

Stalking Behaviors Targeting LGBTQ+ Individuals

Stalking can take on specific tactics — and implications — when abusers identify characteristics that they can exploit as part of the abuse, including sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, a stalker might threaten to out an LGBTQ+ victim or use anti-LGBTQ+ slurs to frighten them. A stalker might deliberately

target someone with identities that they are biased against. Since every person has multiple and overlapping identities, a stalker might target victims based on multiple characteristics, including LGBTQ+ identity, immigration status, religious affiliation, or racial/ethnic background. **Stalking may also precede other crimes, including hate crimes, as offenders target and gather information about victims for planning attacks.**



Stalking is a prevalent, dangerous, and traumatic victimization that too often remains unrecognized and unnamed. Victims, friends, family of origin and of choice, community members, and victim support professionals often fail to recognize patterns of behavior as “stalking,” or associate the term exclusively with following, monitoring, or surveillance — acts that represent only one variety of the many types of stalking behaviors. They may also not recognize that LGBTQ+ people experience stalking or not recognize that the experience a victim describes is stalking, because of their own implicit biases, lack of information about stalking and LGBTQ+ populations, or another reason.

Stalking includes a wide range of threatening and disturbing behaviors that can be classified into four categories: Surveillance, Life invasion, Intimidation, and Interference through sabotage or attack (SLII).

These categories overlap and build on each other. When stalking victims talk about what they are experiencing, they are unlikely to use the word “stalking.” Instead of asking victims if they are being stalked or harassed, it is better to ask specific questions about stalking SLII behaviors.

Victim support professionals should be familiar with stalking SLII behaviors to identify them as stalking; more examples and information can be found on SPARC’s website about [identifying common SLII behaviors](#), [how sexual violence intersects with SLII behaviors](#), [how technology intersects with SLII behaviors](#), and [how SLII behaviors may target immigrant victims](#). **When working with LGBTQ+ clients, it is also important for victim advocates to be familiar with the unique ways that stalking SLII behaviors can present with LGBTQ+**



stalking victims. Below is a list of examples of how stalking may present itself with LGBTQ+ individuals; remember that nearly all of these can be done in-person and/or through technology. **For more complete information, see SPARC and FORGE’s [Guide for Supporting LGBTQ+ Stalking Victims](#).**

SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance is the most commonly identified stalking tactic and includes watching and gathering information about the victim. Ways a stalker may use such tactics to exploit a victim's LGBTQ+ identity for harm include:

- Leverage a small, insular LGBTQ+ community to monitor and/or find the victim
- Wait for and/or find the victim in LGBTQ+ venues, websites, or neighborhoods
- Search public records and/or social media for LGBTQ+ identifying information
- Monitor victim location through geo-based dating/hook-up apps (like Grindr & Scruff)

LIFE INVASION

Life invasion describes ways that the offender shows up in the victim's life without the victim's consent. Ways a stalker may exploit a victim's LGBTQ+ identity to invade and show up in their life include:

- Show up at LGBTQ+ events, knowing the victim will be there
- Purposely and publicly use the victim's wrong name or pronouns
- Publicly use anti-LGBTQ+ slurs against the victim
- Slander the victim in LGBTQ+ spaces
- Join LGBTQ+ groups, events, and/or spaces with the intent to upset, worry, frighten, slander, monitor, or humiliate the victim
- Create online profiles of the victim with the intent to humiliate them and/or ruin their reputation in LGBTQ+ groups and spaces



INTIMIDATION

Many behaviors are intimidating when considered within the totality of stalking behaviors and with the victim and offender's relationship and history in mind. Threats can be explicit or implicit. Ways a stalker may exploit a victim's LGBTQ+ identity to intimidate them include:

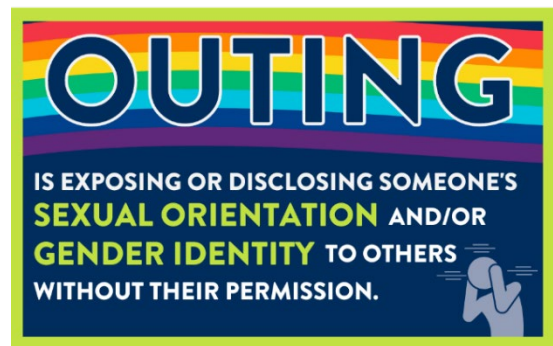
- Threats to out the victim by revealing sexual orientation and/or gender identities
- Threats to reveal sensitive medical information, including HIV or sexually transmitted infection status
- Threats to interfere with a trans victim's medical or legal transition
- Threats to share information and photos of a transgender or nonbinary victim from before they transitioned or expressed themselves the way they do currently
- Threats to use the victim's LGBTQ+ identity to take away or control access to kids, pets, or assets
- Threats leveraging a lack of legal recognition or protection for LGBTQ+ victims (such as employment protection, recognized marriage/domestic partnership, etc.)
- Threats to release false information about a victim's sexual orientation or gender identity
- Deface a car or other property with anti-LGBTQ+ epithets or slurs

- Threats to share online profiles or accounts that would disclose the victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity
- Symbolic violence, such as cutting up a Pride flag or clothing important to the victim’s identity, or buying a Pride flag to display at the victim’s home to out them

 **INTERFERENCE THROUGH SABOTAGE OR ATTACK**

Stalkers may interfere in a victim’s life in many ways, affecting everything from the victim’s reputation to their employment and/or physical safety. Ways that a stalker may exploit a victim’s LGBTQ+ identity to sabotage or attack them include:

- Out the victim to their employer, family, school, or other people in the victim’s life who may not know about their gender identity or sexual orientation
- Spread rumors about a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity
- Share/post private information, photos, videos about a victim’s LGBTQ+ identity
- Damage or discard clothing, items, or medicine vital to the victim’s identity or expression
- Share/post information and photos of a transgender or nonbinary victim from before they transitioned or expressed themselves the way they do currently
- Engage in an intentional public argument to disclose a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity information with others
- Take custody of children or pets, or seize assets, because the victim’s intimate relationship is not legally binding or they do not have legal protection in place
- Restrict access to bank accounts, set limits on credit card spending, or not allow expenditures on clothing, items, or medical care vital to the victim’s identity or expression
- Limit, withhold, throw away, or threaten access to clothing, items, or medical care vital to the victim’s identity or expression
- Restrict or remove access to housing because of the victim’s LGBTQ+ identity or because the victim’s intimate relationship has not been legally codified
- Use the victim’s gender identity and/or sexual orientation as part of emotional and psychological abuse/control
- Exploit service providers’ and responders’ lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ relationships and victimization to harm the victim and/or prevent them from getting help, including by pretending to be the victim in a situation.



This project was supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-22-GK-03986-MUMU awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.