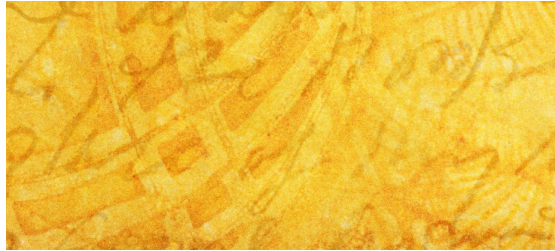


When Physical Security is Not Enough

Responding to people who stalk and threaten

Dr Troy McEwan and Dr Lisa Warren



Threateners and Stalkers

- Occasionally the *usual* methods of dissuading those who threaten to harm and those who stalk the protected fail
- People who don't respond to standard security measures can become a liability and an expense
- New research examining those who stalk, threaten and otherwise harass can be applied to those who stalk companies and corporate figures
- Understanding the psychology behind such behaviour can help you manage it more effectively

Outline

- Knowledge of threateners and stalkers
- The benefit of understanding why they behave in this way
- When and why to call mental health clinicians to help dissuade

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Who is a Threatener?

- Anyone who communicates that they intend to harm?
- Spoken, written, gestured, symbolic (eg: engraved bullet)
- Content – innumerable
- Uttered directly or to a third party

*Warren et al
(2008)*

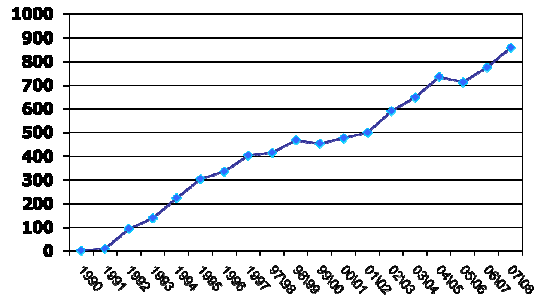
What the research says...

- high risk threateners usually don't threaten their targets
- BUT...high risk threateners almost always tell 'someone' what they are planning
- when that 'someone' tells you – take it seriously
- it remains wise to assess those who do utter direct threats

Frequency

- The throw-away threat is ubiquitous
- Threats generating sufficient fear to prompt reporting are less common
- Reported threats are increasing
 - 30%-50% of victims contact police
 - mental health clinicians increasingly seeing threateners

Frequency of convictions



source: DOJ Sentencing Statistics, Sentencing Advisory Council

Violence

- Prosecuted threateners:
 - within 10 years –
 - 44% violent
 - 5% convicted of homicide
 - 14% reoffended against threat victim (most within months)
- Threateners assessed by mental health:
 - within 12 months –
 - 21% violent
 - 1% killed

Warren et al (2008), Warren et al (in press)

Threateners

- Psychological problems are common among those appearing in court for threatening to kill
 - problems not limited to minor complaints
 - major mental disorders are much more common than in the general community
 - major mental disorders are:
 - schizophrenia
 - major depression
 - bipolar disorder

Warren et al (2008)

Threateners

- Psychological problems are common among those appearing in court for threatening to kill
 - those with a diagnosed disorder are at least twice as likely to physically attack after threatening to kill
 - eg: depression increases the risk of assault 3.5 times
 - those with schizophrenia are four times as likely to kill after threatening to kill
 - substance abuse further increases the risk of attack

Warren et al (2008)

Threateners

- The relationship between mental disorder and violence is not straight forward
- Risk multiples depending on other social and contextual determinants of violence:
 - social disadvantage
 - antisocial peers and supports
 - substance abuse
- Treatment can address all the risks (including the contribution of untreated mental disorder)

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Threateners

- We statistically built a predictive model for violence that showed which threateners are most likely to progress to violence:
 - mentally disordered
 - younger (usually male)
 - substance abusers
 - not always with a criminal record
 - threateners in court without a criminal history were more likely to progress to violence than those with this history
 - this was especially true for those in court primarily for threatening (ie: not a minor part of a more serious violent act)

Warren et al
(2008)

Threateners

- Broader psychological problems can increase risk and are also common, regardless of whether diagnosable mental disorders were present:
 - personality disorder
 - intense and easily aroused anger
 - poor problem solving
 - limited verbal skills
 - tendencies to isolate and fester
 - suspiciousness and sensitivity

Warren et al (in
press)

What is stalking?

- A person engages in a pattern of unwanted communication and contact

EITHER

- With the intention of causing fear/concern

OR

- The behaviour would cause a reasonable person fear/concern regardless of the perpetrator's intention

Corporate stalkers

- We don't know how often corporate figures are targets of stalking but it's thought to be common based on anecdotal reports
- Stalking can easily interfere with the functioning of an organisation, even if the organisation itself is not the primary target.
- We can extrapolate from studies of public figures and victims of stalking in the general community to better understand how to manage stalking that affects corporations.

Relationships between stalker and victim

Personal relationship

- The stalker and victim were in a close relationship (sexual or very close friends) and the harassment begins following the breakdown of that relationship.

Stalking, Threatening and Harassing Public Figures,
2008

Relationships between stalker and victim

Outside the company:

- Strangers with little or no direct connection with the victim who target the company and/or individuals representing the company.
 - E.g. Individual who stalks CEO of bank because he perceives the CEO is directly responsible for his financial losses on money he had invested

Relationships between stalker and victim

Inside the company:

- Employees who target other employees with whom they have some direct contact
 - E.g. employee who targets another employee because they perceive the victim was promoted ahead of them
 - E.g. Worker who targets senior manager with whom they have no direct contact but who they feel has acted wrongly

Why stalk?

Personal relationships:

- REJECTION
 - want the victim back, and/or
 - want retribution for the end of the relationship, and/or
 - want 'an explanation'.

Why stalk?

Outside of personal relationships:

RESENTMENT/REVENGE

- Perceive that the victim has harmed them in some way
- Strong sense of injustice and self-righteousness
- May blame the victim for persecuting them

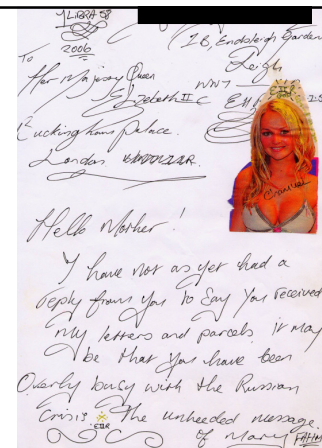
E.g. Disgruntled employees, disgruntled shareholders, unhappy customers, individuals who have severe mental illnesses causing them to fixate on the company

Why stalk? – other relationships

ATTACHMENT OR INTIMACY SEEKING

- Want a relationship with the victim (business, platonic or sexual)
- May believe they have a relationship with the victim even though they don't

E.g. Strangers who see themselves as peers of the victim and want to offer advice, people who are 'in love' with the victim in the context of a severe mental illness



Why stalk?

ATTENTION SEEKING

- 'Pests' who are making public statements or draw attention to themselves for personal reasons
- Representatives of political organisations who use persistent harassment to draw media attention to their cause



Peter Hore

- Serial invasions and disruptions of public events and government business
- Has been imprisoned on multiple occasions
- No evidence of major mental disorder when assessed



Why stalk? – other relationships

CHAOTIC

- Confused presentation, usually due to mental illness
- Can't discern any clear motivation because communications and contacts are so disorganised and disturbed

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Risks in Stalking

- Risk of violence
- Risk of persistence
- Risk of escalating

Risk of violence

- Ex-partners who feel rejected by the victim present the greatest risk of violence
- Research in the general community suggests up to 50% of ex-partner stalkers will use violence as part of their harassment
- Male and female stalkers present an equal risk of violence
- Angry, entitled ex-partners who are uttering threats are at greatest risk of violence, particularly if they have a history of violence.

Risk of violence

Stalkers without a personal relationship to the victim are rarely violent, although they may utter many threats.

Risk of violence

- Indicators of increased risk:
 - Attempting to approach or successfully approaching the victim
 - Stating or implying that they have no other options and/or are willing to take matters into their own hands
 - Talking about detailed plans to kill themselves or the victim (not just a threat, but how, when, where etc)
 - If the person who receives the communication is scared by it

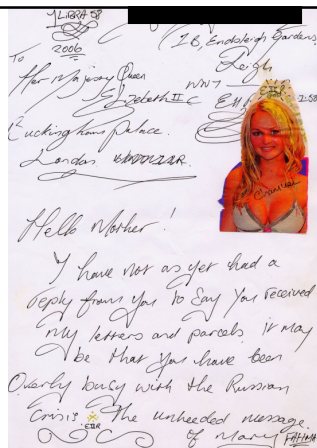
Risk of persisting

- Persistent stalking is costly and can be extremely damaging to victims' and companies' reputations
- Attachment/Intimacy seekers and Resentful/Revenge seekers are usually the most persistent (months → years)
- Rejected stalkers who had a personal relationship to the victim tend to be moderately persistent, and are generally more amenable to legal/security solutions

Risk of persisting

- Strongest predictor of persistent stalking is the presence of psychotic symptoms
- Indicators of potential psychosis and the need for mental health evaluation:
 - anomalies of form (highlighting, multiple exclamation marks)
 - odd or irrelevant attachments
 - incoherent text
 - made-up words and repetitions
 - over-familiarity (eg: expressions of love)
 - querulous persistence

Report of the Fixated Research Group (2006)



Risk of persisting

Other risk factors for persistence

- Ongoing contact
 - E.g. stalker has a legitimate reason to be in vicinity of victim, or there is an ongoing complaints procedure at which both have to attend
- Not abiding by agreements or legal restraints
- Strong sense of entitlement to the victim

Risk of escalating

- Progression of stalking into more intrusive forms of behaviour
- Risk factors:
 - Multiple communications (i.e. more than one phone call, letter, email, fax)
 - Multiple methods of communication
 - Multiple victims (stalking more than one person/organisation)
 - Psychosis
 - Fixation on a person (rather than a cause)

Summary

- Individuals who stalk companies, corporate, and public figures often do so because they are severely mentally ill
- Stalkers who are driven by mental illness and fixation are unlikely to respond to security measures alone
- Understanding the context of the stalking, and the stalker's motivation can help you determine the likely risks involved.

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The mental health model

- Three ways clinicians can augment security:
 - Consultation about individual threateners and stalkers
 - Consultation for victims
 - Consultation about organisational policy and procedures
- ...also advancing practice guidelines for documentation and follow-up

e.g.: practice guidelines provided to specialist TMU police

Guidelines will help determine and document:

- who is at risk (their perception of risk)
 - targeted victim, colleagues, family, even pets
 - victims good assessors of risk posed to them (eg: Weisz et al, 2000)
- context of the behaviour
 - ex-employee, quest for 'justice' or DV in the workplace
- how risk factors interact with each other
 - eg: how a history of suicide attempts increases violence risk

FTAC

- Joint police/mental health intelligence unit
- Purpose: to assess and manage threats to prominent people in the UK from lone individuals (as opposed to groups)
- Approach:
 - structured threat assessment
 - police and mental health interventions
 - repeat assessments
 - continuing management and monitoring
- Each case worked by two staff (detective + clinician)

Farnham & James
(2009)

FTAC

- Evaluates those who inappropriately contact the prominent
- Assertively links them to local services
- Aim: improve the life of the threateners and stalkers as a means of managing the risk to the prominent
- Follow-up evaluation of first 100 cases initially assessed as medium or high risk:
 - High to low: 11
 - High to medium: 10
 - Medium to low: 69
 - Medium to medium: 10

Farnham & James
(2009)

Situation in Australia

- The collaboration of security and mental health is currently under-utilised but growing
- New development of Threat Management Teams in Universities that are based on security and student counselling working together
- Well-established model overseas (eg: LAPD-TMU, FTAC)

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Conclusions

- Mental health can provide a practical addition to security measures among those who threaten or stalk
- Mental health data can help direct security measures
- The collaboration between security and mental health is producing excellent results across the world and is starting to be seen in Australia