**Abstract**

Objective. The present study had two main aims: to investigate how ordinary people conceptualize stalking behaviors and to deepen whether respondents' gender and attitudes toward women are related to the way the phenomenon is described and understood. The research was conducted from the perspective of social representation.

Method. Three hundred fifteen university students from Torino who had never experienced stalking completed a questionnaire investigating their knowledge about the phenomenon and the levels of sexism. The participants also provided their free definition of stalking.

Results. The results showed that the participants identify the causes of stalking in distorted outcomes of romantic relationships, view its aim as controlling the victims, and attribute psychological pain to victims. Women tended more to identify stalking with ambiguous behaviors; hostile sexists did not recognize psychological consequences in victims. The representations of stalking showed an opposition between morbidity and aggression in the stalking definition, associated with the endorsement of sexist attitudes toward women. Specifically, benevolent sexism favored a conception of stalking as an annoying but not truly dangerous event.

Conclusion. It would be useful to reconsider the contents of prevention initiatives: they have to be directed more toward acting on the symptoms and causes of stalking.


Keywords (new): sexism – intrusive behaviors – social issue - prevention - aggression

Gender, Sexism and the Social Representation of Stalking:

What Makes the Difference?

## Introduction

According to Westrup (1998), stalking is characterized by a constellation of behaviors that "(a) are directed repeatedly toward a specific individual (the "target"), (b) are experienced by the target as unwelcome and intrusive, and (c) are reported to trigger fear or concern in the target" (p. 276). Although this phenomenon has existed for a very long time, it is quite a new legal concept. The first antistalking legislation was introduced in 1990 in the USA (California Penal Code, Sect 649.9 Stalking, 1990), while in Europe it first appeared in 1997 (De Fazio, 2009, 2011). Italy conformed to the legislative trend in 2009.

The identification of this new category of violence and crime had several important consequences. First, it allowed those who were terrified because they were being chased and harassed to express the anguish they felt; second, it provided the framework for legislating in defense of a group of victims hitherto ignored. Finally, it responded to a need felt by the population to react and respond clearly to a form of previously unnamed persecution. However, finding a common and shared definition of the phenomenon continues to be difficult.

On the whole, the various legal definitions agree in describing stalking as behaviors that involve repeated harassment by an individual toward another such that the victim fears for his or her safety (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003; Dennison, 2007). However, *stalking* as a legislative term applies to a multitude of activities, many of which are harmless under normal conditions, and which are not easily defined in legal terms (Sheridan & Davies, 2001; Lyndon, Sinclair, MacArthur, Fay, Ratajack & Collier, 2012). In fact, it may be difficult to draw a line between behaviors that constitute romantic courtship and harassment. In the great majority of cases, stalking is a distortion of the rituals of romantic courtship and failed relationships, and it can be regarded as a product of the normal relations between individuals (Sheridan, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

One of the main problems in defining the offense of stalking lies in its double standard of harm. On the one hand, the crime is defined by victims as a set of behaviors that cause them apprehension and are perceived as intrusive and potentially harmful. On the other hand, to label behaviors stalking, the stalkers' intent to worry and create apprehension must be detected (Caputo, 2013). Therefore, despite the presence of legislative tools to prosecute stalkers, stalking behaviors are in many cases offenses that are difficult to prove "beyond any reasonable doubt".

The present study aims to investigate how ordinary people conceptualize stalking behaviors and to gain a deeper insight into the effects of gender differences and sexism on the perception and description of phenomenon. The research was conducted from the perspective of social representation (SR; Moscovici, 1984, 2005), which focuses on language to capture the interdependence between individual and socially shared knowledge. Indeed, language is the fundamental tool that people use to express their view of the world. It conveys traditions, cultural norms and social customs that, in turn, make a significant contribution to the way people construct the world in terms of different social categories and group belonging (author, 2010).

**Attitudes toward stalking: Traditional gender roles and ambivalent sexism**

Social scientists started to study the stalking syndrome in the late 1990s. A greater part of the literature in these fields is focused on offenders and victims. Research investigated the characteristics of stalking and its prevalence in the population, the different types of behaviors, the relationship between victim and stalker, the stalker's motivations, and the consequences for victims (see Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Mullen, Pathè & Purcell, 2000; Galeazzi & Curci, 2001; Purcell, Pathè & Mullen, 2001, 2002; Modena Group of stalking, 2005; Basile, Chen, Black & Saltzman, 2007; Baum, Catalano, Rand & Rose, 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014; author, 2014).

Other studies have focused on how stalking is perceived by the general population. Although evidence in this field is sometimes conflicting (see Russell & Trigg, 2004 for a review;

Spitzberg, Cupach & Ciceraro, 2010; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014 for meta-analysis), a number of studies have noted the presence of gender differences in the perception of stalking. For example, Jagessar and Sheridan (2004) highlighted gender differences when stalking is identified with monitoring or proximity-seeking behaviors. Specifically, women tend to view these behaviors as serious manifestations of stalking, while men share that view only whether they have had personal experiences of the phenomenon (Yanowitz, 2006).

Overall, such gender differences appear to be related to the degree of ambiguity of situations involving socio-sexual behaviors, which women tend to identify as stalking more than men (Englebrecht & Reyns, 2011). This relationship suggests that other factors in addition to gender are at play in the perception of what is harassing behavior and what is not (Harris & Miller, 2000; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld & O'Connor, 2004).

From a psychosocial perspective, the attitudes of both genders toward women and their role in society seem to play a role in the identification of specific behaviors as stalking. Researchers have demonstrated the relevance of gender role stereotypes in sexual harassment (Pryor, 1987); others have highlighted the association between sexism and typical gender roles and/or the stereotypical images that people have about gender roles (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Indeed, the biological and social conditions on which sexist attitudes toward women are based (Sinclair, 2011) are probably the same as those that make people view women as the prototypical victims of stalking incidents (Sheridan, Gillett & Davies, 2003; Eagly, Beall & Sternberg, 2005).

Many researchers agree that coercive behaviors, such as sexual harassment, must be understood from a broader and more general perspective of hostility toward women (Cowan, 2000; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Pryor, 1987; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995). In 2004, Russell & Trigg reported a positive relationship between sexism and tolerance of harassment regardless of the respondent's gender. Similarly, a content analysis study of Italian newspapers (Caputo, 2013) revealed that in the Italian press stalking is interpreted within the framework of gender violence as a way of re-establishing traditional gender roles and maintaining gender inequalities (see also De

Fazio, Merafina & Sgarbi, 2014). These studies, taken as a whole, add direct and indirect evidence to the notion that hostile attitudes toward women predict greater tolerance of harassment and pose the focus on the role of sexism in the perception of the phenomenon.

A fairly recent perspective (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001, 2012) attributes an ambivalent nature to sexism owing to the simultaneous presence of two sets of attitudes: hostile and benevolent. Both forms sustain gender inequality, albeit in different ways, and support the idea of prototypical gender roles according to which women are subordinate to men. Hostile sexism (HS) is "an adversarial view of gender relations in which women are perceived as seeking to control men". Additionally, benevolent sexism (BS) ascribes stereotypical traits to women, although more favorable than in the former case. On the one hand, a stereotypical perception of women allows men to see themselves as protectors, thus maintaining a positive self-image; on the other hand, it allows men to view women who seek power "as ungrateful harpies deserving of harsh treatment" (Glick & Fiske, 2012, p. 70). Ambivalent sexism results from both hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes and can be described as the simultaneous presence of feelings of protection and hostility toward women. Sexism may influence perceptions of stalking: when the sexist's motivation can be interpreted as protective, people high in sexism may be more tolerant of certain types of socio-sexual behaviors than those who are not sexist.


**The social construction of shared notions**

Stalking's own ambiguity makes this notion a suitable candidate for investigation within the framework of social representation. This theory focuses on the specific content of a culture and "emphasizes the way the world is understood via images or shared mental representations which are present in a particular culture, in a particular time in history, and often only in particular groups in the culture" (Potter & Wetherell, 1998, pp. 139-140).

A SR "is a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to

master it; secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual group history [sic]" (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii).

As outcomes of a system of social negotiation, SRs are related to both individual and social levels. They are linked to individuals' social conditions and to their private and emotional sphere as well as to the *state-of-the-art* of specific scientific knowledge and/or to broader cultural and ideological systems. These linkages imply that SRs underpin different values from which they draw their meaning, according to the various social groups (Jodelet, 1989). Thus, representations express those (individuals or groups) that shape them and give the object they represent a specific definition. That definition is shared by group members and is a consensual view of reality for the group itself (Guimelli, 1994; Jodelet, 1994; author, 2013).

According to Doise (1995), SRs generate principles of stances related to specific individuals' insertions in a set of social relations and organize the symbolic processes involved in these relations. Through the analysis of individuals' stances, it is possible to investigate the relationship between socio-cognitive processes and social dynamics to grasp the connection between individual and collective spheres. SR involves two mechanisms: *anchoring* and *objectification*. *Anchoring* makes the unknown familiar. At the cognitive level, it serves to integrate and understand new phenomena; at the social level, it guides behaviors and social relations. In fact, "a social representation always consists in *anchoring* our knowledge in a world of hierarchical social values that result from the asymmetric positions of individuals and groups in the social field" (Doise & Palmonari, 1990, p. 114). The complementary mechanism of *objectification* addresses the construction of the figurative nucleus of a representation and consists of constructing an icon or metaphor that stands for the new phenomenon (Moscovici, 1984; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1997). That core thus "captures the essence of the phenomenon, makes it intelligible for people and weaves it into the fabric of the group's common sense" (Caputo, 2013, p. 446).

**Current work**

*Aims and Hypotheses.* The present study had the general aims of understanding how people conceptualize stalking behaviors and exploring its social representation. To reach these goals, we conducted a study based on quantitative and qualitative measures. The former sought to: a) assess the general knowledge that people who had never directly experienced stalking have about this phenomenon, i.e., beliefs that "naïve" people share about what stalking is; and b) investigate whether those beliefs are related to respondents' gender and attitudes toward women.

The conceptualization of stalking was also addressed from a more qualitative perspective, aiming to explore people's SR. Additionally, we were interested in understanding how gender, attitudes toward women and shared beliefs about stalking shape its representation. Based on the abovementioned literature, we expected that (a) women's (*vs.* men's) descriptions of stalking would cover a broader range of behaviors, including ambiguous ones, and that (b) people higher in sexism would describe stalking in more tolerant ways than non-sexists, who would focus more on the disruptive effects of these behaviors on victims.

*The Italian context.* The study was conducted on a population of Italian young adults. We focused on this population because young people are particularly affected by the phenomenon. Studies show higher rates of stalking incidents among college-aged people than in the general population (Wilcox, Jordan & Pritchard, 2007), and the prevalence rate of victimization is between 10 and 30% (Amar, 2006; Bjerregaard, 2000; Fischer, Cullen & Turner, 2002; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Coker, Sanderson, Cantu, Huerta, & Fadden, 2008; Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009; Bonomi, Anderson, Nemeth, Bartle-Haring, Buettner & Schipper, 2012). Italy shows similar percentages, with a rate of victimization of approximately 25% in this population (authors, 2014). A recent report from the Italian Ministry of Justice (2014) indicates that the prevalence rate of the phenomenon in the general population is 11.2%. The victims are mostly women (90%), while the typical stalkers are men (91.1%). In 2012, there were 2,603 convictions, with an increase of 30.5%

from the previous year. These data are particularly relevant when considering that Italy only recently introduced an anti-stalking law in its Penal Code (art. 612 bis, 2009). The law defines the crime as to "continuously threaten or harass another person to such an extent as to cause a serious, continual state of anxiety or fear, or to instill in the victim(s) a motivated fear for his/her own safety or for the safety of relatives or other persons linked to the victim(s) by virtue of kinship or emotional relationship or to force the victim(s) to change his/her living habits".

Additionally, the introduction of this law increased the public's knowledge and awareness (De Fazio, Sgarbi, Moore & Spitzberg, 2015) of stalking, that is currently on the public agenda.

## Method

### Participants

The investigation involved 384 undergraduate students enrolled in various courses at the University of Torino, all of whom took part on a voluntary basis. Two exclusion criteria were used. A *pre-hoc* criterion was linked to the attendance of the courses of Psychology and Law because the local University provides specific educational courses about the stalking phenomenon for these schools. A *post-hoc* criterion was related to having had previous direct experience with stalking as an offender or victim.

Of the original data set, 49 cases were dropped because the individuals reported having been the victims of stalking in the past, 12 owing to substantial missing data and 8 because they defined themselves as stalkers. The analyses were performed on 315 cases (48% female; mean age = 21.4; SD = 2.1).

### Procedure

Data were collected by the researchers themselves and by research assistants trained by the researchers. The participants were contacted through their academic courses and were informed that they were participating in a study to investigate relevant social problems in Italian society. Data collection involved completion of a structured questionnaire submitted on paper; all the participants

were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses were anonymous. All the questionnaires were group-administered in classrooms with the teachers' permission. The self-report questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The study was conducted in accordance with privacy requirements.

**Materials**

The participants filled in a self-report questionnaire containing quantitative and qualitative measures. The order of presentation of the quantitative measures described below was randomly inverted to reduce any halo effects (Thorndike, 1920).

*Beliefs about stalking*. We adapted the modified Italian version of the Stalking Questionnaire (authors, 2014). The original questionnaire – constructed by The Network for Surviving Stalking (NSS) with Dr. Lorraine Sheridan (Forensic Psychologist, University of Leicester) – is addressed to victims and covers issues such as the nature of the relationship, the motivations as perceived by the victims, the stalking behaviors, any help the stalker received, the coping strategies used, and the physical and emotional consequences (authors, 2014). Because the present study addresses people who had never directly experienced stalking, the questionnaire was rephrased in the third person, e.g., the item "The stalker sent me gifts" became "The stalker sent gifts to the victim". Five areas were investigated: three were concerned with stalkers and stalking behaviors (motivations for stalkers' behaviors, existence of emotional problems in stalkers, types of behaviors), and two were concerned with the victims (their emotional and physical consequences, coping strategies suggested to them). The participants rated each item on a five-point scale (1 = not at all; 5= yes, definitely) on the basis of the specific instructions below:

a) Motivations for stalkers' behaviors: "In your opinion, to what extent might the following reasons be the causes of stalking behaviors?" (15 items; e.g., "desire for control", "anger" "alcohol or drug abuse", "need for attention").

b) Stalkers' emotional problems: "The following is a list of some emotional problems. For each of them, please indicate the likelihood of it being a root cause of stalking behaviors" (6 items;

e.g., "depression", "fear", "sadness").

c) Stalkers' characteristic behaviors: "Here is a list of some different behaviors. In your opinion, how characteristic of stalking behaviors is each one of them?" (8 items; e.g., "spreading lies", "aggression", "threats").

d) Emotional and physical consequences for victims: "Now let's consider the victims of stalking. The following is a list of some physical and emotional symptoms. In your opinion, how much might a person who is a victim of stalking suffer from each of these symptoms?" (19 items; e.g., "confusion", "headaches", "anxiety", "fear").

e) Suggested coping strategies: "The following is a list of actions that a victim of stalking may take to stop his/her stalker. Please rate each one on the basis of its usefulness, in your opinion" (12 items; e.g., "moving away", "reporting to the police", "seeking help from friends").

*Sexist attitudes toward women.* These were measured on the 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick e Fiske, 1996). This scale is composed of two subscales, each with 11 items: hostile sexism (e.g., "Women tend to exaggerate problems they have at work") and benevolent sexism ("Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores"). The respondents rated their agreement on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items were reversed when necessary and computed as two separate scores where higher values meant a higher level of the single variable. Cronbach's alphas were good (HS: $\alpha = .85$; BS: $\alpha = .77$).

The qualitative measure consisted of asking the participants to define stalking freely, "as if you were explaining it to a friend". This question was always posed as the first on the questionnaire to avoid the influence of additional information on the definition of stalking.

Finally, we asked the participants whether they had ever stalked or been stalked, and we gathered information about the respondents' sex and age.

**Data analysis**

**Quantitative analyses.** Descriptive statistics, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) t-test and Pearson's correlations were obtained through SPSS (version 22). Principal Component Analysis

(PCA; Varimax rotation)[1] and Parallel Analysis (PA) were performed to define factors in beliefs about stalking and victims. PA was carried out based on the recommended steps defined by Hayton, Allen and Scarpello (2004). Variables whose factor loadings were >.35 on a single factor were summed to form scores used in subsequent analyses. Items loaded on more than one factor with a value greater than .35 were not included in the scores. Scores were computed so that higher scores referred to higher endorsement of a specific set of beliefs.

**Textual corpus analysis.** Data were analyzed using *Alceste 6.0* (Reinert, 1986). This software treats verbal data according to a descending hierarchical classification (DHC) in which the text, divided into elementary context units (E.C.U.), is categorized into homogeneous classes. The basic idea is that a representation is expressed through similar ideas and concepts but above all similar words. In these terms, it is possible to isolate and separate internally homogeneous groups (or classes) within specific populations. Classes are formed on the basis of the co-occurrence of forms and units of context (Matteucci & Tommasetto, 2002). The first class that is formed will be the most homogeneous in terms of content, i.e., the one whose semantic lexical universe appears to clearly differ from the others. The software performs the $\chi^2$ test on the association between words and classes to identify the specific vocabulary for each class. This step allows the researcher to identify the lexical worlds in the text, i.e., the "usual places" (*topoi*) of a discourse (Reinert, 1998). Reinert (1993) noted a bridge between the statistical analysis of a text and the study of social representations because both address commonplaces of common sense. By analyzing the classification tree (dendrogram), it is possible to slide from the lexical worlds to the thematic universes of reference. The software also allows repeated segments to be highlighted, i.e., associations of the most frequent words in a class and related classes with the selected *anchoring* variables. These are called *illustrative variables* and carry further information about the textual

---

[1] Preliminary Oblimin rotations showed that the internal intercorrelations among factors in each PCA were < .025. Varimax rotations were used for final analyses.

corpus, allowing the researcher to identify the specific characteristics that define individuals sharing the same semantic universe.

For the present study, we created a textual corpus comprising the descriptions of stalking provided by the participants. The following illustrative variables were included in the corpus: gender, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and beliefs about stalking.

## Results

As previously stated, the research had two main aims. The first was to explore participants' general knowledge about stalking and to investigate whether laypeople's beliefs relate to their gender and level of sexism. The second aim was to explore the social representation of stalking through the analysis of laypeople's definitions of this phenomenon.

**Beliefs about stalking: descriptive and exploratory factor analysis**

The most important motivations for stalking incidents were found in stalkers' jealousy and violent behaviors, while social marginality (stalkers' low level of education and substance abuse) and low self-esteem were rated as the least important (table 1). Anxiety and fear were rated the two emotional problems most commonly at the basis of stalkers' behaviors; loss of interest in daily activities was rated the least common. The respondents thought the most typical stalking behavior was controlling the victim by shadowing, spying or surveillance; they rated defamation the least typical feature of stalking.

Victims were seen as experiencing emotional symptoms such as panic, fear or anxiety, while an increase in aggressiveness in the victim was rated the least widespread symptom. Finally, seeking psychological support was rated the most common coping response to prevent or reduce stalking incidents, followed by requesting police intervention (by reporting the incident), awareness of the problem (i.e., not underestimating it) and seeking the help of friends. Changing one's identity or moving away were considered the least useful coping strategies.

To reduce the information from beliefs about stalking and victims, we run a series of exploratory factor analyses (CPA) for each set of items (Table 1). In general terms, the beliefs about stalkers' motivations and behaviors show a two-factor structure, with the exception of stalkers' emotional problems (monofactorial). The motivations for stalking behaviors resulted in two sets of beliefs: the belief that stalkers have a fundamentally weak character and that referring to stalkers' social maladjustment. The items loading in the former factor address insecurity, fear of abandonment and frustration, while the items loading on the social maladjustment factor are concerned with personality disorders, substance abuse and anger. The items for each factor were summed to obtain two summed scores: weak character and social maladjustment ($\alpha = .60$ and $.53$, respectively.).

The two factors emerging from the beliefs about stalkers' behaviors addressed two different conceptions of stalking. The first factor identified stalking in aggressive behaviors, consisting of injuries and threats ($\alpha = .63$); the second referred to proximity-seeking behaviors ($\alpha = .57$), such as unwanted communication and objects and seeking control of the victim. The summed score obtained of stalkers' emotional problems reached an alpha value of $.64$.

The beliefs about victims generally highlighted three-factor structures. The consequences on victims were reduced to a first dimension addressing victims' self-destructive feelings (e.g., self-inflicted injuries and agoraphobia; $\alpha = .69$) and a second referring to general physical problems ($\alpha = .74$), composed of eating disorders and headaches. The third factor concerned beliefs about victims' psychological problems (e.g., fear and anxiety; $\alpha = .73$).

Ultimately, three factors emerged from the suggested coping styles: proactive coping (prevention, awareness and the need for psychological support; $\alpha = .77$), seeking external help, specifically from police ($\alpha = .78$), and escape, through moving away and changing one's identity ($\alpha = .88$).

- Table 1 about here

**Gender and sexism-based differences in stalking perception**

As expected, women (*vs*. men) identified both aggression ($t = -2.2$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .02$) and seeking contact ($t = -3.2$; $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .03$) as stalking; they attributed more psychological symptoms to victims ($t = -5.3$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .08$) and suggested proactive forms of coping ($t = -2.1$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .01$). In line with the literature, men displayed higher levels of HS ($t = -9.4$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .03$).

Differences also emerged in relation to the degree of acceptance of hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes. People higher in HS and BS attributed more emotional problems to stalkers (HS: $t = -2$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .01$; BS: $t = -2.4$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .02$). People higher in HS did not identify contact-seeking behaviors as stalking ($t = -3.3$; $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .04$) and were less likely to recognize psychological suffering in victims ($t = -3.9$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .05$).

Correlations (Table 2) show that people higher in HS tended not to attribute physical problems to victims either and to exclude coping strategies, such as external help. Benevolent sexists tended to associate stalking behaviors with social maladjustment of stalkers. Unlike people higher in HS, those higher in BS tended to consider seeking external help and escape to be effective coping strategies.

- Table 2 about here -

The two motivations of stalking behaviors (social maladjustment and weak character) were weakly correlated with each other but were both more strongly correlated with emotional problems, as if this antecedent were common to all stalking behaviors. Moreover, both motivations were positively related to all types of disorders (physical and psychological) in victims, although the highest correlations involved stalkers' social maladjustment and victims' physical symptoms and self-destructive attitudes. The two factors concerning typical stalking behaviors were each positively related and were more highly correlated with psychological symptoms in the victim. Proactive coping was positively associated with all the variables concerning stalkers and victims.

The two others suggested that forms of coping were unrelated or only slightly related to the other beliefs about stalking.

The summed scores were then split on the basis of their observed mean (see Tab. 2 for descriptive statistics) and associated with the textual corpus as *anchoring* variables.

**Analysis of the textual corpus: The Social Representation of Stalking**

The analyzed corpus was composed of 5,827 occurrences, 1,908 distinct forms (mean frequency = 6.23 per form) and 706 *hapax*, i.e., words used only once. The overall number of E.C.U. was 326.

At first glance, the general definition of stalking described this phenomenon as morbid and aggressive behaviors enacted by a person who wants to exert control over another person. Indeed, the ten most frequent words (associated forms) in the corpus were: *Person(s)* (N = 224); *Other(s)* (N = 100); *Obsession(ing)* (N = 87); *Persecute(d)* (N = 59); *Phenomenon* (N = 59); *Individual(s)* (N = 52); *Behavior(s)* (N = 47); *Violence* (N = 46); *Physical* (N = 45); and *Control(led)* (N = 45).

The dendrogram of stable classes (Figure 1) shows the classification procedure used to create the four classes that emerged and highlights which classes are closer, and therefore more similar. For each class, the characterizing words are presented in order of Chi-squared results (Table 3), together with the associated illustrative variables. Overall, the four classes explained a large amount of variance (96%). As shown in Figure 1, the classification procedure opposed two pairs of classes: II-III versus I-IV. In the description below, terms and sentences in brackets are examples of the respondents' textual production.

- Figure 1 about here –

Class II explained 31% of variance and was labeled *Persistent Harassment.* The most representative words in terms of $\chi^2$ describe stalking as a form of "persecution" that involves "persons". It implies "communications" and is a form of "annoyance" and "daily obsession". The lexical world refers to victims' persecution and stalkers' daily harassing behaviors. Stalking was

defined as an "annoying behavior that leads a person to harass another person for various reasons" characterized in particular by seeking contact through communications ("when a person tries to hurt another person through annoying and persistent phone calls and messages"). This class included people who did not think that stalkers' behaviors could cause physical or self-destructive symptoms in victims, those who did not suggest that victims should escape and those who showed a higher level of BS, suggesting a stereotypical vision of women as caring creatures.

Class III (*Intrusion*; 23% var.) refers to privacy violation through "morbid spying". Victims are "women" and "individuals" over whom the stalker attempts to exert a "morbid control". Stalking was understood as a "series of behaviors and attitudes by an individual who follows and spies on another individual (often a female)" or has "a morbid interest in a person". In this class, we found people who did not attribute social maladjustment to stalkers and those who did not identify stalking with aggressive behaviors.

- Table 3 about here -

The most representative words in Class I, labeled *Dysfunctional Relationship* (25% var.), frame stalking as an outcome of a romantic relationship that ended badly. Stalkers, whether "men" or "women", are "ex-partners" in a "relationship". Stalking is "an obsessive search for contact (physical, by phone) that does not stop with the victim's refusal but becomes a threat". It consists of a "series of attitudes of a partner who does not accept the end of the relationship and insistently seeks to establish contact". Stalking consists of "verbal (messages, letters) or physical abuse suffered by men and women" and may include "violent acts". People in this class share the belief that victims may suffer from self-destructive and physical symptoms and show low levels of BS.

Class IV was labeled *Aggressive Interaction* (23% var.) because the most related words describe stalking starting from its characteristics of psychological abuse, such as "persecution" and "restriction of freedom". Stalking was described as an "offence" characterized by "psychological violence that may turn physical, where the victim is pressured and persecuted by the stalker or as a set of behaviors directed to intimidate, shock, upset a victim". Such behaviors can often lead to acts

of violence, including physical violence". People in this class identified stalking with aggressive acts and suggested that victims should try to cope through escape.

## Discussion

Stalking as a concept has an ambiguous nature in that it includes behaviors, such as unwelcome sexual advances or unwanted attention, that do not represent offenses *per se*. Several common forms of socio-sexual behaviors may indeed be perceived as stalking by some people but fall within the range of "ordinary" courtship behaviors for others. These differences in interpretation are probably linked to culturally shared negative attitudes toward women and a traditional understanding of gender roles.

The present research focused on the social representation of stalking in a population of young Italian people. The results overall show that the participants are aware of the phenomenon. This finding is probably linked to the fact that, owing to their young age, they have grown up in a cultural context where stalking was already regarded and reviled as a crime. The study also aimed to gain insight into whether perceivers' gender and sexist attitudes might affect how they perceive and describe the phenomenon. Overall, the study revealed that the participants perceived the causes of the phenomenon in individual terms. The profile that emerged was of a stalker suffering from jealousy: the end of a romantic relationship arouses feelings of anxiety and fear, and stalking behaviors are mostly directed at controlling the victim. The victim experiences fear, panic and anxiety. The more the stalker was perceived as emotionally unstable and the victim as affected by psychological and physical symptoms, the more the coping strategy consisted of involving informal (friends) and formal (police) networks.

Consistent with the literature (see Russel & Trigg, 2004), some gender differences emerged. As expected, women tended to identify a broader range of behaviors as stalking, including ambiguous behaviors, such as contact seeking. Moreover, women more readily recognized that

victims might suffer psychological pain and showed lower levels of hostile sexism than men. No gender differences emerged regarding benevolent sexism.

Sexism was a second expected source of individual differences. Hostile sexists seemed to be more empathetic toward stalkers – identified as people suffering from emotional problems – than toward victims, whose psychological suffering they denied. Ambivalent sexists (i.e., people higher in HS and in BS) did not identify stalking in contact-seeking behaviors, suggesting that "some lesser forms of harassment do not meet the criteria for stalking" (Finnegan & Timmons Fritz, 2012, p. 895). In this relation, the effect size values highlighted that benevolent sexism seems to play a slightly more important role than hostile sexism.

The representations of stalking that emerged from the respondents' descriptions of the phenomenon highlighted the link between language and social cognition on the one hand and allowed us to deepen our understanding of how people interpret the stalking syndrome on the other. The words used to describe the phenomenon gave us an initial clue about how stalking is perceived. The stalker and the victim were both indicated with the neutral term "person", without attributing to them a specific gender. This result suggests a greater awareness of the crime, of the variety of actors involved, and of the different scenarios that can be labeled stalking.

A greater awareness is probably the reason why the two themes that form the basis of the phenomenon (assault and intrusiveness) emerged clearly from the participants' representations, producing the opposition between morbidity (Classes II and III) and aggression (Classes I and IV). Indeed, *Persistent Harassment* and *Intrusion* shared a lexical world that identifies stalking with invasion of the victim's living space. Both representations suggest an underestimation of the dangerousness of stalking, downgraded to an unpleasant incident. This syndrome was depicted as annoying but not dangerous because it occurs through forms of indirect control, such as telephone calls, shadowing or spying. In contrast, *Dysfunctional Relationship* and *Aggressive Interaction* expressed a representation of stalking characterized by aggression and threat. Here stalking has disruptive effects on victims, who may suffer at both the physical and psychological levels.

In addition to the morbidity/aggression continuum, we can trace a further opposition that addresses perceivers' levels of sexism. Indeed, people who described stalking as an annoying incident (*Persistent Harassment*) showed higher levels of benevolent sexism attitudes than those who represented this syndrome in its dangerous and disruptive effects (*Dysfunctional Relationship*). In other words, our study suggests that the endorsement of sexist beliefs makes a difference in representing stalking as an intrusive or an aggressive event.

**Limitations**

Some limits of this research should be underlined. First, the results are not generalizable because the study involved university students only. Future studies should broaden the scope of participants in terms of educational level and age, including people from previous generations, who grew up without the anti-stalking law. In this way – as suggested by Cass and Rosay (2012) – we could better understand how a law is a social and cultural factor that can affect the way this phenomenon is understood.

A second limitation concerns the social and cultural features of the context that were not investigated in the study. Further research should extend the investigation to consider a wider range of personal (e.g., ideological beliefs, prejudice toward deviant persons) and social (e.g., ingroup norms and values, ingroup conformity and cohesion, collective security) anchorages and their role in shaping the perception of the phenomenon and its severity.

**Research Implications**

The present research represents a first step in seeking to determine what factors affect the perception of the stalking phenomenon.

In line with previous studies (Dardis, Edwards, Kelley & Gidycz, 2015), our findings confirm that women are more sensitive to stalking than men. Women identify stalking with a broader range of behaviors that encompass tolerated socio-sexual behaviors. Moreover, our findings

support those who pose cultural factors as the basis of stalking and of tolerance toward such behaviors.

Overall, the representations that emerged reflect the intrinsic ambiguity of the concept, namely the opposition between morbidity and aggression. The two forms of sexism act on different aspects of stalking perception. Hostile sexism, which emphasizes a conflict between genders, has a role in the identification of stalking according to the type of behaviors and consequences on victims. Benevolent sexism instead contributes to shaping representations. This form of sexism proposes an image of women as fragile and needing protection, insofar as they respect traditional gender roles.

**Clinical and Policy Implications**

The findings from this research should make us reflect on the need to continue to promote cultural change aimed at fostering greater gender equality and overcoming stereotypes about gender roles. Cultural change may also be promoted through the numerous primary prevention efforts, which should take care not to present a model of the victim that is coherent with paternalistic attitudes toward women – the same attitudes that lead people to see stalking as a phenomenon linked to morbidity and not to aggression (Lyndon et al, 2012). As Yanowitz and Yanowitz (2012) noted, there is a risk of thwarting prevention efforts, and it would be useful to reconsider the contents of prevention initiatives, which should be less focused on "women's issues" (not central to our research participants) and directed more toward acting on the symptoms and causes of stalking. This last approach will ultimately address the need to investigate the cultural context that feeds sexism, turning it into aggression, and sometimes even murder (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011; Volpato, 2013).

**References**

Amar, A. F. (2006). College women's experience of stalking: Mental health symptoms and changes in routines. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, *20*(3), 108-116. doi: 10.1016/j.apnu.2005.10.003

Basile, K.C., Chen, J., Black, M.C., & Saltzman, L.E. (2007). Prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence victimization among U.S. adults, 2001–2003. *Violence and Victims*, *22*, 437–48. doi: 10.1891/088667007781553955

Baum, K., Catalano, S., Rand, M,. & Rose, K. (2009). *Stalking Victimization in the United States. U.S.* Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Bjerregaard, B. (2000). An empirical study of stalking victimization. *Violence and victims*, *15*(4), 389-406.

Bonomi, A. E., Anderson, M., Nemeth, J., Bartle-Haring, S., Buettner, C., & Schipper, D. (2012). Dating violence victimization across the teen years: Abuse frequency, number of abusive partners, and age at first occurrence. *BMC Public Health, 12*(1), 637. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-637

Budd, T., & Mattinson, J. (2000). *Stalking: Findings from the 1998 British Crime Survey.* London, UK: Home service.

Buhi, E. R., Clayton, H., & Surrency, H. H. (2009). Stalking victimization among college women and subsequent help-seeking behaviors. *Journal of American College Health*, *57*(4), 419-426. doi: 10.3200/JACH.57.4.419-426

California Penal Code, Sect 649.9 Stalking (1990).

Caputo, A. (2013). Cultural Models Shaping Stalking From a Content Analysis of Italian Newspapers. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, *9*(3), 443-460.doi: 10.5964/ejop.v9i3.604

Cass, A. I., & Rosay, A. B. (2012). College student perceptions of criminal justice system responses to stalking. *Sex roles, 66*(5-6), 392-404. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9934-3

Coker, A. L., Sanderson, M., Cantu, E., Huerta, D., & Fadden, M. K. (2008). Frequency and types of partner violence among Mexican American college women. *Journal of American College Health*, *56*(6), 665-674.doi: 10.3200/JACH.56.6.665-674

Cowan, G. (2000). Women's hostility toward women and rape and sexual harassment myths. *Violence against women*, *6*(3), 238-246. doi: 10.1177/10778010022181822

Dardis, C. M., Edwards, K. M., Kelley, E. L., & Gidycz, C. A. (2015). Perceptions of Dating Violence and Associated Correlates A Study of College Young Adults. *Journal of interpersonal violence*. Advance online publication. doi: 0886260515597439.

De Fazio, L. (2009). The Legal Situation on Stalking among the European Member States. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research, 3*, 229-42.doi: 10.1007/s10610-009-9101-3

De Fazio, L. (2011). Criminalization of Stalking in Italy: One of the Last among the Current European Member States' Anti-Stalking Laws. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, *29*, 317-323.doi: 10.1007/s10979-006-9067-3

De Fazio, L., Merafina, R., & Sgarbi, C. (2014). Stalking and mass media. *Italian Journal of Criminology*, *3*(3), 433-450.

De Fazio, L., Sgarbi, C., Moore, J., & Spitzberg, B. H. (2015). The Impact of Criminalization of Stalking on Italian Students: Adherence to Stalking Myths. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *24*(10), 1106-1122. doi: 10.1080/10926771.2015.1079280

Dennison, S. M. (2007). Interpersonal relationships and stalking: identifying when to intervene. *Law and human behavior*, *31*(4), 353.doi: 10.1007/s10979-006-9067-3

Doise, W. (1995). Le rappresentazioni sociali [Social Representation]. In R. Ghiglione, C. Bonnet
and J. F. Richard (Eds.), *Trattato di psicologia cognitiva* [Handbook of Cognitive
Psychology] (pp.161-243). Roma: Borla.

Doise, W., & Palmonari, A. (1990). *Létude des représentations sociales* [Investigation on Social
Representation]. Paris: Delachaux et Niestle.

Eagly, A. H., Beall, A. E., & Sternberg, R. J. (Eds.). (2005). *The psychology of gender*. New York,
NY: Guilford Press.

Englebrecht, C. M., & Reyns, B. W. (2011). Gender differences in acknowledgment of stalking
victimization: Results from the NCVS stalking supplement. *Violence and victims*, *26*(5),
560-579.doi: 10.1891/0886-6708.26.5.560

Finnegan, H. A., & Timmons Fritz, P. A. (2012). Differential Effects of Gender on Perceptions of
Stalking and Harassment Behavior. *Violence and Victims*, *27*, 6, 895-910.doi:
10.1891/0886-6708.27.6.895

Fischer, B.S., Cullen, F.T. & Turner, M.G. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women*.
Washington, DC: US. Department of Justice.

Galeazzi, G. M., & Curci, P. (2001). La sindrome del molestatore assillante (stalking): una rassegna
[The tormenting harasser syndrome (stalking): a review]. *Giornale Italiano di
Psicopatologia*, *7*, 434-52.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S.T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and
Benevolent Sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(3), 491-512. doi:
10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as
complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist*, *56*, 109.doi:
10.1037/0003-066X.56.2.109

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2012). An ambivalent alliance: hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justification for gender inequality. In J. Dixon and M. Levine (Eds). Beyond prejudice. Extending the social psychology of conflict, inequality and social change (pp. 70-88). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Guimelli, C. (1994). Structures et transformations des représentations sociales. *Textes de base en sciences sociales* [Structure and transformation of social representation. Book of Social Sciences]. Lausanne: Delachaux et Niestlé.

Harris, M. B., & Miller, K. C. (2000). Gender and perceptions of danger. *Sex Roles, 43,* 843-863. doi: 10.1023/A:1011036905770

Haugaard, J.J. & Seri, L.G. (2003). Stalking and Other Forms of Intrusive Contact After the Dissolution of Adolescent Dating or Romantic Relationship. *Violence and Victims, 18*(3), 279-297.doi: 10.1891/vivi.2003.18.3.279

Hayton, J. C., Allen, D. G., & Scarpello, V. (2004). Factor retention decisions in exploratory factor analysis: A tutorial on parallel analysis. *Organizational research methods*, *7*(2), 191-205. doi: 10.1177/1094428104263675

Italian Penal Code, art. 612 *(bis)* (2009).

Jagessar, J. D., & Sheridan, L. P. (2004). Stalking perceptions and experiences across two cultures. *Criminal justice and behavior*, *31*(1), 97-119. doi: 10.1177/0093854803259244

Jodelet, D. (Ed.) (1989). *Les Représentations Sociales* [Social Representations]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Jodelet, D. (1994). Représentation sociale: phénomène, un domaine en expansion [Social Representation: a phenomenon, a domain expanding].In D. Jodelet (Ed.), *Les Représentations socials* (4ª ed.) [Social Representations, 4th edition] (21-61). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J. (2012). Gender and stalking: Current intersections and future directions. *Sex roles*, *66*(5-6), 418-426.doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0093-3

Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. (1997). *Questions de méthodologie en sciences sociales* [Methodology of social sciences]. Paris: Delachaux et Niestle.

Lyndon, A. E., Sinclair, H. C., MacArthur, J., Fay, B., Ratajack, E., & Collier, K. E. (2012). An introduction to issues of gender in stalking research. *Sex Roles*, *66*(5-6), 299-310. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0106-2

Matteucci, M.C., &  Tomasetto, C. (2002). Alceste: un software per l'analisi dei dati testuali [Alceste: a software for the analysis of textual data]. In B.M. Mazzara (Ed.) *Metodi qualitativi in psicologia sociale* [Qualitative methods in social psychology] (pp. 305-328). Roma: Carocci.

Ministry of Justice, Italy (2014). *Stalking*. Retrieved from http://webstat.giustizia.it/Analisi%20e%20ricerche/2014%20-%20Rilevazione%20procedimenti%20di%20Stalking.pdf

Modena Group on Stalking (Eds.) (2005). *Female victims of stalking: Recognition and intervention models: A European study*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

Moscovici, S. (1973). Foreword. In C. Herzlich (Ed.), *Health and illness: A social psychological analysis* (pp. 9–14). London, UK: Academic Press.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 3-69). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Moscovici, S. (2005). *Le rappresentazioni sociali* [Social Representations]. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Mullen, P. E., Pathé, M., & Purcell, R. (2000). *Stalkers and their victims* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, L., Quirk, R., Rosenfeld, B., & O'Connor, M. (2004). Is it stalking? Perceptions of stalking among college undergraduates. *Criminal justice and behavior*, *31*(1), 73-96. doi: 10.1177/0093854803259251

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1998). Social representations, discourse analysis, and racism. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The psychology of the social* (pp. 138-155). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Pryor, J. B. (1987). Sexual harassment proclivities in men. *Sex Roles*, *17*(5-6), 269-290. doi: 10.1007/BF00288453

Pryor, J. B., Giedd, J. L., & Williams, K. B. (1995). A social psychological model for predicting sexual harassment. *Journal of Social Issues*, *51*(1), 69-84. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.1995.tb01309.x

Purcell, R., Pathé, M., & Mullen, P.E. (2001). A study of women who stalk. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *158*, 2056-60 .doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.158.12.2056

Purcell, R., Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E. (2002). The prevalence and nature of stalking in the Australian community. *Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, *36*, 114-120. doi:10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.00985.x

Reinert, M. (1986). Un logiciel d'analyse lexicale: ALCESTE [A lexical analysis software: ALCESTE]. *Les Cahiers de l'Analyse des Données, 11* (4), 471–484.

Reinert, M. (1993). Les 'Mondes Lexicaux' et leur 'Logique' à travers l'Analyse Statistique d'un Corpus de Récits de Cauchemars [The 'lexical worlds' and 'Logic' through Statistical Analysis of Corpus Stories of *Cauchemars*]. *Langage et Société*, *66*, 5-37.

Reinert, M. (1998). Mondes lexicaux et topoi dans l'approche de Alceste [Lexical worlds and topoi in Alceste approach]. In S. Mellet and M. Vuillome (Eds.), *Mots chiffrés et déchiffrés* [Coded and decoded words] (pp. 289-303). Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur.

Russell, B. L., & Trigg, K. Y. (2004). Tolerance of sexual harassment: An examination of gender differences, ambivalent sexism, social dominance, and gender roles. *Sex Roles*, *50*(7-8), 565-573.doi: 10.1023/B:SERS.0000023075.32252.fd

Sheridan, L. (2000). What is stalking? The match between legislation and public perception. Paper presented at the *Stalking: Criminal Justice Responses Conference* convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and held in Sydney 7-8 December 2000.

Sheridan, L., & Davies, G.M. (2001). Stalking: The elusive crime. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *6*, 133-147. doi: 10.1348/135532501168244

Sheridan, L., Blaauw, E. & Davies, G.M. (2003). Stalking: Knowns and unknowns. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 4*, 148-62. doi: 10.1177/1524838002250766

Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., & Davies, G. (2000). 'Stalking'—Seeking the victim's perspective. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 6*, 267-280. doi: 10.1080/10683160008409807

Sinclair, H. C. (2012). Stalking myth-attributions: Examining the role of individual and contextual variables on attributions in unwanted pursuit scenarios. *Sex Roles*, *66*(5-6), 378-391. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9853-8

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). The state of the art of stalking: Taking stock of the emerging literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12* , 64–86. doi:10.1016/ j.avb.2006.05.001

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2014). *The dark side of relationship pursuit: From attraction to obsession and stalking*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Spitzberg, B. H., Cupach, W. R., & Ciceraro, L. D. (2010). Sex differences in stalking and obsessive relational intrusion: Two meta-analyses. *Partner Abuse*, *1*(3), 259-285. doi: 10.1891/1946-6560.1.3.259

Swim, J. K., & Cohen, L. L. (1997). Overt, Covert, and Subtle Sexism a Comparison Between the

Attitudes Toward Women and Modern Sexism Scales. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *21*(1), 103-118. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00103.x

Thorndike, E. L. (1920). A constant error in psychological ratings. *Journal of applied psychology*, *4*(1), 25-29.

Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (1998). *Prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women: findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey* (No. NCJ 169592). US Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

Volpato, C. (2013). *Psicologia del maschilismo* [Psychology of machismo]. Bari: Laterza.

Westrup, D. (1998). Applying Functional Analysis to Stalking Behavior. In J.R. Meloy (Ed.), *The psychology of Stalking: Clinical and Forensic Perspective* (pp.275-294). Academic Press. San Diego: Academic Press.

Wilcox, P., Jordan, C. E., & Pritchard, A. J. (2007). A multidimensional examination of campus safety victimization, perceptions of danger, worry about crime, and precautionary behavior among college women in the Post-Clery Era. *Crime & Delinquency*, *53*(2), 219-254. doi: 10.1177/0097700405283664

Yanowitz, K. L. (2006). Influence of gender and experience on college students' stalking schemas. *Violence and Victims*, *21*(1), 91-100. doi: 10.1891/0886-6708.21.1.91

Yanowitz, K. L., & Yanowitz, J. L. (2012). The role of gender in the generation of stalking scripts. *Sex roles*, *66*(5-6), 366-377.doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9867-2.doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0093-3

Table 1. Beliefs about stalking: item means, standard deviation and factors loadings (after PA) (N = 315)

| Motivations of stalkers' behaviors | M | SD | Factorial Loadings (PC; Varimax) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | F1 (15.3%) Weak Character | F2 (14.8%) Social Maladjust. |
| Jealousy | 4.4 | .9 | | **.43** |
| Violent personality | 4.4 | 7. 7 | | .34 |
| Desire of control | 4.3 | .9 | | .35 |
| Distorted view of love | 4.1 | 1 | .37 | .33 |
| Need attention | 3.9 | 5.5 | .31 | |
| Personality desorder | 3.9 | 1.1 | | **.61** |
| Social maladjustment | 3.7 | 5.5 | | |
| Anger | 3. 7 | 1.1 | .31 | **.53** |
| Insecurity | 3.6 | 1.1 | **.81** | |
| Fear for abandonement | 3.6 | 1.1 | **.49** | |
| Frustration | 3.6 | 1 | | |
| Childhood trauma | 3.3 | 1.2 | | |
| Low self-esteem | 3.2 | 1.2 | **.79** | |
| Alcohol/drugs abuse | 3 | 1. 3 | | **.67** |
| Low level of education | 2.5 | 1.2 | | **.52** |
| Stalkers' emotional problems | M | SD | | |

| | M | SD | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nervousness | 3.4 | 1.0 | | |
| Fear | 3.2 | 1.0 | | |
| Depression | 3.2 | 1.1 | | |
| Concern | 3.0 | 1.0 | MONOFACTORIAL SOLUTION | |
| Sadness | 2.9 | 1.0 | | |
| Loss of interest in daily activities | 2.7 | 1.2 | | |

| | | | F1 (26.2%) | F2 (24%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Stalkers' behaviors* | *M* | *SD* | Aggressive behavior | Seeking contacts |
| Control | 4.8 | .6 | .35 | **.69** |
| Communications | 4.4 | .9 | | **.81** |
| Threats | 4.4 | .8 | **.81** | |
| Injuries | 3.9 | 1.0 | **.83** | |
| Material damages | 3.8 | 5.5 | .34 | |
| Sending materials | 3.8 | 1.0 | | **.66** |
| Defamation | 3.6 | 1.1 | **.43** | |

| | | | F1 (17.1%) | F2 (17.1%) | F3 (16.1%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Consequences on victims* | *M* | *SD* | Self-destruction | Physical desease | Psychological desease |
| Panic | 3.6 | 1.1 | | .32 | |
| Fear | 3.4 | 1.2 | | | **.83** |
| Anxiety | 3.4 | 1.2 | | | **.85** |

| | M | SD | F1 | F2 | F3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paranoia | 3.4 | 1.1 | | | **.53** |
| Depression | 3.2 | 1.0 | **.57** | | |
| Irritation | 3.1 | 1.0 | | .45 | .37 |
| Self-inflicted injuries | 2.6 | 1.0 | **.66** | | |
| Distrust | 3.4 | 1.2 | **.50** | | |
| Agorafobia | 3.4 | 1.2 | **.53** | | |
| Eating disorders. | 3. 4 | 1.1 | | **.65** | |
| Weight fluctuation | 3.3 | 1.2 | | **.56** | |
| Suicidal thoughts | 3.2 | 1.2 | **.87** | | |
| Tiredness | 3.1 | 1.0 | | **.67** | |
| Headache | 3.0 | 1.0 | | **.78** | |

| | | | F1 | F2 | F3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | (24.5%) | (16.7%) | (15%) |
| | | | Proactive coping | External Help | Escape |
| *Suggested Coping* | M | SD | | | |
| Psychological support | 4.3 | .9 | **.61** | | |
| Police report | 4.2 | 1.0 | | **.91** | |
| Awareness of the problem | 4.2 | .9 | **.69** | | |
| Police intervention | 4.2 | 1.1 | | **.92** | |
| Help form friends | 4.2 | .9 | | | |
| Self-defence | 4.0 | 1.1 | **.47** | | |
| Prevention | 3.5 | 1.2 | **.73** | | |
| Information campaigns | 3.3 | 1.1 | **.68** | | |
| Control telephone lines | 3.2 | 1.1 | **.56** | | |
| Promotion of social Wellbeing | 3.1 | 1.2 | **.70** | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moving away | 2.4 | 1.2 | | **.89** |
| Identity change | 2. 1 | 1.1 | | **.91** |

*Note*: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; F1 = Factor one; F2 = Factor two; F3 = Factor three;

values in bolt show the items used for computing scores; loadings <.30 were not reported in table.

All the items value ranged from 1 to 5.

1 Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and correlations among variables (N= 315).

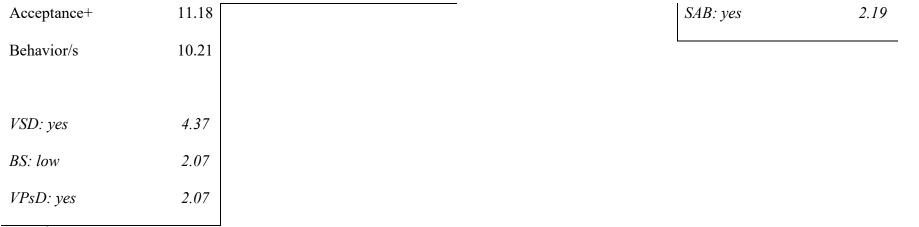| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. SWC | 10.4 | 2.5 | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. SSM | 17.6 | 3.3 | .19** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. SEP | 18.4 | 3.9 | .47** | .32** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. SAB | 13.1 | 1.9 | .14* | .33** | .06 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 5. SSC | 13.0 | 1.8 | .22** | .21** | .15** | .28** | - | | | | | | | |
| 6. VSD | 16.8 | 3.7 | .20** | .40** | .32** | .18** | .17** | - | | | | | | |
| 7. VPsD | 13.1 | 3.3 | .22** | .38** | .27** | .22** | .25** | .47** | - | | | | | |
| 8. VPD | 13.4 | 1.9 | .25** | .25** | .23** | .34** | .38** | .34** | .34** | - | | | | |
| 9. CP | 25.7 | 4.9 | .24** | .32** | .22** | .19** | .20** | .41** | .39** | .26** | - | | | |
| 10. CE | 4.5 | 2.1 | .12 | .15** | .17** | .01 | -.03 | .14* | .08 | -.08 | .10 | - | | |
| 11. CEH | 8.4 | 2.0 | .08 | .19** | .14* | .20** | .20** | .03 | .05 | .12* | .19** | .01 | - | |
| 12. HS | 30.0 | 8.4 | -.04 | .03 | .10 | -.05 | -.13* | .01 | -.13* | -.19** | -.13* | .06 | .08 | - |
| 13. BS | 29.5 | 7.1 | .01 | .12* | .19** | .01 | .01 | .10 | -.01 | -.03 | -.01 | .15** | .13* | .24** |

1    *Note*. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. SWC = Stalker's Weak Character; SSM = Stalker's Social Maladjustment; SEP = Stalker's Emotional Problems;

2    SAB= Stalkers' Aggressive Behavior; SSC = Stalkers' Search for Contact; VSD = Victims' Self-Destruction; VPsD = Victims' Physical

3    Disease; VPD = Victims' Psychological Disease; CP = Coping Proactive; CE = Coping Escape; CEH = Coping External Help; HS = Hostile

4    Sexism; BS = Benevolent Sexism.

5

6

1    Table 3. The words, Chi-square and illustrative variables characterizing each class

| Class I (25%) | | Class II (31%) | | Class III (23%) | | Class IV (23%) | |
| *Dysfunctional Relationships* | | *Persistent Harassment* | | *Intrusion* | | *Aggressive Interaction* | |
| | $\chi^2$ | | $\chi^2$ | | $\chi^2$ | | $\chi^2$ |
| Woman/men | 61.72 | Persecution+ | 42.19 | Intrusiveness+ | 35.89 | Physic+ | 65.14 |
| Man/men | 51.33 | Person/s | 35.64 | Privacy | 32.20 | Psychol+ | 61.97 |
| Partner | 32.94 | Obsess+ | 17.46 | Spying+ | 30.89 | Persecution+ | 24.91 |
| Ex | 21.85 | Other/s | 15.62 | Woman/men | 27.37 | Freedom+ | 30.62 |
| Relation | 21.85 | Communication+ | 12.29 | Violation+ | 25.53 | Limitation | 22.37 |
| Rejection+ | 20.55 | Annoyance+ | 11.75 | Morbidity+ | 18.95 | Violence+ | 13.42 |
| Intimate | 17.43 | Daily | 11.43 | Individual/s | 14.68 | Behavior/s | 23.78 |
| Desire | 17.01 | | | Control+ | 10.70 | Offence+ | 18.58 |
| Possessive+ | 17.01 | *VSD: no* | *5.38* | | | Moral+ | 17.52 |
| Obsessive+ | 14.75 | *CE: no* | *3.68* | *SSM.: no* | *2.34* | Victim/s | 12.09 |
| Contact+ | 14.06 | *BS: high* | *2.28* | *SAB: no* | *2.04* | | |
| Search for | 12.37 | *VPsD: no* | *2.25* | | | *CE: yes* | *2.91* |

Acceptance+      11.18

Behavior/s      10.21

*VSD: yes*      *4.37*

*BS: low*      *2.07*

*VPsD: yes*      *2.07*

*SAB: yes*      *2.19*

1     *Note.* $\chi^2$ = chi square; SSM = Stalkers' Social Maladjustment; SAB = Stalkers' Aggressive Behavior; VSD = Victims' Self-Destruction; VPsD = Victims'

2     Physical Disease; CE = Coping Escape; BS = Benevolent sexism. The symbol '+' means that textual forms (words) encompass words semantically similar

3     (e.g., the form 'possessive+' includes 'possess' 'possessive' 'to own').

4