

CYBERSTALKING

by

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This article is a basic information about the new social pathology phenomenon called cyberstalking; it is supplemented with results of empirical probe investigating the background for this pattern of behaviour in the Czech Republic territory.

INTRODUCTION [1]

According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, technological inventions, one of which is computer, resp. the Internet, cause some of the most dramatic social changes (Marshall 1998).

Cyberstalking is about invasion of privacy with the help of the Internet. As P. Bocij correctly states, „the Internet is a reflection of society, including some of its darker aspects, such as crime.” (Bocij 2004:91) and „the same technology that facilitate our increased privacy have made it possible to invade this privacy by monitoring and recording our behaviour.”(Ben-Ze’ev 2003:459)

CYBERSTALKING [2]

BACKGROUND [2.1]

MODERN LIFE-STYLE [2.1.1]

Background for developing of cyberstalking has similar features to urbane life: people are connected by a system of money, mostly do not know each other, they expect that the other will do them wrong. Natural bonds between people are broken. People became isolated, anonymous, superficial and aggressive. They do not have respect to the other, are ready to humiliate him/her, spy on his/her privacy, even intimacy and use him/her as a thing.

PRIVACY [2.1.2]

The liberal tradition is characterized by a firm separation between public and private spheres. Our society is much more exhibitionist than previous societies, but, still, our sense of privacy and shame is not reduced. „The 1970s and 1980s were marked by an increasing public concern about privacy and the capacity of others to monitor and pry into the lives of fellow citizens.”(Mullen et al. 2000:19) Not only of so called celebrities. The interest but is only superficial, people are looking just for scandals.

So called reality-shows (Big Brother etc.) shift the border between private and public. It's participants are watched permanently, while voyeurs are hidden in their homes, even having power over those whom they watch, with the help of voting. This “household” control is parallel to Orwell's and Foucault's concept of state control over its citizens by watching, monitoring and documenting, as objects, for the purpose of eventual use or punishment. Donna J.Haraway calls controlling gaze from nowhere, capacity of seeing and not being seen, perverse capacity (Haraway 1999).

Today's situation is leading to what is being called surveillance society (Capurro 2005).

Even home, a traditional place of privacy and sovereignty guaranteed, loses these qualities (Alijevová 2001).

HISTORY OF CYBERSTALKING [2.2]

The word cyberstalking is deduced from stalking, which means chasing (animals).

Both are dangerous patterns of behaviour, in the jurisdiction of many states (for ex. the USA, Canada, Australia, the U.K.) judged as crimes.

Cyberstalking is present in the Czech Republic, but unknown as a concept and out of appropriate interest. The case of Dr. J. Payne, from 1998

on, is a good example.¹

Historically older stalking came in use after it was seen as a social problem. In 1989 young actress Rebecca Schaeffer was murdered by her fan and shortly after that three young women by their former partners. The case were medialized and a false idea arose, that celebrities are endangered by psychologically and mentally weak people. Later experiences showed that stalking is a problem of much wider group.

DEFINITION [2.3]

(Cyberstalking is) „Where an individual or a group of individuals contrive to use personal information and the Internet and modern technology to take away another individual's personal rights, freedom and safety usually by covert or anonymous methods, and pursue and monitor the victim in such a manner as to create paranoia and fear within the said victim.“ (Bocij 2004: 8)

METHODS OF CYBERSTALKING [2.4]

Many (cyber)stalkers are motivated by a desire to exert control over their victims.

In many cases, the cyberstalker and the victim had a prior relationship, and the cyberstalking begins when the victim attempts to break off the relationship.

Online harassment and threats may be a prelude to more serious behavior, including physical violence.

Perpetrator may be remote geographically, act in one state against victim in another state, which still is practically unpunishable.

Cyberstalkers use multimedia and/or photographs, videos and audio-tapes (threatening, pornographic/obscene), to demonstrate detailed knowledge about the victim(s), send gifts, sexual comments, threaten to injure victims and/or others, expose private information about victim to others,

¹ During his active politics carrier, in 1998, RNDr. J.Payne got numerous messages from an unknown lady. First letters, then e-mails and SMS, expressing her affection to him. He did not reply. When the quantity of messages became to bother him, he expressed his refusal to any communication with her. She then continued in writing, but now reproaches. With no reply from Dr.P. she even contacted his work representatives, his church representatives, his family, even international institutions. With the help of media the monitored meeting between Dr. P. and the lady was held. They exchanged words of mutual disappointment. The TV programme finished without any solution. According to the personal report, cyberstalking was not finished even in spring 2006. In : Progr. TV Nova „Na vlastní oči“ 2. 8. 2005

impersonate the victim, sabotage victim's reputation, direct others to the victim in threatening ways, order good in the name of victim, bugg victim's car, home, office by listening or/and recording device, commit identity theft etc. (McFarlane, L. and Bocij, P. 2003, Bocij, P. 2004)

One of the new threats is the market in medical databases, which is growing. Then the identity of the client is appropriated and the one is treated as object without liberty, dignity and respect. Personal data may be then manipulated and misused (Fox 2000, Robinson 1997, Nissenbaum 1997).

Stalking and cyberstalking are called a „paradoxical crime“. Paradoxical because most (cyber)stalking practices are rather an exaggeration or an extreme version of normal social interaction. Social behaviour crosses the line to become (cyber)stalking, when that behaviour causes fear, apprehension or harm in the other person (Gani 2000).

PORNOGRAPHY [2.4.1]

Communication media have modeled attitudes and behavior, created new vocabulary and symbols, promoted norms for personal interactions and have actively impacted the social construction of human sexuality worldwide (Goodson et al. 2001).

This chapter deals solely with the kind of pornography which is distributed as a part of cyberstalking and was made totally without knowledge and approval of victim.

Internet as a place of extraordinary freedom became rapidly a tool for distributing of pornography, which is for some a source of prosperous business (Revel 2000).

Young people, too, can be responsible for manufacturing an distribution of pornography and so stimulate the industry, which profits from abuse of people (Bocij 2004).

Internet pornography is rarely the topic of academic discourse. Still, abuse of victim's privacy for making pornography of it, as one type of cyberstalking, is not considered. On the Internet some authors regard adult Internet pornography as a business stimulus to e-commerce, whilst others regard it as but an extension of women's conventional exploitation (privacy violations physical or otherwise of bodies, watching of and gazing at bodies).

Difficulty of removing all copies of the images of victims from computer

networks means that their images have spread so far on the Internet that they may be there for ever, gazed upon by others and their abuse is going to continue for the rest of their life (Adam 2002).

THIRD-PARTY CYBERSTALKING

(CYBERSTALKING BY PROXY) [2.4.2]

Is a typical method of cyberstalking, differently from stalking Third-party cyberstalking means involving other people into cyberstalking. Corrupted employees in telephone companies may be hired by cyberstalker to monitor victim calls, private detectives commissioned to locate the victim and monitor her/his moves by sophisticated means of surveillance, including helicopter (Mullen et al. 2000:173).

Third party cyberstalking is not just a question of individual psychology but also the wider culture in which individuals are situated.

Cyberstalking transgresses privacy in two ways. The original perpetrator becomes a voyeur, someone who invades by watching and looking. The gaze of anonymous Internet user is still largely unconsidered.

Private voyeuristic gazing can open up into surveillance, which can then be seen as a type of 'official' gaze.(Mentioned in the chapter „Privacy“) Those who are the subject of a gaze on the Internet adjust their activity, i.e. they are manipulated, their freedom is stolen.

Third party cyberstalking is largely underestimated by experts (Adam 2002).They also fail to grasp the potential that the Internet offers for cyberstalking by impersonation. The effect is not only to defame the victim but, in addition, because the postings contain some kind of pornographic invitation, they caused others to display threatening behavior toward the victim. The victim's telephone number and address are given, unwanted visits are made. So the cyberstalker can hide behind the anonymity of the Internet and, at the same time, can trigger real-life stalking behavior in others.Victim's privacy is decreased and perpetrators enjoy more privacy than would have been possible in the real-world version of stalking (Adam 2001).

MOTIVATION OF CYBERSTALKERS (BOCIJ 2004: 92-106) [2.5]

The research still seeks for motivation to cyberstalking. Many cyberstalkers are „normal“people, who would never commit any crime in the real world.

They are seen as decent in their work, by their neighbours. Often they have high education, good job, no criminal record.

TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS [2.5.1]

- A. Increased access to technology
- B. Increased familiarity with technology
- C. Ability to remain anonymous
- D. Ability to disguise activities
- E. Ability to destroy evidence of deviant activities

SOCIAL FACTORS [2.5.2]

- A. Disinhibition
- B. Deindividuation
- C. Dehumanizing others
- D. Perceptions of power and physical and emotional
- E. Formation of strategic identities
- F. Lack of policing
- G. Formation of deviant groups

TYOLOGY (MCFARLANE, BOCIJ 2003) [2.6]

VINDICTIVE CYBERSTALKERS [2.6.1]

use strong threats, 1/3 had a previous criminal record, and 2/3 victimised others before, cyberstalking started over a trivial debate or discussion, cyberstalkers had a medium to high level of computer literacy, utilised the widest range of ICT methods, incl. disturbing messages, bizarre comments, intimidating multimedia images and/or sounds. These cyberstalkers probably have severe personality disorder.

COMPOSED CYBERSTALKERS [2.6.2]

cause constant annoyance and irritation to the victims, have no intention to establish a relationship but wish to cause distress, generally issue threats, they had a medium to high level of computer literacy, none had a psychiatric history, some of the perpetrators went on to conventionally stalk their victims.

INTIMATE CYBERSTALKERS [2.6.3]

tried to gain the attention, the computer literacy of these cyberstalkers was from fairly low to high, utilised e-mail, web discussion groups and electronic dating sites, demonstrated detailed knowledge about victims.

They divide into two sub-groups:

- a) ex-intimates: presented a combination of behaviours ranging from messages aimed at restoring their relationship to threats on their former significant other or friend. The harassment started online. In a number of cases the ex-intimate had impersonated their ex-partner online, and used behaviours that ranged pretending to be their ex-partner in chat-rooms to buying goods via credit card transactions. There were no cases of offline stalking occurring after cyberstalking.
- b) the infatuates : were all seeking to form a closer relationship with the victim. Communication was much more intimate, but when they were rebuffed, their messages were more threatening. There was a case of an infatuate stalking a victim offline then.

COLLECTIVE CYBERSTALKERS [2.6.4]

are individuals or groups, harming groups.

Types :

- a) revengeful
- b) pump and dump (individual profit)
- c) ideological
- d) unwitting
- e) (group) profit
- f) competitive

CONSEQUENCES OF CYBERSTALKING (ABRAMS ET AL. 1998, AVINA 2002, BOCIJ 2004, CARMODY 1994) [2.7]

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES [2.7.1]

Psychological harm experienced by victim is often overlooked. There still is no research on cyberstalking consequences, but they are similar to those of stalking.

Long time exposure to persecution and threats leads to serious psycholo-

gical consequences - distress, intense sense of intrusion and violation of private domain without escape.

78% of victims had diagnosable psychiatric disorder, 31% suffered repeated suicidal thoughts.

The most serious psychosomatic health consequences are incurable or fatal diseases caused by stress like cancer or multiple sclerosis.

The therapist who does not understand the patient's reactions to the harassment or who gives the message that the victim has created the problem himself/herself risks revictimizing him/her.

SOCIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES [2.7.2]

Cyberstalking severely influences interpersonal, occupational and generally social functioning. Victims control the information kept about them by various people and groups, change personal details (tel. number, address, even name), remove number from tel. list, alter their routines, discontinue activities, switch jobs, find new school for their children, relocate, cease to communicate with family and friends. These changes often prove unsuccessful.

Relatives, friends and colleagues often become secondary victims. Many times victim spent a great deal of energy, time and money just trying to stay alive.

GENERAL STATISTICS [2.8]

In this contribution we do not deal with children and companies as victims.

The research of cyberstalking is not enough developed yet to give representative figures.

As for stalking, the researches came to these results :

In the United States, one out of every 12 women (8.2 million) and one out of every 45 men (2 million) have been stalked at some time in their lives. (Attorney General to the Vice President 1999) and we can suppose, that the situation in Europe is similar. (Čírtková, Červinka 2004).

Concerning cyberstalking , the estimation is as follows :

„The annual number of cyberstalking victims across the world could range from 474000 to 18.45 million“ (Bocij 2004:47)

Half of the victims are aged less than 40.

The most victims are in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, the U.K., the

Netherlands.

Half of the victims were harassed by a stranger.

One third of cyberstalking cases changed into cyberstalking .

Cyberstalking cases lasted from 2 weeks to 38 months, (as for stalking it was 1 day to 40 years) (Bocij 2004).

The majority of reported cyberstalking cases involve women as victims and men as perpetrators (Adam 2001).

Among cyberstalkers there also are children and youngsters. In many of these cases cyberstalking is connected with sexual crimes. Up to a third of all sex crimes in the U.K. are carried out by young people (Bocij 2004).

Most of victims do not report their case, out of uncertainty, that they will not be taken seriously (Attorney General to the Vice President 1999).

GENERAL RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL PROBE [3]

made by interviewing experts on disciplines related to sociology, representatives of population and therapists (totally 22 respondents).

Stalking is an unknown term in the Czech Republic, but there are experiences with its components (namely related to divorce) among respondents. The role of victim is accredited mostly to celebrities and the role of perpetrators to ill people.

Cyberstalking is totally unknown concept, but therapists meet danger to children via the Internet and phone.

Identity theft is known, but not experienced.

Interest in privacy: according to most respondents, loss of privacy is unavoidable, interest in privacy is superficial, gossip-like, technology worsens it.

Internet: respondents know about the effect of anonymity, easy possibility of obtaining personal data, endangering of privacy, readiness of proxies to involve into cyberstalking. Control of children on the Internet is insufficient - parents do not realize the danger, schools do not warn children properly.

Use of technology: some respondents agree with prevention (but even negative experience with it is reported). Many are scared about misuse of television and want controlled sale of it. An interesting question arose: who has „control over control“?

Criminal pornography on the Internet: no experience was reported.

Consequences of cyberstalking - quality of therapy: bad quality in similar cases is experienced.

CONCLUSION [4]

Cyberstalking is a very dangerous pattern of behaviour.

Using ICT by pathological person is underrated, therefore not enough researched, but for the time being limited amount of research in several countries has shown, that cyberstalking is a real social problem.

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