CUTE OR CRAZY?:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
GENDERED STALKING PORTRAYALS IN FILM

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By

Bobbi J. Reidinger

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Thesis written by
Bobbi J. Reidinger
B.S., Winona State University, 2008
M.A., Kent State University, 2013

Approved by

__________________________________, Advisor

Molly Merryman

__________________________________, Chair, Department of Sociology

Richard Serpe

__________________________________, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Raymond A. Craig
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INTRODUCTION

Stalking is a relatively new social problem which has generated public and academic attention. A lack of research however surrounds the way in which stalking behaviors and stalkers themselves are depicted in popular culture through the use of romantic and sexual scripts. This research uses the qualitative method of content analysis to examine these portrayals. Films were chosen across two genres, romantic comedies and classic stalking films, as well as before and after the implementation of stalking legislation. It was found that across genres the films reinforce traditional gender roles both in the depictions of the behaviors and the stalkers themselves. The embedded nature of romantic and sexual scripts is also clearly displayed among the sampled films. Lastly, the lack of change in stalking portrayals over time is discussed with consideration given to stalking legislation as well as a rise in public awareness.

Every day individuals are bombarded with media images of which behaviors are appropriate, and desirable. Media conveys messages about intimate interactions, gender, sexual desirability, and who holds power over both. There is substantial research in the United States regarding both media and stalking. However, little research exists examining how stalking is portrayed in the media, specifically film. The following research will examine the portrayal of stalking behavior across two genres of films. Specific attention will be given to the way gender and romantic or sexual scripts are constructed and presented in the sampled films. The role of media in creating romantic and sexual scripts and reinforcing traditional views of gender and gendered interactions will also be investigated. This project utilizes a qualitative approach, more specifically, content analysis, in order to fully understand the messages being portrayed.
The social problem of stalking is relatively new to both public attention and academia. While previous incidents of stalking were reported in the media (Lowney and Best 1995) it was not until the highly publicized murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer in 1989 that stalking received national attention (Melton 2000; Tjaden 2009). In the six weeks that followed four other women were killed in Orange County California by men who were stalking them. In three of the four cases women reported this behavior to authorities and obtained restraining orders, which proved to be ineffective (Melton 2000; Tjaden 2009). Following these murders, California was the first state to create anti-stalking legislation in 1990, with all other states and the District of Columbia following soon after.

The murder of Rebecca Schaeffer is one example of the close relationship between the media and crime. However, the messages conveyed about stalking move beyond mere news reporting. Messages regarding stalking, from who is stalking to how people should react to stalking behaviors, both as victims and non-victims, are conveyed through film. These films, which are often written and produced by men, introduce sexual and romantic scripts which verify traditional ideals of gender roles, intimate relationships, and stalking behaviors. These messages are unconsciously consumed and internalized by the public which may in turn affect public reactions to stalking perpetrators and victims, though this project focuses only on the production of film.

Initially this project will examine the relationship between gender, stalking, and media. This review will be followed by a content analysis of films released both before and after stalking legislation was put into place. Attention will be paid to which scripts,
romantic, sexual, or a combination of both, are conveyed to the public and how they reinforce traditional views on gender. A subset of quantitative frequencies of stalking behaviors in these films will also be discussed.
STALKING

While recognizing stalking behaviors as criminal was a step in the right direction, media portrayals of stalking behavior do not accurately represent what is currently known about stalking in general. Patricia G. Tjaden (2009) contextualizes ‘stalking’ historically as “…the seeking and pursuing of quarry or prey stealthily in order to kill it…” (263). This historical influence can be seen in an academic definition which describes stalking as willful, repeated, and malicious following or harassing which threatens the safety of another individual (Melton 2000; Blaauw et al. 2002; Tjaden 2009; Logan and Walker 2009). From a legal standpoint stalking is a very difficult crime to define as it can manifest in various behaviors that must occur over a period of time.

Various studies have attempted to define behaviors that constitute stalking. These behaviors have been divided into two categories, violent behavior and harassing behavior (Coleman 1997). Violent behaviors include breaking into or attempting to break into the victim’s home or car, threatening or attempting to harm or actually physically harming the victim, and damaging the property of a new partner. The harassing behaviors include calling the victim at home, work, or school, following or watching the victim, unwanted arrivals at the home, work or school of the victim, and more (Coleman 1997). All of these behaviors are methods employed by the stalker in an attempt to exert control over their victims (Brewster 2003).
Legal definitions of stalking can vary as widely as the behaviors and the relationships in which they occur. The legislation of many states differs on behaviors or relationships that must be present in order for any type of legal intervention to take place. California state statute requires that a credible threat be made against the victim. Colorado takes it expands on this by requiring the threat and also “…to engage in conduct to further the threat” (Melton 2000:253). West Virginia’s stalking legislation can only be enforced when the behavior is carried out by an individual with whom the victim was or is intimately involved (Melton 2000). Federal legislation, passed by Congress in 1996, is concerned with stalking only when the behaviors cross state lines, however great emphasis is placed on the intent motivating the stalking behaviors. According to the National Center for Victims of Crime (2006), the federal interstate stalking law states there must be an “…intent to kill, injure, harass, or place under surveillance with intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person, and […] places that person in reasonable fear of the death of, or serious bodily injury to, or causes substantial emotional distress to that person…”. Intent, as defined here, is difficult to distinguish. Societal messages construe harassing and violent behaviors as a form of attention if committed by a male towards a romantic partner. In popular films for example the actions of one character may be seen as sweet and caring, whereas if perpetrated by another character the same behavior could be given the label of stalking.

Despite how stalkers, or their intentions, are portrayed in film, the costs incurred by victims are significant. Survivors of stalking can experience psychological and physical consequences. Some of the psychological effects include depression, thoughts
of suicide, increased anxiety, persistent states of fear, post-traumatic stress disorder, feelings of powerlessness, recurrent nightmares, intense flashbacks, detachment and estrangement from the external world, personality changes, lower self esteem, and guilt. The physical outcomes may include jumpiness, panic attacks, excessive vigilance, sleep and appetite disturbances, increase in alcohol use, development or worsening of health issues, and exaggerated startle response. (Roberts and Dziegielewski 1996; Wallace and Silverman 1996; Pathe and Mullen 1997; Hall 1998; Kraaij et al. 2007; Tjaden 2009). Other consequences experienced by stalking victims include, having to move out of town, miss work, vary their driving habits, and more (Tjaden, 2009) extending victimization into a financial realm. These costs to stalking victims are substantial and affect their lives in multi-faceted ways.

Stalking has long been seen as a form of interpersonal violence. This association can be seen in some of the legal requirements of stalking, which are discussed above. Like other sexualized crimes, such as rape, stalking prosecution is often dependent upon noncompliance of the victims towards their stalker (Dunn 2002). Noncompliance is difficult however, as stalking behaviors are often observed within the context of an intimate relationship as well as after the relationship has ended. Substantial research has shown that in addition to stalking, victims also report physical, sexual, and psychological abuse by their partners (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Davis, Ace, and Andra 2000; Logan et al. 2000; McFarlane, Campbell, and Watson 2002). In order to understand how stalking behaviors and their consequences are framed it is necessary to study how they are portrayed to the public.
Gender & Stalking

There are significant findings regarding the gendered nature of stalking victimization. Information is gathered through tools, such as the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) survey which collects data regarding the actual incidents of stalking. “Seventy-eight percent of the self-reported stalking victims in the NVAW study were women and 22% were male.” (Morewitz 2003:28). This is in line with other research which indicates that victims of stalking are most likely to be women, up to 80%, below the age of 30. Perpetrators of stalking are mostly comprised of men, up to 87% (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Melton 2000, Morewitz 2003). The presence of an existing or previous intimate relationship between perpetrators and their victims is also common, with statistics ranging between 50% and 81% (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Melton 2000; Tjaden 2009; Logan and Walker 2009). The known information regarding stalking victimology is not accurately represented in film. However, traditional gender views are conveyed.

The desire to control one’s victim through the use of stalking is a form of patriarchal terrorism. Johnson (1995) describes “patriarchal terrorism” as “…a product of patriarchal traditions of men’s right to control “their” women…” (284). It is this entitlement to control that is ingrained in men from a young age. For women however, the necessity to submit is as equally as strong. Social construction feminism posits that the formation of gender identities begins before birth. Pregnant women are given clothing, toys, and furniture based upon the gender of their future child which will provide the baby with gender cues before they can fully understand their meanings.
These gendered cues are not only pushed onto individuals through the physical material surrounding them but also the societal messages which bombard them daily whether they come from music, magazines, or film.

Many argue that gender is socially constructed, not inherent, and reinforced through individual interactions. However the messages and guidelines which shape gender stem from larger social structures (West and Zimmerman 1987; Lorber 1994; Pyke and Johnson 2003). These messages and meanings shape social interactions. Kane and Schippers (1996) state, “…socially constructed meanings can play an especially important role in gender relations because they can be attached to and thus reconstruct the biological difference in a manner that legitimates gender stratification” (650). For example the ideologies of female passivity and male hyper-sexuality are used to support gendered beliefs (Kane and Schippers 1996), specifically regarding stalking. The passive woman desires the pursuit of an aggressive partner and thus what can legally be defined as stalking behavior is portrayed and socially accepted as attention or flattery.

Traditional messages regarding gender may impact how victims of stalking respond to their own victimization, how stalkers respond to the behaviors of their victims, and how society views stalking as a criminal act. It is necessary to critically examine the ways stalkers and their victims are portrayed to the public in order to understand how social institutions, like the media and film, perpetuate gendered beliefs and attitudes affecting stalkers and their victims. First, the influence of media must be understood and, in this case, films must be examined to determine the presence and pervasiveness of these gendered messages.


**Stalking and Media**

Kamir (2001) states, “Fictional male stalkers tend to strengthen the grip of the patriarchal social order; fictional female stalkers pose an inherent threat to that patriarchy” (8). It is argued here that the portrayals of stalkers in film, as crafted by a mostly male film industry, reinforce traditional gender roles through the romanticizing of male stalkers by depicting males who exhibit stalking behaviors as comedic, sweet, and desirable. The male pursuit of the female is deemed “appropriate”. These portrayals are found in films within the romantic comedy genre. The representations of females who exhibit the same behaviors are often portrayed in the opposite manner. It is necessary to note that not only are pursuing behaviors normalized by gender but so are the responses. In other words, women who are stalked by men should view their actions as attractive and wanted, whereas men who are stalked by women should view their actions as repulsive and fear-inducing. Dunn (2002) states, “These [reactions to stalking] are socially derived, maintained, and reproduced” (2). One of the many ways in which these gendered expectations are perpetuated is through film.

It is generally accepted that stalking an individual is an undesirable act. However, as Dill (2009) states, “The more we do something that is regarded as controversial or potentially harmful, the more we need to justify doing it. It’s also true that the less we really think something is harmful, the more we can feel free to do it” (10). The behavior exhibited by stalking perpetrators in films is seen as potentially harmful, both physically and psychologically. Yet when males exhibit these behaviors there is a comedic haze produced which justifies the behavior. This haze is not present when it is females who
are displaying these types of behavior. Producers and consumers of these films do not actively think about the differences in gendered stalking portrayals and therefore the current media representations are seen as harmless and have been continuously reproduced.

Messages conveyed in film regarding stalking are two-fold. Chesney-Lind (1999) writes, “Women’s everyday violence and aggression, and its social context have been ignored or trivialized. Instead we witness the sporadic “discovery” of rather heinous female offenders. In addition, focusing on women’s violence obscures the fact that it is women’s victimization, not male victimization, that has increased dramatically over the past two decades.” (133). Stalking behavior when perpetuated by men is romanticized ignoring the very real consequences incurred by women who are stalked. However, when women exhibit stalking behaviors against men, it is shown in an extreme manner, both focusing on female offending as well as reinforcing traditional gender roles. For example, as Chesney-Lind (1999) notes in Fatal Attraction the focus is on the attack of a career woman, rather than the violence perpetrated by the female lead (120). Frus (2001) writes specifically of domestic violence, however her assertions are easily translatable to stalking. She argues that films reinforce that victimization is the fault of the woman and that there are commonsensical solutions which would end their trauma (Frus 2001:227). The formation, production, and perpetuation of these traditional gendered roles regarding relationships through a male dominated film industry is an act of patriarchal terrorism in which non-traditional gender roles are attacked and the very real consequences of stalking are trivialized.
MEDIA

Individuals are constantly confronted with various forms of media. From billboards to film, messages and attitudes are conveyed in both overt and subtle ways. Winter (2007) writes that “…media help us formulate our views, ideas, beliefs, and oftentimes they actually shape our views because what they tell us is all we know about an issue. Or we are influenced by others who, in turn, have gotten their views from the media” (2). These messages are absorbed by the public as true even though they often do not correlate with an individual’s lived experiences. In fact, people are often exposed to far more graphic representations in the media compared to their own lived experiences (Winter 2007). Most people have not been stalked in their lifetimes. However, by consuming media both directly through viewing films and indirectly by discussing films or reading about them, opinions are formed. In the case of stalking this consumption has led to a disconnect between actual knowledge regarding stalking and what is portrayed in popular films.

The idea that media portrayals impact attitudes and behaviors is a long contested one. The argument that people consume media with conscious knowledge that what is being depicted is merely a work of fiction seems to give credit where it is not necessarily due. Dill (2009) writes,

“People reading a book, watching a movie or TV show, or playing a video game become transported, swept up, or lost in the story, even feeling like they themselves are part of the story. This is one of the appealing
properties of the media: being transported is a state of flow in which the person loses track of time because of deep engagement. When a fictional story transports us, we are persuaded rather uncritically because transportation decreases counter arguing (questioning assertions) and increases connection with the characters and the sense that the story has a reality to it” (14).

As individuals consume the messages portrayed in popular film regarding stalking and the gender roles of both men and women, validity is given to these depictions influencing both attitudes and behavior.

While there is a lack of research regarding stalking and film, there has been extensive research regarding sex, gender, in both mainstream and adult films. Milburn et al. (2000) presented a study in which social scripts, which include sexual scripts, in film are discussed. Men and women are the actors who must interpret the script and then role play accordingly. A common myth about the role of women, perpetuated by mainstream motion pictures, is that women are incapable of truly resisting, and in fact any attempt at resistance is merely a fulfillment of the female role (Milburn et al. 2000). It could be argued conversely this understanding of the feminine role would in turn strengthen the overly aggressive attitude of males, making any force applied to women in a sexual manner, merely the execution of their role. While portrayals of traditional femininity are evident in films so are traditional views of masculinity. A content analysis of film conducted by Jana Bufkin and Sarah Eschholz found that men are more likely to be sexually aggressive in film, whereas women who initiated sex were condemned for doing so, thus reinforcing that the role men is to be sexually aggressive and the role of women is to be submissive (Bufkin and Eschholz, 2000). Milburn et al. (2000) found that when males were shown excerpts from R-rated films containing both objectification and
degradation of women with sexual content lessened the perception of victimization. In fact, after watching these scenes, males were more likely to report that the rape victim had received pleasure from the acts and had “got what she wanted” (Milburn et al. 2000:660). Similar results were found by Shope (2004) in her analysis of rape-themed pornographic websites. Shope (2004) found a strong positive relationship between sexual abuse and pornography indicating that the more pornography viewed by men the more likely they are to commit acts of sexual violence against women. Not every individual who views sexually explicit material, either mainstream or adult, will adopt these attitudes or engage in these behaviors; however these are examples of how behaviors and relationships portrayed in popular film influence the attitudes of the public. It is logical to assume then that attitudes regarding various social phenomena, in this case stalking, can be produced and reinforced through film.

Dill (2009) argues that media consumption has tangible repercussions for the larger society as a whole. Appel and Richter (2007) note that the public can be influenced to believe information that is inserted into a fictional story, whether that information is true or not. As Dill (2009) noted this consumption happens unconsciously, which aligns with Appel and Richter’s (2007) argument that over time individuals forget where information is learned, while their confidence in that information increases. The ever-increasing confidence in information regarding stalking, gender roles, and interpersonal violence is problematic especially if based on false information as public opinion is affected. By influencing public opinion the messages conveyed in popular
media help shape public policies as well as reactions to both stalking victims and perpetrators.

**Gender and Media**

Collins (2000) discusses the important role of who is producing knowledge. The individuals writing and producing films are overwhelmingly male. Bielby (2009) examines the shift from the early 20th century, when female writers were the majority, to the present day, when male outnumber women significantly in this field. Early on most writers were female, however as industrialization occurred and more men became owners of the modes of production, women were effectively phased out, though not completely, of film writing (Bielby 2009). By the 1930’s women accounted for a mere 15% of film writers which is a stark decline compared to the majority status they once held. While there has been a rise in the number of females involved in film production, women significantly occupy a minority role in film. These women provide what studio chiefs call the “women’s angle” for films (Bielby 2009:242). However, with the majority of film writers being male, women writers are not providing a “women’s angle”. Instead, men are scripting gendered behavior and language as men believe women should act. As gender and gendered behaviors are perpetuated throughout society and individuals learn from these structures, one could argue that a reciprocal production of gendered norms is in motion. Men and women are influenced by media portrayals regarding stalking. Men are to conquer and pursue women as a form of romantic intent whereas women are to accept such behaviors as desirable and to not engage in those behaviors. These messages are internalized and reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. Men then go
on to become the most prominent gender in the film industry and draw upon their own views and opinions in their work. Thus the gendered ideals that have been ingrained in them are recreated and disseminated through film.

It should be noted that this author does not believe that there is some grand conspiracy to reinforce traditional masculinity and femininity by men through film. In fact, it is not illogical to assume that should the gender composition of film production change, the messages would remain the same. As stated earlier, in order for a film to be successful and sell, it must hold mass appeal. While various individuals, such as Tiny Fey and Amy Poehler, have successfully challenged these views of traditional gender roles through film, it is still necessary to examine the impact of male dominance in film production on the messages portrayed in film.

White (1950) documented the gate keeping function of media as having the power to decided what is worthy of attention. Further research has gone on to show a disproportionate amount of attention given to crime-related articles with little resemblance to established crime trends (Davis 1952; Garofolo 1981). Finally, Sacco (1995), as summarized by Chesney-Lind (1999) demonstrates “that media reports with the strongest ideological content are the most likely to affect public attitudes” (131). Those in control of popular film, CEO’s, writers, and directors, all disproportionately male, are indeed manufacturing crime-related films which bear very little resemblance to established crime trends when it comes to stalking. These films do not need to be action or crime related. Women are more likely to be stalked and violently victimized by males yet popular films show us the opposite. This study attempts to determine if these
trends and messages regarding stalking and sexual scripts are present in both classic stalking films and romantic comedies.

These gendered ideals are dangerous for female stalking victims as they allow for the portrayal of their victimization to be seen as necessary in order for her to fulfill her role. Should there be an influence of ethnicity in rates of stalking one could expect to find slight differences in the ethnicities of stalking victims. Yet this is not the case. When comparing White and Non-White women the NVAW Survey found “no differences in stalking victimization during their lifetime” (Morewitz, 2003:34). This could support the argument that stalking is more influenced by a patriarchal society than ethnicity. It is merely within some ethnic cultures that this influence is acknowledged. Other research has also found that while there are no differences in the likelihood of stalking among women of varying races, reporting victimization can vary (Melton, 2000).

Little research has been conducted regarding differences among characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and class differences of both victims and perpetrators of stalking. However there has been some research that suggests there may be a cultural or rather ethnic influence. “Stalking may be influenced by ethnic background and socioeconomic status. For instance, the Latino values of machismo and marianismo emphasize male control and female subordination…” (Morewitz, 2003:9) Do these concepts of male control really stem from ethnic backgrounds? Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are emphasized in American culture yet they stay below the radar so to speak. In all reality it would seem that, in this example, Latino cultures merely have placed a label on their gendered values whereas in American culture the very same ideologies are instilled in
males and females through various social structures, including the media, while never being fully acknowledged. Pyke and Johnson (2003) discuss the different femininities across cultures and the relationship these variations have with power. The argument is made that those in power created images “...often forged around the contours of the one-dimensional stereotypes...Thus, controlling images penetrate all aspect of the experience of subordinates...” (Pyke and Johnson, 2003:37). Images of the desirability of traditional femininity and masculinity are pervasive in American culture. It should be noted however, that the majority of films do not portray various races when depicting stalking victims or perpetrators in film which ignores the experiences of non-white victims and perpetrators.

**Romantic and Sexual Scripts and the Media**

The internalization of scripted behaviors occurs at three levels, cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. For the purpose of this study, greater attention will be paid to film as a cultural scenario. Simon and Gagnon (1986) define cultural scenarios as instructional guides which “…essentially instruct in the narrative requirements of specific roles; they provide for the understandings that make role entry, performance, and/or exit plausible for both self and others: providing the who and what of both past and future without which the present remains uncertain and fragile” (98). Cultural scenarios exist at the macro level of social life, with social institutions providing various situations from which scripts are constructed. Cultural scenarios are abstract and not necessarily predictive of behaviors (Bourdieu 1977); however, the abstract nature of cultural scenarios is remedied at the next two levels. The next level is external, or the
interpersonal script, which is composed of shared conventions which allow for two or more actors to participate in a complex interaction involving mutual dependence (Gagnon and Simon 1986, 2005). These scripts have normalizing and regulating functions in the sense that certain behaviors may be seen as expected or normal in a given social interaction.

A sexual script is a cognitive model which allows individuals to assess and engage in sexual interactions, or simply a way of conceptualizing the production of behavior within social life (Simon and Gagnon 1986). A romantic script, similarly, is a cognitive model which individuals use to interpret and engage in purely romantic interactions. It is difficult to entirely delineate between these two scripts. It is logical to believe that romantic and sexual scripts may remain separate theoretically. In practice, however, these scripts overlap. Romantic and sexual scripts are important to recognize as Simon and Gagnon (1986) argue that individuals draw upon cultural scenarios, including romantic and sexual narratives, in order to obtain clues regarding the appropriate performance and interpretation of social roles as well as identifying behavioral patterns (Escoffier 2007). The patterns of interactions, either sexual or romantic, created in film allow individuals to draw upon fictitious patterns of behaviors regarding gendered interactions. This project aims to not only examine which scripts are presented in film but how these scripts interact. By examining film, understanding the intricacies of romantic and sexual scripts may offer greater delineation or a better understanding of their embeddedness in one another.
It is important to understand how messages are transferred through film. Gagnon (2004) argues that fantasies are created in social institutions and transferred into behavior in two phases. The first phase is the assembling of erotic mental fragments and emotions which are then encoded during the second stage into organized cognitive scripts (Gagnon 2004). Escoffier (2007) argues that media, pornographic films in particular require this two phase process to occur simultaneously. The film must activate mental fragments and emotions among the viewers in order for the created scripts “…to realize both the sexual performances and the filmed versions of the fantasies” (61). This process solidifies a sexual script which is absorbed by the viewer. “This society talks all the time; it can never ‘let people be’; ‘presentation’ is all; it must constantly aim at that point which is the place where millions come together” (Hoggart 2004:48). Films are a vehicle for these societal messages and scripts. Millions of people watch movies every day and some of these movies, either overtly or covertly, relay and reinforce messages regarding the gendered nature of relationships and stalking.

Kamir (2001) offers up an interesting perspective in which consumers of stalking films simultaneously experience what it is like to be both the stalker and the stalking victim, which he calls “voyeuristic stalking”. He argues that film, when compared to other forms of media, conveys a more realistic experience for the viewer (Kamir, 2001). Kamir (2001) states, “Characters move on the screen in what seems to be “real time”…This creates a feeling of constant change in distance between the viewer and the screen characters, enhancing the viewer’s realistic feeling of movement, as well as his realistic sensation of stalking” (113). Escoffier (2007) notes, in fact, that in order to
effectively convey the message of a film, the audience must be convinced of the realness or authenticity of the performances. Escoffier (2007) also points out that excitement of the audience is heightened when the outcome of a given situation is unknown and involves an element of danger (64). This could be why many are unaware of the gendered messages being shown in film. It is argued here that this enhancement of feelings is not exclusive to stalking films. When an individual can experience what is being “lived” by the screen characters they are learning a script about acceptable behaviors and well as expected responses. For example, in a romantic comedy a man following a woman home may be met with fondness on part of the woman which conveys the messages that stalking behaviors are appropriate and should be met with pleasure, in accordance to the sexual script offered by the film.

It is important to understand that while scripts, either romantic or sexual, are created in film there is a level of individual agency involved in the consumption of them. Escoffier (2007) notes that directors provide a complete script for an individual, however it is the individual that can alter their personal consumption of this script. For example, the view may re-watch certain scenes or fast forward through others in the privacy of their own home. In the theaters, people may pay more attention to certain aspects of the film than others. It is unlikely that individuals will interpret romantic or sexual scripts exactly the same as individual experiences and subjectivity play a role in the consumption process. The importance then, is understanding exactly what is being portrayed in films regarding stalking and gender. This study aims to determine if stalking behaviors are romanticized or sexualized in film. Using the above examples, is a man
following a woman home an expected behavior in a romantic exchange or is it indicative of a sexual exchange? By examining selected films, a clearer picture of how stalking behaviors are portrayed will appear.
ANALYSIS

Positionality and Subjectivity

A tenant of qualitative research is beginning where you are or in other words, studying what is known to the researcher. Lofland et al. (2006) state, “Because of the central role of the researcher as both data experiences and collector and the problematic of achieving this role, fieldstudy people encourage budding researchers to start where you are – to use your current situation or past involvement as a topic of research” (3). I am interested in stalking and choose to study stalking behaviors because I am a stalking victim. I am also a feminist. I conduct research through the lens of both victim and feminist. I identify as a stalking victim and my experience of being stalked has shaped the way I see the world. By admitting my position, I am aware that some may question my research motives and possibly any results I find. However, I argue that by recognizing my situatedness and understanding the limitations of it, I will be able to examine the behaviors presented in film as objectively as possible and in fact, in a unique way which another research may not. Donna Haraway (1988) states, “…objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object.” (583).

As I have been trained in a discipline which emphasizes the need for objectivity, the recognition of personal subjectivity and the ability to produce objective knowledge may seem paradoxical. Howard Becker (2007) writes of the accusations of bias which
may be brought forth by sociologists and others, when a non-normative position is central to the identity of the researcher. I fully agree with the arguments that individuals should be aware of who is constructing and providing knowledge. I believe all researchers should have to acknowledge their positionality and subjectivity as true objectivity is an illusion, whether their research is qualitative or quantitative in nature. My subjectivity does not make me less objective, in fact Carl Ratner (2002) discusses the idea of objectivism within qualitative research as being a marriage between subjectivity and objectivity. He states, “Objectivism integrates subjectivity and objectivity because it argues that objective knowledge requires active, sophisticated subjective processes – such as perception, analytical reasoning, synthetic reasoning, logical deduction, and the distinction of essences from appearances.” (Ratner, 2002:2). My identification as a stalking victim allows me to engage in the processes described by Ratner (2002), however, I fully acknowledge the necessity of being reflexive. I will take every precaution in order to assure that I am not projecting my experiences onto the information presented in the sampled films.

**Research Question**

As presented earlier, this study attempts to examine how stalking behavior is portrayed in film with particular attention paid to gender and romantic or sexual scripts. This analysis also seeks to understand if films are producing romantic or sexual scripts involving stalking behavior. I have argued that the media, through the use of romantic or sexual scripts, reinforces traditional views of gender and reinforces traditional gender roles and interactions. Using the methodological approach of qualitative content analysis
I will study films to understand how sexual or romantic scripts are constructed, how stalking behaviors are presented, and how these scripts and behaviors pertain to traditional cultural messages of gender.

**Sampling**

As shown earlier, individuals digest and internalize messages portrayed in the media both consciously and subconsciously. These messages are transmitted through all genres of film. In order to ensure an examination of meanings across more than one genre, ten films were selected from the genres of romantic comedy and classic stalking films both before and after the implementation of stalking laws. The initial 40 films were chosen using theoretical purposive sampling\(^1\) to ensure that the then randomly selected films would contain stalking content. According to Taylor (2003), “In a purposive sample, the researcher draws upon his or her expertise to select a sample that exemplifies certain characteristics of the population to be studied” (302). I read film descriptions of various films, and drawing on my knowledge of stalking, chose 40 films, 20 “pre-stalking legislation” and 20 “post-stalking legislation”. The goal of this study is not to make conclusions about all films as a whole; instead it is to examine the gendered cultural messages being displayed. It is because of this goal that the selection of films which represent an ‘ideal type’ is acceptable and justified (Taylor, 2003). These 40 films represent ideal types of stalking or stalking behavior. Twelve films, three from each category, were selected randomly from this list of 40 by utilizing a website designed to

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\(^1\) Four separate sampling methods were considered for this study, such as including top grossing films, most highly rated films, etc. However, not every produced film contains portrayals of stalking behavior. Therefore to ensure that there would be an adequate presence of stalking behavior to be examined, films were purposively sampled and then further narrowed down by random selection.
generate random numbers. This randomization was a reflexive move to ensure that there was no bias generated through the theoretical purposive sample.

The implementation of stalking legislation provides a social marker around which to choose films. As discussed earlier, stalking laws were first implemented in the United States in the year of 1990, following the murder of Rebecca Schaffer in 1989 (Melton, 2000; Tjaden, 2009). The enacting of these laws was a dramatic social shift as legal sanctions could be applied to behaviors previously seen as simply bothersome. By choosing films which were released across multiple decades it will be possible to see differences, if any, in the way portrayals of stalking behavior are presented in film over time.

When examining Table 1, it will be noticed that the bulk of the “post-legislation” films are marked as top grossing. I found it difficult to find a larger sample of films to choose from which provided enough information in the film description to be added to the initial 20 films prior to 1990. This impediment could possibly be explained by the growing popularity or fascination with stalking behaviors. The death of Rebecca Schaffer brought to public light a social phenomenon that had not been given significant media attention. The sampling of films post 1990 was much less problematic. It seems that not only are more films being made in recent years, but that more films display stalking behaviors.
Table 1. *Romantic Comedies and Stalking Films (Pre and Post Stalking Legislation)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Stalking Legislation (up to 1989)</th>
<th>Romantic Comedies</th>
<th>Stalking Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pretty in Pink (1986)</strong> *</td>
<td>The Stepfather (1987)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moonstruck (1987)*</td>
<td><strong>Play Misty for Me (1971)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Better off Dead (1985)</strong></td>
<td>Klute (1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lovesick (1983)</td>
<td>Strangers on a Train (1951)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                                        | While you were Sleeping (1995)* | Obsessed (2009) * |
|                                        | She’s All That (1999)* | **Swimfan (2002)** * |
|                                        | Two Week’s Notice (2002)* | **Fear (1996)** * |
|                                        | **Crazy Stupid Love (2011)** * | Cape Fear (1991)* |
|                                        | The Mirror has Two Faces (1996)* | **Sleeping with the Enemy (1991)** * |

* Top grossing film
** Chosen films bolded
Analysis and Coding

As the goal of this study is to examine portrayals of stalking behaviors, as well as relational and sexual scripts, both manifest and latent content in film was examined. In order to remain consistent with stalking literature analysis of manifest stalking behaviors was restricted to a predefined coding scheme. Films were watched to determine which types of stalking behaviors, violent or harassing\(^*\), occur as well as the frequency of these behaviors. The analysis of latent content, however, followed a three-step process of emergent coding. The sampled films were initially viewed and notes were taken regarding broad patterns of behaviors and portrayals of both the stalkers and the victims. Films were then viewed a second time in order to more thoroughly record latent content, such as meanings or characteristics attached to the context of the stalking behaviors as well as the “stalkers” themselves. For example, while watching a film, the end goal of the individual engaging in stalking behaviors may not be explicitly stated, but implied. Therefore, interpretation on the part of the researcher was necessary in order to document the meanings presented in the sampled films. After the films had been watched and a list of latent topics documented, a consolidated list of themes was created with specific time stamps and examples from the films. The data collected is presented in the form of themes below.

\(^*\) Definitions for these behaviors can be found on page 4.
Results

Throughout the emergent coding process it became clear that there were two main themes which emerged from the viewing of the sampled films, the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and the gendered way in which desired results of the stalking behaviors are portrayed. Here, the terms traditional femininity and traditional masculinity will be used to convey normative attitudes surrounding the relational nature of gender (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). For example, women are conveyed as traditionally submissive; therefore men are traditionally more aggressive. Also, it should be noted that the final sample was comprised of twelve total films, six romantic comedies which portrayed all male stalkers and female victims, and six classic stalking films, three with female stalkers with male victims and three with male stalkers and female victims. Utilizing examples and transcribed dialogue from these films, each of the themes will be discussed. The thematic discussion will be followed by an examination of the role of domestic violence in stalking in conjunction with one film serving as the exception to the established patterns. Following this evidence, attention will be given to the clear embeddedness of the relationship between romantic and sexual scripts. Lastly, the presence of change, if any, that has been made in film depictions of stalking after the implementation of stalking legislation across the country will be discussed.
Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Roles

Traditional Femininity

The reinforcement of traditional femininity and masculinity emerged as a strong theme among all of the sampled films. Interestingly, traditional feminine and masculine characteristics are emphasized across both genres in similar ways with one key difference. Classic stalking films tend to be more extreme with regards to the consequences presented for both men and women who deviate from societal standards. Romantic comedies on the other hand, show the redemption of men and women choosing to fall in line with traditional their respective gender roles.

Underlying and overt messages regarding traditional femininity can be seen in various ways. Initially, romantic comedies may portray main and supporting characters as socially attractive by depicting them as socially adept, physically appealing, emotionally available to those around her etc. For example, in *There’s Something About Mary*, Mary is shown to be a woman who fits physical attractiveness ideals with her slim form and blonde hair. The first few scenes of the movie convey that she is quite popular and compassionate regarding social outcasts and her mentally disabled brother. *Crazy Stupid Love* provides the audience with multiple women who embody traditionally feminine characteristics as well in the characters of Emily, Hannah, and Jessica. All of these women are shown to have close emotional and social relationships with other women and spend a great deal of time discussing romance concerns. What is key here is that stalking behaviors are portrayed as loving devotion in response to the embodiments of these characteristics. *There’s Something About Mary* has a series of scenes during
which Ted’s obsessive thoughts and behaviors involving Mary are made light of and portrayed as endearing.

Healy: “So Dom, tells me you’re looking for some lady friend you knew back at school.”
Ted: “Yeah, yeah.”
Healy: “That’s cute, I don’t buy it, but it’s cute.”

Here Healy, the private investigator hired by Ted to track Mary down, states that while Ted does not acknowledge his behaviors to be in line with stalking behaviors, those behaviors are “cute”. During this interaction there are several instances where Healy openly acknowledges that Ted’s motivations and behaviors are those of a stalker.

Healy: “You expect me to believe this is a straight stalker case?”
Ted: “Hey, hey, hey, hey I’m not a stalker. I’m not a stalker.”

What makes this exchange so interesting is that in response to a woman who personifies traditionally feminine characteristics stalking behaviors are seen as romantic and their severity is lessened. The message portrayed to the audience is that traditional femininity inspires love and dedication which are things societal norms dictate to be desirable.

Not only are traditional feminine characteristics idealized in romantic comedies, but feminine behaviors as well. While some romantic comedies present female lead characters as socially adept, traditional gender roles are reinforced even if this characteristic is missing. In order to make up for this lack of social prowess socially awkward or outcast female leads cling more tightly to traditionally feminine behaviors. This can clearly be seen in the differences in female leads in There’s Something About Mary and Pretty in Pink. Mary, a socially popular woman, may engage in masculine activities such as playing golf or discussing various sports with enthusiasm without
consequence. However, in *Pretty in Pink*, Andy is depicted as socially awkward. In this case, Andy cares for her unemployed father, cleans their home, makes her own clothing, and, as the title suggests, has an affinity for pink and other pastel colors. These are all domestically feminine skills that popular female leads do not need to display. This fervor for traditionally feminine behaviors is furthered in an interaction between Andy and her stalker, Duckie.

*Andy:* “What are we going to do next year?”
*Duckie:* “Well according to you, I’ll still be in high school.”
*Andy:* “No, I’m serious! I mean not a day has passed in what 8 years that I haven’t seen or talked to you at least 20 times.”
*Duckie:* “Well that’s devotion.”
*Andy:* “I know. Even though I get angry sometimes, you know I secretly love it.”

This passage, while seemingly a touching moment between two friends, is potent for various reasons. First, both characters acknowledge the incredibly frequent daily encounters between the two of them. Throughout the film Duckie is shown to show up to her home and place of employment unannounced causing disruptions. He also calls and leaves messages obsessively. These are clearly stalking behaviors yet here it is simply devotion which is a socially ideal characteristic of romantic relationships. Secondly, Duckie’s advances are normally rebuffed by Andy who finds them troublesome, but in this exchange she is blatantly reinforcing traditional gendered notions that women desire to be chased and that should they say otherwise – they secretly enjoy the attention.

This train of thought is common in literature involving portrayals of other
sexualized crimes, like stalking (Wester et al. 1997; Milburn et al. 2000; Adams and Fuller 2006; Ward and Friedman 2006; Kahlor and Morrison 2007).

There is great overlap across the sampled genres with regards to placing a female character that depicts traditionally feminine traits in stark contrast with women who differ from those standards. This allows film portrayals to not only show what is an acceptable display of femininity through their lead characters, but to highlight these ideals further by showing what femininity is not. The representations in romantic comedies carry with them this notion of salvation through traditional roles more strongly. In *Pretty in Pink*, Andy’s closest friend Iona, is a non-traditional female who alters her appearance regularly in an alternative style, floats from one romantic relationship to the next, owns her own business, and is prone to aggressive behaviors. Several times throughout the film she is shown as sad and unfulfilled somehow. When she meets a new man who embodies traditional masculine traits however, she suddenly changes her ways and is quieter, more normal in her style of dress, and seems more subdued. The genre of stalking films does this in a more subtle way than what is portrayed in romantic comedies. When a female stalker is portrayed in a stalking film, they are depicted in relation to the wife or partner of their stalking victim. These partners are submissive, forgiving, compassionate, and nurturing. Female stalkers in film are portrayed as highly sexual but anti-feminine, while the partners of their victims are the epitome of traditional femininity. The audience is left to understand that non-traditional women should expect dissatisfaction with various areas of their life and it is only through an adoption of traditional gendered standards will romantic and social success ensue.
Classic stalking films also show the preference of traditional femininity by illustrating the serious consequences of defiance through the depiction of female stalkers. Half of the stalking films sampled had female stalkers. Every one of them defied traditional feminine standards in their behaviors. In Fatal Attraction, Alex works in a male dominated field, lives in a nice home, is intelligent, and relies only upon herself for monetary survival. In Play Misty for Me, Evelyn lives alone, lacks female social relationships, and is aggressive in her attempts to meet the man she desires. Swimfan portrays the female lead as transient, narcissistic, impulsive yet methodical. Each of these women displays characteristics that are typically designated to traditionally male standards. Instead of allowing for varied expressions of gendered roles, these women, who defy traditional femininity, are demonized as mentally unstable, violent, and sexually aggressive.

Mental instability for non-normative female characters was consistent throughout the stalking films both through behaviors and interactions. For example, in Fatal Attraction, Alex attempts to convince Dan to go with her to see Madame Butterfly. When he rejects her the films switches back and forth between Alex, who is sitting on her floor, listening to Madame Butterfly while she continuously stares at two tickets to the opera and flips her lamp on and off repeatedly and Dan, who is out with his wife and their friends for a social night of bowling. The rapid swapping between the two scenes depicts Dan as socially normative and Alex as mentally unstable and menacing. The volatility surrounding Alex is reinforced when, after realizing Dan has changed his phone
number, she shows up under a false name to look at the apartment which he and his wife are trying to sell. After the encounter Dan arrives at her house to confront her.

Dan: “I don’t know what you’re up to but I’m gonna tell you it’s gonna stop right now.”
Alex: “No it’s not gonna stop. It’s gonna go on and on until you face up to your responsibilities.”
   Dan (yelling): “What responsibilities?”
Alex: “I’m pregnant. I’m gonna have our child.”
Dan: “Alex, that’s your choice honey. That has nothing to do with me.”
Alex: “I just want to be a part of your life.”
Dan: “Oh this is the way you do it huh? Showing up at my apartment?”
Alex: “Well what am I supposed to do? You won’t answer my calls. You changed your number. I mean, I’m not going to be ignored Dan.”
Dan: “You don’t get it. You just – you don’t get it.”

This exchange shows the audience that this woman, who engages in non-normative anti-traditional female behaviors, lacks the capacity to understand social cues and is erratic in her thoughts and behaviors. Not only does this highlight the notion that non-traditional females are threatening but lends itself to the underlying message that traditional femininity is preferred.

Another way mental instability was shown is through attempts made by the women to kill themselves after being rejected by the men they desire. In *Play Misty for Me*, as well as *Fatal Attraction*, the female stalkers enter a bathroom, following rejection, and slit their wrists.

Dave: “We don’t have a god damned thing between us. Now how many ways am I going to have to say this to you?”
Evelyn (yelling): “I don’t care how many ways you say it! It’s not true!”
Dave: “What do I have to do to convince you?”
Evelyn (crying): “It’s not true! It’s not! What are you doing?”
Dave: “Getting dressed to drive you home – that’s what.”
Evelyn: “Why do you play these games? Why are you pretending you don’t love me?”
Dave: “I don’t even believe I’m hearing this.”
Evelyn: “But I love you!”
Dave: “You haven’t got the vaguest idea of what love is. We don’t even know each other.”
Evelyn: “Wait a minute, you don’t have to do that. I’m okay. I can drive home.”

After this rapid change in Evelyn’s demeanor she asks to wash her face. Upon entering the bathroom, Evelyn attempts suicide and is cared for afterward by Dave. The same outcome is seen in Fatal Attraction. Various messages regarding traditional femininity are shown in these brief but heated interactions. Not only are non-traditional women mentally unstable, but they are overly emotional and manipulative. In these films, stalkers use emotions and suicide in such a manipulative way that their victims feel compelled to prolong their interactions despite indicating no desire to do so. This is in line with research regarding real stalking behaviors and stalking interactions (Roberts and Dziegielewski 1996; Wallace and Silverman 1996; Coleman 1997; Pathe and Mullen 1997; Hall 1998; Brewster 2003; Logan et al. 2006; NCVS 2006; Kraaij et al. 2007; Tjaden 2009).

Non-traditional gender displays are again negatively portrayed through the hyper-sexualized behaviors of female stalkers. Each of the three female stalkers is the first to initiate sex with their soon to be victim. In Swimfan, Madison and Ben end up at the school’s swimming pool. While there, Madison disrobes and enters the pool to seduce Ben. Ben attempts to stop the sexual interaction but is met with continued sexual aggression.

Madison: “It’s okay I want you to.”
[They kiss]
Ben: “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. We can’t – we can’t do this.”
Madison: “It’s alright. It’ll be our little secret.”
The film uses facial expressions and other non-verbal forms of communication to convey that Ben succumbs to Madison’s sexual advances. Audiences are aware by the time that these sexual encounters occur that these women do not conform to traditional gender standards and “normal” women would not be as aggressive. The standard formula for these female stalkers is that they meet someone, display sexually aggressive tactics and sleep with them almost immediately. These film portrayals cast non-traditional women in a predatory light while concurrently emphasizing traditional standards of feminine behavior.

**Traditional Masculinity**

Similarities can be drawn between how traditional femininity and masculinity are emphasized across these two genres of film. Male victims, like portrayed female victims, embody traditional masculine traits and behavior accordingly. Also, male stalkers deviate from these norms indicating that non-traditional displays of masculinity are dangerous. Depictions of men in both romantic comedies and classic stalking films differ from the representations of women in that, aside from the male stalkers, non-traditional displays of masculinity are forgiven. Each of these masculine illustrations will be discussed further.

Male victims of stalking are shown to exemplify traditional male characteristics. The men in *Swimfan*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *Play Misty for Me* are all portrayed as mentally stable, employed, having social relationships, traditionally feminine romantic partners, living in nice residences, having families, and morally upstanding. It is this
display of masculinity which makes them attractive to both their stalker and the audience. Interestingly however, these same men are shown to be sexually weak and easily fall victim to the sexual assertion of their female stalkers. The virtuous nature of male stalking victims is not called into question despite the fact that each of these men has cheated at least one on their traditionally feminine romantic partners. At one point during *Play Misty for Me*, Dave and his romantic partner Tobie discuss his unfaithfulness.

Dave: “What are we going to do? Go through a whole list is that it? [He is referring to a list of women he was unfaithful with while romantically involved with Tobie]"  
Tobie: “Who’s got that kind of time? I just don’t know if I’m up to it anymore.”  
Dave: “Up to what?”  
Tobie: “Those nights, sitting and waiting for you to finish your program and come by. Nights when it would start to get late and I’d start to think I wonder if he’s run himself off a cliff or maybe he’s run into a blonde.”  
[...]
Tobie: “You know the thing I hate the most in the world is a jealous female and that’s what I was getting to be. That’s why I had to split.”

Social standards assert that monogamy is ideal within romantic relationships, yet when these men defy this standard the blame is placed on the women – both the one with whom he was unfaithful or as in the example above the woman he was romantically involved with. The interaction between Dave and Tobie is significant in that blame is placed on her for the end of their relationship. Women should not be jealous and the unfaithful man has no blame. Later on in *Play Misty for Me* Dave admonishes Tobie for having roommates, citing it as a reason for his infidelity. Other stalking films rely on the sexual aggressiveness of the female stalkers for placing blame. It was the female who made the
man succumb to his natural instincts and therefore the man is forgiven for defying this traditionally masculine standard of monogamy.

Unlike the male stalkers depicted in classic stalking films, men who stalk in romantic comedies are not necessarily portrayed as possessing non-traditional masculine traits. Instead they are shown to be slightly socially awkward but loveable. For example, in *Better off Dead*, Lane sees his drawings come to life and watches as fake hamburgers become animated. He also attempts suicide multiple times throughout the film. Yet not once is his mental instability seen as threatening or dangerous. Duckie, in *Pretty in Pink*, exhibits obsessive behaviors revolving around Andy for years but they are not seen as creepy but commitment. In *Serendipity*, Jonathon compulsively checks used books stores for information regarding a woman he met only once and later frantically travels around attempting to find her. Again these behaviors are shown as cute and romantic. None of these men exhibit mentally sound patterns of behavior. Because, they do not deviate so significantly from traditionally masculine standards and they are pursuing traditionally feminine women however, the non-normality of their behaviors goes by seemingly unnoticed.

As with portrayed female stalkers, male stalkers in classic stalking films are shown to be the antithesis of what is considered traditionally masculine. These non-normative men show that males who deviate from gendered standards are mentally erratic and volatile. Travis, in *Taxi Driver*, is depicted as mentally unstable, erratic, socially inept, living in poor housing, and morally corrupt. While male victims have their sexual immorality forgiven, here non-traditional men are demonized for it. Travis’ social
ineptitude and sexual immorality are displayed unmistakably when he takes Betsy on a date.

_Betsy:_ “You’ve gotta be kidding.”
_Travis:_ “What?”
_Betsy:_ “This is a dirty movie.”
_Travis:_ “No, no this is – this is a movie that a lot of couples come to. All kinds of couples go here.”
_Betsy:_ “You sure about that?”
_Travis:_ “Yeah, I see ‘em all the time. Come on.”

After entering the theater Betsy quickly leaves and asks Travis if he only watches that type of film to which he replies yes. Travis is seemingly unaware of the social standard that men should not take women to see pornographic movies on the first date, nor admit that they watch those materials regularly. Travis has been shown to defy traditional masculine standards from the beginning of the film and therefore the same forgiveness afforded to men who embody traditional masculine characteristics is absent.

The dangerous nature of men who adhere to non-traditional ideals of masculinity is seen in the male stalker in _Fear_. David, the stalker, is mentally unstable, violent, involved in criminal activity, unemployed, lacks a family, and is sexually deviant. David’s capacity for violent outbursts is seen quickly in the film when he confronts Nicole, his romantic interest, and her friend Gary after he witnesses them hug. Upon seeing this platonic interaction between Nicole and another male, David leaps from his car and begins to beat Gary. Following this violent outburst Nicole begins to resist David. It is as a result of this resistance that his mental instability is brought into focus. His mental state is portrayed as manipulative and unstable during a confrontation with Nicole’s father, Steve. While the actual dialogue is too explicit for this project, David
calls into question Steve’s role as a father, employee, and husband insinuating an intimate relationship with both his daughter and his wife. Upon hearing this Steve threatens David with physical violence. After the interaction is over David begins to beat his chest until bruises appear. He later shows these bruises to Nicole in order to further alienate her from her father.

The messages here are two-fold. First, threats of violence and violent behaviors are justifiable among traditionally masculine men should they be nested in protectiveness. Nicole’s father explicitly threatens to harm another person, but the message is that men who embody traditional masculine traits are inherently protective and their violence is justifiable. Secondly, only men who deviate from traditional masculinity have violent outbursts as a result of jealously. Nor do mentally sound men beat themselves until physical markers appear in order to manipulate their romantic partner. These anti-traditional displays of masculinity bolster the underlying messages of permissible protective violence, confidence, and mental stability as masculine traits.

Gendered Results of Stalking Behavior

Protective Love

The second theme to emerge from these films is the gendered portrayals of desired outcomes of the stalking behaviors. What is shown in these films is that no matter the context, either in a romantic comedy or classic stalking film, men stalk in the hopes of pursuing a romantic relationship with their victim. Stalking behaviors exhibited by women however, end in a more violent fashion. These gendered portrayals of results
continue to demonize women who break away from traditional gender roles, thereby reinforcing gendered standards.

Romantic comedies portray stalking behaviors as being motivated by love, no matter who is doing the stalking. While the majority of sampled romantic comedies featured women being stalked by men, the film *Serendipity* portrayed a woman and a man stalking one another in order to rekindle a brief romance. While neither character is described as challenging traditional gender norms, both exhibit obsessive stalking behaviors. For example, Sara, the female lead, manipulates her friend into flying to New York from San Francisco in order to find, Jonathon.

*Sara:* “Eve, please don’t be mad at me.”
*Eve:* “Oh no. I cannot believe this.”
*Sara:* “Look I was going to tell you when we got on the plane.”
*Eve:* “You know what? That’s really sneaky of you Sara.”
*Sara:* “Eve wait! Eve! Eve!”
*Eve:* “You tricked me.”
*Sara:* “I knew you wouldn’t come if I told you the truth and I needed my best friend with me.”

Here, Sara acknowledges that her behavior and manipulation of her friend are abnormal. Later on in this same interaction Eve relents and aids Sara in her obsessive search for Jonathon because it is motivated by love. *Serendipity* was the exception in this sample of romantic comedies and yet the male lead is depicted as engaging in more extensive and obsessive behaviors in order to find Sara. Upon finding a seven year old receipt in an old glove, Jonathon returns to the store to implore an employee to aid him in his search. When this tactic proves fruitless Jonathon, has a violent outburst and the store clerk is forced to manipulate his way through the aggressive interaction. Later, Jonathon, his friend, and the store clerk enter a warehouse to search though hundreds of carbon copies
for more information regarding Sara. Jonathon’s search culminates in a fanatical search at a leasing office as well as convincing his friend, who is a reporter, to track down various people who knew Sara. The supportive characters and the audience are convinced that while the behaviors engaged in by both the male and female lead characters are abnormal, the result will be romantic in nature and therefore the behaviors are justifiable.

The results obtained by male perpetrators in stalking films are definitely more violent than what is shown in romantic comedies. In these films the desired result is also love, but it is achieved through violence and terror. At the end of Fear, David and his friends are seeking revenge on Nicole’s father for having ransacked their house. Prior to entering David tells his friends that Nicole is not to be harmed.

Friend 1: “An eye for an eye.”
Friend 2: “Tooth for f***ing tooth.”
David: “Just remember. Nicole ain’t a part of this game.”

The violence to be perpetrated by David’s friends is related to Steve’s vandalism of their house. For David however, the violence is necessary in order to continue his romantic relationship with Nicole.

David: “It’s time to go Nicole. First I want you to do the right thing and say goodbye to Daddy.” [David puts a gun to Steve’s head]
Nicole (screaming): “No!”
David: “What? You want to go with me don’t you?”
Nicole (crying): “Yes.”
David: “Alright then. Come over here and give your father a kiss goodbye. It’s not easy to give away your daughter.”
[David again puts the gun to Steve’s head]
Nicole (screaming): “David! Don’t! Please!”
David: “Nicole, I know this is hard. I’m sorry it has to be like this. But it does. It’s not our fault, it’s his. I tried so hard to be nice, to get
him to accept me. Can’t you see all he wants is for you to be his little girl forever. You don’t want that do you?”

[Nicole shakes her head]

[...]  

David: “Now I know this is going to be hard. We’ll get over it. Together. Just me and you. Nobody else remember?”

David’s compulsive need to use violence to ensure a continued romance with Nicole is portrayed as being rooted in love. The behaviors themselves are depicted as unnecessary and overly aggressive but their desired outcome is a socially desirable romantic relationship. Male stalkers are shown to want to protect their victims, however misguided their methods or thought processes may be. David sought to protect Nicole from what he viewed as the over-controlling nature of her father through violent means. The film did not attempt to convey that the violence was to be condoned but the motivations behind these violent stalking behaviors was fixed within romantic love.

In Taxi Driver, Travis stalks a young prostitute. In the end he attempts to free her from her deviant life style by killing those around her. The example of Travis’ violence is portrayed as a protective non-romantic love towards the young prostitute. Taxi Driver ends with the public applauding Travis’ actions and proclaiming him a hero. Though his means were unlawful and his motivations blurred by mental instability this once socially undesirable man is shown as a traditionally masculine man. This swift shift in social response draws attention to the desirability of a protective love as well as traditional gender roles.
Manipulation and Violence

The violence displayed by female stalkers in film is more manipulative, which is in line with the demonization of non-traditional displays of femininity. As with their male counterparts, the actions of female stalking behaviors are motivated by romantic interest and representations of female stalkers in film show women to have violent outbursts against individuals surrounding their victim. A key difference in these gendered stalking portrayals is that female stalkers also manipulate and use violence against their romantic interest in the name of love. By stressing the manipulative and violent nature of non-traditional women, classic stalking films accentuate the social desirability of traditional gender relationships, in which men are the pursuer and women are more submissive.

Contrasting messages are sent regarding violent outbursts of female stalkers against others. While male stalkers use violence to keep their victims from imagined harms, female stalkers use violence as a way to inflict emotional pain on their victims. Evelyn, in *Play Misty for Me*, has multiple violent outbursts against, in this scenario, the women in Dave’s life. The first example occurs after Evelyn spies on Dave and Tobie. Evelyn returns to Dave’s house and with a knife begins to destroy his possessions where she is caught by his maid, Birdie. Without hesitation Evelyn attacks and seriously injures Birdie with a knife. Later Evelyn takes advantage of Tobie’s need for a roommate and poses as Annabelle. After her true identity is discovered, Evelyn again uses a knife, as well as a pair of scissors to terrorize the romantic love interest of Dave. While David discussed the need to overcome the hardship of losing Nicole’s loved ones, Evelyn
displays no remorse for the pain she knows David will feel from her actions. When males use violence against people in their victims’ lives in these films it is a protective form of violence rooted in love. Violence displayed by female stalkers against their victims’ loved ones however is shown to be the result of mental instability and multiple justified rejections from their male victim.

Aside from attacking those around their victims, female stalkers also attempt to physically harm the men they claim to love. Early in the film, Dan attempts to leave Alex’s apartment after spending the night with her and she attacks him both verbally and physically. After kidnapping his daughter, Alex is confronted by Dan in her apartment and a physical confrontation ensues. During this altercation, Alex grabs a knife and Dan manages to disarm her. While some may view this as self defense, the film goes on to show the mental instability of the female stalker by showing Alex smiling following her attempt on Dan’s life. Shortly after this, Alex appears at Dan’s home, and while reinforcing her unstable nature, verbally attacks his wife and eventually attacks both he and his wife, Beth.

Alex: “He tried to say goodbye to me last night but he couldn’t because he and I feel the same way about each other. [Alex begins sawing a knife against her leg] [...] Don’t you think I understand what you’re doing? You’re trying to move him in the country and you’re keeping him away from me and you’re playing happy family. [...] He told me about you. He told me about you. He was very honest. If you weren’t so stupid you’d know that. You’re so stupid. You’re just so stupid. You’re a stupid selfish b***.”

This rant by Alex reinforces her mentally instability. Once she is finished with her verbal abuse she begins to attack Beth. Dan enters the bathroom and all of her violence is turned on him. Shown in contrast to male stalkers who go out of their way to keep their
victims from experiencing harm, female stalkers are portrayed as having no protective instinct and consistently using physical violence against their victims.

Lastly the manipulative nature of female stalkers seems to be depicted consistently. As mentioned earlier in two separate films, produced 16 years apart, female stalkers were shown to attempt suicide after being rejected by their victims. While these portrayals reinforce the mental instability of female stalkers as a way to reinforce traditional gender norms, here they indicate a sharp diversion from male stalkers. It is true that in one of the romantic comedies the male stalker attempted to kill himself several times. However, it should be noted that this case was the outlier and that each attempt ended in a comical failure to end his life. The suicide attempts by the female stalkers were illustrated graphically through the use of dramatic music and special effects makeup. The audience is left with the impression that these women utilized these behaviors to invoke the protective instinct traditionally associated with men. This message of manipulation on the part of non-traditional women is reinforced after the suicide attempts as well. Not only are these attempts manipulative in the sense that they occur immediately following rejection, but both Evelyn and Alex then ease drop on conversations each of their male victims makes to their romantic partners. What is depicted in these films is that female stalkers will utilize whatever behavior necessary to be successful. Both Dan and Dave delay arrangements with their romantic partners in order to care for their stalker, which in turn allows the stalker to prolong their interactions.
Female stalkers also manipulate their victims through means other than self harm. Alex, for example, in *Fatal Attraction* kidnap's Dan’s daughter. This invokes not only panic in Dan but Beth, his wife, as well. This kidnapping ensures that she will see Dan again. The use of manipulation in *Swimfan* is much more direct. The very beginning of the film informs the audience that Ben was once a drug addicted teen who turned to crime to feed his habit. He self proclaims swimming and his current girlfriend to be the reasons he turned his life around. Ben now holds a stable job and will soon be swimming for college recruiters. After rejecting her repeatedly Madison manipulates the things Ben holds most dear. For instance, she wears a nurse’s costume and switches the medications around on his cart at work. This switch results in the loss of his job. Shortly after, the film shows Ben being disqualified from his important swim meet because his urine tested positive for steroids, destroying his future in swimming. 

*Ben’s Coach:* “You did this to yourself Ben. Now go pack and go home.”

*Ben [to Josh]:* “Where is she? Where is she?”

*Josh:* “Dude, you’re losin’ it man.”

*Ben:* “You helped her.”

Later Ben ransacks her room and finds the nurses costume as well as the steroids confirming her involvement. When Ben later confronts her about further manipulation, her involvement is again verified.

*Ben:* “They think I killed Josh. That I tried to kill Amy. I’m already going to spend the rest of my life in prison what’s one more?”

*Madison:* “Don’t be mad, I did it for us.”

Madison admits to harming and manipulating various aspects of Ben’s life in order to prolong their romantic involvement. Perhaps the depiction of violent and manipulative behaviors which deviate from traditional gender standards is so pervasive with regards to
women as they are socialized to be more submissive whereas men are socialized display more aggressive behaviors. Therefore when men engage in angry or violent outbursts it is almost expected by an audience. The violent behaviors are also justified through the underlying messages shown in film. Women who engage in aggressive behaviors however, defying long standing gender roles, are portrayed in such a way that their behavior seem all that more extreme.

The use of described scenes as well as transcribed dialogue has shown that both romantic comedies as well as classic stalking films reinforce traditional gender roles by showing the negative consequences of deviation. The message portrayed in these films is that non-traditional women are independent both financially and socially, sexual, career oriented and therefore these women are mentally unstable, aggressive, and will use manipulation and violence against those around them. Male stalkers on the other hand served as the “anti-man” almost in that they were unemployed or working low wage jobs, mentally unstable, had no familial ties, and were socially awkward. What is interesting here is that the male stalkers were socially undesirable as a whole whereas the female stalkers were more calculating in using their gender to lure their victims before displaying their true natures. The totality of these portrayals serves to emphasize the desirability of traditional embodiment of gender roles.

**Domestic Violence and Sleeping with the Enemy**

Fear of crime, especially crimes committed by strangers, is well established (Stanko 1995; Heath and Gilbert 1996; Scott 2003). It is this fear which may contribute to the lack of gravity given to victims of stalking within the context of domestic violence.
Catalano (2012) reports that 7 of 10 stalking victims know their perpetrator, with previous research reporting an existing or previous intimate relationship of a stalker and their victim between 50% and 81% (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Melton 2000; Tjaden 2009; Logan and Walker 2009). While the commonality of intimate partner stalking has been established, the seriousness associated with stalking is greater for victims who are stalked by a stranger than for victims stalked by their partner (Phillips et al. 2004). While the psychological consequences of stalking are severe, this lack of significance is disconcerting given that these harms experienced by victims of partner stalking are exacerbated (Brewster 2002; Logan et al. 2004). In fact one study found that the anxiety symptoms of partner stalking victims are three times that of victims of stranger stalking (Nicastro et al. 2000). The lack of seriousness extends into the legal realm. Arrest rates for stalking are quite low and range from 25% to 40% (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Brewster 2001). Not only is there lower arrest rates, but the most common legal response in stalking cases is dismissal (Jordan et al. 2003). This research stresses the importance of understanding why popular culture portrayals of stalking do not reflect what is known.

Of all the sampled films, only one stood out as the exception – Sleeping with the Enemy. It was clearly established in the films that men who embody conventionally normative masculine characteristics are desirable. Romantic comedies depicted traditionally masculine men as attractive in more than the physical sense. For example, throughout There’s Something About Mary references are made to her ex-boyfriend, Brett Favre, being everything a woman could want from a partner. Classic stalking films showed the desirable nature surrounding masculinity in the representations of male
victims. The male victims in *Play Misty for Me*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *Swimfan* were all traditionally masculine in appearance, social status, mental stability, etc. It is these depictions that makes Martin’s behavior in *Sleeping with the Enemy* more disturbing to the audience. Martin embodies similar characteristics as portrayals of male victims. He is attractive, financially and socially established, and initially portrayed as morally upstanding. However, within the first ten minutes of the film his controlling nature is revealed. Martin calls his wife Laura into an otherwise pristine bathroom to show her that she had not hung the towel properly. Within the first twelve minutes the audience sees the first act of domestic violence committed against Laura. While it is not abnormal to see these conventionally masculine men turn to violence, what is different here is that Martin is violent from the start. Other men however were driven to violence by the female stalkers justifying their violent acts against women.

The characterization of Martin again diverges from the established patterns in that he is more apt to use manipulation and violence, like the portrayed female stalkers. Male stalkers used violence against those around their victims as a form of protective love. Martin however uses violence as an extension of domestic violence. For example, Laura’s blind mother is manipulated into divulging information regarding Laura’s whereabouts after she fakes her own death and leaves Martin. After unknowingly giving Martin the information, the film shows Martin holding a pillow above her face and it is assumed by the audience that he is prepared to murder her and is only thwarted when a nurse enters the room. Once Martin finds Laura the depth of his desire to control her is revealed. Martin breaks into Laura’s new home and confronts her.
Martin: “Hello princess. It’s wonderful to see you...alive. [He grabs her from behind] Oh there’s the first touch after so long apart.”

Laura: [crying]

Martin: “Have you been thinking of it too?”

[...]

Martin: “Remember this? [Holds up her abandoned wedding band]

Hmm? This is yours Laura. We are one. We will always be one. Nothing can keep us apart.”

Laura: [kneels Martin in the groin]

[They struggle]

Martin: “I’m impressed. Now let’s end this while you’re still ahead.”

Laura: [Aiming a gun at Martin] “Come to me Martin. Walk this way.”

Martin: “Always my pleasure.”

Laura: “That’s far enough.”

Martin: “Oh I don’t think so. [takes a step] Here feels right. There’s the telephone. You could call the police. I know you’re ever thought Laura. You’re wondering if they can protect you. Who knows? They may issue an order instructing me to stay away from my own wife. Nothing can keep me away. I love you Laura. I can’t live without you and I won’t let you live without me.”

Following this exchange Martin attacks Laura who, in the end, kills him. The portrayals of male stalkers among the sampled films depict a pattern of perpetrators explicitly not wanting to end the lives of their victims, however Martin clearly states his willingness to end the life of Laura if she will not submit to his control. *Sleeping with the Enemy* more closely aligns with knowledge regarding the lived experiences of stalking victims in that they are most likely stalked by an intimate partner and in the context of some form of domestic violence. What is striking is that this is the only sampled film which does so while the others follow another path.
Romantic and Sexual Scripts Analysis

As stated earlier, romantic and sexual scripts are cognitive models allowing individuals to assess and engage in romantic and sexual behaviors respectively (Simon and Gagnon 1986). By analyzing these films which contain both romantic and sexual behaviors the entanglement of romantic and sexual scripts became clear. Romantic comedies, as the genre title would suggest, clearly discuss romantic scripts and allude to the sexual scripts. Classic stalking films do the opposite however by making reference to the romantic scripts while the sexual scripts are more fervent. A discussion of romantic and sexual scripts will begin with romantic comedies and then stalking films.

Romantic scripts and sexual scripts are not so much embedded in one another as sexual scripts are embedded into romantic scripts. Romantic comedies and stalking films show this to be the case. First, romantic comedies place greater emphasis on the romance and less on the sexual scripts. However, this does not mean that the sexual scripts are completely absent from stalking portrayals in this genre. For example, in the film Better Off Dead the main character, Lane does a favor for his father by going on a blind date with Joann. Meeting Lane at the door Joann gives a full description of what a date consists of, reinforcing expected romantic behavior.

Joann: “Now first we’d have gone to dinner which is 10 bucks a piece – unless you’re a cheapskate but I’m willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. [...] I would have ordered double dessert so that’s 22 dollars all together...”

Not only does Joann provide this information but she does so in a manner conveying these actions to be standard during a romantic situation. Similar interactions are seen in
Say Anything. During the very first scene, Lloyd is told by his friends what does and does not constitute a date.

Lloyd: “I’m going to take out Diane Court again.”
Corey: “Well that’s unlikely.”
Lloyd: “Is a movie a good second date? As a date?”
Corey: “But you never had a first date.”
Lloyd: “Yes I did! I sat across from her at a mall. We ate together. We ate – That’s eating – sharing an important physical event.”
Corey: “That’s not even a scam.”
Lloyd: “What’s a scam?”
Corey: “Going out as friends”
DC: “Not it’s not. A scam is lusting.”
Lloyd and Corey: “Then what’s a date” x2
DC: “A date is prearrangement with the possibility of love.”

Within the first two minutes of this film, the main character and the audience is informed that there are differences surrounding what can be considered a date and what cannot.

Sexual scripts are also embedded into these romantic scripts. One romantic comedy in particular conveyed the involved nature of both scripts. Crazy Stupid Love simultaneously tells the stories of two men, one experiencing the failure of a romantic relationship and the other the beginning of one. Throughout the film Jacob teaches Cal how to pick up women for explicitly sexual relationships.

Cal: “Just because I’ve watched you pick up women doesn’t mean I know how to pick up women.”
Jacob: “You ever see Karate Kid?”
Cal: “What does that have to do with anything?”
Jacob: “You know when he’s teaching him to wax on and off and he’s really teaching him to fight?”
Cal: “You want me to fight someone?”
Jacob: “What’s the first thing I do when I go up to a girl – I buy her a drink.”
Cal: “Yes. Always. Without fail. Buy her a drink, even if she doesn’t want one, you insist.”
Jacob: “And do I talk about myself?”
Cal: “Never. Never talk about yourself, always about her.”
Jacob: “Because bar banter is the worst.”
Cal: “So you put the impetus on her. She has to be the interesting one. Impress me, impress me with how interesting you are – it’s a big game.”

[...]

Jacob: “At the end of the night what do I do? Do I ask them to go home with me?”
Cal: “No you tell them to come home with you. They have no choice in the matter. It is your choice and they are so overjoyed to have had the opportunity to make sweet, sweet love to you. Oh my god! You did – you Miyagi’d me.”

Jacob has taught Cal by example which behaviors to engage in that will convince a woman to enter into a casual sexual relationship with him. Even though Cal decries the whole process a game, the sexual script portrayed is literally a list of behaviors to be engaged in by men that will result in a sexual encounter. Jacob is portrayed as an expert in picking up women for sexual encounters, once he becomes romantically involved with a woman he turns to Cal for advice.

Jacob: “Yeah, well I’m in a bit of a situation – a pickle if you will. I just, I got no one else to call. I met a girl.”
Cal: “Oh really?”
Jacob: “I’m spending all this time with her and she is a game changer.”
Cal: “She’s a game changer? No way.”
Jacob: “So much so that I’m going to meet her mother right now.”
[...]
Jacob: “I don’t know what to do. I need some advice.”
Cal: “You realize you might have to answer some personal questions about yourself. You gotta smile a lot. You gotta be charming.”

Here, the sexual script described earlier is clearly shown to not apply in romantic relationships. Instead, an entirely new set of behaviors is required to maintain this relationship, in this case impressing a romantic partner’s family. While Crazy Stupid Love clearly displays both romantic and sexual scripts it is important to reiterate that the romantic scripts are based on an entirely different set of gendered behaviors.
Classic stalking films differ from romantic comedies not in the sense that romantic scripts are absent but in that the sexual scripts are not so much alluded to as discussed outright. In *Fatal Attraction*, the audience views a scene during which Dan’s wife, Beth, allows their daughter to sleep in their bed claiming it is just for the night. By allowing their child into their bed the audience is not surprised later on when Dan cheats. The sexual script expressed is that women should be sexually available to their husbands within the romantic context of marriage and if they are not, then it is almost expected that a man will stray. *Fatal Attraction* conveys another important sexual script regarding the need for discretion. Early in the film, Alex and Dan go out to dinner after a meeting during which she implies her desire for a sexual relationship.

*Alex:* “Are you discreet?”
*Dan:* “Yes, I’m discreet.”
*Alex:* “Me too.”

While these quotes may seem insignificant what they convey is the need to be secretive about non-marital sex. This puts across the preference to experience sex within a romantic context, more specifically marriage.

Other messages regarding expected sexual behaviors are expressed in the film, *Play Misty for Me*. In this film, Dave and Evelyn meet at a bar and end up at Evelyn’s home. There she is sexually forward and Dave attempts to convey the importance of his romantic entanglement with another woman.

*Evelyn:* “But who needs nice girls?”
*Dave:* “Well I’m kind of hung up on one.”
*Evelyn:* “And you don’t want to complicate your life.”
*Dave:* “That’s exactly right.”
*Evelyn:* “Well neither do I. But that’s no reason we shouldn’t sleep together to night if we feel like it.”
As in *Fatal Attraction* and *Swimfan*, the male stalking victim in *Play Misty for Me* stresses the significance of his romantic relationship with another woman, indicated by stating they cannot or will not be with the sexually aggressive woman who is pursuing them. The underlying message sent to the audience is that romantic relationships can be sexual, but sexual relationships cannot be romantic. At times classic stalking films drive the point home by expressing the importance of a romantic relationship over a sexual one by having the male victim reiterate multiple times their unwillingness to leave their romantic relationship. In *Swimfan* Ben tells Madison of the significance of his romantic relationship with Amy.

*Ben:* “*Madison I should tell you something.*”  
*Madison:* “*You have a girlfriend.*”  
*Ben:* “*Yeah, Amy.*”  
*Madison:* “*Is it serious?*”  
*Ben:* “*Yeah it is.*”  
[…]

*Ben:* “*For what it’s worth, my friend Josh would gladly murder me and step over my dead body just to be sitting here right now with you.*”  
*Madison:* “*Thanks but I’m not interested in Josh.*”

Later on in the movie he reiterates his commitment to his romantic relationship.

*Ben:* “*Madison, I think you’re misunderstanding our relationship in a very fundamental way.*”  
[…]

*Ben:* “*You’re just coming on a little strong. Ya know?*”  
*Madison:* “*You didn’t think I was coming on too strong when we were in the pool.*”  
*Ben:* “*I have a girlfriend. I told you that I had a girlfriend.*”  
*Madison:* “*What are you saying? That making love to me was a mistake?*”  
*Ben:* “*Yeah I guess I am.*”
Again, similarities can be drawn across the three stalking films with male victims. All three men indicated loyalty to their romantic partners multiple times and yet each time the women attempted to continue their sexual relationship. The sexual script disseminated to the audience is that romantic relationships deserve commitment and the sexually aggressive women are abnormal. These scripts simultaneously reinforce traditional gender dynamics and roles within romantic and sexual relationships.

**Changes in Portrayals Following Legislation**

As mentioned earlier, a goal of this research was to determine what impact, if any, the implementation of stalking legislation had on film portrayals of stalking behavior. Based on this analysis, stalking legislation has had no impact on the way stalking perpetrators and victims are portrayed. Neither genre of film, romantic comedy nor stalking, has wavered significantly from a seemingly standard formula regarding stalking behaviors or gender. Pre and post-legislation films reinforce traditional gender roles for both men and women, continue to employ standard outcomes of stalking behaviors, and convey traditional romantic and sexual scripts.

Pre-legislation romantic comedies and stalking films portrayed female victims of stalking as traditionally feminine and encouraging of the stalking behavior through contradictions. *Pretty in Pink* was used as an example earlier regarding her quote about secretly loving the attention she received from her stalker. The post-legislation film *Crazy Stupid Love* depicts the same thing in that the young babysitter character gives her stalker naked photos of herself after continuously dismissing his behaviors. Pre and post-legislation stalking films depicted female stalkers as too modern and too masculine in
their demeanor making them less desirable. The female stalkers in *Fatal Attraction*, *Play Misty for Me*, and *Swimfan*, were all portrayed as mentally unstable modern women in stark contrast to female partners of their stalking victims who embodied traditional femininity.

Masculine gender roles are emphasized across genre and legislation boundaries. Pre and post-legislation romantic comedies portray men who embody the traditional masculine traits such as attractiveness, mental stability, financial success, maturity, etc. as desirable. However, most of the time these traditional traits do not come to fruition until the male stalker is given romantic attention from their stalking victim or another traditional female. The pre-legislation film, *Better off Dead*, shows the main character as a bit dopey and mentally unstable. However, once he receives romantic attention from the traditional female lead he is “saved”. Stalking films, like with traditional femininity, reinforce traditional masculinity by showing what it is not masculine. The male stalkers shown in these films were socially undesirable and morally corrupt. Travis, in the film *Taxi Driver*, and David, in the film *Fear*, both engage in morally vacant behaviors such as random sexual encounters, drugs, violence, and viewing of pornographic materials.

The portrayal of stalking itself also remains unchanged following the execution of stalking legislation across the United States. As more and more research is revealed, stalking is largely a male perpetrated and female victimized phenomenon (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Melton 2000; Morewitz 2003). Yet of the classic stalking films, half included female stalkers and half male victims, both of which do not accurately represent knowledge of stalking. The stalking films made it clear that the behaviors of the
perpetrators were indeed stalking behaviors and only one of the romantic comedies labeled the portrayed behaviors as being reminiscent of stalking. Romantic comedies also gave no significant attention to the fear, violence, and negative consequences experienced by stalking victims, again reinforcing the supposedly inherent desire women have to be pursued.

What makes this lack of change even more surprising is the rise in awareness surrounding both domestic violence and stalking. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 was the first comprehensive approach by the government to protect women from violence. VAWA seeks to hold perpetrators accountable by increasing adherence to restraining orders, increasing rates of prosecution, conviction, and sentencing of offenders, as well as increasing the penalties associated with certain crimes (The White House VAWA Fact Sheet). The availability of services catering to women exposed to domestic violence has increased dramatically. For example, the National Network to End Domestic Violence reports 1,944 services available nationwide for victims of domestic violence in 2011 (nnedv.org). The onset of services can be traced back to the 1970’s and have been linked to less exposure to and homicidal results of interpersonal violence (Dugan et al. 1999). In conjunction with the rise in domestic violence services, health education courses offered in schools and other social institutions have added a component to the curriculum focusing on domestic violence awareness and prevention. These steps have added to an increase in public awareness regarding domestic violence, however, as far as can be determined by this researcher, there is a lack
of focus on stalking behaviors. This may reflect the disjointedness of definitions surrounding stalking as well as a lack of national congruence in stalking legislation.

The lack of influence of the implementation of stalking legislation regarding gender roles may be understandable when one considers the long standing history of gender inequality in the United States. Also, romantic and sexual scripts were unaffected which again may be rooted in the tendency to learn romantic and sexual behavioral expectations from others. What is more surprisingly is the lack of change in portrayal of stalking itself especially after stalking garnered such scholarly and media attention. It seems ironic almost that some of the most highly publicized cases of stalking have involved film stars, yet film portrayals of stalking perpetrators, victims, and behaviors remains unchanged.

**Conclusion**

This work contributes to various aspects of sociological study. This examination of stalking representation adds to a lacking body of sociological research focused on media portrayals of stalking. Significant attention has been given to stalking, the gendered way in which films are produced, and displays of traditional gender roles in media. However, there is a lack of connection between these bodies of literature. What has been established here is a need to further examine gendered portrayals of stalking behaviors, the outcomes, and the stalkers themselves. Secondly, the current research surrounding romantic and sexual scripts makes the interconnectedness of the two unclear. While there is a sizeable amount of research regarding portrayals of these scripts in popular culture, this work has shown the clear representation of both romantic and sexual
scripts presented in popular films over a significant time period. Lastly, the lack of change in depictions of stalkers and stalking behaviors is disconcerting when considered in conjunction with the rise of social awareness regarding violence against women. This consistency in conjunction with that lack of accurate portrayals of stalking in film is unexplored but highlighted in this work.

As noted earlier, while the majority of films reflected specific patterns regarding stalkers and stalking behaviors, a very clear exception was made in *Sleeping with the Enemy*. This begs the question as to why a greater number of films do not portray the more accurate representation of stalking as occurring in conjunction with domestic violence. The lack of public focus on stalking and the impact on victims may have contributed to less intense anti-stalking social message when compared to the social meanings attached to domestic violence. There is also a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes stalking behaviors and is reflected in scholarly research as well as legislation. When actual knowledge of stalking is mirrored in film representations, as occurring within domestic violence, a social and political message is also portrayed regarding the significance of violence against women. *Sleeping with the Enemy* may also make viewers more uncomfortable as clear deviations from gender roles are not present. Martin embodies many of the characteristics which society deems desirable in that he is attractive, masculine, wealthy, socially established, and more. It is when this socially desirable man engages in socially deplorable acts that the audience may be left with feelings of discomfort in the actuality of the stalking and domestic violence portrayal. As audiences seek out movies to be entertained with sensationalized imagery and not to be
confronted with authentic portrayals of violence against women, the lack of accurate stalking representations in film may be attributed to desire to be entertained over the desire to be confronted with distressing messages of social issues.

A clear limitation of this research is its sample size. While clear patterns were established across the films, a larger sample would further strengthen these findings. Also, the sample size contributed a lack of portrayals of female perpetrators, as all romantic comedies and half of the classic stalking films depicted male stalkers and only three depicted female stalkers. The three films depicted a series of patterns, but also hinted to more. For example, two of the three films, *Play Misty for Me* and *Fatal Attraction*, follow similar behavioral patterns such as their willingness to use self harm as manipulative. However, the third film *Swimfan* offers a deviation in the lack of use of self harming behaviors. While this is a mere hint of differences in portrayals of female stalkers, further research may show that male stalkers are portrayed consistently where as female stalkers are not. An extensive examination of a greater number of classic stalking films may reveal greater gendered variations associated with female stalkers, as well as reinforcing the themes presented here. Also, research spanning across genres could provide further evidence to gendered portrayals of stalking and stalking behaviors. Lastly, the consistent portrayal of stalking behaviors and stalkers over a time period where public awareness has increased regarding this crime deserves greater attention which was beyond the scope of this project.

This current work provides evidence that gendered portrayals of stalking convey messages that non-traditional displays of masculinity are undesirable and deviations from
traditional femininity are dangerous. Male stalkers are portrayed differently across genres of film, with romantic comedies representing their stalking behaviors as cute and classic stalking films depicting their behaviors as more perilous. What is essential is the connectedness of the end goals in both these genres, that of love. These popular films show men are simply seeking out love and connectedness from their victims. Female stalkers on the other hand are consistently shown to be manipulative, mentally unstable, and upon being rebuffed, apt to use violence to eliminate the source of their rejection. These non-normative displays of gender serve to reinforce conventional norms and a gender hierarchy. Romantic and sexual scripts were found to be clearly displayed across genres of film. These representations provided unambiguous behaviors and patterns associated with romantic and sexual behavior. A lack of modification to the depictions of stalkers and stalking behaviors after an increase in public awareness and the nationwide implementation of stalking legislation is disheartening. The culmination of these findings indicates a need for further research regarding the disconnect between representations of stalking in popular culture and knowledge of stalking that has been established over the past two decades.
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