Differential Effects of Gender on Perceptions of Stalking and Harassment Behavior

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This study examined the effect of gender on perceptions of stalking following the breakup of a romantic relationship. Three hundred forty-nine university students were presented with 11 brief scenarios in which the gender of the target and pursuer of the harassment behavior were systematically varied. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they considered the behavior stalking, how concerned they would be if this was happening to a friend, and the likelihood that they would recommend help seeking. Participants were significantly more likely to express concern for and to recommend both informal and formal help seeking when the scenarios described a man stalking a woman. This research is important in understanding factors that influence perceptions of stalking and harassment, which may have repercussions for the legislation and enforcement of stalking laws.

L egal definitions vary, but general consensus is that stalking involves the repeated harassment of another individual such that the individual fears for his or her safety (Dennison, 2007; Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The intent to cause harm appears to play an important role in individuals' perceptions of stalking; however, in the absence of explicit intent, higher levels of persistence increase the likelihood that individuals will view an incident as stalking (Dennison & Thomson, 2002). Although most courts do not consider isolated incidents to be stalking, there are no straightforward definitions of criminal harassment (Dennison, 2007; Sheridan, Blaauw, et al., 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In some cases, credible threat to the target or the target's family is required, suggesting that some lesser forms of harassment do not meet criteria for stalking (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). Given this uncertainty, how do individuals identify and respond to potential stalking behaviors? This study examined the role of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behavior.

The ambiguous nature of stalking and harassment allows individual and contextual factors to play a significant role in the perception of this behavior (e.g., Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Kinkade, Burns, & Fuentes, 2005; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). The impact of these variables is of particular interest given the repercussions they may have in legislation and enforcement of stalking laws, as well as the likelihood that

victims will seek help. A recent study found that of the college women who reported stalk-ing victimization, only half sought assistance (Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009). Moreover, despite specific legislation, juries can sometimes disagree with the classification of a given behavior based on their own preconceptions of stalking. Congruence between public opinion and legislation is needed, but unlike most other crimes, there does not appear to be a single accepted definition (Dennison, 2007; Sheridan, Blaauw, et al., 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Although a handful of behaviors have been consistently identified as indicative of stalking (Davis & Frieze, 2000), research has shown that several factors influence percep-tions of stalking, including the relationship between the target and pursuer and the gender of both the participant and the target and pursuer. A review of these factors follows.

TARGET–PURSUER RELATIONSHIP

Stalking is no longer considered a stranger-based crime only but is viewed by many researchers as a variant of intimate partner violence (IPV; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000). Of the almost 80% of female victims who know their stalker, the largest propor-tion are former partners (Logan & Walker, 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The recognition that stalking occurs in dating relationships, particularly among ex-partners, has led many researchers to investigate relationship context in percep-tions of stalking behavior.

Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, and Patel's (2003) study of university students sug-gested that the greater the level of intimacy between target and pursuer, the less likely it was that participants would express concern for the target. Participants rated the same behavior as less indicative of stalking when the perpetrator was an ex-spouse than when it depicted an acquaintance or a stranger. Participants also perceived the target as more responsible for the stalking when the pursuer was an ex-spouse or an acquaintance. Finally, participants were more likely to report that police intervention was needed for stranger-perpetrated stalking compared to ex-partner and acquaintance stalking (Sheridan, Gillett, et al., 2003). Subsequent studies have replicated these findings, suggesting that there is a consistent bias toward perceiving partner stalking as less dangerous than stranger stalk-ing (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Despite this pervasive belief, research has suggested that ex-partner stalking is actually more dangerous; ex-partners are signifi-cantly more likely to become violent than acquaintance or stranger stalkers, with targets of intimate partner stalking being four times as likely to be physically harmed (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). Therefore, all of the scenarios used in this study described behaviors that followed a recent relationship breakup to investigate factors involved in the perception of ex-partner stalking.

GENDER

Target and Pursuer Gender

Given the subjective nature of stalking and the relation between gender and altered per-ceptions of violence, an investigation into the specific influence of gender on perceptions of stalking is particularly relevant. A recent study of 124 university students found that when asked to generate a stalking script, 68% of participants described a male pursuer

and a female target, 7% described a female pursuer and a male target, and the remaining 25% indicated targets and pursuers could be either gender (Yanowitz & Yanowitz, 2010). Research has demonstrated that the gender of the target and the pursuer is influential in determining the extent to which and under what conditions situations are perceived to be stalking. For instance, in a sample of mostly female (71%) university students in the United Kingdom, Sheridan, Gillett, et al. (2003) found that when the pursuer was female and the target was male, participants tended to believe that the likelihood of injury was less, that there was less need for police intervention, that the target (man) was more responsible for the stalking, and that men were also more capable of improving the situation. Two other important but seemingly contradictory findings from this research were that participants were just as likely to report that a given behavior was stalking, regardless of actor gender, and that similar severity ratings were provided for both male and female pursuers. It appears that although actor gender does not necessarily affect the determination of stalking, gender affects attitudes toward the target, such that male targets are seen as less likely to be injured and as more capable of helping themselves.

These conclusions have received empirical support. Results have indicated that although the gender of the target and the pursuer had no effect on whether the scenarios were considered stalking, gender influenced perceptions related to the risk involved and the need for help seeking (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010), and to the determination of the seriousness of the behavior and of the potential harm to the target (Cass, 2008; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Specifically, when a man pursued a woman, participants were more likely to rate the target as needing help, to express greater concern for her safety, and to perceive the behaviors as more serious and as more likely to result in physical harm. Furthermore, when asked to rate their perceptions of how the criminal justice system would respond to events described in the scenarios, participants indicated that they felt that female-perpetrated stalking would be taken less seriously than male-perpetrated stalking (Cass, 2008) and that male pursuers of female targets were more likely to be seen as criminals (and thus requiring imprisonment) than female pursuers of male targets (Sheridan & Scott, 2010). These results suggest that although the determination of stalking is unaffected by actor gender, concern for the target and need for help seeking tend to be significantly higher when targets are female and pursuers are male.

Participant Gender

Participant gender also appears to play a role in perceptions of stalking. In a study in which participants were provided with a list of possible stalking behaviors and were asked to indicate whether the item constituted stalking based on the behavior alone, women were significantly more likely than men to respond that a given behavior was stalking (Yanowitz, 2006). These findings are in line with other research examining the role of participant gender on perceptions of pursuit behaviors (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Hills & Taplin, 1998; Perrilloux & Buss, 2008; Phillips et al., 2004). Overall, these results suggest that men and women appear to view the same situations very differently when faced with stalking behavior.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH STALKING

Given the ambiguous nature of stalking, it follows that personal characteristics such as previous experience with stalking might influence individuals' perceptions of stalking. Although Phillips and colleagues (2004) predicted that participants who had previously been victims

of stalking would be more likely to perceive a scenario as stalking, previous experience with stalking did not affect participants' ratings. This finding has been replicated in other research (e.g., Kinkade et al., 2005). For instance, Yanowitz (2006) found that although men with prior knowledge of stalking (either as the target of stalking or knowing someone who had been stalked) showed higher ratings for mild stalking scenarios compared to men with no prior knowledge, there was no effect of personal knowledge on perceptions of stalking for women. An in-depth exploration of the role of experience with stalking is outside the scope of this study. However, these findings suggest that researchers should assess and possibly control for prior stalking experience in studies of perceptions of stalking behavior.

CURRENT STUDY

This study extends the literature in several ways. First, unlike past research, which presented half of participants with one detailed scenario depicting a man stalking a woman and the other half with a (single) parallel scenario depicting a woman stalking a man, we presented all participants with several brief scenarios to examine participants' perceptions across a range of behaviors. This allowed for conclusions to be drawn across several behaviors, increasing external validity. Each scenario described the breakup of a relationship followed by a single behavior commonly identified as stalking in the literature. However, scenarios did not include a statement regarding the target's experience of fear in response to the behavior, a necessary component in the legal definition of stalking. Therefore, our scenarios were more consistent with harassment (Baum et al., 2009). By focusing on a single behavioral incident, we were able to elicit participants' reactions to specific harassment behaviors and to examine how gender altered participants' responses to those behaviors, regardless of whether or not the behaviors met legal definitions of stalking.

Second, in addition to a measure of the likelihood of recommending seeking help from the police (i.e., formal help seeking), which other studies have investigated (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillet, et al., 2003), we also included a measure of informal help seeking (help from friends or family). The additional help-seeking variable was included to differentiate types of recommendations people make depending on actor and perceiver gender. Literature on IPV and help seeking suggests that informal sources play a critical role (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Buhi et al., 2009). Third, participants were asked to report on three different dimensions of personal experience with stalking—victimization, perpetration, and knowing someone who has been a victim of stalking. The inclusion of perpetration (rather than victimization only) was meant to provide a greater range of stalking experience than was used in previous research (Phillips et al., 2004; Yanowitz, 2006). Finally, in comparison to past research, which tended to have unequal numbers of men and women in their experimental conditions, we used counterbalancing to ensure that an equal number of each were presented with each version of the scenarios.

We hypothesized that actor gender (pursuer and target) would have no effect on the determination of whether stalking has occurred (Hypothesis 1) based on research, which shows that regardless of the gender of the actors in the vignettes, participants are just as likely to consider a given behavior as stalking (e.g., Cass, 2008; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). However, consistent with previous research (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Sheridan & Scott, 2010), we predicted that participants would express greater concern for female targets of male pursuers than for male targets of female pursuers (Hypothesis 2). We also expected participants to provide higher ratings on recommendations for both informal and formal forms of help seeking when the scenarios depicted a female target and a male pur-

suer (Hypothesis 3). No research to date has examined informal versus formal help seeking; therefore, we had no reason to expect a difference in effects for the two types of help seeking. Finally, based on Dennison and Thomson's (2002) research, we predicted that women would provide higher ratings across all four domains (stalking perceptions, concern for target, and recommendations for informal and formal help seeking) compared to men (Hypothesis 4).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 349 undergraduate students from a large Canadian university. Of the original 380 cases, 10 were removed because of substantial missing data, 6 as a result of high ratings on the control scenario, and 15 as outliers. The sample included 159 (45.6%) men, 176 (50.4%) women, and 1 transgendered (0.3%) participant (13 [3.7%] participants did not disclose their sex) with a mean age of 20.82 (range = 17–44) years. Participants were predominately White (72%) and heterosexual (93%), with nearly half (49%) currently in a committed relationship. Men and women were recruited using separate advertisements on the participant pool Website to ensure an equal number of each. Participants received credit toward a course requirement for participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Materials and Procedure

A quasi-experimental 2 × 2 (actor gender × participant gender) repeated measures design was used in which men and women were randomly assigned to one of two versions of the scenarios. Participants were directed to an Internet Web page and presented with a scenario describing a potential stalking behavior (e.g., repeated phone calls). They were asked to read the scenario and provide ratings based on their impressions. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the "pursuer" in the scenario was stalking the "target" (i.e., "Is Jane stalking Andy?"), as well as, "How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?" "How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?" and "How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?" These ratings were all made on the study Web page using a 5-point scale following the presentation of each scenario, with higher ratings denoting greater belief that a given scenario was indicative of stalking, higher levels of concern for the target, and a greater likelihood of recommending seeking help.

We first relied on stalking scenarios used in previous studies (Cass, 2008; Phillips et al., 2004; Yanowitz, 2006) and then on commonly identified stalking behaviors (Ben, 2000; Davis & Frieze, 2000; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000) when creating the scenarios used in this study. Scenarios were developed in this way in an attempt to create a consistent but very general conceptualization of stalking and to allow for comparisons to be made to previous research in this area. Each scenario described a heterosexual relationship that one partner ended, followed by a single harassment behavior by the other partner (see Appendix). Rather than reporting a specific number of instances, scenarios were intentionally written using vague terms such as "several" to keep descriptions ambiguous and open to interpretation. Participants were presented with 11 different scenarios; 10 detailing a unique potential stalking behavior and 1 nonstalking control scenario in which the "pursuer" sent the "target" a birthday card several months after the end of their relationship. The control scenario served as a manipulation check for participants who may not have actually read the scenario(s), as well as for those who perceived stalking even where there was none (ceiling effects).

Scenarios were counterbalanced by actor gender, yielding two different versions of the measure. Actor gender was systematically varied such that half of the participants read a given scenario as a man pursuing a woman (man–woman [M–W]) and half read the same scenario as a woman pursuing a man (woman–man [W–M]). This ensured that, across participants, each version was presented the same number of times. In Version 1 (V1), Scenarios 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 described a woman pursuing a man (W–M). In Version 2 (V2), these same scenarios (1, 3, 5, 7, & 10) depicted a man pursuing a woman (M–W). In contrast, Scenarios 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9 portrayed a man pursuing a woman (M–W) in V1 and a woman pursuing a man (W–M) in V2. Given this clustering of scenarios, Scenarios 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 were referred to as "Cluster 1," and Scenarios 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9 were "Cluster 2." Assignment to clusters was random and although no specific attention was paid to ensure that scenario severity was equal between clusters, we did not expect an effect for version based on use of random assignment. Gender of the participant was also counterbalanced such that an equal number of men and women viewed each version. Scenarios were presented in a random order to minimize the impact of order effects.

After providing ratings for each of the 11 scenarios, participants completed an adapted version of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001). Although participants in this study (aged 17–44 years) were slightly older than participants in the study the CADRI was validated on (aged 14–16 years), the CADRI has been reliably used with older adolescents (aged 18–21 years; Simon, Kobielski, & Martin, 2008) and allows participants to report victimization and perpetration for various behaviors. The CADRI was made gender neutral by changing the words "boyfriend/girlfriend" to "partner" and was used to evaluate participants' experience with IPV perpetration and victimization by averaging all 35 items for each subscale. Cronbach's alpha was .94 for the adapted version of the scale used in this study; test–retest reliability during a 2-week period was .75 (Wolfe et al., 2001).

A demographic questionnaire was included and asked about age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and relationship history. Participants also reported any previous experience with stalking as part of the demographic questionnaire. They were asked, "Have you ever been a target of stalking or excessive pursuit behavior?" "Have you ever engaged in stalking or excessive pursuit behaviors?" and "Has anyone you know ever been the target of stalking?"

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Although there were no hypotheses or research questions relating to scenario version, we checked for the effects of version to see if participants' ratings differed based on version only. Version was significantly correlated with all four dependent variables ($r_s = -.49$ to .44). Given that the only difference between the two versions was actor gender, which was randomly assigned to each scenario, this inequality suggested that the W–M scenarios in V1 were not equivalent to the W–M scenarios in V2 and vice versa. A version effect meant that we could no longer average across scenarios based on actor gender. As a result, perceptions of stalking ratings from Scenarios 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 (Cluster 1) in V1 were compared to the same scenarios in V2 (where the actor gender was reversed). Likewise, perceptions of stalking ratings from Scenarios 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9 (Cluster 2) in V1 were compared to the same

scenarios in V2. Separate between-subject multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were used, with each scenario cluster acting as a separate dependent variable.

Bivariate correlations revealed that experience with stalking perpetration and participant gender were both identified as covariates (see Table 1). Stalking perpetration was negatively correlated with the dependent variables; individuals self-identifying as perpetrators had lower ratings compared to nonperpetrators. We thus controlled for participant gender and stalking perpetration in subsequent analyses. Significance was set at $p < .05$ throughout. The mean, standard deviation, range, and Cronbach's alpha of each dependent variable can be found in Table 2. The mean rating for perceptions of stalking was 3.73 (0.58) on a scale from 1 to 5, indicating that many participants saw the harassing behaviors as stalking even though they did not meet criteria for the legal definition of stalking. Ratings on the control scenario were significantly lower than ratings on the other scenarios, suggesting that the manipulation was successful, and aberrant ratings on this scenario indicated inappropriate or inaccurate responding.

Main Analyses

Given the bivariate correlations reported in Table 1, experience with stalking (perpetrator) and participant gender were considered covariates in the analysis of actor gender and were controlled for in analysis of perception of stalking (Hypothesis 1), concern for target (Hypothesis 2), and recommendations for help seeking (Hypothesis 3). Experience with stalking (as a perpetrator) was also significantly correlated with informal ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$) and formal help seeking ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$) and was therefore regarded as a covariate and controlled for in the analysis of the effect of participant gender (Hypothesis 4).

A 2 (actor gender: M–W, W–M) $\times$ 1 MANOVA (using perception.cluster.1 and perception.cluster.2 as the dependent variables) revealed a significant effect for actor gender on perceptions of stalking, $F(2, 346) = 3.19$, $p = .042$, $\eta^2 = .02$. However, this effect became nonsignificant after controlling for participant gender and experience with stalking, $F(2, 330) = 1.84$, $p = .16$, $\eta^2 = .01$. That is, actor gender (pursuer and target) no longer had an effect on the determination of whether stalking had occurred once participant gender and experience with stalking were accounted for (see Table 3).

A 2 $\times$ 1 MANOVA (using concern.cluster.1 and concern.cluster.2) revealed a significant effect for actor gender on concern for target, $F(2, 346) = 18.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. This effect remained significant after controlling for participant gender and experience with stalking, $F(2, 330) = 17.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Actor gender had a significant effect on ratings of concern for target, such that participants expressed greater concern for female targets of male pursuers than for male targets of female pursuers (see Table 3).

A 2 $\times$ 1 MANOVA (using informal.cluster.1, informal.cluster.2, formal.cluster.1, and formal.cluster.2) revealed a significant main effect for actor gender on recommendations for help seeking, $F(4, 344) = 16.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. This effect remained significant after controlling for participant gender and experience with stalking, $F(4, 328) = 17.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$. Participants provided significantly higher ratings on recommendations for both informal (friends and family) and formal (law enforcement) forms of help seeking when the scenarios depicted a female target and a male pursuer. A significantly different pattern of results for informal versus formal help seeking did not emerge, although ratings for informal help seeking were higher than ratings for formal help seeking (see Table 3).

A 2 $\times$ 1 MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for participant gender on all four dependent variables (perceptions of stalking, concern for target, informal help seeking,

TABLE 1. Correlations With Actor Gender Variables Divided by Scenario Cluster

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Perception.1	1.00													
2 Perception.2	.46**	1.00												
3 Concern.1	.57**	.12*	1.00											
4 Concern.2	.27**	.34**	.50**	1.00										
5 Informal.1	.49**	.11*	.82**	.44**	1.00									
6 Informal.2	.20**	.28**	.44**	.75**	.50**	1.00								
7 Formal.1	.52**	.12*	.72**	.30**	.70**	.27**	1.00							
8 Formal.2	.27**	.28**	.36**	.56**	.38**	.54**	.52**	1.00						
9 Participant gender	.14*	.14**	.32**	.27**	.31**	.24**	.25**	.17**	1.00					
10 CADRI_perpetration	−.02	−.06	−.07	−.09	−.05	−.07	−.01	−.04	.03	1.00				
11 CADRI_victimization	−.04	−.04	−.07	−.09	−.06	−.04	−.02	−.03	−.06	.77**	1.00			
12 Target of stalking	.05	.05	.11*	.00	.12*	.03	.10	.05	.08	.13*	.17**	1.00		
13 Perpetrator of stalking	−.15**	−.04	−.13*	.02	−.20**	−.06	−.16**	−.06	−.01	.12*	.09	.17**	1.00	
14 Know target of stalking	.05	.08	.04	.02	.04	−.01	−.03	−.03	−.05	.08	.12*	.20**	.01	1.00

Note. Perception.1 refers to the ratings of perception of stalking for scenarios in Cluster 1; Perception.2 refers to the ratings of perceptions of stalking in Cluster 2; Concern.1 refers to the ratings of concern for the target in Cluster 1; Concern.2 refers to the ratings of concern for the target in Cluster 2; Informal.1 refers to the ratings of informal recommendations for help seeking in Cluster 1; Informal.2 refers to the ratings of informal recommendations for help seeking in Cluster 2; Formal.1 refers to the ratings of formal recommendations for help seeking in Cluster 1; Formal.2 refers to the ratings of formal recommendations for help seeking in Cluster 2. CADRI = Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory.
$*p < .05$ (two-tailed). $**p < .01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, Range, and Cronbach's Alpha for Each Dependent Variable

	M	*SD*	Range	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceptions of stalking	3.73	0.58	1.90–5.00	.71
Concern for target	4.05	0.48	2.40–5.00	.76
Informal help seeking	3.92	0.57	1.70–5.00	.77
Formal help seeking	3.44	0.60	1.80–4.75	.79

Note. Values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1–5 scale.

and formal help seeking), $F(4, 344) = 12.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. This effect remained significant after controlling for experience with stalking, $F(4, 331) = 11.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Women provided significantly higher ratings across all four domains compared to men (see Table 4).

Post Hoc Analyses

The data were reanalyzed using linear discriminant functions (LDF) with MANOVA to examine the relative contribution of each scenario in the overall actor gender effect (see Huberty & Smith, 1982). Given the significant relation between concern for target and help-seeking recommendations (see Table 1), only perceptions of stalking and concern for target were reanalyzed using LDF to reduce Type I error. Two 2 (actor gender: M–W, W–M) × 1 LDF MANOVAs were performed using individual ratings on perceptions of stalking and concern for target for each scenario as the dependent variables. The assumption of homogeneity was not met, suggesting differential weighting of covariates; participant gender and prior stalking perpetration were therefore not included as covariates in the analyses.

Reanalysis of perceptions of stalking revealed a significant univariate effect for Scenario 4, $F(1, 331) = 4.53$, $p = .034$; and Scenario 7, $F(1, 331) = 7.77$, $p = .006$. Scenario 7

TABLE 3. Variable Means and Standard Deviations by Scenario Cluster and Actor Gender

Variable	Cluster 1		Cluster 2	
	V1 (W–M)	V2 (M–W)	V2 (W–M)	V1 (M–W)
Perceptions of stalking	3.72 (0.65)	3.80 (0.56)	3.67 (0.75)	3.73 (0.70)
Concern for target	3.70 (0.67)[a]	3.88 (0.59)[b]	4.24 (0.54)[c]	4.39 (0.40)[d]
Informal help seeking	3.58 (0.72)[a]	3.83 (0.69)[b]	4.09 (0.70)[c]	4.24 (0.52)[d]
Formal help seeking	2.92 (0.80)[a]	3.15 (0.73)[b]	3.69 (0.67)[c]	3.96 (0.54)[d]

Note. Numbers in the table reflect Likert-type ratings on a 1–5 scale. V1 = Version 1; V2 = Version 2; W–M = woman pursuing a man; M–W = man pursuing a woman.
[a,b]Denote a statistically significant difference for Cluster 1.
[c,d]Denote a statistically significant difference for Cluster 2.

TABLE 4. Variable Means and Standard Deviations by Participant Gender

	Participant Gender	
Variable	Male	Female
Perceptions of stalking	3.62 (0.56)	3.83 (0.58)
Concern for target	3.87 (0.49)	4.22 (0.43)
Informal help seeking	3.73 (0.61)	4.11 (0.48)
Formal help seeking	3.27 (0.61)	3.59 (0.58)

Note. Numbers in the table reflect Likert-type ratings on a 1–5 scale. All means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

contributed the highest weight, $\beta = .97$, followed by Scenario 4, $\beta = -.65$. Thus, although there was no overall effect for actor gender when determining stalking, participants were more likely to report that threatening to set an ex-partner's place on fire while the partner was still inside (Scenario 7) and breaking into an ex-partner's car and rummaging through his or her things (Scenario 4) were stalking when the scenario described a male pursuer and a female target.

Reanalysis of concern for target revealed a significant univariate effect for only 5 of the 10 scenarios; Scenarios 3, $F(1, 328) = 5.78$, $p = .017$; 4, $F(1, 328) = 13.85$, $p < .001$; 5, $F(1, 328) = 8.17$, $p = .005$; 7, $F(1, 328) = 12.72$, $p < .001$; and 8, $F(1, 328) = 12.43$, $p < .001$. Scenario 7 contributed the highest weight, $\beta = -.64$, followed by Scenarios 4, $\beta = .54$; 5, $\beta = -.49$; 8, $\beta = .40$; and 3, $\beta = -.16$. Thus, although there was an overall effect for actor gender on concern for target (as indicated by the primary analyses), participants were only more likely to express concern for female targets of male pursuers for threatening to set an ex-partner's place on fire while the partner was still inside (Scenario 7), breaking into an ex-partner's car and rummaging through his or her things (Scenario 4), following ex-partner (Scenario 5), breaking into ex-partner's apartment and taking several things (Scenario 8), and being seen outside ex-partner's house several times (Scenario 3).

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behavior following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. As hypothesized, after controlling for experience with stalking and participant gender, participants provided similar ratings for scenarios in which a man pursued a woman as for scenarios describing a woman pursuing a man. These findings support previous research (Cass, 2008; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010), which found that participants presented with a hypothetical vignette were equally as likely to judge a particular behavior as stalking regardless of the gender of the pursuers or targets. These results suggest that individuals tend to define stalking the same way despite differences in actor gender.

Consistent with our second hypothesis, which stated that individuals would express greater concern for female targets of male pursuers, we found a significant effect for actor gender, with participants providing higher ratings and expressing greater concern for female

targets of male pursuers than for male targets of female pursuers. This is also consistent with previous research (Cass, 2008; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Wigman, 2009). Victimization of male targets tend to be seen as less concerning, with men being viewed as more capable of helping themselves than women (Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Wigman, 2009).

Interestingly, participants expressed high levels of concern for targets ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.48$, on a 1–5 scale) despite the brief scenarios used and the absence of descriptions of targets' fear or perceptions of harm. This suggests that individuals express greater concern for female targets of male pursuit behavior regardless of whether or not the incident meets legal criteria for stalking. Goffman's (1977) work on gender norms and perceived helplessness in women suggests that this is may be because of the belief that women are less able to defend themselves. Following traditional gender roles, the idea of a man acting aggressively toward a woman may seem more threatening than if a woman were to behave similarly toward a man. However, given that the effect did not hold for all scenarios, other explanations may exist. Regardless of why participants tended to express greater concern for female targets of male pursuers, these results support the idea that stalking is perceived differently on the basis of gender roles.

The inference that individuals tend to view women as more needing of help led to the third hypothesis, which was that individuals would be more likely to recommend seeking help when scenarios depicted a man pursuing a woman than for scenarios in which a woman pursued a man. Participants behaved as predicted, providing higher ratings on recommendations of both informal (friends and family) and formal (law enforcement) help seeking for female targets of male pursuers. Ratings for informal help seeking were higher than for formal help seeking (consistent with Buhi et al.'s [2009] findings), but the pattern of results remained the same. By including an additional measure of help seeking and using several brief harassment scenarios, these findings support previous research and provide further evidence of the tendency to perceive male-perpetrated pursuit behavior as more threatening and female targets as more vulnerable (Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Wigman, 2009). They also highlight the role of gender in recommending help seeking from both close others and law enforcement.

The differential influence of actor gender on individual scenarios as discovered in follow-up analyses suggests that the overall effect discussed in this study may not apply to all potential stalking and harassment behaviors, but that actor gender may play a role in the determination of stalking for certain harassment behaviors (i.e., setting target's residence on fire and breaking into target's car). Similarly, only 5 of the 10 scenarios elicited an actor gender effect for concern for target; Scenarios 1 (calling several times), 2 (repeatedly sending flowers, gifts, and letters), 6 (threatening to kill self), 9 (smashing target's car with a baseball bat), and 10 (repeatedly showing up at target's place of work) did not elicit different ratings on the basis of actor gender.

Although an examination of the factors involved in this differential effect is beyond the scope of this study, future research should explicitly test hypotheses regarding the nature of this effect. It may be that Scenarios 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 were perceived as more severe than the remaining five scenarios, causing participants to express greater concern for female targets of male pursuers. According to a recent study, scenarios identified as more severe (i.e., higher levels of persistence and threatening intentions) were more likely to be identified as stalking, to require police intervention, and to create distress and fear of violence in the target (Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Although our scenarios described a single behavioral incident and did not vary in persistence or describe intent of the pursuer, mean ratings on concern for target varied across scenarios, suggesting that something other than severity was driving the effect.

Perceived intrusiveness of the behavior may be in part responsible for the differential effect for actor gender; for example, breaking into an ex-partner's car and rummaging through his or her things (Scenario 4; significant effect for perceptions of stalking and concern for target) might be seen as more intrusive than smashing the car with a baseball bat (Scenario 9; nonsignificant effect). It may also be that target and pursuer gender is more salient for some behaviors than others; threatening to kill oneself (Scenario 6) may be just as concerning regardless of whether the pursuer is a man or a woman, whereas following an ex-partner (Scenario 5) may seem much more threatening for female targets of male pursuers. It is clear that more research is needed to elucidate the exact nature of this effect.

Previous research on the effects of participant gender on perceptions of stalking have found that women typically perceive hypothetical pursuit scenarios as more indicative of stalking and express greater concern for targets (Dennison & Thomson, 2002) than men. As predicted, this study replicated these findings using several brief harassment scenarios. Compared to men, women were more likely to perceive the scenarios as stalking, to express greater concern for targets, and to recommend informal and formal help. The differences in findings between this study and those reported by Phillips et al. (2004) may be related to scenario characteristics or study design, or may result from differences in the two samples (i.e., there were more men in this study). It is also possible that use of harassment behaviors that did not meet the legal definition of stalking, compared to the detailed stalking vignette used by Phillips et al., allowed for greater variability in ratings between men and women. Regardless, findings from this study suggest that even for simple behavioral incidents with no explicit mention of harm or fear, women seem to perceive the same behavior as more threatening and are more likely to label it stalking, express concern for the target, and recommend seeking help than men.

Previous research by Phillips and colleagues (2004) found no effect for prior experience with stalking, although the authors only considered stalking victimization in their study. Other researchers have found that experience with stalking does play a role in perceptions of stalking but only for men (Yanowitz, 2006). Experience with stalking in this study was assessed based on experience as the target of stalking behavior, the perpetrator of stalking behavior, and knowing someone who had been the target of stalking behavior. Of these three dimensions, only experience as the perpetrator of stalking was related to the dependent variables. It may be that stalking targets and individuals who know targets of stalking do not differ significantly in their perceptions of stalking than those with no experience. Alternatively, individuals who have perpetrated stalking behavior may be more likely to minimize the behavior and less likely to perceive the behavior as stalking, express concern for targets, and recommend help. Given that stalking perpetration was negatively correlated with recommending both informal and formal help seeking, one explanation may be that individuals who have victimized others are less likely to recommend that stalking targets seek help; future research should investigate whether this is the case. Past experience with IPV was likewise separated into experience as either the perpetrator or the victim of IPV. Unlike prior experience with stalking, neither IPV perpetration nor victimization was related to the experimental variables.

Limitations of the Current Study and Future Directions

This study was not without its limitations. The use of multiple scenarios might have been both a strength and a limitation of this study. Although use of multiple scenarios allowed us to capture a broader picture of individuals' perceptions toward stalking across various behaviors, to reduce the chances of participant fatigue, and to eliminate extraneous details,

it may also have encouraged participants to respond more flippantly and to spend less time on each scenario, thus resulting in increased respondent error. The manipulation check examining ratings on the nonstalking scenario suggested that this was likely the case for a few participants. However, it should be noted that aberrant ratings on the control scenario were only found for participants who completed V1 of the stalking scenarios.

In addition, as noted previously, with the exception of perceptions of stalking, ratings from Cluster 2 (Scenarios 2, 4, 6, 8, & 9) were, on average, much higher than ratings from Cluster 1 (Scenarios 1, 3, 5, 7, & 10; see Table 4). Thus, although assignment to scenario cluster was random, scenarios in Cluster 2 were perceived as more severe than scenarios in Cluster 1. The failure to appropriately control for severity and to create two different but equivalent versions of the scenarios meant that a within-participant comparison could not be conducted to compare participants' responses on male pursuer–female target scenarios to their ratings on female pursuer–male target scenarios. The present findings are also limited in their generalizability to predominantly White Canadian university students. Future research should attempt to replicate and extend the present findings by using more diverse community-based samples, legally relevant samples of potential jurors or members of law enforcement, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) samples. Future research should also examine the effect of gender on perceptions of same-sex couple stalking. Despite these limitations, this study successfully used a quasi-experimental design to assess the role of gender in the study of perceptions of stalking behavior.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Findings from this study have important practical, legal, and policy implications. The finding that experience as the perpetrator of stalking was associated with lower ratings across all four dimensions suggests that individuals who have been the perpetrator of stalking or harassment behavior may be less likely to perceive an incident as stalking and to express concern or recommend help for targets of that behavior. This has implications for public perceptions of stalking and harassment behavior, as well as in the legal system (i.e., jury selection). Given that less than 3% of the total sample self-identified as perpetrators, it is unclear if these findings are representative of perpetrators in general; future research should investigate the specific role of experience as a perpetrator of stalking/harassment behavior in perceptions of stalking.

Results of this study suggest that although individuals were just as likely to perceive a behavior as stalking when a woman was pursuing a man, there was a tendency to express more concern for and to recommend help from both informal and formal sources for female targets. These findings are consistent with research that suggests that women are twice as likely to be victims of stalking as men (Sheridan, Blaauw, et al., 2003; Statistics Canada, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) but are contrary to research suggesting that men and women perpetrate unwanted pursuit behavior at equal rates (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). Given that stalking is considered an extension of IPV, which results in more injuries for women than for men (e.g., Romans, Forte, Cohen, Du Mont, & Hyman, 2007), it is not surprising that individuals continue to perceive female pursuers as less threatening and male targets as more capable.

If individuals are more likely to see female pursuers as less threatening and male targets as more capable, it follows that law enforcement officials may also be prone to this view. Law enforcement officials should be careful not to discount male targets of female pursuers; all stalking behavior should be taken seriously, regardless of the gender of the pursuer and the target. Gender effects may also influence the treatment of female pursuers in court. Judges and juries may be more lenient toward female pursuers, believing that their actions,

despite being equal to male pursuers, are less threatening (Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Likewise, they may believe that male targets are better able to protect themselves, making the behavior less dangerous. Although these perceptions are often accurate, the tendency to consistently view stalking in this way may prevent appropriate action from being taken to protect male targets and to avoid future aggression. Training with legal officials might help to prevent these potential biases.

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APPENDIX: SCENARIOS VERSION 1

1. Jane and Andy had been dating for several months when Andy realized that things were not working out in the relationship and he decided that it would be best to break up with Jane. Jane, however, wanted to continue the relationship. Since their breakup, Jane has called Andy several times, but he no longer answers her phone calls.

2. Alice and Chris recently broke up after dating for nearly a year when Alice decided that she was no longer interested in Chris. However, Chris still wanted to date Alice. He has repeatedly sent flowers and other gifts to Alice's house, along with personal letters.

3. Tom decided to end things with his girlfriend Lisa, whom he had been dating for several months. Lisa, however, was interested in maintaining the relationship. Tom thinks that he has seen Lisa outside his house on several occasions since their breakup.

4. Erica recently broke up with her long term boyfriend Steve. Although Erica is no longer interested in seeing Steve, Steve was still very interested in Erica. Since their breakup, Steve has broken into Erica's car and rummaged through her things.

5. Paul and Sandra were together for several months when Paul decided to end their relationship. Despite his decision, Sandra was interested in continuing the relationship. Paul has noticed Sandra following him a number of times.

6. Crystal and Jacob recently ended their relationship. Crystal was interested in seeing other people, but Jacob was only interested in seeing Crystal. A few weeks after their break-up, Jacob called and told Crystal that he was going to kill himself if she didn't take him back.

7. Allan and Joanna are no longer seeing each other following a decision by Allan to end the relationship. Joanna was very upset by this, since she still wanted to date Allan. A few days after their split, Joanna sent an email to Allan threatening to set his place on fire while he was still inside.

8. Frank was recently dumped by his girlfriend Helen. Helen was no longer interested in seeing Frank; however, Frank was still interested in dating Helen. Several days after their break-up, Frank broke into Helen's apartment and stole several items.

9. Karen and David terminated their relationship at Karen's insistence. David was still interested in seeing Karen, but he recently discovered she had started dating someone else. After hearing this, David used a baseball bat to smash her new boyfriend's car.

10. Kyle and his girlfriend Sheila broke up a few weeks ago. Although Sheila was interested in maintaining the relationship, Kyle decided he didn't want to date Sheila anymore. Since their break-up, Sheila has shown up at Kyle's work on more than one occasion asking him to take her back.

11. Tom and his girlfriend Mary split up a several months ago when Tom decided to end their relationship. Despite Tom's decision, Mary was still interested in continuing the relationship. Although they had not been contact since the break-up, Mary sent Tom a card on his birthday.

Note. Version 2 is identical to Version 1, except that names and pronouns are reversed.