

NO MEANS NO

Stalking happens in the queer community, too
by Carole Boswell



MARTY DAVIS

As a domestic violence detective, I see an unbelievable volume of violence in the Portland and Vancouver communities. As a lesbian, I see just as much. The sad part for me is that rarely as a detective do I see gay and lesbian victims come in seeking help. Why? Because they are not reporting the violence.

I was out with friends earlier this year, talking to a good friend who told me how happy she was with her new girlfriend. Then she started talking about her wife's ex-girlfriend and recent harassing behaviors. I started to cringe. She was describing a stalker.

My friend (we can call her Judy) told me that the ex started driving by their new home, calling at all hours, threatening Judy and damaging property in their yard. She told me the ex knows where they work and makes a point to be there and walk by often. She said this ex openly follows them at functions and sits nearby, making it a point to sit facing them to make them nervous.

After hearing this, I put on my police face and informed Judy they are being stalked. She nodded as if she agreed, but didn't think it was worth reporting to police. I told her that this is crime and that the behavior is clearly a pattern of harassment meant to intimidate them. Anyone who is open about following them, threatening her and possibly damaging their property is someone who is obsessed and immature, and therefore very unstable. Stalkers don't know how to move on. It's one thing to miss your ex and go through the normal grieving process. It's another thing to begin to make that person afraid for her safety.

If you find yourself saying things like, "If I can't have you, no one will," you might be a stalker. If you call or write to someone every day who isn't writing or calling back and has expressed he or she doesn't want to be with you, you might be a stalker. If you drive by an ex's house to see who he or she is seeing now, you might be a stalker.

Generally speaking, people tend to minimize problems in hopes they will go away. The problem with stalkers is they don't minimize; they obsess. The behavior of a stalker ranges from annoying to extreme, sometimes resulting in homicide. Anything in between can seriously affect a victim's day-to-day life. Many victims who allow stalking to go unchecked for long periods say they are eventually just "worn down" by their predator.

If your partner or ex follows you or spies on you, leaves threatening notes or messages, destroys your property or calls when you don't want him or her to, then they could be stalking you.

People who are being harassed by someone they know or a stranger should report it to the police or, at the least, apply for a protective

order. Stalkers need to know in no uncertain terms their behavior is not acceptable. It is important to remember that at the time you apply for the order, the stalker may become more obsessed. People at the resources listed here can help you form a safety plan.

Stalking in a domestic violence situation is extremely dangerous and should be reported to the police. You are particularly vulnerable if a person knows you intimately; knows your day-to-day habits, strengths and weaknesses; and is obsessed with you. If you are in a situation involving physical violence in the home, if you are now trying to separate and if your ex is not letting you go, it is important to have a safety plan.

I know we don't like to report things to the police for fear that either we'll be outed or they will cause someone else to be arrested. People in the queer community are used to drama and, for

whatever reason, often know friends are being abused but never step in to help. A lesbian or gay man in an abusive relationship may find it harder than others to step forward and admit she or he lives with an abusive person. If you find yourself wanting to stop abusive patterns of behavior, you may want to seek support through a batterers intervention group or some other support group.

In the queer community, we could all do a better job of speaking out when we see someone in an abusive relationship or being

Stalking is Oregon is defined as "knowingly alarming or coercing another person (or member of that person's immediate family or household) by engaging in repeated and unwanted contact with the other person; and causing that person objectively reasonable alarm; and the repeated and unwanted contact causes the victim reasonable apprehension regarding the personal safety of the victim or a member of the victim's immediate family or household"

stalked. Please report stalking to the police or seek assistance to keep yourself safe. The bottom line is none of us deserves to be hit, abused, controlled, stalked, frightened, intimidated or manipulated. 

CAROLE BOSWELL is a Vancouver Police Department detective.

RESOURCES

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 800-799-7233
- **Regional:** Northwest Network, www.northwestnetwork.org
- **Portland Women's Crisis Line:** 503-235-5333
- **Bradley-Angle House:** Sexual and Gender Minority Services (women battered by women group), 503-232-1805, ext. 3
- **Younger than 24:** Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, www.smyrc.org
- **Trans:** www.survivorproject.org



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