

Cyberstalking A Case Study

Culled from the Los Angeles Times

The same networks as those used for the transmission of information, business transactions, banking and gaming also provide a virtual backdrop from which individuals may conduct electronic crimes of varying natures. The nature and extent of Cyberstalking is perhaps more difficult to assess than its terrestrial cousin, given the anonymity and breath of electronic communications.

While the differences between the two forms of stalking must be acknowledged, it is most important to acknowledge that Cyberstalking is fundamentally an extension of the physical act.

Casey (1999) cautions: "the overarching message here is that we should concentrate on the details, the uniqueness and complexity of a case rather than get caught up on typologies, terminology or the fact that we are dealing with a different medium".

The diversity of the problem will only truly be known once a larger number of cases are presented to both researchers and the criminal justice system for examination.

The inability to access technology does not necessarily protect one from the reaches of the Cyberstalker. The following example illustrates how a computer or internet access is not even a requirement to be Cyberstalked.

The Case

The victim met the perpetrator at church, and continually rejected his romantic attempts. The perpetrator, a fifty-year-old security guard, retaliated to her rejection by posting her personal details to the Internet.

These included her physical description, address and telephone number, and even including details about how one could bypass her home security system.

He also posted false rape and gang-bang fantasies to on-line forums. On approximately half a dozen occasions, men arrived at the victim's home in the hope of cashing in on these supposed fantasies. As the victim posted messages to her door stating these requests were false, the perpetrator posted messages on-line stating that these were simply tests to determine who was in fact worthy of her fantasies.

The victim's mother states that she had men coming to her door at all hours of the night, and that she got dozens of calls by men who would leave filthy, disgusting messages.

The victim was eventually forced from her home, suffered from weight loss, lost her job, and developed a fear of going outside of her home (from the L.A. Times Friday the 22nd of January, 1999 and Saturday the 23rd of January, 1999).

The subsequent effects of this behavior on the victim include distinct psychological impairments and behavior change that brought about the loss of the victim's home and job.

While the offender may never have intended for the victim to come to physical harm, the presence of the threat was always real, and the possibility that this harm came through a third party was ever present. Despite issues relating to her personal safety, psychological effects of this harassment are unmistakable.