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From Desire to Obsession: Gender and Bodies in the Netflix Series "YOU"

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**THESIS**

The show YOU exhibits how stalking is gendered and how it further exemplifies the ceaseless male necessity to control women particularly once romantically involved. The series allows for the audience to see how easy stalking can be in our modern age and how it generally involves toxic masculinity intertwined with femininity.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Netflix series, YOU, quickly rose to mass streaming success in December of 2018 when it was released with more than 40 million viewers in the first few weeks. The show, based on the book by Caroline Kepnes, is a binge worthy thriller almost forcing viewers to hit “next episode” the minute after the one-hour long episode ends. The show's instant success could be connected to a few factors but the main one the Internet can't seem to let go of is the fascination of the stalker main male character, Joe. The show is told from Joe’s perspective which reveals his chillingly smart stalker tactics he uses to pursue a young woman’s admiration. Joe latches onto a young energetic woman named Beck, who seemingly relies on the approval of her social media followers and self absorbed girl friends on a daily basis.

**SUPPORTING POINT ONE:**

• **The ‘Validation’ of Stalking:**

Throughout the show, Beck's agency is being controlled by Joe without her knowledge she is being dominated by a male. Joe perceives his stalking of Beck as his way of protecting her, therefore, he must gain access to her private life in order to do so. In a study done by the Scientific American Mind, they examined the common patterns seen in stalkers coming to the conclusion that many stalkers often resulted in violence in some way. “Our research has shown that stalkers are able to exert tremendous control over their victims’ life even though physical abuse typically does not occur. In one of five cases, however, we found that the stalker does resort to violence in the form of beatings, armed assaults or even attempted murder” (Wondrak and Hoffman, pg. 80). Before Joe and Beck even have the chance to have an intimate relationship he resorts to violence in order to “protect her” from her ex boyfriend.

“**THERE ARE TERRIFYING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE SAFE AND THAT’S WHY I HAVE TO DO WHAT I’M GOING TO DO**” – Joe Goldberg, YOU.

**SUPPORTING POINT 2:**

• **Stalking in Modern Day:**

The Netflix series YOU, illustrates the issue of how easy it is in modern day to fall into a manipulative relationship without realizing it until it consumes you. Through Joe and Beck’s first encounter takes place when she innocently wanders into the bookstore he works at, he is instantly infatuated with her and manages to sneakily gain access to her life just by glancing at her full name on her credit card. He begins to stalk her entire life on a daily basis through her social media. In Daniel Miller’s article, How the World Changed Social Media, he explains how social media has allowed people to create online identities exposing their lives for anyone to have access to view. Miller explains how social media genders our society to perpetuate our own stereotypes, “Public online spaces have emerged as often highly conservative, reinforcing established gender roles (pg. 116)” a platforms and even finds her address from her Instagram. The easy access Joe has to Beck's personal life is quite terrifying as well as the accessibility she has to her privacy objectifies her power over her own body.

**SUPPORTING POINT 3:**

• **Connection to Gender and Bodies:**

The show exemplifies how stalking is a gendered obsession for male control over women. Joe believes, as a male, his duty is to protect Beck at all costs because she is a woman. He places her into a female stereotype of being defenseless, dainty, and in need of his hyper masculinity. He strips Beck of any control she may have over her body by gaining her trust and engaging in a sexual relationship with her while stalking her.

On the surface, Joe seems to be a hopeless romantic pining for Beck’s affection, however what the female fans fail to remember is that Joe is fulfilling only his own interests in his chase. Everything that Joe does is in his own self-interest and a way for him to create Beck into the perfect woman for him to spend his life with. Joe is perpetuating the control men have over women in today's world and trying to change every aspect of Beck that doesn’t suit him, for example, murdering the people in her life he doesn’t like.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Netflix series, YOU, contains many underlying issues surrounding gender and bodies. The show displays a controlling and manipulative main male character who obsesses over a woman to the extent where his needs consume him. Through Joe's character it is easy for the audience. In conclusion, the Netflix series YOU, displays the reality women face to hold onto their agency in a world where men feel they have a right to take it for themselves no matter what they have to do in order to do so.

to see the relationship between stalking and gender.

**References**


