It's Not Stalking If . . .

The Effects of Sexual Orientation, Perpetrator-Target Relatedness, and Gender on Perceptions of Stalking Behavior

Stephanie A. Larson & Susan C. South
Purdue University

Background

- Stalking is a problem that can have adverse effects on psychological and physical well-being.
- Davis, Coker, & Sandersen (2020).
- No study to date has examined the effects of perpetrator and target sexual orientation on perceptions of stalking.
- More research needed on why participants see a gay man pursuing another gay man as inappropriate.
- A significant interaction between acquaintedness and sexuality for perceptions of stalking.
- Sexual minorities can be the targets of stalking.
- Intimate Partner Violence research has shown that victim-abuser sexual orientation plays a role in how serious domestic violence is rated, the recommendation of police intervention, and how believable the victim is.
- Purpose of Current Study: examine the effects of sexual orientation and perpetrator-target relatedness on perceptions of stalking behavior in a sample of undergraduate college students.

Method

Participants and Procedure:
- 242 undergraduates from Purdue University: Caucasian (62%), Christian (58%), Single (62%), Female (50%), with an average age of 19.49.
- Recruited for a study of Perceptions of Human Interactions; not told that the study was examining the effects of sexual orientation and perpetrator-target relatedness on perceptions of stalking.
- Completed all measures during one-time data collection session (either in-person or online).

Materials:
- Vignettes: Participants randomly assigned to read one of eight vignettes that manipulated sexual orientation of the vignette couple (4 levels: heterosexual varying gender of stalker, gay, or lesbian).
- Perpetrator-target relatedness (2 levels: stranger or ex-partner).
- A main effect of acquaintedness was found in every dependent variables related to stalking behavior.

Design and Analysis:
- 2 x 4 ANOVA with follow up simple main effects for significant interactions.
- A significant interaction was discovered for the dependent variable of Stalking.

Vignette

Male Stalking Female Ex-Partner:

James and Emily are two students who attend the same University. Both James and Emily are heterosexual. One day while in the library Emily was having trouble with the computer and asked the first person who walked by for help. This person turned out to be James. Although they had never met each other before, the two had an instant connection and started dating. The two have been in a serious committed romantic relationship for two months. Last Friday Emily told James that she wished to end the relationship because she realized things were not working out and it would be best to break up. Despite Emily’s desire to break up, James does not want to end the relationship because he still has feelings for Emily. Since the breakup, James has called Emily numerous times. At first Emily responded to James’ calls because she wanted to explain her decision to end the relationship and remain friends with James. But now, James will not stop calling and he is calling at all hours of the day and night. The non-stop calls have forced Emily to leave her phone on silent. James has also been frequently emailing, texting, and Facebook messaging Emily. Emily has told James to stop, but James’ behavior has not changed. For the past two days, Emily believes she has seen James waiting outside of buildings where Emily has class. Emily responded to James’ calls because she wanted to explain her decision to end the relationship and remain friends with James. But now, James will not stop calling and he is calling at all hours of the day and night. The non-stop calls have forced Emily to leave her phone on silent. James has also been frequently emailing, texting, and Facebook messaging Emily. Emily has told James to stop, but James’ behavior has not changed. For the past two days, Emily believes she has seen James waiting outside of buildings where Emily has class.