Where Romance Meets Stalking:
How Heteronormative Gender Beliefs Perpetuate Stalking Culture

By

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To my parents for their sacrifices, support, and boundless love.
No pudiera haberlo logrado sin ustedes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Where do we draw the line between normative romance and sexual violence? This question is of interest in both sociological scholarship and popular culture, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement—a movement in which women are collectively contesting what should be regarded as a sexual crime. While this question has been explored for some forms of sexual violence—namely rape and sexual harassment—others are undertheorized and overlooked. This is certainly the case for stalking, in both its offline and cyber manifestations. Stalking is said to be an "ancient practice but modern crime" (Meloy 1996), since the first anti-stalking legislation in the United States passed as early as 1990 in California (Lambert et al. 2013). While definitions vary widely, both within the literature and in legislation, stalking is often defined by researchers as a series of actions directed a specific person including repeated visual or physical proximity; nonconsensual communication; or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof (Owens 2015; Dietz & Martin 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes 1998). Cyberstalking is stalking that primarily takes place using technology—including social media, cellphones, messaging, and GPS tracking—though instances of stalking often comprise both online and offline tactics.

Though only recently defined as a social problem, stalking victimization is strikingly pervasive. While estimates differ, approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will become victims of stalking at some point in the life course (Cunach & Spitzberg 2014). Given underreporting and low prosecution rates, these numbers likely reflect an underestimate of what is an alarmingly common crime (Black et al 2011). Such

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discrepancies indicate a discordance between community and legal definitions of stalking,

leading to the mislabeling of stalking behaviors. Additionally, increases in social media

and internet usage may be catalyzing the rate of cyberstalking—one specific stalking tactic

that may be responsible for driving increases in prevalence (Pittaro 2007). Despite the

psychological trauma that all stalking—cyber or otherwise—may bring to its victims,

cyberstalking is generally not regarded as a serious issue, and it is severely undertheorized

(Ahlgrim 2015). It is crucial to understand the mechanisms that undergird common

misconceptions held about cyberstalking in order to mitigate what I posit is a *stalking*

culture: a culture in which stalking is accepted, eroticized, and minimized through social,

cultural, and structural discourses

    Akin to most sexual violence victimization, stalking is a highly gendered crime

(Dunn 2011). Current research shows that the majority of stalking victims are women,

while the majority of stalkers are men (Flowers, 2003; Baum et al, 2009; Lernhart et al.,

2016), situating stalking within the larger context of gender inequality and gendered

sexuality. I conceive stalking as a maladaptive way of "doing gender" within the context of

compulsory heteronormativity (Fenstermaker and West 2002; West and Zimmerman

1987): as an interactional accomplishment founded upon normative expectations of

femininity and masculinity. Heteronormativity structures the ways men and women relate,

in a way that is assumed, expected, and understood as natural (Rich 1980; Jackson 2009;

Kitzinger 2005; Schippers 2007). Moreover, through the construction of female sexuality

as passive and submissive, and male sexuality as dominant and aggressive (Butler 1999;

Ingraham 1994), these traditional gender beliefs and behaviors manifest in stalking (Hvlaka

2014).Through a framework of "doing gender," heteronormativity (Rich 1980; Kitzinger

2005; Jackson 2009), and sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon 1973) I explore the ways in

which normative beliefs about gender and sexuality shape perceptions of cyberstalking on social media. This approach allows me to pose the question: how do normative beliefs about gender and sexuality impact where we draw the line between ordinary romance and deviant stalking?

This study contributes to the literature on gender, heteronormativity, and deviance in a territory seldom explored by social scientists: the Internet. Social media has quickly become a primary platform for social interaction, and it is important for sociology to take account of the rapid development of technology and the widespread use of social media. As social life becomes increasingly embedded in cyberspace, it is crucial to analyze how sociological theories and principles apply to the digital world, and if cyberspace governed by the same social norms. Moreover, I identify the ways gender, sexist beliefs, and sexual double standards perpetuate the normalization of stalking online. The data come from a large, representative vignette study in which respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk read and respond to a hypothetical story that adheres to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey's definition of stalking (Black et al 2018), excluding the fear requirement[1]. The vignettes vary in the stalker-victim relationship, comprising strangers, coworkers, a onetime hook-up, and ex-partners, providing further insight into how different cyberstalking scenarios might be perceived and labeled differently.

While previous studies on stalking focus on fairly homogenous samples of college students (e.g. Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Sinclair and Frieze 2005; Lambert et al 2013), the present study is based on a sample relatively diverse in terms of age, race,

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[1] The fear requirement in many anti-stalking legislations has been deemed faulty in the literature due to the highly gendered and racialized nature of the fear response. More specifically, women are more likely to experience fear compared to men and white women are more likely to experience fear compared to black women. (e.g. Dietz and Martin, 2007; Owens, 2015)

sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, granting novel insight on how such perceptions vary between different segments in the population. Further, respondents were asked to respond to items from abridged versions of the Sexual Double Standards Scale (Lefkowitz et al. 2014), the Benevolent Sexism Scale (Rollero et al. 2014), and the Hostile Sexism Scale (Rollero et al. 2014), which I combined into one "heteronormativity index." In addition to its methodological novelty, this study provides a valuable theoretical contribution for understanding how sexual scripts and heteronormativity perpetuate the normalization of sexual violence in the context of the elusive cyberworld.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sexual Scripts and Stalking Beliefs

Though sexuality is traditionally conceptualized as simply residing within the biological body, Gagnon and Simon's (1973) sexual scripts framework posits instead, that sexuality is constructed through a complex meaning-making process of external symbols and cues. Put more simply, sexuality is shaped by socially learned sets of conduct and sexual desires, rather than by biological imperatives. According to this framework, "appropriate" sexual behaviors are learned from external sources such as media portrayals, enacted and tested with others, and internalized as facts. In their later work, Simon and Gagnon (1986) categorize these scripts into three interrelated levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic. At the broader, societal level, cultural scenarios are "road maps" perpetuated by social institutions such as religious institutions, schools, and mass media, on when, how, why, and with whom to be sexual. On the interpersonal level, individuals influence and are influenced by one another's sexual beliefs and conducts through social interaction. Finally, the individual, intrapsychic level of scripting refers to one's own sexual intentions, beliefs, and desires—which are heavily influenced by cultural and interpersonal scripts. This study examines sexual scripts on the intrapsychic and cultural levels, through an analysis of individually held beliefs on sexuality and gender, and the way these beliefs might shape the normalization of sexually abusive behaviors as ordinary sexuality or romance.

Sexuality scholars have repeatedly shown how culturally learned sexual scripts shape beliefs and behaviors in various contexts. External cues and definitions shape the

labeling of sexual behaviors—as Carpenter (2001) found in defining virginity and identifying one's virginity loss, for instance. Moreover, sexual scripts act as roadmaps in labeling and defining sexual violence, as well, as in the case of labeling child abuse (Hvlaka 2014) and rape (Ford 2017; Jackson 1997). In regard to stalking, scholars have analyzed the impact of the script of the "persistent" man, commonly depicted in romantic television and film. In these popular culture portrayals, a man's persistence and grand gestures are cast as "true love" with a happy ending, (Brewster 2003) whether he is an acquaintance, ex-, or current boyfriend. Exposure to such depictions shape our understanding of persistence, which might affect the ability to identify and label a behavior as *stalking*, rather than "true love."

In the case of Lippman's (2015) work, watching these scenarios in movies and TV series predicted higher endorsement of "stalking myths," or false beliefs about what stalking ought to look like. (Sinclair 2006, 2012). Like other sexual violence myths (Lisak 2011; Grubb & Turner 2012) "stalking myths" comprise ideas of what "real stalking" looks like, and what the experience of "real" stalking is like. For instance, stalking myths include beliefs that stalking is only between strangers, is benign or merely a "nuisance," that stalking victims caused their stalking by being "encouraging," and that stalking should be flattering for the victim (Lippman & Ward, 2014; Kamphuis, Galeazzi, De Fazio, Emmelkamp, Farnham, Groenen, James, & Vervaeke, 2005; Sinclair, 2006). Overall, the growing body of sexual scripts literature underscores the importance of meaning-making regarding sexuality, and the capacity for culturally transmitted messages about sexuality to normalize myriad forms of sexual violence. Since sociologists have yet to fully flesh out how norms operate on social media, it is unclear whether the sexual scripts found in "real" life" operate identically on the internet. This present research sheds light on the

heterosexual sexual scripts of social media by interrogating how individuals perceive and define cyberstalking.

Heteronormativity and Violence

Nested within overarching sexual scripts is heteronormativity—an institution which shapes the way men and women interact and relate (Rich 1980). Heteronormativity is defined in feminist scholarship as prescriptive standards for "normal" sexual interactions between men and women (Hird, 2002; Jackson,2006). Rooted in gender norms, heteronormativity constructs women and men as sexually oppositional, yet complementary, in a way that ultimately reinforces men's superiority over women (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Mahoney & Knudson-Martin, 2009; Sprecher & McKinney, 1993; Winstead, Derlega, & Rose, 1997). Within heteronormativity, masculinity is understood as active and persistent, while femininity is passive and submissive to masculine sexuality (Hird 2002; Jackson 2006). Thus, one common cultural scenario for heterosexual encounters is that of a "cat and mouse" game in which the woman acts as the passive sexual gate keeper to a man's active—and often uncontrollable—sexual desires (Messerschmidt 1986;Wiederman 2005). Moreover, compulsory heteronormativity presents these prescriptions and proscriptions a way that is assumed, expected, and understood as natural (Hvlaka 2014; Rich 1980; Jackson 2009; Kitzinger 2005; Schippers 2007).

While heteronormativity shapes sexual relations, it also draws boundaries between the ordinary and the deviant. For instance, men are generally expected to have the most active role on a first date—from initiating the date to paying the bill (Eaton & Rose 2012). Men are also believed to be the more active—if not aggressive—partner during sexual activity, and to initiate and control the sexual encounter as a means of properly "doing" masculinity (Muehlenhard & Felts, 1998; Snell, Belk, & Hawkins, 1986). Yet, Jackson

(1997) argues, all sexuality—sexual violence included—falls on a continuum, and the heteronormative beliefs that organize men's and women's sexual behaviors in highly gendered ways also perpetuate and normalize sexual violence. In the case of stalking, the behaviors are likely normalized through the salient narrative of the *active sexual man* whose sexuality is difficult, if not impossible to control, and the woman who passively receives and gatekeeps masculine desire. Such heteronormative narratives normalize men's sexual aggression as simply "boys being boys" (Connell 1987; Messerschmidt 2012), in a way that comes to be believed as a natural part of a man. From the perspective of heteronormative sexual scripts, individuals likely recast men's aggressive stalking behaviors as part of normal, romantic pursuit and thus normalized as "a man in love."

Perceptions of Stalking

Though a relatively small and limited body of work, other scholars—mainly social psychologists—have examined perceptions of stalking behaviors. This scholarship chiefly focuses on the impact of gender on perceptions of stalking and draws from samples of college students (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Sheridan & Davies, 2001; Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Yanowitz, 2006; Lambert et al. 2013). The data are inconclusive; while some studies confirms that women are more likely to identify stalking (McKeon et al. 2014; Yanowits 2006) and regard stalking as more harmful and pervasive (Lambert et al. 2013) relative to men, other studies find no gender difference (Cass, 2011; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Sheridan et al., 2002). The role of stalker-victim relationship on perceptions of stalking is similarly unclear. While some research shows attitudes toward ex-partners are more lenient relative to strangers and acquaintances (e.g. Blaauw, & Patel, 2003; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013), other research finds no impact of prior relationship on ratings of severity (Ahlgrim 2015). The impact of stalker-victim

relationship is particularly important, because stalking by a former intimate is not only more likely, but often more dangerous, relative to strangers (Dunn 2002). If individuals do not believe that stalking by current or former intimates is severe—or even recognize it as stalking, this could have serious implications for reporting and prosecuting the most pervasive and dangerous form of stalking.

In addition to contradictory results, these studies were conducted among small, relatively homogenous, groups of college students, and only one of these studies specifically examines cyberstalking (Ahglrim 2010). In its current state, research on perceptions of stalking is in crucial need of further development, with particular attention to: expanding data beyond undergraduate respondents, reexamining the impact of gender and stalker-victim pairing, and moving beyond only gender, to understand how other embodied identities such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and race impact perceptions of stalking—is there variation? Further, studies on perceptions of stalking must be contextualized within the broader institutions of gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity, in order to more comprehensively understand the mechanisms behind what I posit is a *stalking culture.* Much like rape and sexual harassment, stalking does not emerge in a vacuum, but rather is the product of cultural messages on gender, sexuality, and heterosexual relations. The present study seeks to shed light on how the broader culture normalizes stalking, posing the following questions. What impact does one's gender and sexual orientation have on labeling stalking? How does the prior relationship between a stalker and victim impact how others perceive the stalking behaviors? How do sexist beliefs and sexual double standards shape these processes? These research questions are part of a larger pursuit to understand where the boundary lies between sexuality and violence, with particular interest to how norms and modes of conduct apply to cyberspace.

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CHAPTER III

DATA AND METHODS

Participant Recruitment

This data for this study used an online format, conducted using Amazon

Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and collected using Qualtrics survey software. Mturk is a

crowdsourcing website that allows researchers to post surveys or other tasks to be

completed by site users in exchange for payment (Hunzaker 2016). MTurk is becoming an

increasingly popular recruitment platform among social scientists due to its highly efficient

recruitment of a more diverse participant pool than traditional college samples (Bujrmester

et al. 2011; Paolacci and Chandler 2014; Shank 2016). The data collected from MTurk

participants, particularly in the case of vignette studies, has been shown to be of

comparable or higher quality than data collected from undergraduate participants

(Weinberg et al. 2014; Hunzaker 2016). Further, samples generated from MTurk have been

found to provide a subject pool that is slightly more technologically savvy than the national

average (Hahl & Zuckerman 2014), which is preferable in the present study focusing on

stalking via social media platforms on the internet. The online format of MTurk allows the

respondent to be fully immersed in the hypothetical internet scenario by virtue of reading

the vignette and social messenger screenshots on a computer.

A common concern regarding the use of MTurk is the presence of individuals who

have been repeatedly exposed to the same measures and scales—and would thus provide

lower quality data—as well as the risk that some subjects seek to complete the task without

paying close attention. These concerns were mitigated by excluding the top 1% most active

MTurk users—who collectively complete about 21% of all MTurk published tasks, as well

as by limiting the study to participants who had completed at least 100 tasks and had a high

approval rating. Additionally, though Mturk is already believed to recruit more diverse samples than undergraduate studies, I oversampled for Black, Latino, and Asian participants in order to reach approximately a nationally representative racial/ethnic composition.

Table I. Means, Percents, and Standard Deviations (SD) for Key Study Variables. (N=810)

Variables	Mean/ Percent	SD
Woman (1=Yes)	50.86%	--
Man (1=Yes)	46.17%	--
White (1=Yes)	53.58%	--
Latino (1=Yes)	16.30%	--
Black (1=Yes)	15.06%	--
Asian (1=Yes)	6.79%	--
Other or Multiracial (1=Yes)	5.31%	--
Age (18-72)	34.76	10.40
High School or GED (1=Yes)	13.52%	--
Associate's Degree (1=Yes)	30.16%	--
Bacherlor's Degree (1=yes)	57.32%	--
MA, PhD, JD, or MD (1=Yes)	0.44%	--
Heterosexual/Straight (1=Yes)	84.57%	--
Non-Heterosexual/Queer (1=Yes)	12.22%	--
Rural (1=Yes)	16.79%	--
Suburban (1=Yes)	50.12%	--
Urban (1=Yes)	30.12%	--
Religious Importance (0-4)	2.44	1.49
Has Been Stalked (1=Yes)	25.43%	--
Hostile Sexism (0-24)	15.26	6.22
Benevolent Sexism (0-24)	12.43	5.61
Sexual Double Standards (-20-40)	12.32	6.29
Heteronormativity (-8-73)	40.02	14.46

A total of 810 participants were recruited (46% men and 51% women) with a mean age of 34.76 years (SD=10.40)[2]. Fifty-four percent of our sample self-identified as White/Caucasian, 16% as Latino/ Hispanic, 7% as Asian, 15% as Black/African-American,

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[2] MTurk workers must be at least 18 years old to participate

and 5% as other or Multiracial. About 85% of respondents identified as straight or

heterosexual, and 12% identify as Gay/Homosexual, Bisexual, or Queer. In regard to

education level, about 30% of respondents had a High School Degree or GED, 19% an

Associate's Degree, 38% a Bachelor's Degree, and 13% a Master's Degree, PhD, JD, or

MD[3]. Further, about half of the sample reported living in a suburban area, 30% urban, and

16% in a rural area. In terms of religion, 37.53% of the sample considers religion to be "not

at all important" to them; 14.50% "not very important; 16.41% "somewhat important";

17.18% "very important"; and 14.38% as "extremely important." Approximately 25% of

the sample reported having been a victim of stalking or cyberstalking; this matches Cunach

& Spitzberg's (2014) estimate of women's stalking victimization but is higher than past

estimations in approximately gender-balanced samples.

Vignettes and Analyses

In a survey called "Romance and Internet Interactions." participants read and

responded to one of four vignettes depicting a scenario between Paul and Kim. The terms

"stalking," "sexual violence," and "heteronormativity" did not appear in the survey

description, and the word "stalking" does not appear until after the participant responds to

the scenario. The vignettes vary in the stalker-victim relationship, comprising strangers,

coworkers, a onetime hook-up, and ex-partners. All vignettes are complemented by

"screen-shots" of Facebook messages in order to fully immerse the participant in the

narrative. In these vignettes, Paul is actively reaching out to Kim via various remote forms

of communication: repeated Facebook messages, "liking" and commenting on photos, and

finding Kim's Twitter and Instagram accounts. These messages range from sharing stories,

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[3]This sample is fairly representative of the national average, in which 33% of adults have a college education, and 12% have an advanced degree (Ryan & Bauman 2016).

complimenting Kim's appearance, telling Kim, "I love you," to begging for Kim to respond. After Kim blocks Paul, he begins calling her house and sending flowers to her at work. After reading the short snippet describing Paul and Kim's prior relationship (or lack thereof) and the Facebook screenshots, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions on their perceptions of the scenario. All four vignettes adhere to legal stalking definitions (Tjaden 1998). Further, respondents were asked to respond to items from abridged versions of the Sexual Double Standards Scale (Lefkowitz et al. 2014), the Benevolent Sexism Scale (Rollero et al. 2014), and the Hostile Sexism Scale (Rollero et al. 2014) which assess their endorsement of a variety of heteronormative beliefs about gender and sexuality.

The three aforementioned scales were used to indicate participants' endorsement of sexual double standards based on gender, as well as hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs. The measures were expected to create a single index representing "heteronormative beliefs." The Hostile and Benevolent sexism scales are part of the abridged Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1999). "Hostile Sexism" (HS) taps into adversarial views in which women are believed to be seeking to take control over men (Rollero et al. 2014). "Benevolent Sexism" (BS) refers to beliefs in which women are idealized as "pure creatures" who must be protected by men, though in a way that implies that women are weak and best suited for traditional gender norms (Rollero et al. 2014). Each scale is comprised of 6 questions on a 5-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."Cronbach's Alphas for HS and BS were .90 and .84 respectively. The abridged version of the Sexual Double Standards scale assesses gender beliefs specific to sexual behavior and measures the extent to which respondents adhere to the sexual double standard that grants men more sexual freedom than women (Lefkowitz 2002; Muehlenhard

& Quackenbush 1996). This scale consists of 17 items on a 5-point scale (to make the scale consistent with the other measures) from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The Crohnbach's Alpha was .71. I combined the 29 measures from the three scales to create a Heteronormativity Index, for which the Cronbach's alpha is .71. The three scales have been used as part of a Heteronormative Beliefs scale, with heteronormative beliefs as a latent variable (Eaton & Matamala 2014); while the measure developed by Eaton and Matamala also includes two scales on men's sexuality, the scales were dropped from this analysis to reduce length and repetitiveness of the survey.

Analyses

The data were analyzed using ordinary least squares regression and binary logistic regression. For logistic regression, the dependent variable was "is this stalking" (1=Yes). The dependent variables in the OLS models is "Acceptable" was measured on 5-Point Likert Scale. Respondents were asked "How socially acceptable or unacceptable do you consider Paul's actions?" and possible answers range from "not at all socially acceptable" to "extremely socially acceptable." The independent variable of particular interest is the stalker-victim relationship Coworkers/Acquaintances (1=Yes), One Time Date/Hookup (1=Yes), and Former Partners (1=Yes). The victim-stalker relationship variables were constructed from a single parent variable; "relationship," "hook up" and "acquaintances" were included in one model in order to compare the effects of the stalker-victim relationship relative to that of the "stranger" category. I controlled for respondent's gender (1=woman), age (18 to 72), race—Black (1=Yes) and Latino (1=Yes), and Asian (1=Yes), education (0-3), sexual orientation—heterosexual (1=Yes), non-heterosexual (1=Yes), location—Rural (1=Yes), Suburban (1=Yes), and Urban (1=Yes), religious importance (0-4) measured with Pearce et al.'s (2017) subscale, and prior stalking victimization (1=Yes).

The particular control variables were selected either as indicators of a respondent's relative position in the social structure or as other factors which are thought to impact beliefs on sexuality and gender according to the sexual scripts framework (Gagnon & Simon 1973). The intercept represents individuals who self-identified as heterosexual, men, white, have a high school diploma, rural, regard religion as extremely important, and have not been victims of stalking or cyberstalking.

Predictor variables of particular interest are: benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, sexual double standards, and heteronormativity. As described in earlier sections, these variables were measured using preverified scales; hostile and benevolent sexism measures are part of the abridged ambivalent sexism index (ASI) (Rollero et al. 2014), and sexual double standard beliefs are measured using the abridged SDS (Lefkowitz 2002). "Heteronormativity" is an index created by combining the items from the abridged ASI and SDS scales.

Figure I. Intercorrelations Among Variables (N=733)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
1. Woman (1=yes)	--									
2. Queer (1=yes)	.074*	--								
3. Education (1=yes)	.021	.023	--							
4. Age (1=yes)	.260***	-.165***	-.146***	--						
5. Religiosity (1-5)	.164***	-.091*	-.074*	-.146***	--					
6. Stalked (1=yes)	.260***	.161***	.043	.025	-.036	--				
7. Hostile Sexism	-.360***	-.119**	.006	.071	.117**	.07	--			
8. Benevolent Sexism	-.138***	-.199***	.059	.008	.382***	.022	.407***	--		
9. Sexual Double Standards	-.223***	-.123***	-.008	-.070	.022***	.072	.503***	.432***	--	
10. Heteronormativity	-.306***	-.182***	.022	.003	.295***	.070	.810***	.753***	.821***	--

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Is It Stalking? Gender and Relationship Types

Table II. Labeling Vignette as Stalking on Key Study Variables   (N=786)

Demographics and Victimization	Odds Ratio Estimate	S.E.	Odds Ratio Estimate	S.E.
Woman (1=Yes)	3.923***	0.405	4.078***	0.332
Latino (1=Yes)	1.598	0.331	1.636	0.411
Black (1=Yes)	1.889	0.555	2.069	0.727
Asian (1=Yes)	1.598	0.493	1.349	0.299
Non-Heterosexual (1=Yes)	1.607	0.407	1.631	0.546
Suburban (1=Yes)	1.405	0.542	1.373	0.397
Urban (1=Yes)	1.012	0.373	0.937	0.397
Has Been Stalked (1=Yes)	1.58	0.457	1.759	0.407
Victim-Stalker Pairing				
Coworkers			0.230**	0.525
Hookup			0.322*	0.540
Relationship			0.171***	0.514
Constant	1.58	0.333	1.759	0.553
R-square	0.0988		0.146	

*p<.05; **<.01; ***<.001 (two-tailed tests).

To understand general patterns in labeling instances of cyberstalking as "stalking,"

I first conducted logistic regression analyses of stalking on the key study variables. As

Table 2 indicates, gender has a strong impact on likelihood of identifying and labeling a set

of cyberstalking behaviors as stalking. Adjusting for race, sexual orientation, location, and

past victimization of stalking, women in the sample are 2.923 times more likely ($p <.001$),

relative to men, to label any of the vignettes as stalking. Surprisingly, identifying as non-

heterosexual or as a past victim of stalking had no impact on stalking labeling. Race and

location similarly have no impact on the likelihood of labeling a vignette as stalking. This

model accounts for approximately 9.88% of the variation in "stalking" ($r = .0988$). In the

second model, I included victim-stalker pairing to understand the impact of the vignette

type on stalking labeling. Once again, gender has a strong impact on stalking labeling, while all other demographic and victimization variables have no impact. In this model, women are 3.078 times more likely ($p <.001$) relative to men to label a vignette as stalking. In regard to relationship pairing, I found that all relationship types, relative to the "Strangers" vignette, are significantly less likely to be identified as stalking. If Paul and Kim were presented as having gone on a date (or "hooked up"), participants were 67.8% less likely ($p <.01$) to label the situation as stalking. If Kim and Paul were presented as co-workers, participants were 77% less likely ($p <.01$) to label the situation as stalking. Lastly, if Paul was presented as Kim's ex-boyfriend, participants were 82.9% less likely ($p <.01$) to label the situation as stalking, relative to if Kim and Paul were complete strangers. This model accounts for approximately 14.60% of the variation in "stalking" ($r = .146$).

Is It Socially Acceptable?

Once I established this broad pattern in labeling, I then analyzed the impact of the key study variables, as well as endorsement of heteronormativity on perceived social acceptability of the vignettes. As Table 3 Indicates, I first examined "Acceptability" on the key demographic variables and past stalking victimization. Similar to labeling the vignettes as stalking, gender has a significant, and relatively strong impact on perceived social acceptability of Paul's actions. More specifically, being a woman is associated with labeling a vignette as .231 (b) points less socially acceptable ($p <.01$), relative to respondents who are men. Once more, race, sexual orientation, past stalking victimization, and location have no impact. In this model, age, religious importance, and education were included, all of which have significant impacts on the dependent variable. More specifically, increase in respondent age is associated with a relatively small decrease in perceived acceptability ($b = -.0093$, $p<.01$); each additional year in respondent age predicts

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a .0093 decrease in perceived acceptability. Further, each additional score on the religious

importance scale predicts a .095 increase in perceived acceptability ($b = .095$, $p < .001$).

Surprisingly, a higher education level predicts .132 increase in perceived social

acceptability of Paul's actions which is a relatively large effect ($b = .132$, $p < .001$). This

model accounts for approximately 7.3% of variation in perceived social acceptability of

stalking behaviors across vignettes.

Table III. Perceived Acceptability (1-5) on Key Study Variables (N=786)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Demographics and Victimization	*b*	S.E.	*b*	S.E.	*b*	S.E.
Woman (1=Yes)	-0.231**	0.070	-0.228**	0.070	-0.091	0.074
Latino (1=Yes)	-0.0863	0.093	-0.086	0.093	-0.109	0.091
Black (1=Yes)	-0.010	0.102	-0.022	0.102	-0.033	0.102
Asian (1=Yes)	-0.036	0.133	-0.033	0.133	-0.129	0.133
Non-Heterosexual (1=Yes)	0.097	0.102	0.093	0.102	0.169	0.101
Suburban (1=Yes)	-0.072	0.095	-0.066	0.095	-0.066	0.093
Urban (1=Yes)	0.071	0.103	0.079	0.103	0.081	0.101
Age (18-72)	-0.0093**	0.003	-0.010**	0.003	-0.010**	0.003
Religion (0-4)	0.095***	0.024	0.097***	0.024	0.056*	0.025
Education (0-3)	0.132***	0.033	0.130***	0.033	0.130***	0.033
Has Been Stalked (1=Yes)	0.026	0.079	0.025	0.079	0.015	0.078
Victim-Stalker Pairing						
Coworkers (1=Yes)			0.103	0.094	0.131	0.093
Hookup (1=Yes)			0.118	0.094	0.125	0.093
Relationship (1=Yes)			0.226*	0.093	0.231*	0.093
Heteronormativity Index						
Heteronormative Beliefs (-8 - 73)					0.011***	0.026
Constant	1.936	0.171	1.844	0.177	2.096	0.189
R-square	0.073		0.08		0.10	

*p<.05; **<.01; ***<.001 (two-tailed tests).

In the next model, I introduce the victim-stalker prior relationship variables.

Adjusting for the relationship pairing, gender, age, religion, and education once more have

significant impacts on perceived acceptability of Paul's behaviors with similar effect sizes.

In this model, being a woman is associated with labeling a vignette .238 (b) points lower on social acceptability (p <.01), relative to respondents who are men. Each additional year in respondent age predicts a .010 decrease in perceived acceptability, which is a small but significant effect ($b = -.010$, $p<.01$). Similar to Model 1, each additional score on the religious importance scale predicts a .097 increase in perceived acceptability ($b = .097$, $p <.001$), and higher education levels predict a .130 increase in perceived social acceptability ($b = .130$, $p <.001$). In regard to the relationship pairings, only "prior monogamous relationship" had an impact on the dependent variable. More specifically, respondents rated the vignette as .226 points higher on social acceptability ($b = .226$, $p <.05$) relative to if Paul and Kim are strangers. This model accounts for approximately 8% of the variation in perceived acceptability of staking vignettes ($r=.08$).

To glean the impact of adherence to heteronormative beliefs on perceived social acceptability, Model 3 includes the Heteronormativity Index. Interestingly, gender no longer has an impact on perceived acceptability when adjusting for heteronormativity. This indicates that heteronormativity mediates the relationship between gender and heteronormativity endorsement. Age, religion, and education once more have significant impacts on perceived social acceptability, in very similar effect sizes and directionality. Each additional year in respondent age predicts a .010 decrease in perceived acceptability ($b = -.010$, $p<.01$). Higher scores on religious importance predicts a .056 increase in perceived acceptability ($b = .056$, $p <.05$), and higher education levels predict a .130 increase in perceived social acceptability ($b = .130$, $p <.001$). The attenuated impact of religion on social acceptability when accounting for heteronormative beliefs suggests a possible mediation of heteronormativity on the impact of religion on social acceptability. Lastly, higher scores on heteronormativity predict a .011 increase in rated social

acceptability of the vignettes, which is a small but significant impact on the dependent variable (b=.011, p<.001).

Heteronormativity, Disaggregated

To further understand the impact of heteronormative beliefs on perceived social acceptability, I disaggregated the subscales of the Heteronormativity Index (Benevolent Sexism, Hostile Sexism, and Sexual Double Standards) in Table 4. In Model 1, I regressed perceived acceptability on the key demographic variables, past victimization, victim-stalker pairing, and benevolent sexism. As Table 4 indicates, gender, age, religion, and education once more have significant impacts on perceived acceptability. Being a woman respondent is associated with a .189 decrease in rated acceptability of the vignettes (b= -.189, p<.001), relative to men respondents. Increases in age predict .009 decreases in perceived acceptability (b= -.009, p<.01); increases in religious importance predicts a .071 increase in perceived acceptability (b= .071, p<.01); increases in education levels predict .140 increases in rated social acceptability (b= .140, p<.001). Once more, if Kim and Paul were presented as formally being in a monogamous relationship, that vignette was rated as .236 points higher on social acceptability, relative to if Paul and Kim are described as strangers (b= .236, p<.01). Lastly, higher scores of benevolent sexism predict a .018 increase in rated social acceptability of the vignettes (b= .018, p<.01). This model accounts for approximately 8.8% of the variation in perceived social acceptability of stalking vignettes.

Table IV. Perceived Acceptability on Sexism and Sexual Double Standards Measures (N=786)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Demographics and Victimization	*b*	S.E.	*b*	S.E.	*b*	S.E.
Woman (1=Yes)	-0.189**	0.072	-0.081	0.074	-0.165*	0.073
Latino (1=Yes)	-0.010	0.093	-0.114	0.091	-0.093	0.092
Black (1=Yes)	-0.041	0.102	0.008	0.101	-0.019	0.102
Asian (1=Yes)	-0.069	0.134	-0.064	0.131	-0.105	0.134
Non-Heterosexual (1=Yes)	0.142	0.103	0.145	0.100	0.116	0.101
Suburban (1=Yes)	-0.063	0.095	-0.075	0.093	-0.061	0.094
Urban (1=Yes)	0.074	0.103	0.092	0.101	0.079	0.102
Age (18-72)	-0.009**	0.003	-0.090**	0.003	-0.010***	0.003
Religion (0-4)	0.071**	0.026	0.071**	0.024	0.079*	0.025
Education (0-3)	0.140***	0.033	0.131***	0.032	0.126***	0.033
Has Been Stalked (1=Yes)	0.015	0.079	0.002	0.077	0.032	0.078
Victim-Stalker Pairing						
Coworkers	0.112	0.094	0.106	0.093	0.131	0.094
Hookup	0.122	0.094	0.106	0.092	0.137	0.094
Relationship	0.236**	0.094	0.230*	0.092	0.225*	0.093
Heteronormativity Measures						
Benevolent Sexism	0.018**	0.007				
Hostile Sexism			.030***	0.006		
Sexual Double Standards					0.012*	0.006
Constant	1.959	0.182	2.144	0.183	1.918	0.187
R-square	0.088		0.112		0.081	

*p<.05; **<.01; ***<.001 (two-tailed tests).

When adjusting for hostile sexism in Model 2, gender no longer has a significant
impact on rated social acceptability. This indicates a possible mediation of hostile sexism
on the relationship between gender and perceived social acceptability of stalking. In
simpler terms, this indicates that gender indirectly impacts perceived social acceptability of
stalking through hostile sexism; one's gender impacts the endorsement of hostile sexist
beliefs, which in turn impacts perceived social acceptability of stalking. Age, religion, and
education once more impact the dependent variable. Increases in age predict .009 decreases
in perceived acceptability (*b*= -.009, *p*<.01); increases in religious importance predicts a
.071 increase in perceived acceptability (*b*= .071, *p*<.01); increases in education levels

predict .131 increases in rated social acceptability (b= .131, p<.001). Similar to Model 1, the vignette in which Paul and Kim were described as former intimates is associated with a .230 increase in perceived social acceptability, relative to the vignette in which they are strangers (b=.230 p<.05). Higher scores on the hostile sexism scale predicts a .030 increase in social acceptability (b=.030 p<.001). This model accounts for about 11.2% of the variation in rated social acceptability of the vignettes (r=.112), which is the greatest proportion of the variation across models.

In Model 3, I adjust for scores on the sexual double standards scale. As in the benevolent sexism model, gender, age, religion, and education have significant impacts on the dependent variable. When adjusting for sexual double standards beliefs, being a woman predicts a .165-point decrease in perceived social acceptability of the vignettes (b=.165 p<.05), relative to men. Increase in age predicts a .010 decrease in perceived social acceptability (b=.010 p<.001); increases in reported religious importance predicts a .079 increase in perceived acceptability (b=.079 p<.05); higher levels of education predict a .126-point increase in social acceptability (b=.126 p<.001), relative to respondents with a high school diploma or GED. Relative to the strangers vignette, the vignette in which Paul and Kim are described as former partners predicts a .225 increase in rated social acceptability of Paul's actions. Lastly, higher scores of sexual double standards scale predicts a .012 increase in perceived social acceptability of the vignette (b=.012 p<.05). This model accounts for about 8.1% of the variation in the dependent variable (r-.081).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Labeling Stalking: Stranger Emerging from the Cyber Bushes

Overall, the findings support the notion that gender and sexual scripts influence the labeling and perceived harm of cyberstalking. As I have indicated, gender has a very strong influence in the identifying and labeling of cyberstalking behaviors. Women in the sample were nearly 3 times more likely to label Paul's behaviors as stalking, even when controlling for myriad demographic characteristics. This finding is highly important given the contradictory results in extant scholarship on the impact of gender on perceptions of stalking. The strong impact of gender persisted—and in fact, increased—when adjusting for stalker-victim relationship, underscoring the salience of one's gender identity in identifying and labeling abusive courtship behaviors. The idea that men are much less likely to recognize and label cyberstalking—or other forms of sexual violence—has wide implications. In a society where men are overrepresented in policy, law enforcement, among other relevant arenas, this gender disparity in identifying legally defined stalking behaviors has the potential to normalize and perpetuate a stalking culture. Akin to rape culture (Buchwald et al., 1993; 2005; Gavey, 2005), stalking culture is one in which stalking behaviors are normalized, romanticized, and often perpetuated, through cultural beliefs on gender and sexuality. Though the term "rape culture" is often used as an umbrella term comprising all forms of normalized sexual violence, I argue that the normalization of stalking occurs through comparable but *distinct* mechanisms, and thus should be understood and analyzed as its own phenomenon. In regard to stalking culture, it appears that one's own gender identity influences awareness of what stalking looks like, which manifests in the identification and labeling of such behaviors as unacceptable.

I identified one mode through which stalking is normalized: the victim-stalker relationship. The findings reveal that the closer the victim is to the stalker, the less likely it is that others will view the behaviors as stalking. Vice versa, the more social distance between the stalker and the victim, the higher likelihood that individuals will perceive the situation as constituting cyberstalking. While individuals are much less likely to recognize stalking between coworkers and one-time hookups as stalking—77% and 67.8% less likely, respectively, this failure to recognize stalking was the most pronounced for former intimates. When Paul was described as Kim's ex-boyfriend, respondents were overall 82.9% less likely to label Paul's behaviors as cyberstalking. This reveals broader cultural beliefs about persistence and romantic pursuit, whereby when ex-boyfriends stalk and harass their ex-girlfriends on the internet, their actions are viewed as ordinary behavior. Similarly, if a stalking victim was acquainted with her stalker through her employment or having gone on a date and hooked up with her stalker, this is likewise normalized, relative to stranger stalking. This reveals the persistence of stalking myths, and victim blaming, potentially by insinuating that if she knew her stalker in some capacity, perhaps she encouraged or "asked for" the situation. Further, this reveals that individuals widely believe stalking to occur exclusively between strangers. While rape myths and rape culture construct a narrative of a rapist as a stranger jumping out of the darkness at night, stalking myths and stalking culture paints a cyberstalker as emerging from the allegorical cyber bushes. While rape and stalking culture operate in parallel, it is imperative to disentangle the two cultural phenomena in order to understand and eradicate the particular cultural mechanisms undergirding widespread cyberstalking victimization and normalization.

How Acceptable Is It? The Role of Heteronormativity and Sexism

To further unravel the cultural beliefs that lead to the acceptance of stalking, I

analyzed perceived social acceptability measured as "how socially acceptable are Paul's

behaviors' as its own dependent variable and included several measures of heteronormative

beliefs as predictors. The findings once more supported my hypotheses regarding the

impact of gender and heteronormative beliefs on stalking normalization. More specifically,

I show how one's gender, as well as other personal characteristics, influence perceived

acceptability of stalking. Women overall rated the situations as .231 points less acceptable,

relative to men. Additionally, age has a negative relationship to perceived acceptability,

whereby the older one is, the less acceptable the behaviors are, though the impact is fairly

small. Further, the findings reveal that higher levels of religious importance and education

correspond with higher perceived acceptability of stalking. This supports the idea that

sexual scripts can be culturally learned through the institutions of religion and education—

two arenas in which gender norms and sexism operate and are enforced through

institutional customs. The cultural messages transmitted through religion and institutions of

higher learning become internalized in individuals, in such a way that stalking is believed

to be socially acceptable behavior.

Introducing victim-stalker pairing, this time the only type of relationship with an

impact on the outcome variable is a prior monogamous relationship between Paul and Kim.

In other words, relative to complete strangers, stalking perpetrated by an ex-boyfriend is

deemed more socially acceptable, while there is no difference for coworkers and one-time

hookups. This underscores the presence of widespread endorsement of ex-boyfriends

engaging in persistent pursuit. The impact of being former romantic partners on perceived

acceptability of Paul's behaviors remained when heteronormative beliefs were included in

the model. Age, religion, and education likewise remained significant when controlling for

heteronormative beliefs. However, gender no longer has an impact on perceived

acceptability of stalking when adjusting for heteronormative beliefs. Since gender and heteronormativity are heavily correlated, this implies the following mediating relationship:

Gender ⟶ Heteronormative Beliefs ⟶ Perceived Acceptability of Stalking
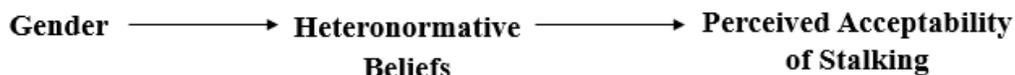
As this above figure shows, I propose a theoretical model whereby one's gender shapes one's adherence to heteronormative beliefs, which then shape one's perceived social acceptability of stalking. Stated differently, one's gender leads to a lesser or stronger endorsement of heteronormative beliefs regarding sexuality and gender, and these beliefs then influence individuals in normalizing stalking behaviors. Traditional heteronormative beliefs support the notion that women are gatekeepers, and men are pursuers; therefore, individuals who hold these beliefs are more likely to consider stalking as acceptable behavior. Further, this trajectory is shaped by one's gender, since men are more likely to hold stronger heteronormative beliefs. This is a novel theoretical model which could aid future gender and sexuality scholars in understanding how gender and heteronormativity lead to the normalization of sexual violence more broadly.

To further understand how heteronormativity shapes perceptions of stalking, I disentangled this index and regressed acceptability on the three individual scales that make up "heteronormativity." This allows me to make direct claims about how two forms of sexism and sexual double standards independently influence perceived social acceptability of cyberstalking. The findings once more support the impact of gender on perceptions of stalking; when adjusting for benevolent sexism and sexual double standards, gender has a strong negative impact on the perceived social acceptability of cyberstalking. Further,

benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, and sexual double standards all predict higher rated social acceptability stalking, even when controlling for social demographics and the different stalker-victim relationships. This supports my hypothesis that sexist beliefs about gender, sexuality, and gendered sexuality lead to the normalization of sexual violence— namely stalking. The sexual scripts embedded in these beliefs support the perpetration of stalking by reframing heterosexual stalking as more socially acceptable and thus less harmful and deviant. Moreover, gender has no impact on perceived acceptability when adjusting for hostile sexism—the heteronormative subscale with the strongest impact on perceived acceptability. Given the strong correlation between gender and hostile sexism— namely, being a man is associated with higher scores in hostile sexism, this once more points to a mediating relationship. More specifically, one's gender influences one's adherence of hostile sexist beliefs, which then lead to a higher perceived acceptability of stalking. Though both forms of sexist beliefs are strongly linked to one's gender, the more overt, aggressive beliefs inherent in hostile sexism—e.g. "women want to take charge and control men"—are more closely associated with being a man. This finding illuminates the particular role of hostile sexism in the normalization of sexual violence, which has wide implications beyond the scope of cyberstalking.

Future research can build on these findings in several ways, in order to glean a more comprehensive understanding of stalking culture. First, while quantitative survey data, such as that of the present study, reveals important overall trends, the topic of stalking would benefit from the rich, theory-building data provided by in-depth interviews. This would allow for the examination of intrapsychic sex scripts and tap into what their own toolkits are in interpersonal romantic and pursuit situations Additionally, while it is important to understand perceptions of heterosexual stalking between a man perpetrator

and woman victim, research has yet to examine other instantiations of stalking. More specifically, future researchers should analyze perceptions of same-gender stalking, as well as stalking perpetrated by a woman. Since such pairings violate the pervasive heteronormative sexual scripts, the findings could illuminate current theories on sexual violence, gender, and sexuality.

Despite the limitations of the data, this study filled various critical gaps in the literature, by illuminating a deeper understanding of how heteronormativity, sexism, sexual double standards, and gender shape varying perceptions of stalking. It sheds new light on the highly undertheorized and understudied realm of stalking, and its even further undertheorized counterpart—cyberstalking. Perhaps most importantly, this study is a step into an area which social scientists have yet to fully explore: the internet and social media. As more of the social world becomes immersed and embedded in the internet, sociologists must catch up to this rapid technologizing of social interaction. This study fills a small piece in this large question by interrogating how the social norms of romance, sexuality, and gender apply to internet interactions. Through its methodological novelty and new theoretical understanding of gender, sexuality, heteronormativity, and sexual violence, this study adds to our understanding of how heteronormative beliefs normalize and perpetuate sexual violence on the internet and in "real life." More generally, this study allows us to begin to answer the question: where do we draw the line between ordinary romance and deviant stalking?

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