victimized and harassed by the stalking victim. A striking finding was that one of the nonpsychotic subjects in the current study, as well as one in the Meloy and Gothard[5] study, sought a restraining order against the victim. The subject in this study felt victimized after the police let the victim into his (the subject's) home to obtain possessions. He could not acknowledge that he had done anything criminally wrong, even though he had called a prosecutor's office threatening to kill the stalking victim. He felt justified in his actions because the victim had his possessions. Consistent with the findings of Meloy and Gothard[5] that many obsessional followers minimize or deny their pattern of behavior, more than one-third of the nonpsychotic stalkers minimized or denied their stalking or criminal behavior, and many lacked remorse for their actions.

While most stalkers, by definition, have an obsession with the victim, close to one-half of the nonpsychotic stalkers showed prominent themes of obsession or preoccupation with the victim. One sub-

ject in the current study related that he became increasingly infatuated and "obsessed" with the victim, his former girlfriend. He stated "she was [like] a drug . . . that I needed . . . my high was being with her . . . I felt like dying when not with her." After the victim obtained an order of protection prohibiting this subject's contact, he murdered her. Regarding the obsession, he said "I let it run my life." He explained "I lost it all because of my obsession . . . This obsession was bad . . . It was like being in heaven and in hell at the same time."

Close to one-half of the nonpsychotic subjects evidenced dependency, often accompanied by reactive depression and suicidal ideation due to the breakup of the intimate relationship with the victim. For example, one subject who was diagnosed with adjustment disorder and dependent personality traits, had a history of dependency on girlfriends and extreme distress accompanied by suicide attempts when they left. He stalked his former girlfriend, stating he would "do anything" to get her back. He subsequently kidnapped the victim at gunpoint and told her that he loved her and could not live without her. He pleaded with the victim to do him "a favor" by stabbing him through the heart with a knife.

In summary, the stalking pattern of psychotic subjects is dominated by delusional beliefs about the activities and motives of the victim. The nonpsychotic subjects, on the other hand, are best described as personality disordered, and their pursuit of the victim is characterized by obsessional ideation, dependency, narcissism, projection, and uncontrolled anger. These differences between psychotic and nonpsychotic stalkers have important consequences.

First, although the majority of stalkers made person-to-person contact with the victim, the psychotic stalkers were significantly more likely to visit the victim's home than the nonpsychotic stalkers. In fact, all of them did. This finding suggests that psychotic stalkers with impaired reality contact, confusion, and disorganized behavior are more likely to take the risk of actually going to the victim's home and entering the home. In contrast, nonpsychotic stalkers are more likely to be resourceful and make personal contact with the victim in places outside of the home, where the stalker is less likely to be detected or apprehended.

Second, nonpsychotic stalkers made threats significantly more often than psychotic stalkers. This finding may be explained by the fact that nonpsychotic stalkers threatened and pursued former intimate partners more often than psychotic stalkers. Meloy and Gothard[5] also found a significant relationship between threats and prior intimacy, with obsessional followers more likely to threaten a prior spouse or intimate partner than a stranger.

Third, nonpsychotic stalkers acted out violently and used weapons more often than the psychotic stalkers. While seven (41%) of the nonpsychotic stalkers physically harmed the victim (two murdered the victim) and/or physically harmed a significant other of the victim, only one (13%) of the psychotic stalkers physically harmed the victim. While eight (47%) of the nonpsychotic stalkers had possession

of a weapon (seven had a firearm and one had a knife) when stalking, only one (13%) psychotic subject had a weapon (a lead pipe). The nonpsychotic subjects had the resourcefulness to obtain a weapon to use in the course of their threatening behavior. The only psychotic subject with a weapon obtained a lead pipe while vandalizing the victim's home, exemplifying the disorganization of the subject.

The nonpsychotic stalkers may be more likely to threaten and act out violently for two reasons: first, their pursuit of the victim tends to be more emotionally charged, since it is related to attachment issues or feelings of mistreatment by the victim; and second, nonpsychotic stalkers tend to have personality disorders that may contribute to their likelihood of becoming threatening and physically assaultive.

Even though the behavior of both psychotic and nonpsychotic stalkers may meet similar legal criteria for the crime of stalking, the clear and consistent differences observed in this study strongly suggest that these two groups represent two different populations. The psychotic stalker is delusional, relatively disorganized, and may be less dangerous than the nonpsychotic stalker. Treatment for psychotic stalkers should focus on the delusional psychosis. The nonpsychotic stalker is obsessive, focused, angry, and more likely to be threatening and violent. Treatment of the nonpsychotic stalker is likely to be difficult and may require long-term psychotherapy focusing on maladaptive character traits. These findings have important implications for the assessment and treatment of incarcerated stalkers and should be considered in making decisions about conditions of release.

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