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Online Comment Incivility And Its Impact On Social Perceptions Of Stalking

Abigail Marie Kroke

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ONLINE COMMENT INCIVILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS
OF STALKING

by

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Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 2016

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Much research has investigated the impact of online incivility on people's opinions of controversial topics, but less has focused on social perceptions of personal disclosure-related online posts, despite large online-based social movements such as #MeToo. The current study focuses on stalking and will enable a better understanding of how stalking is perceived. There are two main study objectives: to examine social perceptions of an online disclosure by a target of stalking behavior and to examine the role of online incivility on mood and social perceptions of stalking. Overall, both men and women responded similarly to the stalking scenario. Participants expressed more concern for the female victim, ascribed her more credibility and less blame compared to the male victim. Exposure to incivility was found to have minimal impact on perceptions of the stalking victim. Overall, findings have implications for how stalking victims are perceived and potentially supported based on their gender.

Introduction

Internet incivility is a topic that most people have encountered if they frequent websites that allow for comments. For example, in an analysis of one news website, incivility was found in 20% of comments on the site's articles and 55% of articles that included a discussion section had at least one uncivil comment (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014). To date, research has primarily focused on online incivility pertaining to controversial topics such as gun control and abortion. In comparison, less is known about the impact of online incivility on social perceptions of personal accounts of negative events. In particular, it is unclear how social perceptions of a victim's personal online disclosure are influenced by the level of incivility in online comments posted after the disclosure. Given that victim disclosures are becoming increasingly common in public online forums (i.e. #MeToo movement or #NotOkay; Bogen, Bleiweiss, & Orchowski, 2018; Bogen, Millman, Huntington, & Orchowski, 2018; Cravens, Whiting, & Amar, 2015; Hosterman, Johnson, Stouffer, & Herring, 2018; Moors, & Webber, 2012), it is important to understand how such disclosures are perceived and what factors shape those social perceptions. The current study examined the role of incivility in online responses to a victim's disclosure in shaping social perceptions of the victim and the victim's disclosure.

Stalking

The bulk of research on social perceptions of victims has focused on sexual victimization (Campbell, Menaker, & King, 2015; Dworkin, Newton, & Allen, 2018;

Venema, 2016). In comparison, less is known about social perceptions of victims of stalking. The US Department of Justice (2019) defines stalking as behavior “directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for his or her safety or the safety of others or suffer substantial emotional distress.” Stalking behaviors can range from seemingly harmless acts, such as sending mail, writing letters, leaving gifts, and repeated calling or texting, to more malicious acts such as property damage, stealing, or threatening the target or the target’s loved ones. When stalking occurs online it is referred to as cyberstalking and may entail the use of technology to harass and pursue victims, often filling their inboxes with obscene or threatening messages and images (National Institute of Justice, 2007).

Although reports of stalking are less common than reports of sexual violence (i.e., 5.8% of men and 16% of women report being stalked vs. 44% of women and 25% of men reporting being victims of sexual violence; Smith et al., 2018), many parallels exist in how victims are perceived in terms of their accountability (e.g., they sent the perpetrator mixed messages and/or they shouldn’t have put themselves in that situation; Sinclair, 2012). Prior research has also found that stalking victims report persistent feelings of fear and, in some cases, more daytime fear than victims of sexual assault, possibly due to a lack of available resources for stalking victims to adequately process and cope with their victimization (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009).

Aside from constant fear, stalking victims often report physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, sleep disturbances), psychological symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety,

paranoia), social consequences (e.g., change of job, loss of friendships or activities), and economic consequences (e.g., therapy costs, vandalism, lost wages due to time off work). Female stalking victims tend to report more physical and psychological consequences than male stalking victims (Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & Bartak, 2003; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2010; Turmanis, & Brown, 2006).

Social Perceptions of Stalking

Given the negative impact of stalking behavior, understanding social perceptions of stalking victims is important. Existing research has yielded varying results in how people perceive targets of stalking behavior and the level of concern expressed for individuals who have been stalked by another person. In particular, there are several gender differences regarding social perceptions of stalking victims. Specifically, there tends to be greater concern for women pursued by a male stalker than for men pursued by a female stalker (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012). Likewise, people are more likely to recommend both informal (friends, family) and formal (police) help-seeking for female victims than for male victims (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012).

Gender-related stereotypes may partly explain these differences in concern for male and female victims. Specifically, women are more often perceived as dependent and as the weaker sex (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011). These perceptions about women may contribute to greater concern shown for female victims. In contrast, traditional male stereotypes dictate that men are strong, protectors, and independent, traits that are typically held in stark opposition to victimization (Bem, 1974;

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011; Weiss, 2010), may contribute to the lack of concern or perception that help is needed for male victims of stalking. Men are also less likely to report harassment and less likely to post a disclosure online compared to women (Andalibi, Haimson, Choudhury, & Forte, 2016).

Compared to men, women are more likely to identify a situation as involving stalking behavior, express greater concern for targets, recommend help-seeking, and express fear of becoming a target of stalking (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013). Previous research has found men more likely than women to blame the victim and less likely to perceive stalking as harmful or dangerous (Lambert et al., 2013). Men are also more likely to believe that stalking is limited to strangers stalking celebrities whereas women are more likely to believe stalking involves prior relational partners (Lambert et al., 2013). In addition, men tend to endorse stalking myths to a greater extent than women do (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014; Sinclair, 2012). Such stalking myths include perceptions that the victim is to blame for sending the stalker mixed messages, belief that the target finds the pursuit flattering, or that stranger stalking is the only real type of stalking (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014).

Another factor previous research has explored is whether prior experience with stalking has an impact on social perceptions of stalking. Lambert, Smith, Geistman, Cluse-Tolar, and Jiang (2013) found that women were approximately twice as likely as men to have been targets of stalking. However, while prior stalking victimization did not appear to impact perceptions of stalking, experience as a perpetrator of stalking is

associated with less concern for the victims and lower likelihood of recommending help-seeking for victims (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012). Conversely, occupational experience working with stalking victims is associated with less victim blame. In particular, Weller, Hope, and Sheridan (2013) found that police officers who have experience with stalking cases are less likely to blame the victim for being stalked.

Through social media facilitated movements such as #MeToo or #NotOkay, people are becoming more outspoken, both online and in person about their experiences with being a target of harassment or interpersonal violence (Bogen, Bleiweiss, & Orchowski, 2018; Bogen, Millman, Huntington, & Orchowski, 2018; Cravens et al., 2015; Hosterman, et al., 2018; Moors, & Webber, 2012). Accordingly, it is important to understand how stalking victim disclosures are perceived in an online setting. For example, knowledge of how targets of stalking are socially viewed could contribute to ensuring victims who disclose their experience in an online forum receive the support they seek. This knowledge may also reduce pervasive myths regarding stalking that are perpetuated via incivility (i.e., blaming the victim for sending the stalker mixed messages, or that stranger stalking is the only real type of stalking; McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014). Such common misperceptions may negatively affect targets of stalking by increasing self-blame, diminishing the severity of the experience, and contributing to reluctance to disclose their experience (Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & Bartak, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011; McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014 Sheridan & Lyndon, 2010; Turmanis, & Brown, 2006). Furthermore, if individuals do disclose their

stalking victimization in a public online forum, various factors can contribute to how that disclosure is viewed by others. As subsequently discussed, one factor that impacts social perceptions, and is the focus of the current study, is online incivility.

Online Incivility

Previous research has established that defining incivility is a complex issue, as views of what is considered uncivil vary widely (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014). Within the context of an online discussion, Hwang, Kim, and Kim (2016) define incivility as “a violation of interactional social norms of politeness through expressing disrespect for, frustration with, and/or insults to an individual or a group that opposes one’s own views” (p. 217). More plainly, incivility may be thought of as comments that are impolite, disruptive, may involve profanity or personal attacks, and/or do not meaningfully contribute to the discussion. People who frequently engage in online incivility are commonly referred to as “internet trolls” who intentionally upset others by using disruptive online behavior and inflammatory comments with no apparent purpose other than to make others appear foolish or emotional (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

Past research has shown that online incivility may enhance polarization of viewpoints regarding discussion topics (Anderson, Brossard, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014). While a civil conversation may facilitate open-mindedness toward opposing views, incivility may diminish inter-group relations and exacerbate intolerance of alternate viewpoints. Thus, online incivility may enhance outgroup hostility (Hwang, Kim, & Kim, 2016).

In addition to worsening inter-group relationships and outgroup perceptions, incivility in online discussions may negatively impact individuals' moods in terms of increasing anger and anxiety (Lu & Myrick, 2016). In a study by Wang and Silvia (2018) examining online incivility in the form of insults and mockery, they found that participants felt negatively regardless of which side of the issue was targeted with incivility. Other research has shown that incivility incites more negative emotions toward individuals on the opposing side of the issue (Hwang et al., 2016). Hwang et al. (2016) also found that participants felt moral indignation towards discussion partners who attacked the opposite side of the issue in an uncivil manner. Moral indignation resulting from uncivil attacks in online discussion boards may also trigger greater defensiveness (Hwang et al., 2016).

Not only can online incivility contribute to negative mood, researchers have also found that individuals are more likely to participate in a discussion when they are exposed to incivility and are already experiencing negative emotion (Lu & Myrick, 2016; Wang & Silvia, 2018). This incivility exposure influencing individuals to participate in the discussion while in a negative mood may serve to exacerbate the ongoing incivility.

Often, individuals engaging in online incivility seem to lack awareness of their own contributions to the incivility. The fundamental attribution error, or tendency for people to ascribe personal or dispositional characteristics to explain behaviors with little thought or emphasis on situational factors (Ross, 1977), may explain why individuals tend to judge others' negative online behavior despite having a blind spot to their own

negativity (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Specifically, Fox and Moreland (2015) found that while participants cited behaviors such as attention seeking or instability as explanations for others' negative posts, they attributed their own negative contributions to external factors such as needing to respond to someone else's misguided post. Together, prior research suggests that exposure to incivility in online comments can both worsen an individual's mood and increase his or her likelihood of posting an uncivil comment, while being largely unaware of his or her role in contributing to an already negative discussion.

Online Incivility and Social Perceptions of Stalking: The Current Study

The current study focuses on social perceptions of an online disclosure of stalking and the impact of online incivility on social perceptions of stalking behavior. Participants read a hypothetical online personal account of being the target of stalking behavior. The posted personal account involved either a female target and male stalker or male target and female stalker. The post was followed by a randomly assigned comment section that included civil posts, uncivil posts, or no comments (control). Thus, the study design entailed a 2 Target/Stalker Gender (male, female) x 2 Participant Gender (male, female) x 3 Civility (civil, uncivil, control discussion) between subjects factorial design.

The first main objective of the current study was to examine social perceptions of an online disclosure of a target of stalking behavior. Specifically, after reading a hypothetical online disclosure of a victim of stalking behavior, participants rated the degree to which they identified the disclosure post as a stalking event, their concern for

the victim, the victim's credibility, and the degree to which they blame the victim for being stalked. The role of empathy, endorsement of stalking myths, victim's gender, and participants' gender were examined to provide insight into perceptions of stalking, victim's credibility, victim blame, and concern for the victim.

Given the parallels between how stalking and other types of interpersonal violence are perceived (Sinclair, 2012) and past research findings that those who score high on empathy ascribe less blame to the victim (Deitz, Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982) the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1a: Greater empathy will be associated with a greater likelihood of viewing the disclosure as a stalking event, more concern for the victim, greater victim credibility, and less victim blame.

Hypothesis 1b: Greater endorsement of stalking myths will be associated with less likelihood of viewing the disclosure as a stalking event, less concern for the victim, less victim credibility, and greater victim blame.

Based on gender differences indicating that women express more concern than men for targets of stalking and recommend more help-seeking for targets (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012) whereas men are more likely to engage in victim blaming behaviors (Lambert et al., 2013):

Hypothesis 1c: Women, compared to men, will be more likely to view the disclosure post as stalking and report more concern, less blame, and more credibility for the target of stalking.

Because men are less likely to report harassment and less likely to post a disclosure online compared to women (Andalibi, Haimson, Choudhury, & Forte, 2016) little is known about how male victims are perceived in an online setting. Accordingly, the current study was also used to explore whether perceptions differ based on whether the stalking victim was a man or a woman. Given that women are more typically viewed in the victim role (Bem, 1974; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Weiss, 2010):

Hypothesis 1d: Disclosures of a female victim will be more likely to be identified as stalking than disclosures of a male victim. We will also explore whether concern for the victim, blame, and credibility differ as a function of the victim's gender.

The second main study objective was to examine the role of online incivility on mood and social perceptions of stalking behavior. To achieve this objective, a subset of participants were randomly assigned to receive either the civil, uncivil, or control comments conditions following the personal disclosure of being a stalking victim. We then assessed participants' emotional responses to a personal account of being stalked and whether that emotional response varies as a function of exposure to civil vs. uncivil comments in the discussion section following the target's post. Previous research has shown that exposure to uncivil discussion on a variety of topics has a negative impact on mood (Hwang et al., 2016; Lu & Myrick, 2016; Wang and Silvia 2018). In line with these past findings the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 2a: Participants exposed to uncivil online discussion will report a more negative mood compared to participants exposed to the civil online comments and those exposed to no comments.

Hypothesis 2b: Participants exposed to the uncivil discussion will experience an increase in negative mood, such that their mood will be significantly more negative after exposure to uncivil discussion compared to prior to that exposure.

In addition to examining how online incivility impacts observers' mood, we will also examine how exposure to online incivility affects perceptions of stalking. Because online incivility polarizes views on discussion topics and increases outgroup hostility (Anderson, Brossard, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014; Hwang, Kim, & Kim, 2016) it is predicted that:

Hypothesis 2c: Exposure to incivility will lead to lower likelihood of identifying the account as stalking behavior, less concern for the victim, greater victim blame, and less victim credibility compared to exposure to civil discussion or control conditions.

In general, women show more concern for stalking victims than men do (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013) and prior research has found incivility to have a polarizing effect on pre-existing opinions and attitudes (Anderson, Brossard, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 2d: Women exposed to the uncivil discussion will report more concern for the female target than women exposed to the civil discussion and compared to men exposed to either the civil or uncivil discussions.

Hypothesis 2e: When exposed to the uncivil vs civil discussion condition, the victim will be perceived as less credible by those high in stalking myth endorsement in the incivility condition compared to those high in stalking myth endorsement in the civil condition.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate college students enrolled in various psychology courses were invited via SONA to participate in an online study about perceptions of online posts and then clicked a link to the study within Qualtrics. A total of 288 participants, consisting of 180 female and 108 male undergraduate college students were recruited for the study. Participants were compensated 0.5 research credits for taking part in the online study which took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Measures

Demographics. As shown in Appendix A, participants were asked demographic questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, and political orientation.

Stalking disclosure. Participants' read the following hypothetical stalking disclosure that, based on random assignment, described either a female stalker named Sarah and male blogger named Andrew, or a male stalker named Andrew and female blogger named Sarah. Names for the individuals in the scenario were chosen based on matches on extraneous variables such as age cohort, attractiveness, and intellectual

competence (Etaugh, & Geraghty, 2018). Participants were instructed to: “Read the blog posted by Sarah/Andrew below and respond to the questions that follow it.”

I don't normally post a lot, especially about personal things, but this has gone too far!

This guy/girl Sarah/Andrew and I dated for about 6 months before we broke up. We tried to work things out after that and saw each other on and off again for a couple more months. Honestly, things just weren't working between us and I finally decided to move on for good. However, Sarah/Andrew didn't seem to get the hint, even after I started seeing someone new.

Since our breakup I received COUNTLESS texts, phone calls, DMs, and even snapchats from Sarah/Andrew to the point that I don't even want to look at my phone anymore! I've blocked him/her and yet he/she still finds a way to get to me through multiple accounts, friends accounts, etc. Also, despite telling him/her to stop and saying we weren't dating anymore, Sarah/Andrew continues to push me to “try to talk about it” and “work things out.”

It gets worse! I swear I have seen Sarah/Andrew lurking around since the breakup—though I haven't gotten a good enough look to be sure. Once when I was with some good friends at a coffee shop he/she walked by the window a couple of times. Also, a few times I could have sworn I saw him/her following me a few aisles back in the grocery store. I even think I saw his/her car outside my workplace a few times. I'm not sure if I am being paranoid or what, but I swear I am being watched which would make anyone feel uneasy! Not to mention finding wrapped gifts with no tag on my car - not hard to guess where they came from!

Bottom line is, I think Sarah/Andrew is either obsessed or just not bright enough to understand that I don't want to date him/her anymore. I just don't know what else to do! This situation seems sort of hopeless and I can't get any peace with all these texts, phone calls, DMs, snaps, and constantly feeling like I'm going to run into him/her when really, I just want to be left alone!

Attention checks. Participants were asked two questions to ensure that they read and understood the online disclosure. The attention check questions were:

“Sarah/Andrew reported finding anonymous gifts in which of the following locations?”

with response options being: “doorstep, mailbox, office, car.” and “Which of the following is a location where Sarah/Andrew reported possibly seeing Sarah/Andrew? with response options being: “Football Game, Coffee Shop, Mall, Sarah/Andrew’s home.”

Additional attention checks were placed throughout the study to ensure participants were paying attention and to minimize response set bias. The additional attention checks were: “I have visited every country in Africa in the past 9 months”, “All of my friends are aliens”, and “I do not understand a word of English” with true or false response options for all three questions. Participants who failed these attention checks had their data omitted from subsequent analyses.

Perceptions of stalking. Participants’ interpretation of the stalking account was assessed using five items. Specifically, participants indicated their level of agreement (i.e., 1 = Strongly disagree through 5 = Strongly agree) with the following statements: “Sarah/Andrew clearly crossed a line.”, “Sarah/Andrew was overreacting to the situation.”, “This situation involved stalking”, “Sarah/Andrew’s response to the break-up was appropriate.” , “This situation seems like a typical break-up.” After reverse coding scores for the second, fourth, and fifth item, participants’ responses to all five items were averaged to create a stalking perception composite with higher scores reflecting a greater perception of stalking having occurred. Internal reliability was low for the five and as a result the last two reverse coded questions were dropped to improve total scale reliability resulting in an increase

from $\alpha = .55$ to $.61$ for male victim/female stalker and from $\alpha = .69$ to $.70$ for female victim/male stalker.

Victim blame. Victim blame was assessed using the Perception of Victim/Perpetrator Blame Scale (Rayburn, Mendoza, & Davison, 2003). As shown in Appendix B, the scale consists of 14 bipolar adjectives pairs (e.g., blameless vs blameworthy) and is rated on a seven-point scale (i.e. 1 = Blameless and 7 = Blameworthy). Participants are asked to “Rate Sarah/Andrew on each of the following characteristics” Responses for each pair are summed such that higher total scores indicate greater perceived blame. Internal reliability for the victim blame composite was $\alpha = .91$ for female victim/male stalker and $\alpha = .92$ for male victim/female stalker.

Victim credibility. Victim credibility was assessed using five questions created for the purpose of the current study. Participants were asked “How credible do you find Sarah/Andrew?”, “How believable do you find Sarah/Andrew’s account/story?”, “How much do you trust that Sarah/Andrew’s post is accurate.”, “How much do you doubt Sarah/Andrew’s post?”, and “How likely is it that the events occurred as posted by Sarah/Andrew?” with response options ranging from 1 (not at all credible) through a midpoint of 3 (somewhat) through to 5 (highly credible). Responses to these five items were averaged to provide a composite victim credibility score. The internal reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .88$ for both female victim/male stalker and male victim/female stalker conditions.

Concern for victim. Participants' concern for the stalking victim was assessed using the following four questions developed for this study: "How concerning is this situation for [victim]?", "How worried should [victim] be about this situation?", "How concerned should the [victim] be for his/her safety?" and "How threatened should [victim] feel by this situation?" Response options range from 1 (not at all) through to a midpoint of 3 (somewhat) to 5 (very). Responses to these four items were averaged such that higher scores reflect greater concern for the victim. The internal reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .89$ for female victim/male stalker and $\alpha = .85$ for male victim/female stalker conditions.

Empathy. Empathy was assessed using the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, Mckinnon, Mar, & Levine, 2009). The TEQ (see Appendix C) was created as a parsimonious questionnaire to assess empathy, primarily as an emotional process. The TEQ is comprised of 16 questions (e.g. "It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully") with response options ranging from 0 (never) through 4 (always). Participants are asked to "read each statement *carefully* and rate how frequently you feel or act in that manner." Scores are summed to obtain an empathy score with higher scores reflecting more empathy. Internal reliability for the empathy composite was $\alpha = .80$

Stalking myths endorsement. Participants' endorsement of stalking myths was assessed using the Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire (McKeon, Mcewan, & Luebbers, 2014). The 34-item SRAQ (see Appendix D) was developed to assess attitudes within the context of relational stalking and reflecting stalking myths that minimize the

seriousness of stalking, normalize the behavior as romantic, and assign blame to the victim. Participants are asked to “indicate how much you agree with the following statements using the scale provided.” Response options range from 1 (absolutely untrue) through 7 (absolutely true). Responses to each item are averaged such that higher scores reflect greater endorsement of stalking myths. Internal reliability for this composite measure was $\alpha = .87$.

Mood. Participants’ mood was assessed using the Discrete Emotions Questionnaire (Harmon-Jones, Bastian, & Harmon-Jones, 2016). The DEQ (see Appendix E) is intended to measure state emotions and is sensitive to several different manipulations of emotion (anger, disgust, fear, anxiety, sadness, happiness, relaxation, and desire). The DEQ consists of 32 items that load onto the eight subscales. Participants are asked “While reading the blog post and comments to what extent did you experience these emotions?” Response options range from 1 (not at all) to 7 (an extreme amount). Items are averaged by subscale to obtain a mean score for that emotion with higher amounts indicating that emotion being felt to a greater extent. For this study, only the anger, happiness, sadness, relaxation and anxiety subscales were utilized. Reliability for each emotion subscale ranged from .54 to .90.

Civility/Incivility manipulation.

Following the stalking blog, participants viewed a comment section in a randomly assigned civility condition (civil or uncivil) or a control (no comments) condition. Developed for the purpose of the current study, the comment section consisted of two

main comments (one supportive and one unsupportive) followed by two replies for each comment for a total of six comments in each civility condition. The comment section was presented in a manner resembling a blog or forum post. For the specific comments, see Appendix F.

Manipulation check. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with two statements: “The comments in the comment section following the blog were respectful” and “The comments in the comment section following the blog were rude” with response options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) through a midpoint of 3 (Somewhat agree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Participants were also be asked: “Overall, how would you rate the comments on this post?” with responses ranging from 1 (uncivil) through a midpoint of 3 (neutral) to 5 (civil). Responses were averaged to determine how uncivil participants felt the comment sections were in that higher scores reflect more civil discussion.

Prior to the current study the civility levels in the comment sections were pilot tested among a sample of 37 undergraduate students enrolled in various online psychology courses. Of the initial 37 students who completed the survey, three failed the attention check, leaving a total of 34 participants on which the pilot data analyses were based. This pilot sample identified as primarily Caucasian (85.3%) and female (70.6%) and were a mean age of $M = 21.94$ ($SD = 3.59$). An independent samples t-test confirmed the manipulation worked and revealed expected differences in civility ratings of the civil

($M = 9.94$, $SD = 2.70$) vs. uncivil ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.38$) conditions: $t(32) = 6.56$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.29, 6.25].

Procedure

Eligible participants were invited to complete an online study regarding perceptions of online posts. Once they clicked the link within SONA, participants were directed to a study information webpage within Qualtrics. After reading the study information, participants were asked to click a link to consent to participate in the study. Those who consented to participate completed demographic measures and items assessing their current mood state. Then they were randomly assigned to read a stalking vignette depicting either a male target and female stalker or a female target and male stalker. The stalking vignette was immediately followed with one of three randomly assigned civility discussion conditions (civil discussion, uncivil discussion, control/no discussion). All participants then completed measures of victim blame, victim credibility, concern for the victim, empathy, stalking myth endorsement and current mood as well as manipulation check questions. Subsequently, participants were asked whether they considered the account to be stalking and if they thought either the victim or perpetrator overreacted. Attention checks were also placed throughout the study.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Of the initial 288 participants who completed the study, data from four participants were excluded due to being duplicate cases, data from another participant

was omitted due to self-identifying as a minor, and data from another 25 participants were excluded due to failed attention checks, leaving a total of 258 participants on which all remaining analyses are based. Of these 258 participants, 164 (63.6%) identified as female, 94 (36.4%) participants identified as male, and the majority identified as Caucasian (85.7%). The remaining participants identified as Black/African American (3.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.1%), Multi-ethnic (3.1%), Mexican/Latin American (2.4%) or Native American/Alaskan Native (1.9%). Participants also indicated a mean age of $M = 19.96$ ($SD = 3.621$) and reported having a moderate to slightly conservative political orientation $M = 4.22$ ($SD = 1.60$).

Manipulation checks were assessed using an independent samples t-test to confirm that the civility manipulation was successful. As expected, the civil comments condition was viewed as significantly more civil than the uncivil comments condition (civil: $M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.86$ vs. uncivil: $M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.63$, $t(154.95) = 14.51$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.44, 1.89]). Finally, preliminary screening indicated no outliers in the data and any missing data appeared to be random in nature.

As detailed in Table 1, descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables including perception of stalking, victim blame, victim credibility, concern for victim, empathy, stalking myth endorsement, and mood. Overall, participants indicated a moderate-high amount of empathy ($M = 49.13$, $SD = 6.71$) and low endorsement of stalking myths ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.59$). Prior to reading the blog post, participants indicated their mood was as follows: they had low levels of anger ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.94$)

and sadness ($M = 2.15, SD = 1.30$), felt moderately relaxed ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.13$), moderately happy ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.30$), and moderately anxious ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.51$). After reading the blog post, participants continued to have low levels of anger ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.37$) and sadness ($M = 1.81, SD = 0.90$), they reported feeling less relaxed ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.59$), less happiness ($M = 1.91, SD = 1.28$), and remained moderately anxious ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.54$).

Overall, participants viewed the scenario as involving stalking for both female and male victims (Female victim: $M = 4.14, SD = 0.71$; Male victim: $M = 4.02, SD = 0.56$) and participants placed a moderate amount of blame on the victims (Female victim: $M = 42.30, SD = 14.15$; Male victim: $M = 47.31, SD = 13.61$). Participants viewed the victim as fairly credible (Female victim: $M = 3.36, SD = 0.71$; Male victim: $M = 3.08, SD = 0.70$) and were very concerned for the female victim ($M = 4.13, SD = 0.73$) but only moderately concerned for the male victim ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.74$).

Main Analyses

The first main objective of the current study was to examine social perceptions of an online disclosure of a target of stalking behavior. Bivariate correlations across male and female participants were computed among empathy, perception of the stalking event, concern for victim, victim credibility, victim blame, and endorsement of stalking myths to assess Hypothesis 1a and 1b. Hypothesis 1a: Greater empathy will be associated with a greater likelihood of viewing the disclosure as a stalking event, more concern for the victim, greater victim credibility, and less victim blame was partially supported. As

shown in Table 2, for female victims, greater empathy was associated with greater likelihood of viewing the disclosure as a stalking event ($r = .27, p = .002$), greater concern for the female victim ($r = .19, p = .029$), viewing the female victim as more credible ($r = .26, p = .002$), and less blaming of the female victim ($r = -.20, p = .019$). None of these expected associations with empathy were found in the scenario involving the male victim.

Hypothesis 1b, that greater endorsement of stalking myths will be associated with less likelihood of viewing the disclosure as a stalking event, less concern for the victim, less victim credibility, and greater victim blame was also partially supported. For the female victim and as shown in Table 2, greater endorsement of stalking myths was associated with less tendency to view the disclosure as stalking ($r = -.30, p = .001$), less concern for the female victim ($r = -.19, p = .032$), viewing the female victim as less credible ($r = -.27, p = .002$), and more blame assigned to the female victim ($r = .21, p = .017$). For the male victim, greater endorsement of stalking myths was only associated with less concern for the male victim ($r = -.25, p = .005$). Together, these findings support Hypotheses 1a and 1b for the female victim but not for the male victim, indicating empathy is associated with a more positive view of the victim whereas endorsement of stalking myths is associated with a more negative view of the victim.

Hypothesis 1c stated that women, compared to men, will be more likely to view the disclosure post as stalking and report more concern, less blame, and more credibility for the target of stalking. In order to test this hypothesis a one-way MANOVA, collapsed

across victim/target gender was computed with participant gender (male, female) as the independent variable and perception of stalking, concern for victim, victim blame, and victim credibility as the dependent measures. The overall MANOVA was significant ($F(4, 253) = 3.51, p = .008, \eta^2 = .05$). However, none of the univariate tests were significant [Perception of stalking: $F(1, 256) = 2.19, p = .141$; Concern for victim: $F(1, 256) = 2.99, p = .085$; Victim Blame: $F(1, 256) = 1.38, p = .24$; Victim Credibility: $F(1, 256) = .00, p = .95$]. Table 3 shows means and standard deviations for these gender comparisons. Thus, Hypothesis 1c was not supported. That is, men and women did not differ in their view of the scenario or their view of the victims.

To test Hypothesis 1d, a one-way MANOVA, collapsed across participant gender was computed with victim/stalker gender (female victim/male stalker vs. male victim/female stalker) as the independent variable and perception of stalking, concern for victim, victim blame, and victim credibility as the dependent measures to assess whether disclosures of a female victim will be more likely to be identified as stalking than disclosures of a male victim, as well as whether, concern for the victim, blame, and credibility differ as a function of the victim and stalker's gender. The overall MANOVA was significant ($F(4, 253) = 13.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$). Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant differences in how the victim was perceived. As detailed in Table 4, participants expressed significantly more concern for the female victim ($M = 4.13, SD = 0.73$) than for the male victim ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.74$), [$F(1, 256) = 41.95, p = .00, \eta^2 = .14$]. Participants also placed significantly less blame on the female victim ($M = 42.30,$

$SD = 14.15$) than on the male victim ($M = 47.31, SD = 13.6$), [$F(1, 256) = 8.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$]. Likewise, participants viewed the female victim as more credible ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.71$) than the male victim ($M = 3.08, SD = 0.70$), [$F(1, 256) = 9.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$]. There was no significant difference in perceiving the disclosure as involving stalking based on victim gender [$F(1, 256) = 2.17, p = .14$]. Therefore, with the exception of viewing the disclosure as involving stalking, Hypothesis 1d was largely supported in that participants viewed the female victim more favorably (i.e., more credible, less blame, more concern) than the male victim.

The second main study objective was to examine the role of online incivility on mood and social perceptions of stalking behavior. A one-way MANOVA was computed with civility condition (civil, uncivil, or control) as the independent variable and post-exposure measures of mood (anger, sadness, happiness, relaxation, and anxiety) as the dependent variables, to assess Hypothesis 2a: Participants exposed to uncivil online discussion will report a more negative mood compared to participants exposed to the civil online comments and those exposed to no comments. The overall MANOVA was marginally significant [$F(10, 502) = 1.82, p = .054$]. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 5. However, none of the univariate follow-ups were significant [Anger: $F(2, 255) = 2.41, p = .092$; Sadness: $F(2, 255) = 1.09, p = .337$; Relaxation: $F(2, 255) = 1.56, p = .213$; Happiness: $F(2, 255) = 1.64, p = .196$; Anxiety: $F(2, 255) = 0.63, p = .536$]. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. That is, after reading the uncivil

comments, participants did not differ in mood from those who read the civil comments condition.

A paired-samples t-test was computed to test Hypothesis 2b, that participants exposed to the uncivil discussion will experience an increase in negative mood, such that their mood will be significantly more negative after exposure to uncivil discussion compared to prior to that exposure. As detailed in Table 6, results indicated a significant pre-post change in anger $t(85) = -7.18, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.56, -.88]$, sadness $t(85) = 3.053, p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.14, 0.67]$, relaxation $t(85) = 7.99, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.03, 1.71]$, and happiness $t(85) = 12.35, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.72, 2.38]$. There was no significant change in anxiety $t(85) = 0.193, p = .85, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.33, 0.39]$. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was partially confirmed. As expected, anger increased while both happiness and relaxation decreased after exposure to the scenario and uncivil discussion, indicating a shift towards a more negative overall mood. Contrary to expectations, sadness decreased after exposure to the uncivil discussion and anxiety showed no significant change.

Hypothesis 2c stated that exposure to incivility will lead to lower likelihood of identifying the account as stalking behavior, less concern for the victim, greater victim blame, and less victim credibility compared to exposure to civil discussion or control conditions. This hypothesis was tested using a one-way MANOVA with civility condition (civil, uncivil, control) as the independent variable and perception of stalking, victim concern, victim blame, and victim credibility as the dependent variables. The

overall MANOVA was non-significant ($F(4, 504) = 1.79, p = .076$). Thus, Hypothesis 2c was not supported in that level of incivility in the discussion did not impact perceptions of the account as stalking or views of the victim.

A 2 Participant Gender (male, female) x 3 Comment Civility (civil, uncivil, no comment) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess Hypothesis 2d: women exposed to the uncivil discussion will report more concern for the female target than women exposed to the civil discussion, and compared to men exposed to either the civil or uncivil discussions. As shown in Table 7, results indicated that neither the main effect for civility condition ($F(2, 128) = 0.02, p = .98$) nor participant gender ($F(1, 128) = 0.32, p = .58$) were significant. The interaction between civility condition and gender was also non-significant ($F(2, 128) = 0.48, p = .62$). Thus, hypothesis 2d was not supported in that women in the uncivil condition did not differ in their concern for the female victim from women in the other two civility conditions nor from men in either condition.

Finally, in order to test Hypothesis 2e, that among participants who strongly endorse stalking myths, those within the incivility condition will view the victim as less credible compared to those within the civil condition, a linear regression model with mean centered stalking myth endorsement and dummy-coded civility (0 = civil, 1 = uncivil) included as the predictors in Step 1, and the stalking myth endorsement x civility condition interaction term added in Step 2 was computed with victim credibility as the criterion variable. The overall regression model in Step 1 was non-significant: $R^2 = 0.03, F(2, 169) = 2.47, p = 0.09$, and the addition of the interaction term in Step 2 was also

non-significant: $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(3, 168) = 2.15$, $p = 0.10$. These results indicate that hypothesis 2e was not supported and that perceptions of victim credibility did not differ among participants high in stalking myth endorsement based on whether they were exposed to civil vs. uncivil discussion.

Discussion

Perceptions of a Stalking Disclosure

The current study focused on social perceptions of an online disclosure of stalking and the impact of online incivility on those perceptions. With recent social media movements such as #MeToo or #NotOkay, people are increasingly likely to disclose their experiences of harassment or interpersonal violence (Bogen, Bleiweiss, & Orchowski, 2018; Bogen, Millman, Huntington, & Orchowski, 2018; Cravens et al., 2015; Hosterman, et al., 2018; Moors, & Webber, 2012). Accordingly, understanding how stalking victim disclosures are perceived in an online setting is imperative to ensuring victims who disclose their experience in an online forum receive the support they seek, and to reducing pervasive myths regarding stalking that are perpetuated via incivility (i.e., blaming the victim for sending the stalker mixed messages, or that stranger stalking is the only real type of stalking; McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbbers, 2014). Thus, a main objective of the current study was to consider how people respond to an online account of a woman or a man describing an experience of being stalked by a former relationship partner. Social responses to this stalking disclosure were assessed in terms of how credible and blameworthy the victim seemed, as well as how much concern was

expressed for the victim. Within the current study, endorsement of stalking myths, such as blaming the victim for sending the stalker mixed messages, was also examined to determine whether it was associated with how participants viewed the stalking scenario and the victim of stalking.

The current findings showed that overall, and regardless of the stalking victim's gender, participants showed low endorsement of stalking myths and viewed the disclosure scenario as involving stalking. They placed some blame on the victim, yet also expressed concern for the victim and saw the victim as credible. Beyond these overall findings, the current results also demonstrated several differences in responses to the stalking disclosure based on the gender of the victim and the stalker.

First, although concern was expressed for both male and female victims of stalking, significantly more concern was expressed for the female victim than for the male victim. Likewise, the female victim was seen as more credible and was assigned less blame compared to the male victim. Moreover, greater general empathy was found to be associated with ascribing more credibility to and concern for the female victim, as well as assigning less blame to her. In contrast, there was no association between general empathy and how the male victim was viewed. Collectively, these findings are consistent with past research showing that there tends to be greater concern for women pursued by a male stalker than for men pursued by a female stalker (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012).

These differing social responses to female versus male victims of stalking may be due to a broader social reluctance to view men as victims. This hesitancy may stem from

traditional male stereotypes that dictate men are strong, protectors, and independent - traits that are typically held in stark opposition to victimization (Bem, 1974; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011; Weiss, 2010). These stereotypes may also account for the lack of concern for male victims of stalking found in the current study. Men are also less likely to post a victimization disclosure online compared to women (Andalibi, Haimson, Choudhury, & Forte, 2016), so the possibility of participants taking the male victim's account less seriously than the female victim's account may also be due to its unexpected nature and a lack of familiarity with a scenario involving a male victim. Likewise, this unexpectedness and lack of familiarity may also extend to the female stalker of the male victim. In addition to traditional male stereotypes that do not fit the "role" of victim, the traditional female stereotypes of women as passive, nurturing, non-aggressive and weaker than men, may have conflicted with the view of a woman as the stalker, making this scenario difficult to imagine (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011).

As predicted, the current findings also indicated that endorsement of stalking myths was associated with a more negative view of the female victim, ascribing more blame and less credibility while also expressing less concern. These findings are consistent with the notion of a more negative view of the victim among individuals who endorse stalking myths (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014). Accordingly, educational intervention efforts aimed toward awareness of these myths and dispelling them could contribute to ensuring that victims get the support they need.

In contrast to associations with responses to female victims, stalking myth endorsement was not associated with male victim credibility or blame, but was associated with less concern. Again, these findings align with past research showing that males do not fit within the stereotypical image of a victim (Bem, 1974; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011; Weiss, 2010). In fact, endorsement of stalking myths was associated with less likelihood of viewing the disclosure as stalking of a female victim, but there was no significant association when the disclosure came from a male victim, likely due to the scenario not following the stereotypical view of a stalking case that would prime these myths.

Although there were several differences in perceptions of a disclosure of stalking based on the gender of the victim and the stalker, the current results indicate that men and women responded to the stalking scenarios similarly. Unlike past findings that women are more likely to identify stalking behavior and express greater concern for targets whereas men are more likely to blame the victim and less likely to perceive stalking as harmful or dangerous (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013), the current findings did not yield these gender differences. Instead, participant gender did not have an impact on concern for, credibility ascribed to, or blame ascribed to a victim. These gender similarities in social responses to stalking disclosures may be due to social media facilitated movements like #NotOkay and #MeToo resulting in greater awareness of the frequency of victimization and reduced tolerance for such victimization. The current results may reflect a shift in societal views from that of past research.

The Impact of Incivility on Perceptions of a Stalking Disclosure

Another main focus of the study was to examine the role of online incivility on mood and social perceptions of stalking behavior. A subset of participants was randomly assigned to receive either civil comments (e.g., “Wow, I am sorry you are going through this, but thank you for sharing your story. I hope things get better and remember you are not alone.”) or uncivil comments (e.g., “He/She’s obviously just looking for attention, He/she sounds crazy and probably made this all up.”) following the personal disclosure of being a stalking victim. Participants’ emotional responses to the stalking disclosure and whether that emotional response varied as a function of exposure to civil vs. uncivil comments in the discussion section following the target’s post were then assessed. Level of credibility, blame, and concern regarding the victim, and perception of the account as stalking were also examined in terms of how they were impacted by exposure to the civil vs. uncivil comments.

The results indicated a significant increase in negative mood after exposure to the uncivil condition. Overall, participants became angrier, less happy, and less relaxed after reading the uncivil comments following the stalking disclosure. These results support the notion that exposure to uncivil comments online can worsen individuals’ current moods (Hwang et al., 2016; Lu & Myrick, 2016; Wang and Silvia 2018). Contrary to expectations, sadness decreased after exposure to the uncivil discussion and anxiety showed no significant change. Further, participants exposed to the uncivil comments did not differ in mood from those who were exposed to the civil comments. Given that mean

comparisons showed the uncivil comments were rated as less civil than the civil comments, the lack of impact on mood does not appear to be due to a lack of difference between the civility conditions. Instead, perhaps the lack of a between group differences was due to the stalking disclosure post overshadowing any differences due to level of civility within the subsequent comments.

Even with past research showing an increase in polarization of viewpoints when exposed to uncivil discussion (Anderson, Brossard, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014; Hwang, Kim, & Kim, 2016), the results of this study indicated that incivility in the discussion did not impact perceptions of the account as stalking or views of the victim. In spite of others attacking the victim in the comments and expressing doubt in the truthfulness of the victim's disclosure, participants were still able to form their own opinions regarding the matter. Considering real-world implications of this, disclosing a victimization online and receiving attacking comments may not result in polarization of others' opinions. Instead, people may form their own opinions and the victim may still be able to receive the support they were seeking, despite other's negative comments.

Past research indicated that on average, women tend to show more concern for stalking victims than men do (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013) and incivility can have a polarizing effect on pre-existing opinions and attitudes (Anderson, Brossard, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014). However, the results of the current study found that women in the uncivil condition did not differ in their concern for the female victim from women in the other two civility conditions, nor from men in either condition. In other

words, no matter what comments women saw, their concern for the victim was similar. Also, participant gender did not have an impact on concern as there was no difference between men and women in level of concern regardless of the civility or incivility of the comments. A post-hoc power analysis did indicate that the specific analysis on which these results are based was slightly underpowered at 0.73 to detect a medium effect. To rule out this lack of power explanation, future research should further consider possible civility level by gender interactions on concern for victims of stalking using a larger sample to achieve sufficient power.

Finally, despite the past research on incivility finding polarization of pre-existing opinions and attitudes (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013), the current results indicated that perceptions of victim credibility did not differ among participants high in stalking myth endorsement based on whether they were exposed to civil vs. uncivil discussion.

Overall incivility appeared to have very little impact on social perception of the victim in the current study. The results of this study did indicate some change in mood after exposure to uncivil comments, however, participants moods did not differ significantly from one another based on which comments they saw (civil, uncivil, none), which indicates that perhaps the change in mood had more to do with the disclosure post itself rather than with how other people responded to it.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study is not without its limitations. One such limitation of the current study is the reliance on a convenience sample of undergraduate college students composed of mostly Caucasian women. Future research may yield different results by using a sample that is more diverse in ethnicity, as well as more evenly split by gender in order to ensure that the lack of gender differences found within this study replicate among a balanced sample of male and female participants. Future research may also consider that due to individual differences in social media use, asking about participants' frequency of social media use could provide additional insight into how incivility is viewed online. For example, individuals who rarely use social media may lack familiarity with online incivility whereas those who do frequent social media could be desensitized to the negative impact of incivility due to frequent exposure. Accordingly, responses to incivility may differ as a function of frequency of social media use and should be considered in future research examining social responses to online disclosures and incivilities.

The current study also focused on a prior relationship stalking scenario solely comprised of cross-sex pairs of male stalker-female victim and female stalker-male victim. Future research may consider examining whether the results of the current study extend to same sex stalker/victim pairs. For example, would participants show more concern for a male victim if his stalker was male rather than female? In contrast, would they show less concern for a female victim if her stalker was also female? Given gender stereotypes of males and females, having same sex stalker/victim pairings could yield

results that either fall in line with or contrast with these stereotypes. For example, an observer may express more concern if the stalker is male but also less concern if the victim is male. Identifying how these same-sex pairs compare to the cross-sex pairs with regards to concern, credibility, blame of the victim, as well as how likely participants are to perceive the scenario as stalking would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social perceptions of stalking disclosures.

Another factor to consider for future research would be varying how well the victim and perpetrator knew each other and if that has any impact on the perception of the victim and disclosure. Given the past research on stalking that found men are also more likely to believe that stalking is limited to strangers stalking celebrities whereas women are more likely to believe stalking involves prior relational partners (Lambert et al., 2013), varying the relationship between the stalker and victim could potentially yield some gender differences with regards to whether or not the scenario depicted stalking and also could show some difference in how the victim is perceived.

Finally, while the current study ensured there were differing civility levels within the online comments posted after the stalking disclosure, that was the extent of how they were measured. Future research on the impact of online incivility should consider explicitly probing whether the incivility affected participants' view of the disclosure or to what extent participants agreed with the comments. Such research would clarify the degree to which the comments influenced perceptions of the stalking disclosure. Future

research may also build upon the current study by considering what role having the victim respond to the comments may impact the perception of the victim.

Conclusion

The current study focused on social perceptions of a hypothetical online disclosure involving stalking. Overall, the present findings indicate that social responses to stalking perpetrators and victims vary as a function of their gender, and regardless of exposure to civil or uncivil comments following the disclosure. In general, the female victim was shown more concern and less blame for the stalking, as well as being seen as more credible when compared to the male victim. Empathy was associated with this more positive view of the female victim whereas stalking myth endorsement was associated with an overall more negative view, with less concern, less credibility, and more blame being ascribed to the female victim.

Importantly, these findings were consistent across male and female participants, indicating that men and women viewed the stalking account and the victim similarly, possibly reflecting a societal shift in reduced tolerance of stalking. Moreover, this intolerance of stalking may not be hampered by uncivil comments following such a disclosure.

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Appendix A

Demographics

- 1.) What is your age? (In Years) _____
- 2.) What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other _____
- 3.) What is your ethnicity?
 - a. White (Caucasian/European or European American)
 - b. Mexican or Mexican American
 - c. Other Latin or Latin American
 - d. Black or African American
 - e. Native American/Alaskan Native
 - f. Caribbean Islander
 - g. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - h. Multi-Ethnic
 - i. Other _____
- 4.) Please select the number that best reflects you for the statement below:

“What is your political orientation?”

1 (Liberal) 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Conservative)

Appendix B

Perception of Victim/Perpetrator Blame Scale

Instructions: Please rate Sarah/Andrew on the following characteristics.

Violent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Nonviolent
Gentle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Forceful
Maniacal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sane
Good Natured	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Vicious
Malicious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Kind
Blameless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Blameworthy
Fault	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Faultless
Harmful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Harmless
Hurtful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Innocuous
Responsible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Irresponsible
Careful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Reckless
Conscientious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Careless
Reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unreliable
Dependable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Undependable

After adjusting for reverse scored items, high scores indicate a more unfavorable view of the victim/perpetrator.

Appendix C

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

Instructions: Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement *carefully* and rate how frequently you feel or act in that manner.

- 1.) When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too
- 2.) Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal
- 3.) It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully
- 4.) I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy
- 5.) I enjoy making other people feel better
- 6.) I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me
- 7.) When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else
- 8.) I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything
- 9.) I find that I am "in tune" with other people's moods
- 10.) I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses
- 11.) I become irritated when someone cries
- 12.) I am not really interested in how other people feel
- 13.) I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset
- 14.) When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them
- 15.) I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness

16.) When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards
him/her

*Items 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 are reverse scored.

Appendix D

Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire

Instructions: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale provided.

- 1.) A person should be allowed to pursue another person to a certain extent, if it is part of romance.
- 2.) If a person says no, even once, they should be left alone.
- 3.) If two people have been in a romantic relationship, one has more right to pursue the other than if they have never met.
- 4.) It's normal for a person to say no to a date at first because they don't want to seem too eager.
- 5.) It's not stalking if you are trying to get your partner back.
- 6.) A person who dates a lot would be more likely to be stalked.
- 7.) Saying no to a stalker will just provoke the stalker.
- 8.) A certain amount of repeated phoning and following is okay, even if the person being pursued has said no.
- 9.) The concept of stalking is just a fad.
- 10.) People find it flattering to be persistently pursued.
- 11.) It's not really stalking if you know the person and they know you.
- 12.) Staying in contact with someone shouldn't really be seen as a crime, if you are actually in love.

- 13.) If one just ignored the person interested in them, he or she would eventually go away.
- 14.) Stalking is a type of violence.
- 15.) “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again”, ideas like this make stalking acceptable.
- 16.) Stalkers are a nuisance, but they are not criminals.
- 17.) If you were really in love with somebody, you wouldn’t take no for an answer.
- 18.) What one person may see as stalking, another may see as romantic.
- 19.) People often say one thing but mean another.
- 20.) Stalking is just an extreme form of courtship.
- 21.) If there is no actual violence, it shouldn’t be a crime.
- 22.) Some people actually want to be stalked; they see it as a compliment.
- 23.) Victims of stalking are often wanting revenge on their ex-partners.
- 24.) Repeatedly following someone, making phone calls and leaving gifts doesn’t actually hurt anyone.
- 25.) Certain types of people are more likely to be stalked.
- 26.) Stalking should really be dealt with in civil, not, criminal law.
- 27.) A person may be more likely to be stalked if he or she cannot clearly say no.
- 28.) If someone gives any encouragement, the other person has a right to continue their pursuit.
- 29.) Those who are upset by stalking are likely more sensitive than others.

30.) Even if they were annoyed, most people would be at least a little flattered by stalking.

31.) If someone continues to say nice things and give nice gifts, then stalking is far more acceptable.

32.) Stranger stalking is the only real stalking.

33.) Any person could be stalked.

34.) Stalkers only continue because they get some kind of encouragement.

*Items 2, 14, 15, and 33 are reverse coded.

Appendix E

Discrete Emotions Questionnaire

Instructions: While reading the blog post and comments to what extent did you experience these emotions?

1 (Not at all) 2 (Slightly) 3 (Somewhat) 4 (Moderately) 5 (Quite a bit) 6 (Very much) 7 (An extreme amount)

Anger (Ag)	Scared (F)
Dread (Ax)	Mad (Ag)
Sad (S)	Sickened (Dg)
Easygoing (R)	Chilled Out (R)
Grossed Out (Dg)	Empty (S)
Happy (H)	Satisfaction (H)
Terror (F)	Panic (F)
Rage (Ag)	Fear (F)
Grief (S)	Revulsion (Dg)
Nausea (Dg)	Worry (Ax)
Anxiety (Ax)	Pissed off (Ag)
Nervous (Ax)	Lonely (S)
Enjoyment (H)	Liking (H)
Calm (R)	Relaxation (R)

Ag = Anger items, Dg = Disgust items, F = Fear items, Ax = Anxiety items, S = Sadness items, H= Happiness items, R= Relaxation items

Appendix F

Comment Section Content

	Unsupportive	Supportive
Civil	<p>Original Comment: “There must be more to the story. I just don’t see why someone would act that way without more context.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Agreeing): “There are always two sides to the story, but without more details from both sides, picking out the truth is tough. I can see where you’re coming from.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Disagreeing): There could be more to the story, but I am not sure he/she would make something like this up.</p>	<p>Original Comment: “Wow, I am sorry you are going through this, but thank you for sharing your story. I hope things get better and remember you are not alone.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Agreeing): “I agree with the above comment, you are not alone! Feel free to send me a message if you ever want to talk.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Disagreeing): “I disagree, there has to be more to this story. I just can’t believe something like this could happen.”</p>
Uncivil	<p>Original Comment: “He/She’s obviously just looking for attention, He/she sounds crazy and probably made this all up.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Agreeing): “No joke, what sort of sane person would post this online? Uhh, right! No sane person would. Only a narcissistic crazy person would think they are so “great” that their ex can’t let them go. Obviously, he/she is trying to get more attention than they are already supposedly getting!”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Disagreeing): “Are you stupid? Yeah, he/she is maybe not the brightest for posting this online when it should be taken to the police but calling someone insane for posting on the internet when they are scared makes you an a**.”</p>	<p>Original Comment: “I believe you, people are stupid sometimes, but you’re an idiot for posting this online where he/she could see.”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Agreeing): “I agree, he/she should be careful. But calling him/her an idiot for this really just makes you look like a jerk. Some people are really showing their true colors...”</p> <p>Reply to comment (Disagreeing): “They aren’t an idiot for posting this online, they’re an idiot for not immediately going to the police. I mean, come on! Use your freakin’ brain!”</p>

Table 2. *Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Empathy	---	.27**	.19*	.26**	-.20*	-.29**
2. Perception of Stalking	.11	---	.61**	.51**	-.45**	-.30**
3. Victim Concern	.06	.55**	---	.46**	-.33**	-.19*
4. Victim Credibility	.11	.38**	.22*	---	-.55**	-.27**
5. Victim Blame	.07	-.30**	-.14	-.65**	---	.21*
6. Stalking Myth Endorsement	-.29**	-.15	-.25**	.10	-.02	---

Note. Upper right corner reflects correlations within the female victim/male stalker scenario (N = 134); bottom left corner reflects correlations within the male victim/female stalker scenario (N = 124). * p<0.05; ** p<0.01 level

Table 3. *A Comparison of Men and Women's Perceptions of Stalking, Concern for the Victim, Victim Blame and Victim Credibility*

Variable	<i>Men (N = 94)</i>		<i>Women (N = 164)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perception of Stalking	4.16	0.63	4.04	0.65
Concern for Victim	3.73	0.87	3.91	0.74
Victim Blame	43.35	14.18	45.48	14.03
Victim Credibility	3.22	0.73	3.23	0.72

* None of the means for men vs women differed significantly

Table 4. *A Comparison of Perceptions of Stalking, Concern for the Victim, Victim Blame and Victim Credibility Based on Victim's Gender*

Variable	Men (N = 124)		Women (N = 134)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perception of Stalking	4.02	0.55	4.14	0.70
Concern for Victim*	3.53	0.74	4.13	0.73
Victim Blame*	47.31	13.61	42.30	14.15
Victim Credibility*	3.08	0.70	3.36	0.71

*Significantly differed between gender of victim/stalker scenarios

Table 5. *A Comparison of Post-Exposure Mood Based on Civility Condition*

Variable	<i>Civil (N = 86)</i>		<i>Uncivil (N = 86)</i>		<i>Control (N = 86)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anger	2.60	1.27	2.84	1.57	2.38	1.23
Sadness	1.75	0.86	1.93	1.00	1.76	0.85
Relaxation	2.71	1.65	2.90	1.76	2.47	1.31
Happiness	1.96	1.36	2.06	1.41	1.72	1.05
Anxiety	3.00	1.41	3.24	1.72	3.21	1.47

Table 6. *A Comparison of Mood Based on Pre and Post Exposure for Uncivil Condition*

Variable	<i>Pre (N = 86)</i>		<i>Post (N = 86)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anger*	1.62	0.96	2.84	1.57
Sadness*	2.34	1.47	1.93	1.00
Relaxation*	4.26	1.15	2.90	1.76
Happiness*	4.11	1.42	2.06	1.41
Anxiety	3.27	1.53	3.23	1.72

*Denotes a significant change from pre to post exposure to the uncivil comments.

Table 7. *A Comparison of Concern for the Female Victim Based on Civility Condition and Participant Gender*

Condition	Participant Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Civil	<i>Male (N = 21)</i>	4.14	0.71
	<i>Female (N = 26)</i>	4.08	0.75
Uncivil	<i>Male (N = 16)</i>	3.98	0.80
	<i>Female (N = 27)</i>	4.23	0.77
Control	<i>Male (N = 13)</i>	4.12	0.83
	<i>Female (N = 31)</i>	4.16	0.66