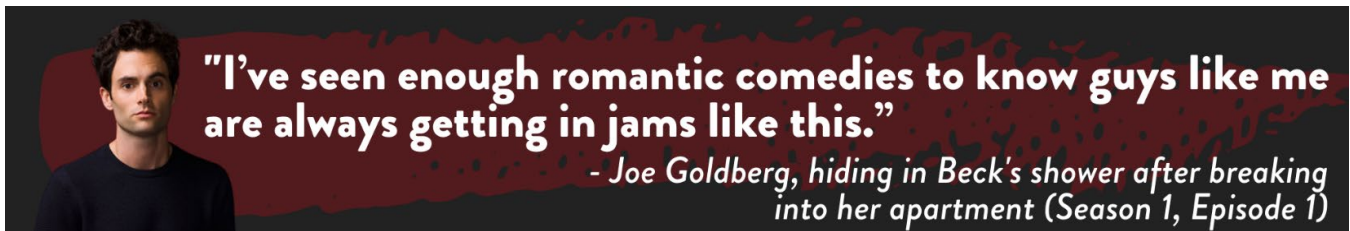




The popular Netflix series *YOU* is returning for a fourth season (trailer [available here](#)). While Joe may have moved to London and adopted (yet another!) new identity, the ominous tone of the trailer heavily implies that his stalking and murder will continue.

What can *YOU* teach us about real stalking victimization? This short discussion guide highlights some major themes from the first three seasons. Complete discussion guides on [season one](#), [season two](#), and [season three](#) are also available. Consider using this guide as a starting point for further learning and sharing relevant [fact sheets](#), [infographics](#), and [short videos](#) to introduce key information on stalking and intimate partner violence.

1) ISN'T IT ROMANTIC?



YOU is a psychological thriller — not a romance. However, throughout the series, Joe refers to romantic films and even points out how his actions mirror those of romantic “heroes.” A popular trope in romantic comedies suggests that if you pursue someone persistently enough — and push through their disinterest and rejection — they will eventually fall in love with you.

Discussion Questions:

- What “guys like Joe” have you seen represented in romantic films or stories? How are these characters similar to him? How are they different?
- In media where a male protagonist will “stop at nothing to get the girl,” what usually happens? What are the consequences of his actions?
- Many fans of the show have expressed love for Joe, tweeting things like “Kidnap me pls” and “Penn Badgley is breaking my heart as Joe...what is it about him?” What is it about Joe’s behaviors that may be appealing to viewers? What romantic ideas does his character evoke?
 - Follow Up: How might ideas like “all’s fair in love and war,” “love takes work,” and “I’ll do anything for love” impact Joe’s self-image and our perceptions of Joe?

Main Points:

- Romantic films often include protagonists who are “guys like Joe,” ones who stop at nothing to “get the girl.” Examples include Edward in *Twilight*, Christian in *50 Shades of Gray*, and plenty of older romantic comedies like *Say Anything*, *You’ve Got Mail*, *There’s Something About Mary*, and many more. They typically are idealistic and not murderous, though.
- These characters are often presented as awkward, funny, sweet and/or passionate rather than scary and problematic. They are usually conventionally attractive, single, cisgender, white men who our society deems desirable.
- Usually, there is no negative consequence for their actions — in fact, the stalking is successful and they persuade their initially reluctant romantic interests that they should be together. They are rewarded despite requests to stop and ignoring her rejections. This “romantic pursuit” usually ends with “guys like Joe” winning over their love interests — the stalker “wears them down” until they “come around” and “see the truth.”
- It’s a romantic fantasy to think that someone might immediately see the real us and fall in love instantly – it’s exciting to feel like someone sees us and thinks we’re special, attractive, and desirable. While people can certainly be attracted and/or interested in someone from an early stage, fixation after one meeting is not normal or healthy.
- In real life, most stalkers are not people we want attention from. They are usually ex-partners or acquaintances who are trying to scare their victims.

STALKING

FANTASY

The stalker is an attractive stranger or desirable “secret admirer.”

The stalker has only good and pure intentions, usually romantic.

The stalker’s actions range from sexy to flattering to harmless. At worst, they’re awkward or misguided.

The stalker’s target should feel grateful, amused, flattered and/or affectionate towards the stalker. It’s nice to get this attention and feel special.

REALITY

The stalker is usually known to the victim, most often an acquaintance or current/former intimate partner.

Stalkers have different motivations, but often intend to scare their victims and/or do not stop when the victim is scared.

Stalking behaviors are interfering, invasive, disturbing, and violent. Stalking can escalate quickly and often co-occurs with or predicts serious violence, including homicide.

Most stalking victims feel extreme fear and emotional distress. Many significantly change their daily lives and even relocate to try to get away from the stalker.

2) WHEN WILL IT END?



For three seasons, we've seen Joe target and stalk several romantic interests — including Candace, Beck, Love, Natalie, and Marianne. His goal was to find “the one” and he's justified everything to himself, from peering into windows to outright murder, in order to pursue these women.

Stalkers are often portrayed as romantic, idealistic figures with good intentions who are simply trying to win over the women they love. At the start of the third season, Joe is settling into the suburbs with his wife, Love, who genuinely adores and wants to be with him. He asks himself, “**I never thought to wonder...what happens after boy gets girl?**”

Discussion Questions:

- If someone engages in stalking behavior in pursuing the relationship, do you think they will stop stalking after they “get the girl”? Why or why not?
- Who is responsible for Joe's decisions to stalk, harm, and kill? How does he justify his own behavior(s)?
- Has Joe learned, changed, or evolved over the seasons? How or how not?

Main Points:

- Stalking is often an extension of power and control, and stalkers feel entitled to have unlimited access to their victims. Controlling behavior generally escalates over time. In other words, stalking before the relationship often carries over into stalking during and/or after the relationship ends.
- Joe occasionally notes “I've made mistakes,” but never seems to feel too badly about his trail of violence and murder. There's a sense that things had to work out in these ways, when in fact, he puts these events into motion.
- It does not seem that Joe has positively changed or evolved; he still stalks and murders, does not really care about what his romantic pursuits want, and eschews all responsibility for his actions.
- Joe may say (to himself) that he's stalking “for love,” but it's clear that he chooses to stalk again and again and enjoys doing it. There are no external reasons that force him to stalk. He chooses to stalk.

3) WHAT'S NEXT?



At the very end of the season, Marianne and her daughter have relocated. Joe's internal monologue says, "I looked for you, but you and Juliette were already gone. Phone number changed, no forwarding address. The end of our story remains unwritten... but I have to believe our paths are destined to cross again... All I know, mon amour, is I'll search the world if I have to. I will find you." Then, the camera pulls back to reveal that he is in Paris, where Marianne is from.

Discussion Questions:

- Does Marianne want Joe to find her? Does Joe consider what she wants?
- Is Marianne different from Candace, Beck, and/or Love? If Joe finds her, is there anything she can do — or not do — to avoid the same fate?

Main Points:

- Marianne has relocated, changed all of her contact information, and has not reached out to Joe. There is no reason to think that she wants to continue her relationship with him.
- Joe does not respect Marianne's boundaries or her departure. He prioritizes his own wants/needs over hers and assumes that she would want to reconnect despite her leaving no indication of this. In fact, since she did not reach out to him in any way, he should assume she does not want to have anything to do with him.
- There is no reason to think that Marianne's fate will be different. When Candace tried to leave Joe, he abducted her and buried her alive. When Beck was horrified by Joe's behaviors but promised to keep quiet, he killed her. When Love actually embraced Joe's dark and criminal side and married him, he ended up killing her, too. Though Joe consistently blames other people, he is the common denominator.

Check back for a Season Four Discussion Guide, coming soon!

Learn more about stalking at www.StalkingAwareness.org.



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