

Stalking in Media Slides – Note to Facilitator

From *Spongebob Squarepants* to *Twilight*, there are countless examples of stalking in the media. Rather than being presented as the prevalent, traumatic, and dangerous crime that it is, stalking is typically presented as harmless, funny, and/or romantic.

These few slides are intended to assist awareness educators in their efforts to contextualize conversations about stalking in the media. The program should be discussion-based and encourage reflection on how popular media – TV, movies, songs, books, and social media – may impact our perceptions of stalking.

These slides are minimal and don't constitute an entire program. **Adding actual song and video clips that resonate with your audience, then discussing what messages they send, will enrich the workshop.** For suggestions on what clips to include, contact info@stalkingawareness.org.

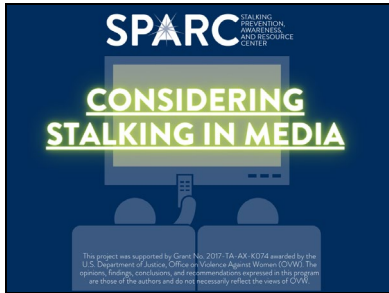
Consider supplementing this discussion with education about stalking. Share SPARC's [fact sheets and infographics](#), and/or incorporate [short videos](#) that highlight stalking's definition, impacts, and prevalence. You may also build these media slides into longer presentations about stalking, combining them with more general [informational slides](#).

Additional resources:

- [Discussion guides on Netflix series "YOU"](#)
- [Public awareness workshop slides and materials](#) – for [campus](#) and [general](#) audiences
- [Spotify Playlist – songs that normalize stalking](#)
- Examples of stalking in media at TVTropes.com

Thank you for bringing stalking education to your community!

Slide
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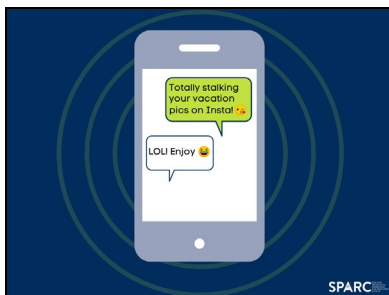
- As a society, we aren't taught very much about stalking.
- We mostly learn about stalking through how it's presented in media.

Slide
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- It's essential to recognize that the media does not cause stalking.
- Casually using the term "stalking" does not cause stalking.
- Many people are exposed to the same media and language and do not choose to stalk.
- Only perpetrators are responsible for their behavior.

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- You may have heard people use the word "stalking" casually in conversation, especially about their use of social media.
- Consider this example --
 - Let's say you receive a text message like the one on the screen from a friend.

- **Is this stalking? Why or why not?**
- Based on the information we have, assuming these people know each other, this is not stalking because it is not scary for a friend to look at pictures that you posted on social media.
- **Why does it matter that the term "stalking" is used casually?**
 - It dilutes the meaning of the word.
 - Stalking is underreported and misunderstood.

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What stalking behaviors have you seen in the media that would be scary if they happened in real life?

How does stalking relate to romantic concepts like "I'll do anything for love" and/or "all's fair in love and war"?

Why does the media representation of stalking matter in the real world?

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- **What stalking behaviors have you seen in media that would be scary if they happened in real life? Think about TV, movies, music, social media, books, and more.**
 - Grand gestures that we often see presented as romantic in media are often scary in real life.
 - Popular love stories often include elements of obsession.
 - Many romantic films feature male protagonists who will "stop at nothing" to "get the girl," pushing past her rejection until she accepts and loves him.

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STALKING	
FANTASY	REALITY
The stalker is an attractive stranger, charming, chance encounter, or desirable "secret admirer."	The stalker is usually known to the victim, most often an acquaintance or intimate partner (current or former).
The stalker has only good and pure intentions, usually romantic.	Stalkers have different motivations, but often intend to scare their victims and/or do not stop when the victim is scared.
The stalker's actions range from sexy to flattering to harmless. At worst, they're awkward or misguided.	Stalking behaviors are interfering, invasive, disturbing, and violent. Stalking can escalate quickly and often occurs with or predicts serious violence, including homicide.
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.	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.

- **Stalking in media often creates a fantasy of stalking that is different than the reality.**
 - Stalkers are often presented as attractive strangers or secret admirers with good intentions.
 - In reality, stalkers are usually known to the victim, intend to cause fear and are likely to become threatening and/or violent.

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Stalking is Shown As...

ROMANTIC	
FUNNY	
HEROIC	
EDGY	

- **In addition to being shown as romantic, is also often shown as funny, heroic, and/or edgy.**
 - **Funny:** there is a trope of a character not understanding boundaries and showing up again and again (like Spongebob and Squidward's relationship)
 - This media doesn't show any real negative consequences for the stalking, it's "played for laughs" and no one is harmed.

- **Heroic:** Superhero movies often feature an isolated hero watching over the city so they can swoop in and save their loved ones and friends.
 - Stalkers may say things like “I trust you, I don’t trust the people around you” to justify constant surveillance, casting themselves in a heroic role.
- **Edgy:** Thrillers and horror movies may show stalking as scary (which is accurate), but also sensationalize it as “edgy” and/or “sexy” in its forbidden nature.
 - In reality, stalking is a prevalent victimization that many people actually experience – not an edgy escape.

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- Again, the media does not cause stalking.
- However, the messages that media sends can create a warped landscape in which stalking is minimized, normalized, accepted and/or laughed off.
- A lot of media on stalking is from the stalker’s perspective and shows hopeless romantics with good intentions.
 - This builds empathy with the perpetrator and may lead us to make excuses for stalkers and/or assume the best about them
 - Instead, we should be focusing on how victims feel about stalking and empathizing with them.
- Victims may minimize or dismiss their experiences instead of taking early warning signs seriously.
- Friends and potential supports – including law enforcement and service providers -- may

underreact to a victim's concerns, treating stalking as "awkward" or "romantic"

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- For more information on the crime of stalking, visit SPARC at www.StalkingAwareness.org
 - SPARC does NOT provide direct services to victims.