

7-28-2015

# The Role of Gender on Perceptions of Stalking and Harassment Behaviour within Same and Cross-Sex Relationships: Evidence from University and Law Enforcement Samples

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THE ROLE OF GENDER ON PERCEPTIONS OF STALKING AND HARASSMENT  
BEHAVIOUR WITHIN SAME AND CROSS-SEX RELATIONSHIPS: EVIDENCE  
FROM UNIVERSITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SAMPLES

by

Heather A. Finnegan

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
Through the Department of Psychology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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The Role of Gender on Perceptions of Stalking and Harassment Behaviour within Same and Cross-Sex Relationships: Evidence from University and Law Enforcement Samples

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November 7, 2014

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers investigating perceptions of stalking have enhanced understanding of the role of gender (i.e., perceived social roles based on sex) on subjective appraisals of harassment behaviour following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. According to data collected from student and community samples, a man harassing a woman (M-W) elicits greater recommendations for police intervention, as well as a tendency to anticipate more harm, than when the same behaviour is perpetrated by a woman against a man (W-M; Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Although cases of stalking often come to the attention of law enforcement, no research to date to the author's knowledge has been conducted with police officers. By manipulating a real stalking (i.e., criminal harassment) case, study 1 examined the role of actor sex (M-W, W-M) on perceptions of stalking in a sample of local police officers. Findings were consistent with previous research. Officers who read the M-W case anticipated more physical, emotional, psychological, and economic harm than officers who read the W-M case. Research has also focused almost exclusively on cross-sex stalking. Study 2 extended previous research by examining perceptions of harassment scenarios using four different actor sex permutations (M-W, W-M, M-M, and W-W) in a sample of university students. Male and female participants anticipated less physical and nonphysical harm for W-M compared to M-W, M-M, and W-W harassment. The findings have implications for research on the relation between sex and perceptions of gender, and may be used to develop intervention programs aimed at educating law enforcement, social support workers, and community agencies to ensure appropriate protection and treatment of individuals harassed by same-sex or cross-sex former partners.

DEDICATION

For my father, Brian Finnegan, who has always challenged me to take a different perspective on what I thought I knew, and who ignited in me a deep sense of curiosity about the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I deeply appreciate the caring guidance of my research advisor, Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz, who read each draft of my dissertation and provided invaluable feedback at every step. She inspired creativity, autonomy, and leadership; my identity as a researcher and supervisor has been guided by her thoughtful mentorship. I would also like to express my gratitude to the members of my committee. To Dr. Betty Barrett, who provided unique insights into identity and the intersection of gender with social roles. To Dr. Alan Scoboria, whose input regarding experimental designs and statistical analyses strengthened my research. To Dr. Charlene Senn, whose feedback allowed for a greater appreciation of the findings and placed the research within a larger social framework. Thank you to Mr. Barry Horrobin for his dedication to the project and the recruitment of police officers, as well as the Windsor Police Service for supporting and participating in the research. Thank you to the Health Research Centre for the Study of Violence Against Women for creating a space for violence research on campus and for financial support through a graduate student research grant, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support through a three year doctoral award. Finally, thank you to my amazing friends and family. To Amanda Robinson, Sandra Gotovac, Fred Howard, Megan Duffett, Jessica Menard, David Liang, Erin Kowal, Marikit McCann, Zoey Schock, and Rory Finnegan. To my father, Brian, for teaching me to think critically, my mother, Mary, for her endless love and encouragement, and my twin sister, Shawna, for being my best friend and greatest ally in everything I do.

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## Chapter 1: Gender and Violence

The current research sought to investigate the role of sex and gender on perceptions of harassment behaviour following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Chapter one explores the concepts of sex and gender and provides a theoretical basis for understanding the role of gender in aggression and violence. Research findings from the gender symmetry debate are used to illustrate the role that gender can have on how intimate partner violence (IPV) is perceived. Chapter two is a review of key stalking research findings, including empirical studies on the role of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour. Chapter three provides an overview of relevant research conducted with law enforcement professionals and details original research conducted in cooperation with the Windsor Police Service to investigate the role of actor sex on law enforcement perceptions of criminal harassment (study 1). Chapter four provides background and related research on same-sex relationships and describes original research conducted with university students to investigate perceptions of same-sex and cross-sex harassment following the break-up of a romantic relationship (study 2). Chapter five is a synthesis and discussion of the research findings.

Violence is a complex, diffuse, multidimensional, and global problem. It accounts for 14% of male deaths and 7% of female deaths worldwide, and is the leading cause of death for 15 to 44 year olds (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002). Violence is defined as “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 1084). The World Health Organization has

acknowledged that violence is a public health concern and has requested that member states initiate programs aimed at treating victims and reducing violence. Research on violence has been identified as a priority for public health (Krug et al., 2002).

Investigations into factors related to perceptions of violence, such as sex and gender, enhance understanding of social and cultural norms around violence and aid in efforts to provide adequate treatment.

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct but related concepts. The present research attempted to elucidate the connection between sex and gender as it relates to perceptions of violence. Specifically, the research investigated how statements regarding an individual's biological sex are interpreted within the social construction of gender to inform perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour following the dissolution of a cross-sex relationship (study 1) and a same-sex or cross-sex romantic relationship (study 2). Thus, in the present research, sex refers to the biological characteristics of the actor or participant, whereas gender refers to the participants' socially constructed interpretation of sex.

Notions of femininity and masculinity are socially defined and constrained. According to Judith Butler (2004), gender is not what an individual "is" or "has"; it is the mechanism through which feminine and masculine are constructed and normalized in conjunction with the associated biological, intrapsychic, and performative aspects of gender. In other words, gender is not "male" or "female" but instead a way that the binary of "male" and "female" are constructed and understood. Cultures vary in their conceptualization of gender. Therefore the traits and behaviours associated with a given

gender vary from culture to culture and from person to person (Connell, 1985; Howard & Hollander, 1997; Lips, 2005; Minas, 2000).

Many (if not most) individuals exist somewhere along the gender continuum (Connell, 2002). However, a binary definition of gender restricts alternative expressions of gender identity (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004). The concept of gender allows for a discussion of individuals who adhere to the binary, and those who do not, and thus provides an opportunity to deconstruct the gender binary (Butler, 2004).

Gender is often used to refer to the social behaviours and characteristics associated with biological sex. Bodily differences in reproductive abilities influence relational processes and inform social practices. Thus, gender identity is based on individuals' self-concept and their understanding of themselves as either male or female. Gender roles rely on prescribed notions of appropriate behaviours and characteristics for men and women. Individuals conform to polarized gender roles, labelled "feminine" and "masculine" (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004; Fraser, 1989/2004). Unfortunately, gender roles ignore variations between individuals, as well as social influences like power inequality (Connell, 1985).

An individuals' sexual identity is often connected to gender roles. Theorists have suggested that cross-sex (heterosexual) attraction is central to the concept of masculinity (i.e., Connell, 1987). However, cross-sex attraction can also be used to explain the conceptual differences between masculinity and femininity, as well as the ways in which masculine and feminine complement one another. In heterosexual attraction, masculinity is based on the desire for a feminine object and femininity is based on being the object of masculine desire (Schippers, 2007). Thus, heterosexual attraction and cross-sex mating

support a binary definition of gender and gender roles. Acknowledgment and investigation of nonheterosexual attraction and mating may aid in the acceptance and perpetuation of nonbinary gender roles. Unfortunately, research on sex and gender has suggested that observing and evaluating individuals through a socially constructed gender lens leads to differential perceptions of women and men.

### **Lenses of Gender**

Sandra Bem (1993) identifies three lenses through which gender is perceived: biological essentialism, androcentrism, and gender polarization. Biological essentialism is the notion that gender differences arise completely from innate biological differences between the sexes. Proponents of this perspective ascribe behaviours such as aggression and dominance (i.e., promiscuity, rape, violence) to men and more nurturing behaviours (i.e., preference for monogamy, investment in offspring) to women, which are a result of differential evolutionary trajectories. Essentialists often argue that men who were more dominant, aggressive, and sexually promiscuous left more copies of their genes than those that did not. Social Darwinism relies on the idea that men are subject to greater selection than women given that men have the ability to impregnate thousands of women over their lifespan, unlike women who are limited in their procreative abilities, leading men to be more highly evolved (Darwin, 1871/1952 as cited in Bem, 1993). Thus, the male gender is perceived as biologically superior.

Androcentrism is the second gender lens and refers to the male centered norm in which men are the standard and women are the “other” (Bem, 1993; Fraser, 1989/2004). In a society that privileges men, patriarchy is the label for the power endowed to fathers, which gives agency to men through language and institutions like government, law,



religion, and marriage. Until recently, “man” was used to refer to all of humankind.

Moreover, the word “he” continues to describe any person, man or woman (Bem, 1993).

The term “hegemony” can be used to refer to the status quo (Sedgwick, 2003).

“Hegemonic masculinity” refers to the pattern of behaviours that contribute to the domination of women by men and leads to social hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Moore, 1994). Admiration for male traits (e.g., ambitious pursuit of goals) and the abhorrence for all things female (e.g., “sissies” who express feminine traits), illustrate the ubiquity of the male standard (Bem, 1993).

The final lens is that of gender polarization, which refers to the tendency to place men and women on opposite ends of a single spectrum, situating gender as a dividing characteristic (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004; Fraser, 1989/2004). What it is to be a man encompasses one set of traits (i.e., hard, aggressive, strong) and what it is to be a woman comprises an entirely different set of traits (i.e., soft, nurturing, vulnerable). In modern society, certain colours are for boys (i.e., blue) whereas other colours are for girls (i.e., pink). Violations of these social norms are met with swift reaction and ostracism (see James, 2011). Social norms around gender may explain children’s evaluations of cross-gendered appearance and play (Blakemore, 2003). Children learn in subtle and not-so-subtle ways what it is to be a boy or a girl, and that negative consequences may ensue if they step outside of the prescribed standards for dress, behaviour, and interests. There is evidence to suggest that boys are perceived more negatively than girls for cross-gendered appearance (i.e., feminine clothing or hairstyle) whereas girls are perceived more negatively than boys for cross-gender play (i.e., playing “rough”; Blakemore, 2003). Whether it is an 18 year old transman being denied consideration for prom king and

instead moved to the list of candidates for prom queen (Dejesus, 2013) or a 21 year old gay man being beaten and left to die tied to a fence (Janofsky, 1999) the message is clear – do not violate social norms. Gender lenses shape the assumptions made about sex and gender and limits expressions of identity.

Gender polarization restricts human potential. For example, “masculine traits” are differentiated from “feminine traits” based on their utility. Men are “instrumental” and goal-focused, whereas women are “expressive” and focused on relationships (Bem, 1993; Fraser, 1989/2004). By polarizing the functions of men and women, the other gender is deprived of the opportunity to access a different and valuable way of experiencing life. The readiness with which individuals rely on a gender lens to perceive and interpret stimuli allows categorization on the basis of gender to become not just a part of reality, but to shape and define reality such that people embody the gender differences they expect (Bem, 1993). Gender differences are thus self-fulfilling – the more the genders are expected to behave differently, the more they will.

Power dynamics are an important part of gender polarization (Bem, 1993). Gender regulates and naturalizes power by operating as a binary and attributing certain characteristics and roles to men (i.e., aggression) and others to women (i.e., nurturance), thereby placing women as the “other sex” (Butler, 2004). Men acknowledge the power and worth of other men without requiring evidence to support this claim, whereas women must prove their worth and abilities in order to be taken seriously. There is also a tendency for women to underestimate their abilities whereas men tend to overestimate their abilities. This assumption of male power leads men to place themselves and other men in positions that illustrate and increase male power and women to place themselves

and other women in positions that support male dominance and minimize female power and agency (Bem, 1993; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Thus, sex and gender cannot be considered biological or social in concept but as an idea that bridges both (Butler, 2004).

The current research investigated the role of gender (i.e., how social roles and the gender binary are constructed and understood; Butler, 2004) on perceptions of harassment following the dissolution of a romantic relationship by varying the sex of target and pursuer in a brief scenario. Mean ratings from each couple gender profile (i.e., woman pursuing woman) were compared to investigate the effect of gender on law enforcement officers' perceptions of cross-sex criminal harassment (study 1) and university students' perceptions of same- and cross-sex harassment (study 2). Given that ex-intimate stalking and harassment behaviour is associated with both ongoing partner violence and a history of IPV, threats of violence, physical and nonphysical (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic) harm, and homicide (Bjerregaarde, 2000; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Friedl, 2011; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), literature on violence and the role of gender in the perception of violence informed the research questions and hypotheses and aided in the interpretation of the research findings.

### **Interpersonal Violence**

Interpersonal violence affects all gender identities, but there is evidence to suggest that women are disproportionately affected. Compared to male participants in a study of 1,921 students from a large southeastern university, female participants were more likely to be victims of interpersonal aggression (i.e., physical assault, theft, IPV, sexual assault, family violence, and stalking), which suggests that men and women are differentially

affected by interpersonal aggression (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009). Violence in the context of an intimate relationship (i.e., intimate partner violence [IPV]) is one of the most common manifestations of interpersonal aggression. Findings from a national survey of 9,086 women and 7,421 men revealed 32.9% of women and 28.1% of men in the U.S. are victims of physical violence in their lifetime (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). Similar rates of physical violence suggest that men and women are similarly affected by IPV. However, rates of severe physical violence are almost twice as high for women than men (24.3 vs. 13.8%), which illustrates the importance of considering type and relative harm of violence perpetrated by men and women.

Partner violence is one of the most dangerous forms of interpersonal aggression. Spousal homicide represents 18% of all solved homicides in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005); thus, acts of intimate partner violence can have potentially fatal consequences. Risks associated with IPV are greater for female victims. Women who were physically assaulted were at greater risk of injury if the perpetrator was a current or former partner, whereas men physically assaulted by a partner were at lower risk of injury (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). Perpetration of physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual violence against women is common among men who are former intimate partner stalkers (Davis et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). According to Statistics Canada (2005), spousal homicide was preceded by another assault in 48% of cases and preceded by criminal harassment (i.e., stalking) in 12% of cases. Despite the potential for harm associated with IPV, acts of physical aggression are often construed as expressions of love by young adults (Lloyd & Emery, 2000). Thus, acts of intimate

partner violence, including intimate partner stalking, represent an important area of inquiry in the study of interpersonal aggression.

### **Intimate Partner Violence**

Intimate partner violence typically exists behind closed doors, and until the 1970s and 1980s it was expected to remain that way (Rhatigan, Moore, & Street, 2005).

Although spousal abuse has existed for thousands of years, widespread disapproval and concern for spousal abuse has only existed for the last 40 years (Johnson & Sigler, 2000). Findings from the first National Family Violence Survey in 1975 illustrated the frequency and severity of violence in families (approximately 12% of married couples reported violence in their relationship), leading the way for research on family violence and IPV. Since that time, research in the area has expanded to include a variety of relationships (i.e., dating, cohabitating, and same-sex partnerships), types of violence (i.e., verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse), and outcomes (i.e., individual, family, societal; Basile & Hall, 2010). There also have been changes in the way violence in close relationships is talked about. Terms such as “partner abuse” and “intimate partner violence” are more inclusive and do not rely on heterosexual notions of IPV, whereas terms like “domestic violence” and “spousal abuse” have heterocentric connotations (Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Walsh, 1996). Advances in research and intervention have allowed for a greater appreciation of the nature and impact of partner violence (Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012), as well as efforts for prevention (Rhatigan et al., 2005; Rybarik, Dosch, Gilmore, & Krajewski, 1995) and treatment (Bjorklund, Hakkanen-Nyholm, Sheridan, & Roberts, 2010).

A variety of behaviours now fall under the definition of IPV (i.e., hitting, yelling, sexual coercion, neglect, financial abuse; Johnson & Sigler, 2000). Researchers have also begun to include behaviours often classified as stalking, such as persistent phone calls and emails, showing up unexpectedly, and generally unwanted attention in the definition of IPV (Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000). In a random sample of 788 college students from a large public U.S. university, 25% of women and 11% of men identified as victims of stalking with 6% being stalked at the time of data collection (Bjerregaard, 2000). A significant proportion of stalking victims reported that they had been threatened. Threats of violence were associated with greater victim fear and greater likelihood of physical violence, especially for female victims (Bjerregaard, 2000). Findings support the link between IPV and harassment behaviours and illustrate the role of actor sex on rates of IPV perpetration.

Despite increased public awareness and research efforts, partner abuse remains an elusive construct. For instance, there is an ongoing debate regarding men's and women's rates of IPV perpetration. Some researchers argue in favour of a gender symmetrical approach (i.e., men and women perpetrate dating violence at similar rates and in similar ways; McFarlane, Willson, Malecha, & Lemmey, 2000; Ross & Babcock, 2009; Straus, 2011) and others argue in favour of feminist perspectives, which take into account individual, interpersonal, social, and structural factors in the perpetration of IPV (Caldwell et al., 2012; DeKeseredy, 2011; Johnson, 2005, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Saunders, 2002). Substantial empirical evidence has been offered in support of both sides of the debate.

## Gender Symmetry

*Intimate partner violence.* Gender (a)symmetry in intimate partner violence has been an area of significant debate since the late 1970s when reports came out suggesting husbands and wives engage in similar rates of spousal abuse (Anderson, 2005; Steinmetz, 1997). The development of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; Straus, 1979) allowed for the measurement of female-perpetrated violence and revealed symmetry in the perpetration of physical aggression (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). Since that time, researchers on both sides of the debate have published dozens of studies in support of (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; McFarlane et al., 2000; Ross & Babcock, 2009; Straus, 2004, 2011) and in opposition to (Caldwell et al., 2012; DeKeseredy, 2011; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009; Hamberger, 2005; Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2008, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Saunders, 2002) gender symmetry in IPV. In this context, symmetry refers to the notion that men and women perpetrate nonsexual physical violence at similar rates (Straus, 2011). Feminist perspectives of IPV tend to take an asymmetrical approach and focus on power imbalance and the patriarchal nature of intimate partner abuse (Cavanaugh, 2012; Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

Gender symmetry proponents argue that feminist perspectives ignore female-perpetrated aggression and that by neglecting female-perpetrated violence, efforts to prevent IPV are hindered (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). On the other hand, many feminist scholars believe that IPV is a means of exerting control over women (Anderson, 1997). Given gender based inequalities in structural power, female victims of violence experience a loss of power (and thus, a loss of status; Schmid Mast, 2010) that is more

significant than male victims. Only female victims of IPV experience a diminished sense of personal control as a result of victimization (Umberson, Anderson, Glick, & Shapiro, 1998). Thus, the impact of violence on women can be seen as different from the impact on men. The movement away from terms like “violence against women” and towards more neutral terms like “family violence” may be more inclusive of other types of IPV, but may also derail the conversation about the ubiquity of violence against women (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

Despite apparent differences in men’s and women’s perpetration of IPV, a review of 91 studies revealed that symmetry in perpetration exists even within serious, clinical-level incidents of IPV (Straus, 2011). Seven percent of women from the general population sampled across 36 studies engaged in severe abuse compared to five percent of men in the same studies. Findings from eight studies investigating severe assaults in the general population indicate that in the majority of cases, both men and women engage in severe violence against their partner. Although more men than women perpetrated assaults that came to the attention of social agencies, a high percentage involved female perpetration. Rates of injury were lower among female perpetrators in both types of samples (Straus, 2011).

Although the findings support gender symmetry, several weaknesses of Straus’ (2011) review can be noted. Violence as a means of self-defense was not coded or analyzed. Thus, women who used violence to protect themselves from an abusive partner were not differentiated from men who used violence to coercively control a partner. Much of the data from the review is based on Straus’ Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS, 1979), which does not account for context or typology (Johnson & Dawson, 2011;



Kimmel, 2002; McHugh, 2005). There is also evidence that compared to women, men tend to underreport acts of aggression in self-report contexts (DeKeseredy, 2011; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh, & Lewis, 1998; Kimmel, 2002). Proponents of gender symmetry argue that national surveys have consistently supported symmetry in the perpetration of physical violence. Critics of gender symmetry claim that the CTS, on which national survey data is primarily based, does not measure individuals' motivations, reasons for the conflict, or consequences of the aggression (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

*Evaluating the Conflict Tactics Scales.* Widespread use of the CTS to measure violence in relationships indicates that the majority of data on intimate partner violence is based on a single measure. Critics have pointed out that the context, intent, and consequences of relational violence vary by gender but are not measured by the CTS (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). The CTS and the revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) focus on violence that arises out of conflict in the relationship and does not consider aggressive acts that are used to control a partner (i.e., forced isolation), which are more typical of male-perpetrated IPV (DeKeseredy, 2011; Kimmel, 2002). Thus, researchers have been recommended to include an additional measure when administering the CTS or CTS2 in order to evaluate context. Coding of participant responses to examine underlying factors (i.e., power, respect, or love) has also been suggested (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010).

In addition to a failure to account for context, the CTS is retrospective and asks about violence in current relationships (or “in the last year”), potentially ignoring violence perpetrated by former partners (Kimmel, 2002). Failure to assess abuse longer than one year ago means that aggressive acts that occur during the course of ex-partner

stalking are generally not assessed. Given that women are at greatest risk of severe violence and femicide upon leaving an abusive partner (Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Kimmel, 2002; Saunders, 2002), this is a significant oversight. By ignoring interpersonal, social, and structural analyses of gender, the Conflict Tactics Scales fail to capture the impact of gender on violence (Anderson, 2005). Ubiquitous use of the CTS for measuring violence in relationships has led some researchers to limit their conceptualization of IPV and the larger social context within which gender violence occurs (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

In addition to critiques regarding the CTS, Straus (2011) acknowledges in his paper that the search criteria used in his review is unlikely to have elicited all relevant studies; thus his findings do not represent all research investigating IPV among men and women. Straus also focused on studies that reported both male and female perpetrated IPV and used search terms like “mutual,” “reciprocal,” and “symmetrical” to find articles. This strategy would likely elicit a greater number of studies in support of “gender symmetry” while discounting research by feminist scholars on violence against women which focus on rates of violence among female victims only. Therefore, findings from Straus’ (2011) review should be interpreted with caution. It may be that research findings indicating that women perpetrate acts of IPV at higher rates than expected reflect a construction of violence that fails to account for gender differences in the use (i.e., self-defense), perception, and reporting of violence in intimate relationships (Kimmel, 2002). Unable to resolve the symmetry debate from numbers alone, many researchers have focused on whether the contradictory research findings can be explained by exploring men’s and women’s perpetration of different types of IPV.

*Types of intimate partner violence.* Johnson (1995, 2005, 2011) identified four major types of IPV: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, mutual violence, and situational couple violence. Intimate terrorism is consistent with many feminist models of IPV and represents partner violence as it is most commonly understood in that it includes physical and sexual abuse as well as controlling behaviours such as economic and emotional abuse, intimidation, surveillance, and threats to reveal damaging information about one's partner. This type of IPV, which has also been called coercive controlling violence, may include nonviolent forms of coercion like intimidation (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Law enforcement, women's shelters, and social welfare agencies are often involved in cases of intimate terrorism. Although intimate terrorism is not limited to men or even heterosexual relationships (Messinger, 2011; Renzetti, 1997), male perpetrators account for the largest proportion of intimate terrorism perpetration (Johnson, 2011). In contrast, violent resistance is considered a response tactic to intimate terrorism and fits with many feminist approaches to understanding women's perpetration of IPV. Violent resistance may be an automatic response to victimization or may occur after repeated assaults. In the case of female victims of heterosexual IPV, inequalities in both physical strength and societal power may render violent resistance ineffective, leading some women to turn to more lethal means of escape (Johnson, 2011).

In contrast, situational couple violence fits with family violence research findings and represents forms of IPV in which disagreements become heated and one or both members of the couple engage in aggressive acts against the other. According to Johnson and colleagues (2011), situational couple violence is the most common form of IPV and tends to be perpetrated equally by both men and women. Household surveys of IPV are

more likely to capture this form of violence, supporting beliefs about the symmetry of IPV among men and women (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Unlike intimate terrorism and violent resistance, situational couple violence does not occur as part of a pattern of aggressive and coercive interactions, but instead arises out of situational conflict. Although many incidents of situational couple violence involve only minor aggressive behaviours, many others include serious and potentially lethal forms of aggression. The intent of the typologies is not to identify some forms of IPV as more serious, but rather to differentiate the different types and contexts of IPV (Johnson, 2011).

Given that there is evidence on both sides of the gender symmetry debate in regards to men's and women's perpetration of IPV, Johnson's work has been suggested as a bridge between the two opposing perspectives (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). Using these typologies, Johnson (2011) argues that the gender symmetry found in national surveys of intimate partner violence is a result of sampling bias and nonresponse rates. National surveys collect information about a more common and gender symmetric form of IPV (i.e., situational couple violence). Intimate terrorism and violent resistance represent a smaller proportion of total IPV perpetration in large, survey-based samples. It is believed that individuals involved in these forms of IPV are also unlikely to respond to surveys as a result of fear of either law enforcement or retribution from their partner. The effect is reversed in data collected from social agencies in which the majority of incidents involve intimate terrorism and violent resistance, suggesting that IPV is predominantly perpetrated by men (Johnson, 2011).

Proponents of gender symmetry argue that underreporting by male victims may also account for differences between men's and women's reported victimization.

According to Dutton and Nicholls (2005), women are four times more likely than men to contact law enforcement agencies to report partner abuse. However, it is important to consider all types of hidden victims. For example, women living in Canada with incomes below \$30,000 and women who identify as a visible minority are less likely to seek help through formal (i.e., law enforcement) or informal (i.e., friend or neighbor) sources (Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011). Separated couples are often not included in surveys of IPV despite the high risk of violence for separated women (Saunders, 2002). Same-sex IPV is also largely ignored by both national surveys and social agencies (Messinger, 2011). Thus, male victims of IPV are not the only hidden victims. Data from surveys and social agencies may not reflect the reality of IPV perpetration.

In addition to underreporting by male victims of IPV, there is evidence to suggest that women perpetrate intimate terrorism at higher rates than described by Johnson (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Ross & Babcock, 2009). Similar rates of controlling tactics by men and women in violent relationships were reported in a sample of 281 couples. However, women's reports of their own violence better predicted outcomes than men's reports, suggesting underreporting of violence by men (Ross & Babcock, 2009). The authors also found that asymmetry of violence predicted greater injury for women, but not for men. In other words, women who are victims of unidirectional IPV experience greater injury than women who engage in bidirectional IPV, whereas men are equally as likely to be injured regardless of whether the violence is unidirectional or bidirectional. Ross and Babcock's (2009) findings suggest differential implications for the victims of men's and women's unidirectional IPV. Also, women's bidirectional IPV may represent

an attempt to minimize injury to her person, at least in some cases. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that women can engage in similar levels of violence as men.

*Stalking.* Gender symmetry in interpersonal violence also applies to related behaviours like intimate partner stalking. As with intimate partner violence, stalking research provides evidence for both sides of the symmetry debate. According to a comprehensive meta-analysis on the nature of stalking using data collected over 160 studies, women were more likely to be victims of stalking, with female victims accounting for 75% of total victimization (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007). The authors found that most women are stalked by men, whereas men tend to be stalked equally by both men and women. On the other hand, two meta-analyses on (a) college students' obsessional relational pursuit (ORI) and (b) community stalking studies found stalking and harassment victimization prevalence rates among 295 community and university samples to be 18% for community women and 26% for college women, compared to 12% of men in the general population and 18% of college men (Spitzberg, Cupach, & Ciceraro, 2010). Although Spitzberg and colleagues' (2010) rates are substantially higher than victimization prevalence rates reported by national surveys (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a), the findings, similar to national data, support the notion that both men and women experience pursuit behaviour.

Two-hundred and ninety-three (76% female) self-identified relational stalkers from an Australian university responded to questions regarding their experience as a perpetrator of stalking behaviour, engagement in stalking violence (as measured by amended subscales of the CTS), justifications for interpersonal violence, and perceived

fear by the target (Thompson, Dennison, & Stewart, 2012). Same-sex stalking perpetration accounted for approximately 8% of cases. Ninety percent of cases involved stalking of ex-partners, 44.4% involved violence (actual and attempted), and 98.6% of cases were never reported to the police. The researchers found that women were more likely than men to engage in moderate forms of violence (28.8% vs. 15.5%) but there was no difference in severe violence perpetration. There also was evidence to suggest that participants were more likely to support women's use of violence against a male partner than vice versa, especially for female-perpetrated severe violence, which received the highest levels of support. Finally, violent male stalkers were more likely to believe that they caused and intended to cause fear in their targets compared to violent female stalkers, which suggests that male- and female-perpetrated stalking behaviour may result in differential levels of harm, regardless of apparent severity.

Findings from the literature indicate that women are just as or more likely to engage in relational stalking and stalking violence (Thompson et al., 2012; Wigman, 2009). Results also suggest that beliefs about the justified nature of female aggression against a male partner may be one reason for women's perpetration of violence and the cultural acceptance of such behaviour. However, it is worth pointing out that Thompson and colleagues' (2012) study is subject to the same limitations as research using the CTS that tends to support gender symmetry in IPV. By removing contextual factors and focusing on number of acts rather than impact on the victim, Thompson and colleagues' (2012) research fails to account for the larger societal and practical implications. Nevertheless, male victims of female-perpetrated stalking and stalking violence do exist, and may be subject to severe forms of violence that goes unacknowledged due to cultural

and social norms around gender. However, the harm associated with stalking and other types of interpersonal violence may differ depending on the sex of the victim and perpetrator.

*Associated harm.* Although Straus (2011) suggests that there appears to be symmetry in perpetration, he acknowledges that the consequences for victims of IPV are not symmetrical. Empirical evidence confirms that women experience more injuries than men (Archer, 2000; Kimmel, 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995; Romans, Forte, Cohen, Du Mont, & Hyman, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994; Winstok, 2011). A telephone survey of 17,005 Canadian men and women revealed that physical injuries resulting from IPV were reported by 41% of women but only 14% of men (Romans et al., 2007). A review of gender differences in 199 married military couples revealed that both husbands and wives admitted to ongoing acts of marital violence in 83% of couples. However, husbands were less likely to be injured, less likely to report experiencing fear during the most recent conflict, and more likely to use severe forms of violence than wives (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1995).

The finding that men and women are differentially affected by partner abuse has been illustrated in other research. In a study of 57 married couples who reported bidirectional partner aggression, women reported more severe injuries and more negative psychological outcomes than men (Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). Male perpetrators tend to cause more violence-related deaths, physical and psychological injury, and fear than their female counterparts (Straus, 2011). Female victims often experience a loss of status or economic power (Anderson, 1997; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Saunders, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000a), and women tend to experience



more fear and emotional anguish as a result of violence in their relationships (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Therefore, symmetry should be discussed in the context of effects for victims, rather than solely in terms of rates of perpetration.

The harms associated with IPV extend to other forms of interpersonal aggression such as harassment and stalking behaviour. Bjerregaarde (2000) found that threats of violence are common among stalking relationships and that threats are linked with greater fear and a greater likelihood of physical violence by the pursuer, particularly for female targets. Data from 2,000 Austrian women revealed that of women who had been stalked, 39-43% reported impairment in social and personal spheres of their life and 32-40% reported impairment in physical and psychological health (Friedl, 2011). The findings provide further evidence of the harm experienced by female victims of stalking. It is worth noting that 19% of respondents were stalked by another woman, suggesting that the negative impact of stalking affects female victims of both same- and cross-sex stalking.

Statistics Canada (2005) reports that 7% of men and 11% of women in Canada have experienced stalking behaviour that caused them to fear for their safety or the safety of someone close to them. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted in 2010, 10.7% of women and 2.1% of men will be stalked by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). The National Crime Victimization Survey conducted in the United States found that although women had higher rates of stalking victimization (2% compared to only 0.7% of men) during the 12 months prior to the survey, men and women tended to experience harassment at similar rates (approximately 1% of both men and women; Baum et al., 2009). Given that

the only difference between stalking and harassment (by definition) is the experience of fear by the victim, these findings suggest that the behaviours experienced by male and female victims may be similar, but that women tend to report that the behaviours evoke more fear than men do. However, given the potential for both physical and psychological consequences, both male and female victimization deserves to be recognized and to receive consideration in research, legal, and therapeutic contexts.

Although research findings indicate that women experience more negative consequences than men as a result of stalking, a study of 665 (58.9% female) German community residents found that after controlling for history of stalking victimization, women's scores on measures of mental health were no poorer than men's scores (Kuehner, Gass, & Dressing, 2012). A similar number of men and women who had experience as the target of stalking behaviour met criteria for a mental disorder, and men and women endorsed similar rates of psychotropic medication usage. Thus, some findings indicate that men and women seem to be subject to similar mental health consequences as a result of stalking victimization. This is in contrast to other research findings, which indicate that the negative effects of violence (i.e., stress, depression, low self-esteem) are greater for female victims than for male victims (Anderson, 2005).

Men and women in Kuehner and colleagues' (2012) study who had been victims of stalking were equally as likely to be physically attacked. However, a greater number of women reported that they had been sexually harassed or assaulted (45.6%) compared to men (20.0%). It is worth noting that 91% of women were stalked by a man compared to 44.4% of men. Thus, the results of the study primarily reflect women's experience of male-perpetrated stalking behaviour compared to men's experience of both female- and

male-perpetrated stalking. The inclusion of same-sex relational stalking highlights the importance of examining nonheterosexual stalking relationships. A relatively large percentage of male-perpetrated same-sex (M-M) stalking may also explain the lack of gender differences on measures of mental health. Men and women stalked by men (M-M, M-W) may experience similar levels of mental health symptoms as a result of the stalking behaviour. It is also apparent that the majority of stalking behaviour goes unreported, and in turn, unaided by helping professionals (Thompson et al., 2012). An examination into the role of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour has implications for the targets of stalking as well as those individuals who are simply exposed to stalking and harassment behaviour. One way of understanding the role of gender on perceptions of stalking, harassment, and violence in relationships is through an analysis of relative power.

*Asymmetrical power.* In discussing the relative harms associated with interpersonal aggression for men and women, it is important to acknowledge that women and men are subject to different social, economic, and interpersonal conditions and therefore cannot be considered equivalent as victims or perpetrators. Greater severity and increased likelihood of harm for female victims may account for differential perceptions of stalking and intimate partner violence on the basis of gender. There is also evidence to suggest that women are more expressive in their use of violence in the course of a conflict, whereas men tend to use violence instrumentally to control, coerce, and intimidate their partners (Kimmel, 2002; Swan, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2009). IPV exists within a gender framework; the use of violence by men against women reflects the gender-based power imbalance of a patriarchal society in ways that violence perpetrated

by women against men (as well as a same-sex IPV) does not (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Feminist scholars and activists seek to highlight the effect that gender inequality has on the experience of IPV by acknowledging the imbalance in women's and men's social power based on gender roles and by conceptualizing IPV as a pattern of behaviour that involves oppression, intimidation, and coercive control (Anderson, 2005).

Nevertheless, male victims of IPV still account for up to half of all partner assaults and often experience serious physical and psychological effects as a result of the abuse. Focusing on female-perpetrated IPV does not negate the harmful effects of male-perpetrated IPV. It simply allows for the treatment and prevention of all forms of IPV (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010; Straus, 2011). The intersection of gender with other factors like age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status can serve to further complicate the picture, particularly because these factors are also related to power. Aboriginal women in Canada are four times as likely to be victims of IPV compared to nonAboriginal women (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Given the minority status and diminished social and economic power of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada, it follows that Aboriginal men would be more likely to use violence to demonstrate power. Women with male partners who are unemployed and women with incomes less than \$15,000 are twice as likely to experience IPV compared to women of higher SES (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Money is a form of power and violence is a means of exerting power. Thus, individuals who are unable to exert power within society (or within an intimate relationship) through financial means would be more likely to use violence, which is consistent with past research (Anderson, 1997). In addition to increased risk of violence, immigrant and minority women and women of low SES may find it more difficult to find supports in the

community and may experience significant economic and social consequences if they attempt to leave a violent partner. In a similar vein, homelessness is a growing problem for women, with a greater likelihood of violence among homeless families (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

One side of the debate argues for symmetry based on apparent similarity between men's and women's engagement in acts of intimate partner violence. The other side argues for asymmetry based on the social and cultural implications of violence against women and the differential harm to male and female victims. Each side of the symmetry debate argues from a distinct paradigm regarding the nature of reality and thus neither side can "win" (Winstok, 2011). In her comprehensive review of the (a)symmetry controversy, Hamby (2009) states that "the moderate asymmetry hypothesis for IPV is currently best supported by the data, and it should be emphasized until a better alternative is found" (p. 33), which indicates that asymmetry more accurately reflects available evidence. Nevertheless, the gender symmetry controversy highlights the role that gender can play on perceptions of violence by pointing out that even professional violence researchers can interpret IPV perpetrated by men and women very differently.

The understanding and treatment of interpersonal aggression rely on outside perception of the event. A great deal of research has focused on the behaviours involved in IPV, but less research has considered factors involved in the perception and classification of intimate partner violence. Given that IPV is often defined not by those involved in the act but by outsiders (friends and family, researchers, law enforcement, judges, and juries), it is important to investigate the specific processes involved in individuals' conceptualizations of IPV. Although the current research cannot and does

not speak to either side of the gender symmetry debate, it does provide information regarding *perceptions* of aggression, and to what extent gender informs an individual's interpretation and subsequent response. One model that has been put forth to explain the processing of sex and gender from a cognitive standpoint is gender schema theory.

### **Gender Schema Theory**

Research on gender tends to focus on the differences rather than the similarities between men and women. This perpetuates the notion that there are innate and enduring differences, allowing for the continued separation of men and women. In many cases, perceived gender differences are a result of some other construct (i.e., level of empathy) rather than gender itself. The tendency to group people on the basis of a characteristic comes from the human need to create cognitive structures or schemas to organize information (Bem, 1981; Howard & Hollander, 1997; Lips, 2005).

Schema theory suggests that individuals process and encode information in their environments using mental representations based on previously encoded information. By doing so, individuals are better able to quickly and efficiently process stimuli. That which is being perceived is a combination of the actual stimulus and the individual's current framework or schema (Axelrod, 1973). Gender is one of the ways in which we organize stimuli in our environments. Children are socialized from an early age to recognize and dichotomize gender differences (i.e., boys play with trucks and girls play with dolls). For example, a study of the role of model gender in children's toy commercials found that children exposed to nontraditional advertisements were more likely to indicate that a toy was for both girls and boys compared to children exposed to traditionally gendered commercials (Pike & Jennings, 2005). Thus, society's endorsement of traditional gender

roles through the gendered depiction of children's toy commercials leads to differential perceptions of gender appropriate toys.

In addition to the media, children's play is affected by their immediate social contacts. An investigation of the role of perceived social constraints of gender, gender stereotypes, and social expectations of gender on children's choice of toy revealed that children's perception that an individual familiar to the child (i.e., mother, father, babysitter, grandparents, neighbour) believes cross-gender-typed play is "bad" were related to decreased time spent playing with cross-gender-typed toys (Raag, 1999). In other words, children who perceived that familiar others would disapprove of engaging in play that is inconsistent with biological sex actually engaged in that kind of play less, suggesting that children may be attempting to avoid negative evaluations from close others. Although the effects of perceived social constraints on girls' play disappeared after controlling for gender stereotype awareness, the perception that familiar others disapprove of cross-gendered-typed play still significantly influenced the amount of time boys spent playing with cross-gender toys. Thus, children's perceptions of how individuals in their environment think about gender influences children's engagement in gendered play, particularly for boys (Raag, 1999). The expectation of negative consequences for failing to conform to gender stereotypes may therefore be amplified when children are exposed to individuals who support traditional gender roles.

Categories of gender and the language used to describe men and women produce and reproduce gendered identities (Moore, 1994). Cultural narratives regarding gender shape language and cultural expectations for women and men (Gergen, 1994). Gender socialization can become so polarizing that biology comes second to social expectations

for grooming and dress on the basis of gender. There is also evidence to support children's use of gender schemas in the evaluation of interpersonal aggression. Preschool children presented with aggression scenarios were more likely to attribute physical aggression to boys and relational aggression to girls when actor sex was not provided, and were less accurate in their memory of the scenarios where actor sex was provided when the behaviour was inconsistent with this pattern (Giles & Heyman, 2005). Thus, empirical research supports gender schema theory and the claim that children are taught to polarize gender, reject cross-gender or nontraditional gender roles, and engage in traditional gendered behaviour.

Masculinity and femininity are culturally constructed. Gender schemas arise from the internalization of traditional gender roles, which allow for the acquired willingness to categorize individuals and behaviours on the basis of gender (Bem, 1993). Gendered stimuli are processed and organized through gender schemas, thereby altering both perception of the stimuli and adding to the larger gender schema (Bem, 1981). Research that acknowledges and investigates the construction of gender allows scholars to look *at* gender lenses rather than through them (Bem, 1993). Nevertheless, the methodology used to examine gender schemas represents a traditional approach to research in which the participant is an object to be manipulated and observed (Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992). Feminist approaches tend to be more person-centered, allowing the participant to provide meaning and interpretation to the data.

### **Integrating Feminist Theories**

Feminist ideologies are heterogeneous and cannot be collapsed into a single theory. Nevertheless, there are common elements among the different theories. For



example, the relation between gender, power, and violence is essential to most feminist theories (Anderson, 2005; Butler, 1997; Cavanaugh, 2012; Fraser, 1989/2004). Many theorists posit that the use of violence by men in a patriarchal society is based on power and suggest that violence is a means of exercising control over women (Cavanaugh, 2012; Lloyd & Emery, 2000). However, only male-perpetrated cross-sex IPV is theorized from this model. Queer theory's attempts to deconstruct the binary models constraining gender and sexuality broaden feminist understanding of the relation between gender and IPV (Rudy, 2000; Valocchi, 2005). The notion of a socially-constructed reality, which shapes identity and behaviour through social structures, is another concept that is commonly associated with feminist ideologies (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Gergen, 1994). Researchers who investigate IPV are encouraged to consider how the experience of violence is affected by unequal and socially constructed roles for women and men (Anderson, 2005).

*Gender, power, and violence.* Feminist theorists seek to extend the conceptualization of partner violence by acknowledging power differentials between men and women based on social norms. Thus, definitions of battering should include reference to a pattern of coercive control, intimidation, and oppression. One way that gender schemas and sex roles limit the conversation about gender is that they minimize the importance of power dynamics in gender relations. In particular, they fail to account for the political, economic, and domestic power that men wield over women (Connell, 1985). An individual's power is related to their status within society – gender is one way of evaluating social status. Women are consistently perceived as less powerful, and less hierarchical in their use of power than men. Men are also more likely than women to

expect social relationships to be based on a hierarchy (Schmid Mast, 2010). The expectation of interpersonal hierarchy is associated with a greater likelihood of perceiving a woman as less powerful than a man in cross-gender interactions, but only for men. Thus, sex of both the perceiver and the perceived influences power-related judgments (Schmid Mast, 2010).

The social roles assigned to men and women create and reflect both real and perceived power differentials. Social roles based on gender intersect with other identities (i.e., race, class, religion, culture, disability) to create hierarchies. Although men are granted more power than women in society, White women experience more privilege than men of colour based social roles that marginalize nonWhite identities. Given that individuals must adhere to social roles in order to be recognized as a “person” in society (Butler, 2004; Moore, 1994), identities based on race and gender (and the way such identities are manifested and understood) indicate social power and impact what it means to be “human” (Butler, 2004). Although power exerted through social norms initially acts as an external influence, norms are gradually internalized and become part of an individual’s self-identity. Social norms operate through differentiation and by restricting possible actions (Foucault, 1982). Thus, social norms act upon and aid in the formation of the subject (Butler, 1997).

Violence is a means of exerting control over another individual. By taking away an individual’s choice to be free from harm, violence exploits and exposes the vulnerability of the individual to outside influence (Butler, 2004). Thus, violence allows for the acquisition and the enactment of power in social relations (Anderson, 1997; Fraser, 1989/2004; Levine, 2003). Historical events, including European colonization

efforts, illustrate the use of violence to acquire and maintain power (Austin, 1983). Power dynamics exist within a social and political context (Connell, 1985; Lips, 2005).

Patriarchy produces, reproduces, and maintains the gender-based power imbalance by promoting men's domination over women. Masculinity is associated with aggression, therefore violence is seen as a means of maintaining the power imbalance that privileges men and masculinity and demoralizes women and femininity (Bem, 1993; Cavanaugh, 2012). Intimate terrorism often mirrors the power imbalance inherent in many heterosexual dating relationships (Johnson, 2011).

Real and perceived differences in power based on gender help to shape individuals' beliefs about men and women. Male victims of same- and cross-sex IPV exist within the same patriarchal social structure, but the dissonance between being a man and being a victim can lead to minimization and even denigration of male victims. Female perpetrated aggression against a male partner is compounded by the perceived inconsistency in gender roles. Given that aggression is consistently associated with men and masculinity, an aggressive woman does not fit with the expected power dynamic for the relationship between women and men. Female aggression tends to be more expressive (rather than instrumental), so it is often labelled "irrational" or "pathological," and thus goes unacknowledged by law enforcement and the larger community. The perception that women are nonaggressive contributes to men's relative power over women by reinforcing men's dominance and women's subservience and fear of men, and by limiting access to arenas like business, politics, and warfare (White & Kowalski, 1994).

The association between control and aggression has been demonstrated by empirical research (i.e., Winstok & Perkis, 2009). However, the reality of power

dynamics and the outside perception of power are not necessarily equal in effect; a review of 120 studies revealed that beliefs about relative power have a greater impact on behaviour than the actual power itself (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005). An evaluation of perceived power as it relates to gender and violence may explain differential responding on the basis of gender. Given the relation between violence, power, and gender, as well as the comparatively greater influence of perceptions of power relative to actual power (Hall et al., 2005), an examination of the role of gender on perceptions of intimate partner stalking is particularly meaningful.

Feminist approaches to understanding interpersonal violence are consistent with power-based definition of violence. However, feminist theories have been criticized for failing to explain same-sex and female-perpetrated cross-sex IPV (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Violence against women is typically perpetrated by men (92% of female physical assaults in the U.S. were perpetrated by men) and women are four times as likely as men to be assaulted by a current or former partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). Thus, male-perpetrated violence against a female victim is a central component of many feminist theories of IPV. Nevertheless, feminist theories can also be used to understand other forms of IPV.

Findings from a review of studies that examined gender differences in power-based motivations for IPV were inconclusive, but there is evidence to suggest that women are also motivated by a desire for power or control (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars, & Misra, 2012). Female-perpetrated cross-sex IPV can therefore be conceptualized using a modified gender-based power theory. Given a gender-based imbalance in structural power, women may use violence against men to create a balance in power (Nobles &

Fox, 2013). Thus, gender-based differences in men's and women's access to structural power can be used to account for cross-sex IPV. On the other hand, there are no apparent gender-based differences in structural power for same-sex couples. Nevertheless, many feminist theories of IPV have moved beyond a male to female aggression model to conceptualize the complex interplay of power and gender as it relates to same-sex IPV (i.e., Hester, Donovan, & Fahmy, 2010).

*Queer theory.* Abuse of power in the perpetration of cross-sex IPV may be primarily gender-based, but differences in structural power are not exclusively based on gender roles (Rorhbaugh, 2006). Feminist theorists have suggested that heterosexuality naturalizes the gender binary in that masculinity and femininity represent opposing but complementary identities (Schippers, 2007). Thus, individuals engaged in same-sex relationships reject the heteronormative polarity of gender as well as structural power associated with heterosexuality. Minority stress has been associated with same-sex IPV perpetration and victimization (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; McClennen, 2005; Rorhbaugh, 2006). Concerns about being exposed as a sexual minority, experiences of extreme isolation, and a distinct lack of legal assistance and protections are common among individuals in same-sex relationships (Rorhbaugh, 2006; St. Pierre & Senn, 2010). Minority stressors represent a social inequality – individuals engaged in same-sex relationships do not have the same structural and institutional power as individuals involved in cross-sex relationships. Thus, IPV in same-sex relationships is associated with structural power differences based on sexual identity.

Consistent with feminist theories on sex and gender, queer theory attempts to deconstruct the binaries that shape definitions of sex, gender, and sexuality (Gamson &

Moon, 2004; Rudy, 2000; Valocchi, 2005). Queer theory recognizes the importance of interpretation for understanding human experience. The impetus of “normal” often leads individuals to ignore disruptions in the status quo (Rudy, 2000). Although queer theory focuses on how culture (i.e., literature, media, language) shapes sexuality, the queer label refers to the critique of normal in favour of acknowledging a wide range of human experiences, sexualities, and identities. Queer theory suggests that sexuality and gender are not distinct concepts but interrelated aspects of an individuals’ personal and social functioning (Valocchi, 2005). Thus, a study of gender must also consider sexuality just as a study of sexuality and sexual identity must integrate an analysis of gender.

Consistent with Butler (2004), queer theory sees gender and sexuality as socially constructed and performative (Chevrette, 2013; Rudy, 2000). Binary categories of male-female and hetero-homo restrict human expression by ignoring alternative expressions of gender and sexuality, or simply labelling them “abnormal” (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004; Rudy, 2000; Valocchi, 2005). Queer theorists seek to deconstruct “normal” by examining the role of social structures in perpetuating attitudes about what is “normal” and “abnormal.” Social structures like marriage and religion influence individuals’ identities by reinforcing categorical definitions of sexuality and gender (Gamson & Moon, 2004). By focusing on cases that do not fit into predetermined categories of gender and sexuality, queer theory illustrates the inability of categorical definitions to capture all variations of human identity and sexuality. Feminism can extend queer theory by acknowledging the intersection of gender and sexuality with other identities (i.e., race; Chevrette, 2013). Both queer and feminist theories have posited that definitions of gender

and sexuality, as well as reality, are socially constructed (Butler, 2004; Dietz, 2003; Rudy, 2000).

*Social constructivism.* An understanding of social influences on gender roles and acts of violence can be approached from a variety of frameworks. Socialization is thought to arise from a need to prepare the next generation for their roles in the social world. Children are reinforced for gender appropriate behaviour, which leads to behavioural differences between boys and girls (Bem, 1993). Boys are reinforced for aggressive or “masculine” behaviours and discouraged from engaging in more nurturing or “feminine” acts, whereas girls are discouraged from being too dominant or “masculine” and reinforced for more submissive or “feminine” behaviour. Failure to conform to socially-constructed roles based on gender creates social stigma. Boys who act “feminine” are called “sissies” and girls who act “masculine” are called “bossy” (Bem, 1993). Given that language shapes perception and thus reality (Boroditsky, 2011), the language used to describe and denigrate gendered behaviour has a significant impact on socialization.

Feminist research has historically taken a social constructivist approach to understanding how gender influences social and relational behaviour (Dietz, 2003; Rudy, 2000). Social constructivism highlights the learning that occurs through group interactions and places knowledge as the product of relationships within a culture or community (Gergen, 1994). Objects do not exist independently in the world, but rather are constructed and negotiated by individuals in an attempt to make sense of their world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1994; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994). Identities are shaped by cultural norms and institutions, which provide social scripts regarding how to think and act (Valocchi, 2005).

Social institutions like religion, law, politics, education, medicine, science, and mass media are built by individuals in power. Male privilege, including separation from child-rearing and domestic tasks, has created institutions that are designed to support and maintain the privilege that built them (Bem, 1993; Connell, 2002; Fraser, 1989/2004; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). A sociohistorical perspective of gender includes early divisions of labour (Bem, 1993). Women, as child-bearers, were (and are) responsible for the care of offspring. Men, who had more physical strength and none of the child-rearing responsibilities, became the warriors. This role bestowed respect and importance, given that warriors were responsible for defending the women and children (Bem, 1993). Early differences in the division of labour between men and women shaped subsequent societies and helped to create the androcentric perspective that has permeated human history (Connell, 2002).

Institutional power held by men has an effect on the creation and enactment of the law. The legal definition of self-defense is an example of legislation that fails to consider women's roles. The definition requires that the perpetrator is at immediate risk of significant bodily harm or death. However, it fails to consider cases of domestic violence in which women may be abused for years before finding the strength to defend themselves, often in ways that do not involve direct aggression given their spouses' (likely) advantage in that area. Rather, female victims of intimate partner violence may use less direct means, and may do so when the risk is not imminent to ensure that they do not place themselves at greater risk (Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Kimmel, 2002). Thus, power represents a fundamental element in the understanding of gender and violence.



A structural perspective on the relation between gender and violence recognizes the importance of power and posits that gendered violence is a result of structures like marriage, employment, and social identities (Anderson, 2005). A social structural approach posits that gender roles are learned through the asymmetrical assignment of roles to men and women within the social structure. Abilities and ambitions are developed within these roles, leading to greater differences between women and men (Bem, 1993). According to the structuralist model, men are encouraged to be aggressive and to express themselves through violence, whereas women are discouraged from engaging in aggressive or violent behaviour. Thus, the relation between violence and masculinity is reinforced by social roles and power dynamics. Power dynamics also contribute to the perception of women as victims – the power structure places women at both a physical and social disadvantage. Structural approaches posit that violence is a product of social and institutional power inequalities and argue that individuals perceive acts of violence through gender based power dynamics and socially constructed gender lenses (Anderson, 2005; Bem, 1993).

Social constructivism serves as a useful framework for understanding the role that gender plays in the perpetuation of violence. Rather than theorizing gender as an individual, categorical, and enduring concept, social constructivism acknowledges the relational and continuous nature of gender and emphasizes the role that society plays in constructing gender roles. The purpose of the current research was to investigate the role of gender on perceptions of interpersonal behaviour that falls under the umbrella of intimate partner violence (IPV; Logan et al., 2000; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007);

specifically, stalking and harassment. Differences in perception were attributed to interpretations based on the larger social context and the meaning in society.

Violence can be understood through the investigation of power and factors that influence power dynamics. Violence research that implements experimental designs in the investigation of aggression allows for the exploration and manipulation of power dynamics. If the social relations involved in an experiment are explicit, the researcher can determine how those relations contribute to violence (Levine, 2003). In order to evaluate gender-based power dynamics on the perception of interpersonal aggression, experimental designs were implemented in the present research to manipulate the sex of the pursuer and target in a hypothetical harassment scenario. Thus, any gender-based differences in the perception of stalking and harassment behaviour were attributed to perceived power differentials and the social construction of gender. A feminist approach that highlights the role of power dynamics was used to conceptualize the research findings.

### **The Current Research**

Violence is a significant social problem (Krug et al., 2002). How violence is perceived (and subsequently responded to) plays a considerable role in how individuals involved in violence are understood, as well as whether the violence will continue, end, or escalate. In 1964, a young woman named Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death outside of her apartment. Her neighbours heard portions of the attack but failed to contact the police (Manning, Levine, & Collins, 2007). Thus, an investigation into factors that alter individuals' perception of violence has significant implications. However, it is morally and ethically problematic to attempt to simulate violence in an experimental setting.

Rather, the use of hypothetical scenarios allows for some understanding while limiting potential harm to the participant (Levine, 2003). Although it is important to acknowledge the limitations of scenario-based research in eliciting genuine responses to violent and aggressive acts, research that manipulates hypothetical scenarios allows an increased understanding of factors that may influence individuals' perception of violence.

Real differences between the sexes do exist, but the more relevant question is how are real differences manifested and interpreted in the larger social environment? Given the complex role that gender plays in identity formation, social interactions, relationships, and sexuality, it follows that individuals may differ in their perceptions of a harassment scenario depending on the perceived gender of the actors in the scenario. The current research examined how interpretations of gender affect law enforcement officers' and university students' perceptions of stalking behaviours. I measured variations in perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour using hypothetical scenarios to determine the effect of gender on individuals' beliefs about the nature of stalking, perceived seriousness, likelihood of harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and anticipated consequences. Specifically, I sought to further investigation of the role of actor (pursuer and target) and participant sex on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour following the break-up of a cross-sex relationship in a law enforcement sample (chapter three) and following the break-up of both cross-sex and same-sex relationships in a university sample (chapter four). Chapter two is a review of essential literature on stalking and the perception of stalking, including research that supports a power-based explanation for engagement in stalking behaviour (Nobles & Fox, 2013).

## Chapter 2: Stalking and Harassment

Stalking represents a significant social problem. A national survey conducted in 2010 of 16,507 women and men living in the United States of America found that 16.2% of women and 5.2% of men surveyed reported that they had been stalked during their lifetime. More than one third of men and more than half of women were victimized before the age of 25 (Black et al., 2011). Stalking is a crime that affects both men and women and has potentially serious consequences. Female and male victims of stalking are at risk of experiencing severe violence (Thompson, Dennison, & Stewart, 2012). Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common among targets of stalking behaviour, with 25% reporting that they have contemplated suicide as a result of victimization (Miller, 2001). Victims of childhood sexual abuse or a history of physical abuse are more likely to be re-victimized by stalking behaviour and have a greater likelihood of experiencing a variety of effects including behavioural, affective, cognitive, physiological, social, and economic repercussions (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007).

Based on data collected from 28 studies, the average duration of pursuit behaviour is 21.6 months ( $SD = 20.1$ ; Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007). The most common pursuit behaviours are surveillance, calling repeatedly, following, and unexpected personal appearances. According to a National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted in the United States, the most commonly experienced stalking or harassment behaviour was unwanted phone calls and messages (63%; Baum et al., 2009). Unwanted letters and emails (30%), spreading rumors about the victim (29%), following or spying on the victim (24%), showing up unexpectedly (22%), waiting for the victim (20%), and leaving unwanted gifts (9%) were also experienced by victims. Half of stalking victims in the

survey reported at least one unwanted contact per week; the same number of victims reported experiencing fear at not knowing what to expect next. Although the rates reported by the NCVS are relatively consistent with a 2010 national survey (Black et al., 2011), prevalence rates vary depending on how stalking is defined and perceived, particularly for gender-role inconsistent stalking (i.e., male targets of a female pursuer) and nontraditional relationships (i.e., same-sex stalking).

Research that examines factors influencing the perception of stalking, such as sex of the perceiver and those being perceived, allow for increased understanding of how stalking and harassment behaviours are interpreted within a particular culture. Researchers have investigated several factors that could influence how stalking related behaviours are interpreted, including relationship context (i.e., stranger versus acquaintance versus ex-intimate), experience with stalking (i.e., as the pursuer, the target, or someone close to the target), and perspective (i.e., rejected/pursuer versus rejecter/target). There have also been efforts to investigate behaviours that do not meet legal definitions of stalking (National Criminal Justice Association, 1993), or criminal harassment (Department of Justice Canada, 2012), but nevertheless involves persistent pursuit of another individual (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). Thus, it is important to be clear about what is meant by the term “stalking.”

### **Defining “Stalking”**

The term “stalking” describes a pattern of behaviour that involves the persistent and unwanted pursuit of another person; most definitions distinguish stalking from other forms of pursuit behaviour (i.e., harassment) based on whether a “reasonable” person

would experience fear as a result of the behaviour (Baum et al., 2009). California was the first state to criminalize stalking in 1990. Within 10 years the rest of the United States, as well as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and parts of Europe followed suit (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Ogilvie, 2000; Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2004). Legal definition of stalking varies by country and therefore incidence rates can also vary based on the definition and operationalization of stalking (Blaauw, Sheridan, & Winkel, 2002; Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003). The ambiguity in definitions of stalking can make it difficult to adequately enforce stalking legislation.

Although the inclusion of “reasonable” fear may appear to differentiate stalking from lesser forms of pursuit behaviour, it is unclear how such a determination is made. Past history of violence, relationship between the target and pursuer, and relative power (physical, social, economic) contribute to the likelihood that the behaviour will result in harm to the target or those close to the target (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Logan & Walker, 2010; Thomas, Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2008). Juries may differentially label a given behaviour “stalking” or “criminal harassment” based on their own beliefs or experiences, or as a result of perceived characteristics of the target and pursuer that are filtered through social norms and cultural expectations (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004). Thus, there may be a discrepancy between stated laws and jurors perceptions of the crime (Dennison & Thomson, 2002).

Despite inconsistencies between jurisdictions, three key components are present in most legal definitions of stalking: there must be a series of acts over a period of time (a single act is insufficient), the behaviour must induce feelings of fear or distress, and there must be intent on the part of the perpetrator to cause harm (Dennison & Thomson, 2002;

Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Miller, 2001; Purcell et al., 2004). Thus, stalking is defined by (a) the behaviour itself, (b) the reaction of the target to the behaviour, and (c) the intent of the pursuer. The definition put forward by the National Criminal Justice Association, which conceptualized stalking as “a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear” (NCJA, 1993, pp. 43-44) is the definition most commonly used by stalking researchers (Lydon et al., 2012). Although the NCJA clarifies the types of (repeated) behaviours that constitute stalking, the definition does not speak to how target fear is assessed and ignores the intentions of the pursuer altogether. Given that target fear (and not pursuer intention) differentiates stalking from harassment (Baum et al., 2009), and thus whether or not the behaviour is illegal, evaluation of “reasonable fear” is particularly relevant. In a mock trial using 129 American undergraduate students, men were less likely to render a guilty verdict when expressed fear was low (Dunlap, Hodell, Golding, & Wasarhaley, 2012), which lends support for the importance of fear in the perception of and response to stalking and harassment behaviour. Although the current set of studies does not explicitly address fear, it evaluates the role of a variable that has the potential to influence perceptions of fear – gender.

Other terms have also been used in the literature to describe behaviours related to stalking. The term “obsessive relational intrusion” (ORI) has been used to describe the recurrent and unsolicited pursuit of an individual with whom a romantic relationship is desired (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998). Several categories of activities have been identified as commonly occurring ORI: hyperintimacy (face-to-face unwanted interactions),

mediated contact (phone calls, emails, letters), interactional contacts (showing up at workplace, talking to target's friends), surveillance (driving past residence), invasion (theft, property damage), harassment and intimidation (sending offensive images, damaging target's reputation), coercion and threat (messages of harm), and aggression and violence (assault, suicide, homicide). As with stalking, the severity of these behaviours ranges from mild (calling repeatedly) to severe (threat of violence) and are distressing to the target (Cupach & Spitzberg).

In contrast, the term "unwanted pursuit behaviour" (UPB) places greater focus on milder pursuit behaviours that may not necessarily fall within definitions of stalking or ORI, and may actually result in a positive outcome for both parties (i.e., reconciliation; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). A study investigating unwanted pursuit behaviour among same-sex couples found that both targets and pursuers reported that leaving unwanted messages, exaggerated displays of affection, and surveillance of the target were among the most common pursuit behaviours (Derlega et al., 2011). Cyber-stalking using email and social networking sites also has come to the attention of researchers (i.e., Chaulk & Jones, 2011; Melander, 2010; Menard & Pincus, 2012; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). The need to expand the definition of stalking and differentiate between different forms of pursuit reinforces the notion that stalking is not so easily defined or perceived. Prior to an examination of factors that contribute to differential perception of stalking, it is worth noting some of the theories set forth to explain why some individuals engage in stalking behaviour.

### **Theorizing Stalking**



Several approaches to understanding stalking behaviour have been posited, including (a) relational goal pursuit theory, (b) attachment theory, and (c) control theory. Each approach can be understood separately and in combination with the others, but each provides a distinct perspective on why an individual might engage in stalking behaviour. An integrated theoretical model of stalking violence has also been proposed in which biological (i.e., propensity for violence, brain abnormalities), sociocultural (i.e., weak social bonds, violence as normative, patriarchal beliefs), psychological (i.e., attachment, need for control), and historical factors (i.e., past use of violence) all contribute to stalking perpetration (Thompson, 2009; Thompson, Dennison, & Stewart, 2013). Thus, a variety of factors may contribute to an individual's decision to engage in stalking behaviour.

**Relational goal theory.** The goal of intimate relationships is connection. When a connection is severed or rebuffed, the intensity of the need to connect increases. However, the level of intensity to satisfy the need for connection with a particular individual depends on the importance of connectedness in the pursuer's hierarchy of needs, as well as the pursuer's perception of available alternatives (Davis, Swan, & Gambone, 2012). Research testing relational goal theory has demonstrated that rumination, resolve to re-acquire a mate, and association with important goals were the greatest predictors of harassment following a relationship break-up (Cupach, Spitzberg, Bolingbroke, & Tellitocci, 2011; Davis et al., 2012; Spitzberg, Cupach, Hannawa, & Crowley, 2014). Negative feelings like hurt, anger, jealousy, sadness, and shame may be experienced and may lead to increased rumination. Greater intensity of negative affect predicted engagement in harassment behaviour (Cupach et al., 2006; Spitzberg et al.,

2014). Potential pursuers may experience persistent and unwanted thoughts and feelings towards the potential target. Attempts to suppress and ignore these internal reactions only increases their frequency and leads to greater intrapsychic tension and distress when the individual ultimately fails. Thus, engaging in unwanted pursuit behaviour is a strategy for relieving negative feelings and for fulfilling important relational goals. In some cases, the goal is to connect. In other cases, the goal is to inflict harm as retribution for the rejection (Davis et al., 2012). Regardless of the specific motivation, it is clear that an individual's relational goals can play a role in whether or not he or she will engage in persistent and unwanted pursuit, especially when the motivation is to acquire or re-acquire a romantic partner. Early childhood experiences, consistency of caregivers, and healthy versus unhealthy attachment may provide some answers to the question of why individuals engage in stalking behaviour.

**Attachment theory.** Several researchers have attempted to conceptualize stalking from an attachment perspective. Caregivers who are overly protective but inconsistent in their love create anxiously attached adults. Anxiously attached adults need reassurance that they are loved by their partners, which can lead to coercive control tactics in order to hold onto their mate. On the other hand, caregivers who respond to distress with anger or rejection, or by simply ignoring it, create ambivalently attached adults. Ambivalently attached adults are often highly self-reliant and see potential partners as dangerous and untrustworthy (Davis et al., 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Although avoidant attachment has little relevance for stalking or partner abuse given the avoidance of close relationships, individuals who are anxiously attached have been found to be more likely to perpetrate physical and psychological abuse (Follingstad, Bradley, Helff, & Laughlin,

2002; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Patton, Nobles, & Fox, 2010). In a sample of 282 college students (39.5% male) who had experienced a relationship break-up, perpetrators who were described as having an insecure or anxious attachment style were more likely to engage in unwanted pursuit behaviour (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). In another sample of 377 undergraduate and graduate students, individuals with an insecure attachment style were more likely to engage in unwanted pursuit behaviour than securely attached individuals (Dutton & Winstead, 2006).

Similarly, in a study of 2,783 college students, anxious attachment was associated with stalking perpetration (Patton et al., 2010). One hypothesis for the relationship between anxious attachment and engagement in intimate partner aggression is that anxious attachment in childhood leads to an angry temperament and a need for control, which has been supported by empirical research (Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Davis et al, 2012; Dye & Davis, 2003). Need for control and feelings of anger and jealousy following the dissolution of the relationship were predictive of stalking in a sample of 338 college students (25.7% male; Dye & Davis, 2003). Thus, an anxious attachment style may lead relational goals to become more salient and may increase the need to exert control over another individual when there is a power imbalance.

Research on IPV in lesbian relationships has theorized that the risk of violence may be based on the level of attachment between lesbian partners. Attachment is theorized to be heightened by stressors related to a minority sexual identity, which cause couples to “fuse” together (Bepko & Johnson, 2000). Thus, attempts to separate or gain independence from a partner are perceived as more threatening and partners may engage

in more extreme behaviours to maintain the connection (i.e., stalking behaviour). However, fusion theory has been criticized for failing to discriminate between positive and negative types of closeness and for pathologizing intimacy in lesbian partnerships. Although fusion theory posits that dependency between partners forms as a result of external stressors (i.e., minority stress; Rorhbaugh, 2006), ratings of closeness made by 77 women in long term lesbian relationships were better predicted by attachment style and age than by perceived social supports or level of outness (Ackbar & Senn, 2010). Thus, attachment style and level of closeness appear to be related in lesbian relationships, but do not necessarily predict risk of violence.

The relationship between attachment and engagement in stalking and other unwanted pursuit behaviour suggests that more research is needed to understand the mechanisms by which anxiously attached adults become stalkers. It may be that persistent pursuit as an adaptive strategy allows for the continued use of stalking at a societal level, whereas an anxious attachment style allows relational goals, power dynamics, and the need for control to become more salient at an individual level. Thus, need for control is another important factor in understanding the motivation to engage in stalking behaviour.

**Control theory.** Control is one way of understanding how mating issues can motivate engagement in stalking behaviour. Coercive control is based on a desire to exert power over another individual and the individual's social environment, which may include surveillance, genuine threats of harm, and isolation from individuals who might threaten the relationship (Davis et al., 2012). Acts of aggression and a need for control are interrelated; there is a positive relationship between aggressive behaviour and

personal control, where the ability to control the self is low and the need to control others is high (Winstok & Perkis, 2009). Use of coercive control within violent relationships is common (Johnson, 2006; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Lloyd & Emery, 2000), including within same-sex IPV (Frankland & Brown, 2014), and is similar to behaviours within a stalking relationship (Davis et al., 2012). Individuals who engage in coercive control and violence as part of an intimate relationship often continue this pattern of harassment after the relationship has dissolved (Logan & Walker, 2009), which can persist for almost two years (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Thus, in some cases stalking behaviour represents an attempt to exert power and control over another individual.

Control balance theory posits that deviant behaviour is caused by an imbalance in power. Specifically, the power that an individual exerts must be equal to the power exerted upon that individual, otherwise the individual will engage in deviant behaviour to either extend surplus power or escape deficit levels of power (Nobles & Fox, 2013). Individuals who employ coercive control over an existing partner are therefore attempting to extend their power and avoid any loss of power that might result from the loss of that partner. In the case of a rejected partner or unrequited love, the act of stalking may stem from a desire to exert control and escape the relative imbalance of power in the relationship that results from being unwanted by the object of pursuit. Thus, individuals who perceive an imbalance of power, whether surplus or deficit, are motivated to acquire more power through the control of another individual.

Empirical evidence supports this claim and suggests that there are differential effects of power and control on stalking for men and women. Nobles and Fox (2013) found that in a sample of 2,783 college students (58% female), control surpluses in men

were associated with stalking perpetration, whereas control deficits in women were associated with both stalking perpetration and victimization. The dynamic mirrors traditional gender roles in which men's power within a heterosexual dyad far exceed women's power, and suggests that men's and women's motivations to acquire control through stalking stem from very different places of power. Thus, the relative power of men and women suggests that the same stalking behaviour enacted by a man may have very different implications than behaviour enacted by a woman. Coercive control of a partner is consistent with many feminist theories on the relation between gender, power, and violence (Cavanaugh, 2012; Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

It is important to make connections between different forms of interpersonal aggression in order to place stalking behaviour within a larger framework. Empirical research on stalking has demonstrated that an imbalance of power and the need to exert control over a current partner are two factors that contribute to stalking perpetration. Perpetration of other forms of abuse has also been linked to power and control (Cavanaugh, 2012). Many of the tactics used to stalk another individual are used by perpetrators of intimate partner violence (Davis et al., 2012). Although the motives may differ, the goal is the same – to control another person. There is a link between coercive control, stalking, and other forms of violence in romantic relationships. Although not all stalking involves current or former partners, the coercive control of a partner through persistent pursuit often co-occurs with intimate partner violence and can be understood as an extension of IPV.

### **Stalking and Intimate Partner Violence**

Despite the perception that stalking is a crime perpetrated by strangers or acquaintances, researchers have begun to consider the role of stalking within intimate relationships (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Logan et al., 2000; Logan & Walker, 2009; Melton, 2007). According to Statistics Canada (2005), 7% of men and 11% of women in Canada report that they have been targets of stalking behaviour that caused them to fear for their own safety or for the safety of someone close to them, and 4% of men and 9% of women reported that they were stalked by a current or former partner. The 2010 national survey of 16,507 women and men living in the U.S. reported that 10.7% of women and 2.1% of men reported that they had been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). Thus, women in the U.S. are more than five times as likely to be stalked by a former partner as U.S. men. For many researchers, stalking is no longer a crime perpetrated solely by strangers or acquaintances; it is now also considered an expression of intimate partner violence (Logan et al., 2000).

A 2000 study of university students from South Carolina found that 40% of participants reported engaging in at least one stalking behaviour following the dissolution of a romantic relationship (Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000). In addition, a meta-analysis of 50 studies found that among stalking perpetrators, 49.8% considered the relationship to be romantic in nature (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007). Of the nearly 80% of female victims who were acquainted with their stalker, the largest proportion were former romantic partners. This pattern has been consistently demonstrated in research on stalking (Logan & Walker, 2009; Sheridan, Blaauw et al., 2003; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007) as well as national surveys on violence (Baum et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). A report on stalking in the United States found that 81% of women in heterosexual marital or

cohabitating relationships who had been physically abused by a former partner were also stalked by that partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Compared to men who had not engaged in stalking, those who had stalked their wives had showed significantly higher rates of emotional abuse and controlling behaviour. The findings suggest that a relationship exists between stalking and other expressions of partner abuse.

One such expression is called “separation-instigated violence” (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Separation-instigated violence does not occur until after the point of separation, usually as a result of feelings of humiliation (Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Kelly & Johnson, 2008), which supports the notion that there are risks associated with ex-partner stalking. Even partners who did not engage in violence during the relationship may engage in “separation-instigated violence” and stalking behaviour once the relationship has dissolved. A Canadian study of men and women reporting experiences of separation induced IPV found that women experience more severe forms of violence (i.e., beaten, choked, threatened with a weapon, sexually assaulted) compared to men (i.e., kicked, bitten, hit) and are more likely to be victims of IPV post-separation (39% vs. 32%). There is also evidence to suggest that women who are in the process of separating from their male partners are at higher risk of femicide, supporting the notion that post break-up stalking is cause for serious concern, particularly among female targets of male pursuers (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

The realization that ex-partners are the primary and most dangerous perpetrators of stalking and harassment behaviour has led many researchers to conceptualize stalking as an extension of intimate partner violence (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Logan et al., 2000; Logan & Walker, 2009; Melton, 2007). Researchers have found a connection



between a history of IPV and stalking behaviours. One study of university students found that stalking victimization following the dissolution of an intimate relationship was associated with both physical and psychological abuse victimization among college women (Logan et al., 2000). Findings from a Canadian study found that both victimization and perpetration of stalking or harassment behaviours were associated with a history of IPV (Costigan, 2007). Four-hundred and fifty-seven undergraduate students who identified as heterosexual were asked about their experience with stalking perpetration and victimization, as well as their history of intimate partner violence. Perpetrators were more likely to have a history of IPV and reported greater psychological distress than nonperpetrators (Costigan, 2007).

In addition, among a sample of 187 female victims interviewed in Pennsylvania, nearly half (46%) of the women reported being the victim of physical violence during the course of the stalking behaviour (Brewster, 2000). There was also a significant relationship between threats of violence and acts of physical violence, which indicates that the probability of violence is high when verbal threats are issued during the course of stalking. In a sample of 107 heterosexual Portuguese women stalked by a former partner, history of violence in the relationship was associated with greater frequency of harassment and invasion tactics, as well as increased frequency of threats and violence, compared to women without a history of partner violence (Ferreira & Matos, 2013). The studies support the notion that stalking is an extension of IPV.

Given the relation between stalking and IPV, researchers have investigated similarities and differences between intimate and nonintimate stalking relationships. Former intimate partner stalkers tend to engage in a wider range of stalking behaviours

and with greater frequency than nonintimates (i.e., stranger or acquaintance) stalkers (McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009). They are also more violent, more likely to use verbal threats, more likely to cause injury, and more likely to engage in property damage during the course of the stalking behaviour (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Logan et al., 2007; Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). Targets of intimate partner stalking are four times more likely to be physically harmed than their stranger or acquaintance counterparts (Palarea et al., 1999). According to Logan and colleagues (2000), partner stalking often begins during the course of the relationship as a means of controlling one's partner and then intensifies following a break-up. Thus, stalking has very real and very powerful effects for individuals who experience pursuit behaviours following the end of an abusive relationship. In fact, findings suggest that the psychological distress experienced by victims during the relationship continues even after the relationship is over (Logan, Cole, Shannon, & Walker, 2006), which may lead individuals to seek extreme solutions.

In 2008, a Nova Scotia woman (Nicole Doucet) attempted to have her ex-husband killed in order to escape the constant harassment and threats to her life (Sheehy, 2011). Ms. Doucet's ex-husband continued to stalk her following their separation. He showed up at her workplace and made explicit threats towards her and their daughter (Sheehy, 2011). When she was unable to find safety through victim services or law enforcement agencies, she decided to take matters into her own hands and attempted to hire someone to murder her ex-husband. Although Doucet was acquitted on the basis of considerable duress, she continued to fear for her safety and the safety of her daughter, who was placed with her ex-husband following her arrest. The case illustrates the connection

between IPV and subsequent stalking behaviour, as well as the impact that continued harassment and stalking can have following the dissolution of a relationship with an abusive partner. Perhaps if the harassment and threats experienced by Nicole Doucet had been perceived and responded to differently, she would not have engaged in such extreme behaviour.

### **Perceptions of Stalking**

In addition to research on the relation between IPV and stalking, numerous studies have examined individuals' perceptions of stalking behaviours. For instance, a study examining 1,785 reports of domestic violence made to the Colorado Spring Police Department found that officers preferred to charge perpetrators with "harassment" or violation of a restraining order rather than stalking (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b). The finding may reflect an explicit decision-making protocol within the department, or may suggest some misunderstanding of or discomfort with what constitutes stalking or "criminal harassment." Prompt police action may be essential in preventing serious physical harm and even death (NCJA, 1993). Therefore, it is important to investigate variables related to the perception of stalking, particularly among law enforcement professionals, in order to understand variations in the identification and reporting of stalking and harassment behaviours. One variable that seems to influence both perception and outcome is the nature of the relationship between the pursuer and target.

**Relationship context.** According to the National Criminal Justice Association (1993) "most stalking victims are former lovers, former spouses, and spouses" (NCJA, 1993, p. 40). Canadian police services reported more than 20,000 acts of criminal harassment in 2009. Men were most often stalked by an acquaintance, whereas women

were most often stalked by an ex-intimate partner (Statistics Canada, 2011). The recognition that stalking occurs in the context of dating relationships, particularly among ex-partners, has led many researchers to investigate the nature of relationship context in perceptions of stalking behaviour.

Researchers investigating community and law enforcement perceptions of stalking behaviour have consistently reported that the same behaviour perpetrated by an ex-partner is considered less representative of stalking than when it is described as being perpetrated by an acquaintance or a stranger, and that the need for police intervention is consistently rated as greater for stranger-perpetrated stalking compared to acquaintance and ex-spousal stalking (Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips et al., 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott, Nixon, & Sheridan, 2013; Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, & Patel, 2003; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013). Participants perceive the target as more responsible for the stalking and are less likely to express concern for the target of the stalking behavior, less likely to report that the behaviour would cause fear/apprehension to the target, and less likely to report that the behaviour would cause mental or physical harm to the target when the target and pursuer know one another (ex-spouse or acquaintance). Thus, research on the role of relationship context highlight a bias towards discounting ex-partner perpetrated stalking despite rates of violence associated with ex-partner stalking that are four times higher compared to other stalking relationships (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). Given that individuals' experiences tend to shape their perceptions (Gergen, 1994), previous experience with stalking or harassment may also play a role in perceptions of stalking.

**Experience with stalking.** Knowledge of an act based on personal experience can influence perceptions of that act (Gibson, 1969). The relation between previous experience with stalking and perceptions of a stalking event has been investigated by several researchers with inconsistent results. Two different studies found no effect for personal experience with stalking on perceptions of a stalking scenario. In particular, the researchers did not find experience as a victim (Kinkade, Burns, & Fuentes, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004) or experience as a friend of a victim of stalking behaviour (Kinkade et al., 2005) to influence participants' perceptions of stalking. Finnegan and Fritz (2012) further extended previous research by investigating the role of three types of stalking experience (victimization, perpetration, and knowledge of a victim) on perceptions of 10 hypothetical harassment vignettes. Experience as either the victim of stalking or knowing someone who had been stalked were not associated with any of the dependent variables. However, individuals with experience as the perpetrator of stalking provided lower ratings on recommendations for help-seeking, suggesting that individuals who had perpetrated stalking in the past were less likely to recommend that targets depicted in the scenarios seek help from friends and family or law enforcement. Thus, based on past research, personal experience with stalking only seems to have an effect on perceptions of stalking if the experience is as a perpetrator of stalking behaviour.

**Actor sex.** In addition to relationship context and previous experience with stalking, the sex of the actors (pursuer and target) has been investigated as a factor that may influence perceptions of stalking behaviour. Findings from several single-vignette studies have shown that although the determination of stalking is unaffected by actor sex, perceptions of subsequent harm, concern for the target, and perceived need for help-

seeking tend to be higher for stalking that involves a male pursuer and a female target (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). The findings may reflect individuals' beliefs that compared to men, women are more likely to experience a variety of negative consequences (including fear) as a result of stalking behavior, which is consistent with reality (Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002; Johnson & Kercher, 2008).

However, single-vignette methodologies are limited in that they do not allow researchers to determine whether the actor sex effect would persist across multiple, brief scenarios. Past research on the influence of gender on perceptions of stalking has also been limited in that past studies have not investigated whether the gender effect holds in the absence an explicit statement of fear or harm (i.e., harassment), which is a necessary component of the legal definition of stalking. To extend previous research, 349 undergraduate students from a large Canadian university were asked to read 10 hypothetical scenarios (in contrast to single vignettes used in previous research) describing the dissolution of a heterosexual romantic relationship by one partner followed by pursuit behaviour by the other (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012). Scenarios described a single behavioural incident and did not include a statement of target fear; scenarios were therefore more consistent with definitions of harassment (Baum et al., 2009). Half of the 10 scenarios described a man pursuing a woman (M-W) and the other half described a woman pursuing a man (W-M). To ensure an equal number of male and female participants in each condition, scenarios were counterbalanced such that half of the participants read a given scenario as depicting a man pursuing a woman (M-W) and the other half read the same scenario with a woman pursuing a man (W-M), resulting in two

versions of the scenarios (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012). Consistent with past research (Kinkade et al., 2005; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003), Finnegan and Fritz (2012) found that actor sex had no effect on whether the scenarios constituted stalking. Participants were equally as likely to identify a scenario as stalking regardless of whether the pursuer and target were male or female. However, also similar to past research (e.g., Phillips et al., 2004), actor sex did influence ratings on concern for the target and recommendations for informal and formal help-seeking. Participants expressed greater concern and were more likely to recommend help when the scenarios described a male pursuer and a female target (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012).

Findings from Finnegan and Fritz (2012) support previous research (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010) and illustrate a need to consider alternative forms of help-seeking when evaluating the role of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour. That is, a strength of the Finnegan and Fritz (2012) study is that it considered both informal (friends and family) and formal (law enforcement intervention) help-seeking unlike past researchers (i.e., Phillips and colleagues, 2004) who assessed formal help-seeking only. Given that more than 90% of 391 college women living in the United States who sought help for stalking victimization reported seeking assistance from friends, whereas only 7% approached the police for help (Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009), perceptions of alternative sources of help-seeking seems relevant.

According to a national survey conducted in the U.S., men tend to be perpetrators of staking (87%) and women tend to be victims of stalking (78%); thus the perception that men stalk women may be consistent with reality (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). On the

other hand, symmetry in men's and women's perpetration of moderate and severe stalking behaviour also has been reported (Thompson, Dennison, & Stewart, 2012). Regardless of whether or not men and women perpetrate unwanted pursuit and harassment behaviours at similar rates, there is evidence to suggest that women experience greater harm as a result of being the target of unwanted pursuit behaviour. Pursuit behaviour of female targets was associated with more depression, more abuse, greater interference with relationships, and a greater amount of personal information revealed. Findings published by IPV researchers suggest that women who are victims of male-perpetrated partner abuse are more likely to be injured and tend to experience greater harm compared to male victims of female perpetrators (Hamberger, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). In other words, both men and women are affected by unwanted pursuit and violence in their relationships, but women tend to experience more negative consequences.

Nevertheless, viewing relationships between people through a gender lens may lead individuals to ignore important facts of a case. Research findings suggest that fear is a strong and consistent predictor of physical, psychological, social, and economic harm to targets of stalking, and mediates the relationship between gender and harm (Sheridan & Lydon, 2012). In order for cases of criminal harassment and stalking to be evaluated fairly and effectively, perceptions of stalking should be based on the details of the case, particularly perceptions of fear, rather than on merely the sex of the actors. Past research indicates that actor sex does not have an effect on whether or not a behaviour is perceived as stalking, but concern for the target of stalking, perception of harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and anticipated response by the criminal justice system are greater when



a man is depicted as pursuing a woman (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010).

### **The Current Research**

Despite the extension of the conceptualization of stalking to include experiences of unwanted pursuit employed by abusive partners, the concept of stalking remains ill-defined. Many researchers have attempted to operationalize stalking and other forms of pursuit behaviour (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998; Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Lydon et al., 2012; Sheridan, Blauww, & Davies, 2003), but the general public's perception of stalking is variable and depends on a variety of context-specific factors (i.e., relationship context, level of persistence, sex of the target and pursuer), as well as characteristics of the perceiver (i.e., sex of the perceiver, previous experience with stalking; Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Although research on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour have provided an excellent basis for understanding the role of gender in differences in perception and responding, two avenues of inquiry are conspicuously absent.

Despite numerous studies conducted using university students (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Yanowitz, 2006), no researchers to the author's knowledge to date have investigated perceptions of stalking and harassment in a law enforcement sample. Thus, study 1 of the current research manipulated a real criminal harassment case to examine the role of actor sex (man-woman, woman-man) on perceptions of stalking (criminal harassment) in a sample of local law enforcement officers. The research improves external validity by increasing

generalizability of previous findings. It also allows for a better understanding of the role of actor sex on law enforcements' perceptions of stalking, which is particularly relevant given the frontline role that law enforcement officers play in responding to incidents of stalking.

A second important void in the literature is that stalking research has focused almost exclusively on heterosexual couple stalking (i.e., Cass, 2008; Costigan, 2006; Dennison & Thompson, 2011; Dunlap et al., 2012; Kamphius et al., 2005; Phillips et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2003; Scott & Sheridan, 2010; Sheridan & Scott, 2010; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000; Weller et al., 2013; Williams & Frieze, 2005). Same-sex relationships are under-researched and often neglected by academics. Although there exists a huge range in reported rates of same-sex IPV, rates of IPV among same-sex couples are considered comparable to heterosexual couples (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009; Brown, 2008; Elliott, 1996). Therefore an investigation into perceptions of same-sex stalking not only allows for more detailed conclusions to be drawn regarding the specific influence of gender, but it also creates a more inclusive definition of stalking following the break-up of a romantic relationship. Study 2 of the current research attempts to expand previous research by examining perceptions of stalking using four different gender permutations (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) in a sample of university students. Although an investigation of same-sex stalking would be pertinent in a law enforcement sample (study 1), sample size limitations make the ability to draw conclusions based on four experimental conditions extremely difficult. The role of participant sex on perceptions of harassment following the dissolution of a same- or cross-sex relationship was also evaluated in study 2.

By extending previous research to include a law enforcement sample and same-sex stalking, researchers may better understand the differential effects of actor sex and participant sex on perceptions of harassment behaviours. The present research may inform future studies and may help law enforcement and community agencies in both prevention and treatment efforts of individuals harassed by a same- or cross-sex ex-partner. Chapter 3 describes study 1, including a review of literature on law enforcement and perceptions of criminal behaviour. Chapter 4 describes study 2, including a review on same-sex violence, and Chapter 5 provides a general discussion of the findings from study 1 and study 2 and attempts to place them within the larger social context.

### Chapter 3: Law Enforcement Sample

#### Study 1: Perceptions of Stalking Among Law Enforcement Officers

The National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA, 1993, pp. 43-44)

conceptualizes stalking as “a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear” (Lydon et al., 2012). In the *Criminal Code of Canada*, stalking is described as “criminal harassment” and refers to conduct that causes another person to reasonably fear for their safety or the safety of anyone known to them. Behaviours include repeated following, communicating with, surveillance of, or threatening of another person or anyone known to them (*Criminal Code*, 1985). In 1997, the *Criminal Code* was amended such that homicide committed as part of criminal harassment is considered first degree murder, whether or not the act was pre-meditated (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). The present study investigated the role of actor sex on police officers’ decisions regarding identification of criminal harassment, perceived seriousness, anticipated harm to the target, and anticipated criminal justice response for criminal harassment perpetrated by a former partner.

Former partners make up the majority of stalking cases in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005) and are the most likely to become violent (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Logan et al., 2007; McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009; Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). Law enforcement professionals become involved in many of cases of criminal harassment (Spitzberg, Cupach, & Ciceraro, 2010; Trainor, 1999). The way harassment behaviour is perceived by the officers who respond to cases

of criminal harassment may have significant consequences for those involved. The early identification of and subsequent response to cases of harassment may help to prevent the pursuer from inflicting serious harm on the target (National Criminal Justice Association [NCJA], 1993). Fortunately, law enforcement officers in Canada are routinely trained to evaluate risk of violence. Unfortunately, satisfaction with police response to cases of intimate partner violence (IPV) decreases if the victim is a visible minority (i.e., Aboriginal or immigrant women; Tutty et al., 2008).

Thus, despite the training provided to law enforcement professionals, officers may be susceptible to contextual factors in their perception of criminal harassment. For example, although ex-partner stalkers are more likely to perpetrate acts of violence and to exhibit higher levels of dangerousness compared to acquaintance or stranger stalkers (Palarea et al., 1999), there continues to be a tendency to perceive ex-partner stalking as less characteristic of stalking and less dangerous than other stalking relationships in both public (Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott, Llyod, & Gavin, 2010; Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, & Patel, 2003) and police samples (Scott, Nixon, & Sherdian, 2013; Weller, Hoe, & Sherdian, 2013). However, specialist officers with specific training in risk assessment, domestic violence, and stalking were less susceptible to relationship effects (Scott et al., 2013). The findings highlight the effect that context can have on perceptions of stalking and indicate the importance of further investigation and training. Sex of the target and pursuer have been shown to play a role in perceptions of stalking and harassment (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010) and may play a role in law enforcement perceptions of criminal harassment.

### **Criminal Harassment in Canada**

To understand the potential role of actor sex on police perceptions of criminal harassment it is important to understand the types of cases that typically come to the attention of law enforcement professionals in Canada. Case management strategies for criminal investigations by law enforcement professionals were examined using Vancouver Police Department investigation files of criminal harassment in Vancouver, Canada (Lyon, 2006). A total of 241 criminal harassment cases from 1997 were included in the study. Perpetrators in reported cases were mostly male (87%) and victims were mostly female (81%). When the victim was female, the relationship between perpetrator and victim was most often former partners. When the victim was male it was most often a nonromantic relationship (i.e., acquaintance). The author notes that this is typical of Canadian samples and may reflect gender-based differences in pursuit relationships (Lyon, 2006). A review of cases of domestic violence in Colorado revealed that 18.3% of women reporting intimate partner violence also reported intimate partner stalking, compared to only 10.5% of men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b). One reason suggested for the difference in prevalence rates for women and men is that harassment by an ex-partner elicits more fear among women than men, leading to differences in reporting (Spitzberg et al., 2010). Thus, women and men experience and/or report experiences of criminal harassment differently.

Perpetrators investigated by the Vancouver Police Department had an average age in the mid-thirties, 39% were unemployed, and half had a history of criminal charges or conviction (Lyon, 2006). Spousal abuse was present in 24% of cases, supporting the link between stalking and other forms of intimate partner violence (IPV; Logan & Walker,

2009). Patterns among stalking behaviours were also found. In approximately 20% of cases, the harassment continued for more than one year and involved over 100 incidents. Repeated phone calls (74%) and showing up at the victim's place of work (67%) were the most common behaviours. More direct behaviours involving personal contact with the victim were less common and tended to occur later in the stalking. Nearly half of cases involved threats of harm. Physical violence occurred in 15% of cases, although most involved more moderate forms of violence (i.e., pushing, slapping, kicking) and did not result in serious injury (Lyon, 2006).

In 40% of cases investigated by the Vancouver Police Department, a warning was used to deter perpetrators from continuing their harassment (Lyon, 2006). Peace bonds, which are orders set out by a criminal court detailing conditions of safety (i.e., restriction of contact), were used in approximately 25% of cases. In 54% of cases, officers charged the perpetrator with a criminal offense. Although a variety of risk factors were associated with greater police response, only four were predictors of arrest: female victim, unemployed perpetrator, threats of physical harm, and physical violence. Threats of physical harm and physical violence were the strongest predictors, suggesting that law enforcement officers are responding appropriately based on level of harm. However, the finding that female gender predicts greater police response indicates differential perception of criminal harassment behaviour by law enforcement professionals based on gender.

### **The Role of Gender on Police Perception**

Female sex of the victim as a predictor of criminal law enforcement response to criminal harassment is consistent with the literature (Cass & Rosay, 2012). Female

victims also predict police response to incidents of IPV (Brown, 2004; Cormier & Woodworth, 2008; Pattavina, Hirschel, Buzawa, Faggiani, & Bentley, 2007). One suggestion is that female gender represents one dimension of victim vulnerability. Factors associated with female gender such as physical size and strength, fewer economic resources, the presence of children or other dependents, and increased fear response are associated with variations in perceived vulnerability (Bem, 1993). In a sample of college students who self-identified as stalking victims, female victims expressed almost twice as much fear as male victims (Bjerregaard, 2000). Thus, female gender itself may not be a risk factor, but rather being a woman is associated with characteristics that lead law enforcement professionals to perceive greater levels of vulnerability among female victims compared to male victims (Lyon, 2006).

Although women are more likely to be victims of stalking behaviour, an analysis of 22,254 reports of spousal abuse to Canadian law enforcement agencies revealed that 6% of women and 7% of men were charged with criminal harassment (Spitzberg et al., 2010; Trainor, 1999). No research to date has explicitly investigated the role of gender in law enforcement officer perceptions of stalking. Therefore, research on the role of gender on perceptions of other types of aggression (i.e., IPV) forms the basis for hypotheses regarding differential responding of law enforcement officers on the basis of gender.

In one study, perceptions of same- and cross-sex IPV among Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP;  $N = 62$ ) were investigated using four hypothetical vignettes that consisted of a mock police report describing an escalating course of unidirectional (i.e., perpetrator-only) physical man-woman, woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman IPV, respectively (Cormier & Woodworth, 2008). Unlike many studies using vignettes, the



study used a within-subjects design in which participants read all four versions of the vignette. There were effects for actor sex on likelihood of contacting the police if witnessed, perception of whether the perpetrator should be convicted, perceived level of violence, opinion of the perpetrator, and perception of whether the victim should leave the perpetrator. For all but the final rating, RCMP officers provided higher ratings for male-perpetrated abuse of a female victim (M-W), indicating that officers were more likely to report the incident to the police, that the incident was more violent, and that perpetrators were more distasteful and should be convicted compared to W-M, M-M, and W-M scenarios (Cormier & Woodworth, 2008). When asked whether the victim should leave the perpetrator, RCMP officers indicated that both female and male victims of male-perpetrated violence should leave their partners compared to female-perpetrated violence. One explanation suggested by the researchers is that victims of male-perpetrated violence (i.e., M-W, M-M) are at greater risk of physical injury compared to victims of female-perpetrated violence (i.e., W-W, W-M; Cormier & Woodworth, 2008). The findings support the notion that male-perpetrated abuse of female victims is perceived differently. However, the results also indicate that male-perpetrated abuse is perceived as more dangerous in general, regardless of victim gender.

Research on the role of gender on perceptions of IPV among law enforcement officers indicates that there is a bias towards perceiving male-perpetrated IPV of a female victim as more dangerous (Cormier & Woodworth, 2008). Female victims are considered more vulnerable and the incident is seen as more violent. This is supported by Canadian data – law enforcement officers were more likely to lay charges or take the perpetrator into custody when the victim was a woman than when the victim was a man (Brown,

2004). An examination of U.S. data from 2,819 police departments in 19 states found that victim sex was a predictor of arrest in heterosexual IPV incidents, although legislation, severity of assault, and location (public versus other location) were stronger predictors (Pattavina et al., 2007). Research on law enforcement experiences with criminal harassment mirrors the IPV literature. The presence of a female victim predicted police response in a Canadian law enforcement sample, although threats of harm and actual violence were still stronger predictors (Lyon, 2006). Given the lack of research on perceptions of staking among law enforcement professionals, a study on the role of gender on police perceptions of a case of criminal harassment seems particularly relevant.

### **The Role of Gender on Perceptions of Harassment**

Researchers investigating the role of gender on perceptions of harassment have found a tendency to perceive scenarios in which a man is pursuing a woman as more threatening than scenarios in which a woman is pursuing a man (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). In two studies conducted with community samples from the United Kingdom, Sheridan and Scott (2010) similarly found an effect of actor sex on impact and criminality such that male pursuit of a female target was perceived as having a greater impact on the target, the pursuit behaviour was perceived as more criminal, and the target was seen as less responsible. Participants were more likely to report that the pursuer should be sent to prison for either six months or five years when the scenario described a male pursuer and a female target than when it described a female pursuer and a male target (Sheridan & Scott, 2010).

Consistent with previous research (Kinkade, Burns, & Fuentes, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003), actor sex had no effect on whether the scenarios constituted stalking, but it had a significant effect on dimensions related to potential harm and perceived seriousness. Taken together, the results suggest that individuals perceive and respond to unwanted pursuit scenarios differently depending on the sex of the pursuer and target. Although actor sex does not appear to have an effect on whether or not a behaviour is perceived as stalking, perception of harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and anticipated response by the criminal justice system are greater when a man is depicted as pursuing a woman than when a woman is depicted as pursuing a man (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010).

The perception that male-perpetrated harassment of a female victim is more serious may be statistically accurate, but it is practically problematic as it underestimates potential help needed for male victims of stalking. Additionally, not all cases of woman-to-man harassment involve less fear or less harm for the victim than cases in which a man is pursuing a woman. An investigation into differential law enforcement perceptions of a case of criminal harassment on the basis of actor sex allows for greater understanding of judgments faced by male and female victims of harassment. By identifying and exploring factors that influence perceptions of stalking among law enforcement professionals, it is possible to move beyond a university sample in order to better understand the role of gender on perceptions of pursuit behaviour in a legal context. It also allows for the development of intervention strategies aimed at educating individuals involved in the criminal justice system that stalking and harassment behaviours should be evaluated

based on the details of the case, particularly actual or expected victim fear, rather than on the sex of the target and pursuer.

### **The Current Research**

The current study sought to extend previous research by presenting law enforcement officers with a single, detailed case based on an actual criminal harassment charge (unlike previous studies which have relied on university samples and hypothetical stalking scenarios; Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). The specific research questions addressed included the following:

- 1) To what extent does actor sex influence officers' decisions regarding the identification of criminal harassment and the perceived seriousness of the case?
- 2) To what extent does actor sex influence officers' decisions regarding expectations of physical and nonphysical harm to target and likely response by the criminal justice system (jury conviction and sentencing by a judge)?

Based on these questions and the literature review presented above, the following hypotheses were investigated to better understand the effects of gender on perceptions of stalking among law enforcement professionals following the break-up of a romantic relationship:

**Hypothesis 1.** Actor sex would not influence officers' identification of criminal harassment based on the findings by Finnegan and Fritz (2012), Phillips and colleagues (2004), Cass (2008), and Sheridan and Scott (2010), who found that regardless of the sex of the actors in the vignettes, participants were just as likely to classify a given behaviour as stalking.

**Hypothesis 2.** Officers would provide higher ratings on perceived seriousness for female targets of male pursuers compared to male targets of female pursuers based on research by Cass (2008), who found that male-perpetrated stalking of female targets was perceived as more serious than female-perpetrated stalking of male targets.

**Hypothesis 3.** Officers would provide higher ratings on anticipated physical and nonphysical harm for a female target of a male pursuer based on research by Cass (2008), Phillips and colleagues (2004), and Sheridan, Gillett and colleagues (2003).

**Hypothesis 4.** Officers would provide higher ratings on anticipated response from the criminal justice system (conviction and sentence) when the scenario depicted a female target and a male pursuer based on findings by Cass (2008).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 101 (87 male, 13 female, 1 undisclosed) police officers from the Windsor Police Service recruited at Police Headquarters in Windsor, Ontario. The final sample included all 101 officers who completed the questionnaire – only the one specific data point indicated was modified (see preliminary analyses). Of the final sample, 87 (86.1%) were male, 13 (12.9%) were female, and 1 (1.0%) did not disclose their sex. Years of experience as a police officer ranged from 1 to 33 years, with a mean of 12.15 ( $SD = 7.77$ ) years. The modal approximate number of harassment cases worked was 100. Key demographic information is presented in Table 1. Officers were recruited at the start of their shifts over a two week period. Four patrol units and three investigative units were approached to participate in the study in collaboration with the Director of Planning and Physical Resources. The response rate was 100%. No compensation was provided.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. In cooperation with members of the Windsor Police Service, the following set of materials and procedures were developed.

Table 1

*Demographic Information (N = 101)*

Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Male	87 (86.1)
Female	13 (12.9)
Undisclosed	1 (1)
Division	
Patrol	73 (72.3)
Investigations	28 (27.7)
Version	
Man-Woman	51 (50.5)
Woman-Man	50 (49.5)

### Materials and Procedure

Permission to conduct the present study was requested and received from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB). A single factor (actor sex) between-subjects experimental design was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Prior to data collection, an informal request to participate was made to specific unit supervisors at the Windsor Police Service by the Director of Planning and Physical Resources at the Windsor Police Service (see Appendix A for study advertisement). Once supervisors agreed to data collection, officers from that unit were approached by the researcher at the beginning of their shifts (“line-up”) and asked to participate in a study examining police officers' perceptions of behaviour following the break-up of a romantic relationship. In compliance with a request from the Windsor Police Service, a letter of information for consent to participate in research was used to ensure officer anonymity (see Appendix B). Officers interested in

participating were asked to read a one page “charge summary” describing a case of criminal harassment, including background history (see Appendix C.1 and C.2). The summary was based on an actual criminal harassment case investigated by the Windsor Police Service within the last year. Names and identifying information were changed. Officers who were involved in the original case were not included in data collection ( $n = 3$ ).

Two different versions of the summary were created: a male pursuer harassing a female target and a female pursuer harassing a male target. The pursuer and target were described as a formerly married couple with a history of domestic issues, threats of harm by the pursuer toward the target and her/his new partner, and a recognizance not to have contact with the target. The target recently re-contacted the police after repeated reconciliation attempts by the pursuer through phone calls and letters. The summary ends with a statement of fear by the target. Once officers read the summary, they were asked to provide six ratings on four different dimensions: identification of criminal harassment, perceived seriousness, anticipated harm, and anticipated response by the criminal justice system. Perceived seriousness was included to assess participants’ general beliefs about the gravity of the behaviour described in the charge summary, whereas anticipated harm assesses participants’ beliefs about the likelihood that the target will be hurt as a result of the behaviour. They were also asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, which asked for their gender, years of experience as a police officer, job assignment within the Windsor Police Service (current and past), and experience with criminal harassment cases (approximate number of cases worked; see Appendix D). Officers were told that the study would take no more than five minutes to complete.

**Identification of criminal harassment.** Officers were asked to rate “To what extent does this case describe criminal harassment as you understand it?” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely*).

**Perceived seriousness.** Officers were asked to rate “How serious is this situation?” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all serious* to 7 = *very serious*).

**Anticipated harm.** Officers were asked to rate “How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?” and “How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., psychological, emotional, economic)?” on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*).

**Anticipated response by criminal justice.** Officers were asked to rate “How likely is it that a jury would convict the perpetrator in a court of law?” and “If convicted, how likely is it that a judge would recommend a prison sentence?” on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*).

## Results

The independent variable was actor sex (male pursuer-female target vs. female pursuer-male target). The dependent variables were (a) identification of criminal harassment (extent to which case describes criminal harassment), (b) perceived seriousness (perception of seriousness of case), (c) anticipated physical harm (likelihood that target will be physically harmed), (d) anticipated other harm (likelihood that target will experienced another form of harm – e.g., emotional, psychological, economic), (e) anticipated jury response (likelihood that perpetrator will be convicted by a jury), and (6) anticipated judge response (likelihood that perpetrator will be sentenced to prison by a judge).



### **Preliminary Analyses**

All data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Scientists 21.0 (SPSS; Statistical Programs for Social Scientists, 2012). Variables were checked for missing data, outliers, univariate and multivariate normality, homogeneity of variances, and multicollinearity. Although some demographic variables had missing data, none of the dependent variables were missing any data. However, one participant wrote in and circled “0” on item six (“If convicted, how likely is it that a judge would recommend a prison sentence?”). Given that ratings are on a scale from 1 to 7, this data point was changed to “1” in the analyses. Results of analyses did not change meaningfully when excluding this item from the analyses or when including the recoded value.

Analyses used to identify univariate outliers were grouped by scenario to ensure accurate identification of outliers within experimental condition. One data point was identified as an outlier based on a  $z$ -score cutoff of  $\pm 3.0$ . Examination of the data revealed that the respondent endorsed a “2” on perceived seriousness, which fell below the normal distribution of scores for this dataset. The data point came from a male patrol officer with 10 years of experience who reported working “too many” harassment cases. Given that his response may reflect the experiences of other officers with a history of exposure to criminal harassment cases, the outlier was left in the analyses. There were no issues with multicollinearity or singularity, and the variances of individual variables were approximately equal. Effect sizes are reported as partial eta-squared and Cohen’s  $d$ ; effects were interpreted based on cutoffs of  $d = 0.2$  (small effect),  $d = 0.5$  (medium effect), and  $d = 0.8$  (large effect; Cohen, 1990).

Participants' scores on the six dependent variables were correlated with participant sex and experience with harassment cases to assess whether participant sex or experience with harassment cases were associated with officers' identification of criminal harassment, perception of seriousness, anticipated harm, or anticipated response by the criminal justice system. There were no significant relations between variables. Thus, participant sex and experience with harassment were not controlled for in the analyses. The mean, standard deviations, and range of each dependent variable can be seen in Table 2. Cronbach's alpha was .74.

Table 2

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range for each Dependent Variable*

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Identification of criminal harassment	6.10	1.15	2 - 7
Perceived seriousness	5.14	1.09	2 - 7
Anticipated physical harm	4.40	1.26	2 - 7
Anticipated other harm	5.51	1.12	2 - 7
Anticipated jury conviction	3.90	1.74	1 - 7
Anticipated judge sentence	1.98	1.22	1 - 5

*Note.* Values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1 to 7 scale.

### Main Analyses

**Identification of criminal harassment.** Consistent with hypothesis 1, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) estimated no difference in mean ratings between version 1 and version 2 on the identification of criminal harassment,  $F(1, 98) = 0.275$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .003$ ,  $d = 0.104$ . Based on confidence intervals for mean ratings of M-W and W-M scenarios with a high proportion of overlap (see Table 3), which represent a range of values that are reasonable estimates of the population mean (Cumming, 2012), participants were equally as likely to identify the behaviour as criminal harassment, regardless of actor sex.

Table 3

*Variable Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals by Actor Gender*

	V1 (M-W)			V2 (W-M)		
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>SE</i>
Identification of harassment	6.04 (1.18)	[5.70, 6.33]	.16	6.16 (1.13)	[5.84, 6.47]	.16
Perceived seriousness	5.31 (1.05)	[5.02, 5.58]	.14	4.96 (1.11)	[4.67, 5.26]	.15
Anticipated physical harm	4.71 (1.25)	[4.35, 5.08]	.18	4.08 (1.19)	[3.73, 4.40]	.17
Anticipated other harm	5.82 (0.91)	[5.56, 6.08]	.13	5.20 (1.23)	[4.85, 5.56]	.18
Anticipated jury conviction	3.90 (1.75)	[3.45, 4.39]	.25	3.90 (1.74)	[3.42, 4.39]	.25
Anticipated judge sentence	2.37 (1.31)	[2.02, 2.74]	.18	1.58 (0.97)	[1.33, 1.87]	.14

*Note.* Values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1 to 7 scale. Confidence intervals calculated using SPSS bootstrapping. Results based on 1000 bootstrap samples. V1 = version 1; V2 = version 2; M-W = man harassing woman; W-M = woman harassing man, male target; *M* = mean rating; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *SE* = standard error.

**Perceived seriousness.** A univariate ANOVA estimated little to no difference in mean ratings between version 1 and version 2 on perceived seriousness,  $F(1, 99) = 2.722$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .027$ ,  $d = 0.324$ . Contrary to hypothesis 2, actor sex (man-woman; woman-man) had a negligible effect. Based on confidence intervals for M-W and W-M with more than 0.5 proportion overlap (Cumming & Finch, 2005) officers did not provide higher ratings on perceived seriousness for female targets of male pursuers than male targets of female pursuers (see Table 3).

**Anticipated harm.** A univariate ANOVA estimated a difference in mean ratings between version 1 and version 2 on physical harm,  $F(1, 99) = 6.604$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .063$ ,  $d = 0.516$ . Officers provided higher ratings on anticipated physical harm when the scenario described a man harassing a woman than when the same scenario described a woman harassing a man based on the small proportion of overlap between confidence intervals

that represent a range of plausible population means for M-W and W-M scenarios (see Table 3). A second univariate ANOVA estimated a difference in mean ratings between version 1 and version 2 on other harm,  $F(1, 99) = 8.420$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .078$ ,  $d = 0.573$ . Officers provided higher ratings on anticipated psychological, emotional, and emotional harm when the scenario described a man harassing a woman than when the same scenario described a woman harassing a man based on the very small proportion of overlap in plausible means (see Table 3). Thus, in support of hypothesis 3, actor sex was related to mean differences in anticipated harm at a medium effect level – officers provided higher ratings on anticipated harm (physical and other harm) when the scenario depicted a female target and a male pursuer than when it depicted a male target and a female pursuer.

**Anticipated response from criminal justice system.** Consistent with hypothesis 4, a univariate ANOVA estimated a difference in mean ratings at the medium effect level between version 1 and version 2 on ratings of anticipated sentencing by a judge,  $F(1, 98) = 11.885$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .107$ ,  $d = 0.711$ . Officers anticipated a greater likelihood of sentencing by a judge for scenarios that described a man harassing a woman than when the same scenario described a woman harassing a man based on confidence intervals (and thus, plausible population means) that do not overlap for M-W and W-M scenarios (see Table 3). However, contrary to expectations and hypothesis 4, a univariate ANOVA estimated no difference in mean ratings between version 1 and version 2 on anticipated jury conviction,  $F(1, 98) = 0.000$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ ,  $d < 0.001$ . Officers anticipated no difference in jury response for man harassing a woman compared to a woman harassing a man based on identical mean ratings with highly overlapping confidence intervals (see Table 3).

Thus, officers provided higher ratings on anticipated response by a judge when the scenario described a man pursuing a woman than when the scenario described a woman pursuing a man, but there were no differences in ratings based on actor sex for anticipated jury conviction. See Table 4 for a summary of the results by hypothesis.

Table 4

*Summary of Results by Hypothesis*

Hypothesis	Supported/Not supported	Main Finding
1. Officers will provide similar ratings on the identification of criminal harassment.	Supported	Officers were equally as likely to identify criminal harassment, regardless of actor gender.
2. Officers will provide higher ratings on perceived seriousness for a man pursuing a woman compared to a woman pursuing a man.	Not supported	Officers did not provide higher ratings on perceived seriousness for man-woman scenarios than woman-man scenarios.
3. Officers will provide higher ratings on anticipated (physical and nonphysical) harm for a man pursuing a woman compared to a woman pursuing a man.	Supported	Officers provided higher ratings on anticipated harm (physical and other harm) for man-woman scenarios than woman-man scenarios.
4. Officers will provide higher ratings on anticipated response from the criminal justice system for a man pursuing a woman compared to a woman pursuing a man.	Partially supported	Officers provided higher ratings on anticipated response by a judge for man-woman scenarios than woman-man scenarios, but there was no effect for anticipated jury conviction.

### Discussion

Based on previous findings in the literature, I predicted that officers' ratings on the identification of criminal harassment would not differ based on actor sex. The results indicated that police officers provided similar ratings on the charge summary that described a man pursuing a woman as on the charge summary that described a woman pursuing a man, supporting the first hypothesis and previous research conducted with

university students by Finnegan and Fritz (2012), Phillips and colleagues (2004), and Cass (2008). The current study suggests that police officers make similar judgments to university students. Thus, the evaluation of whether a situation reflects criminal harassment appears to be based on the behaviour rather than the sex of those involved. In addition, contrary to hypothesis 2 and previous research on police perceptions of seriousness based on sex (Kite & Tyson, 2004), officers did not perceive the charge summary describing a male pursuer and a female target as more serious than officers who read the summary that described a female pursuer and a male target. Thus, sex of the pursuer and target does not appear to influence police officers' perceptions of seriousness. The notion that men who are victimized by women are ignored by law enforcement is not supported by the finding that police officers provided similar ratings on the identification of criminal harassment and perceived seriousness regardless of pursuer and target sex.

In contrast to perceived seriousness, mean ratings on anticipated physical and other (psychological, emotional, economic) harm differed based on actor sex. Participants who read the charge summary describing a male pursuer and a female target anticipated greater physical and other forms of harm than participants who read the summary describing a female pursuer and a male target. The findings support hypothesis 3 and are consistent with findings by other researchers (i.e., concern for the target – Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). It may be that officers viewed men as more capable of defending themselves whereas women were perceived as more vulnerable. This perspective is consistent with theories of perceived gender roles (Bem, 1993) and Goffman's (1977) work on perceived helplessness in

women. Police officers in this study may have based their judgment on a variety of factors, including anticipated biological differences, expectations about social roles and the interaction between men and women, socially constructed characteristics of men and women, or on some entirely different factor like experiences on the job or even knowledge of the research. Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with previous research and support the notion that men and women are perceived differently in cases of criminal harassment.

To determine whether police officers also anticipated differential responding by the criminal justice system on the basis of actor sex, participants were asked to predict conviction of the pursuer by a jury as well as subsequent sentencing by a judge. Mean ratings on both scales were less than 4 on a 7-point scale, which suggests that officers in the study perceived both sentencing by a judge and conviction by a jury as relatively unlikely, regardless of actor sex. Consistent with the results for anticipated harm, officers who read about a man pursuing a woman predicted that a judge would be more likely to recommend a prison sentence than those officers who read about a woman pursuing a man. However, for both M-W and W-M scenarios, officers rated the likelihood of sentencing as low (less than 3 on a 7-point scale), suggesting that police officers do not anticipate a judge to sentence individuals who engage in pursuit of a former partner, regardless of the sex of the pursuer or target. In contrast to sentencing by a judge, officers had higher average ratings but did not anticipate a differential likelihood of conviction by a jury on the basis of gender. Thus, regardless of whether the summary described a male pursuer and female target or a female pursuer and male target officers made similar ratings on the anticipated likelihood of conviction by a jury. Given that officers expected

judges would be more likely to sentence a male pursuer than a female pursuer to prison, but did not expect a similar pattern for jury conviction, it is likely that these judgments are based on actual experiences with the criminal justice system. Findings from the current study were supported by comments made by one staff sergeant who noted that criminal harassment cases rarely make it to court and that judges are notoriously unlikely to convict or sentence individuals charged with criminal harassment.

### **Implications**

The current research has important implications for policy and practice. Based on the findings, police officers perceive criminal harassment perpetrated by a man against a woman as more likely to result in harm (physical and nonphysical) than harassment perpetrated by a woman against a man, which is consistent with the reality of male versus female perpetrated cross-sex harassment following the dissolution of a romantic relationship (Bjerregaard, 2000; Friedl, 2011). Nevertheless, differences in perception may translate into differences in reactions to the pursuer and target of harassment behaviour, despite a similar pattern of behaviour. Male pursuers may be treated as more dangerous whereas male targets may be more easily dismissed or minimized. There is evidence to suggest that requests for temporary restraining orders against a violent male partner by a female plaintiff are more likely to be granted compared to requests made by a male plaintiff against a violent female partner (Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009). Thus, the perception and treatment of partner aggression by the criminal justice system can be influenced by the sex of the victim and perpetrator. Although differential perception may be based on the reality that female victims of criminal harassment experience more harm (e.g., Johnson & Kercher, 2009), the practical effect of using the



knowledge to guide response to cases of criminal harassment is that male victims of harassment may not receive the support and protection they need. Rather than relying on actor sex, criteria like threats of violence and victim fear should inform police decisions about the likelihood of harm to the target.

Police officers are often the first responders and differential perceptions of a stalking incident on the basis of gender may influence immediate responding, as well as the likelihood that charges will be laid and that incidents of stalking or harassment will be reported in the future. Gender-based biases can also have repercussion for judges' and juries' perceptions of stalking, which may influence the likelihood of conviction and subsequent sentencing. The tendency to underestimate potential harm may prevent men from seeking help or contacting the police, particularly if law enforcement officers mirror these attitudes. Female victims of criminal harassment are more common and tend to experience more negative consequences from harassment (Bjerregaard, 2000; Johnson & Kercher, 2009; Lyons, 2006), but there is evidence to suggest that men and women engage in similar levels of lesser forms of harassment termed unwanted pursuit behaviour (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2012). Given that feelings of shame among male victims of IPV are a significant barrier to help-seeking (Cheung et al., 2009; Tsui et al., 2010), male victims of unwanted pursuit and harassment behaviour may not receive necessary support.

It is important to note that in the current study actor sex did not influence officers' determination of whether the behaviour constituted criminal harassment. Therefore, the law was applied similarly, regardless of gender. Perceived seriousness also was not influenced by actor gender, which suggests that harassment of a man by a woman (W-M)

is not minimized relative to harassment of a woman by a man (M-W). However, even if the determination and perceived seriousness are the same, officers' reactions to the actors and decisions about how to proceed may be influenced by differences in anticipated harm. Likewise, the expectation of differential sentencing by judges on the basis of gender may lead officers to make different decisions about whether to pursue criminal charges. However, the low ratings ( $M = 1.98$  on a 7-point scale) indicate that sentencing is unlikely to occur irrespective of actor sex. Although officers' perceptions may reflect real differences between men and women involved in criminal harassment, such perceptions may prevent appropriate action from being taken to identify female pursuers and protect male targets. Joint training of police, judges, and prosecutors may aid in the appropriate enforcement of criminal harassment legislation (NCJA, 1993; Scott et al., 2013).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study represents an important extension of previous research by examining perceptions of criminal harassment within a law enforcement sample. Police officers represent front line personnel involved in responding to cases of criminal harassment. Therefore, differential perception of these behaviours on the basis of actor sex is particularly relevant. One limitation of this study is the small sample size – only 101 participants were included. The sample allowed for adequate power to run the analyses, but a larger sample size would allow for a greater number of conditions and analyses. Collection of additional data also would allow for analyses to determine whether characteristics of the sample influenced perceptions of the criminal harassment case and might also clarify potential actor sex effects on perceived seriousness. However, in order

to maximize the sample size and minimize the impact on the sample, very few questions were asked and only basic demographic information was collected.

The charge summary used in the current study was based on an actual case of criminal harassment worked by the Windsor Police Service in the last year, which could have influenced officer's memories and perceptions. Future research should investigate the role of actor sex on perceptions of criminal harassment in samples recruited from other agencies or organizations involved in law enforcement to determine whether reported findings can be generalized. Finally, future research should investigate whether female gender is itself perceived as a risk factor, thus leading to higher ratings on anticipated harm, or whether factors associated with the female gender (i.e., increased vulnerability, fear response, smaller stature) are responsible for the differential effect of gender on police officer perceptions of criminal harassment (Lyon, 2006). One way to test this hypothesis would be to examine whether the presence or absence of factors associated with vulnerability predict differences in police responding among female victims. If differential responding on the basis of gender is really based on perceived vulnerability, variations in the presentation of these factors should result in differences in perceptions of harm and subsequent reactions. An investigation of vulnerability factors was beyond the scope of the current study due to limitations in sample size and power.

### **Conclusions**

The role of the criminal justice system is to protect the rights of individuals—regardless of their gender—and to advance social welfare through policy initiatives, as well as to prosecute and punish those who fail to conform to legal sanctions. Research indicates that women who are targets of criminal harassment or other forms of IPV

experience more harm as a result of the behaviour than men. Thus, differential expectations of harm reflect reality. However, reliance on gender in the perception and response to cases of criminal harassment may prevent male targets from receiving appropriate treatment or seeking help at all. Enforcement of legislation and appropriate punishment helps to create social standards wherein individuals of any gender or sexual identity feel safe seeking support services and it is unacceptable to engage in gender-based violence. Thus, police perceptions of relational behaviour, particularly behaviour associated with IPV such as stalking is important for understanding how stalking is perceived by the law enforcement community and also has implications for the larger community.

Although the current study represents a meaningful addition to the current body of research on perceptions of stalking behaviour, an investigation into the effects of gender on university students' perception of same-sex as well as cross-sex harassment scenarios would extend the generalizability of research findings to include other actor sex permutations. Given the heteronormative bias of previous research on ex-partner stalking, the consideration of nonheterosexual relationships represents an important contribution to the literature. Additionally, a match in pursuer and target sex through the inclusion of same-sex harassment scenarios, in comparison to the mismatch in actor sex of other-sex harassment scenarios, may provide insight into the mechanisms by which the socially-constructed concept of gender influences the perception of stalking behaviour.

## Chapter 4: University Sample

### Study 2: Perceptions of Stalking in Same- and Cross-Sex Relationships

Man-woman and perpetrator-victim are binary relationships that situate individuals at opposite ends of a single spectrum and describe the relative power of each individual (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004). Same-sex (man-man; woman-woman) and female perpetrated cross-sex (woman-man) aggression are incongruent with the power dynamics inherent in the typical man-woman and perpetrator-victim binaries, which may lead outsiders to perceive the potential for harm as less. However, there is evidence that male and female victims of stalking experience similar mental health effects (Kuehner, Gass, & Dressing, 2012). In a study of 29 same-sex and 134 cross-sex stalkers, Pathé, Mullen, and Purcell (2000) found that risk of violence and consequences for victims were similar across the two groups. The current study investigated the role of actor and participant sex on university students' perceptions of same- and cross-sex harassment following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. In addition to conducting inclusive research, investigation of same-sex harassment allows researchers to understand the similarities and differences between same- and cross-sex relationships and construct a richer understanding of the way that gender shapes perception and behaviour.

Although there is evidence to suggest that targets of same-sex and cross-sex stalking and harassment behaviour experience similar consequences, perpetrators of same-sex stalking in Pathé and colleagues' (2000) study were more likely to be women (62% of same-sex versus 15% of cross-sex stalking) and less likely to be ex-intimates (14% of same-sex versus 34% of cross-sex stalking). Nineteen of the 29 same-sex stalkers identified as heterosexual, three identified as nonheterosexual, and seven did not

disclose their sexual identity. Same-sex stalkers, compared to cross-sex stalkers, were less likely to follow or approach the target (45% versus 69%), but more likely to threaten (72% versus 63%) and engage in property damage (45% versus 39%). Same-sex and cross-sex stalkers were similar in their perpetration of assault (38% versus 37%). Help-seeking by targets of same-sex stalking were seen as comparative to targets of cross-sex stalking in that 73% sought help from friends and family and 60% sought help from the police. Although victims of same- and cross-sex stalking experienced similar levels of distress as a result of the stalking, all but one of the same-sex stalking victims expressed dissatisfaction with reactions from sources of help-seeking. Woman-woman stalking relationships were particularly susceptible to minimization – one respondent noted that her stalker’s relatively smaller stature made it difficult for officers’ to understand her fear.

In contrast to Pathé and colleagues (2000), Derlega and colleagues (2011) collected data from individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) only and reported that participants or participants’ former partners had difficulty letting go of their romantic relationships ( $N = 153$ ; 95% identified as gay or lesbian). In the context of ex-intimate same-sex pursuit, men recalled engaging in more pursuit behaviours compared to women, but there was no difference in the recall of aggressive behaviours. The most commonly identified pursuit behaviours were unwanted messages and surveillance of the target. Physical harm to the target was reported by 6.2% of individuals who had difficulty letting go of a former partner and by 26.8% of individuals whose former partner had difficulty letting go of them, which highlights the

potential dangers of same-sex intimate partner stalking and illustrates the (very likely) differential perception of “physical harm” for targets and pursuers.

The researchers also found evidence of discrimination and prejudice over the lifetime increases the risk that individuals with nonheterosexual identities will be the target of intrusive and unwanted pursuit behaviour when they seek to end a romantic relationship (Derlega et al., 2011). The finding is consistent with research on women’s same-sex IPV, which found that experiences of discrimination and internalized homophobia were associated with both perpetration and victimization of IPV (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Thus, same-sex stalking behaviours and the risk of harm to the target appear to be consistent with cross-sex stalking, but stressors associated with a minority sexual identity increase the likelihood of being a target of same-sex stalking and decrease the likelihood the stalking behaviour will be taken seriously.

### **Perceptions of Same-Sex Relationships**

The American Psychological Association recently submitted a report to the United States of America Supreme Court stating that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that there are any meaningful differences between same- and cross-sex relationships (Mills, 2013). Although same-sex relationships may not be treated with outright contempt, there are often subtle cues that suggest disapproval or condemnation (e.g., homonegativity; Potoczniak, Mourot, Crosbie-Burnett, & Potoczniak, 2003). Unlike homophobia, heterosexism is not based primarily on fear or hatred of nonheterosexual individuals, but is based on belief in the superiority and normality of the heterosexual system (sometimes referred to as “heteronormativity”). Gender polarization and the

gender binary contributes to heteronormativity by situating male and female at opposite ends of a false dichotomy, thereby naturalizing heterosexuality (Bem, 1993).

Beliefs about human sexuality and relationships are filtered through a heterosexual lens in which heterosexuality is the standard (Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Greenfield, 2005). The tendency to view heterosexuality as the default is implicit in most social structures (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Valocchi, 2005). The silencing of nonheterosexual individuals and ideologies leads many individuals to conform to societal expectations (Barnes, 2010; Nakayama, 1998). Laws around partner abuse are written for heterosexual relationships and do not consider other forms of partnerships (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Nakayama, 1998). For example, civil protection orders (CPOs) for gay men and lesbians are not available in several U.S. States (American Bar Association Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2011; Sorenson & Thomas, 2009). The tendency to see the world according to heterosexual norms can make it difficult for victims of same-sex IPV to seek or receive adequate treatment (Brown, 2008; Gillis & Diamond, 2006).

**Intimate partner violence.** Surveys of intimate partner violence in the United States indicate that between 25 and 35 percent of individuals experience IPV during their lifetime (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). Although some research suggests that same-sex and LGBTQ couples experience partner abuse at similar rates as heterosexual couples (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009; Brown, 2008; Elliott, 1996; Rohrbaugh, 2006), a comparison of heterosexual versus nonheterosexual IPV as measured by the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) revealed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents were twice as likely



to endorse IPV victimization compared to heterosexual respondents (Messinger, 2011). There is also no data to suggest that same-sex IPV is any less lethal or destructive than heterosexual IPV. In fact, in a 2006 study, Stanley, Bartholomew, Taylor, Oram, and Landolt suggested that same-sex couples may experience higher levels of emotional abuse than heterosexual couples. Behaviours involving coercive control of an intimate partner, which are essential to feminist theories of IPV (Cavanaugh, 2012; Lloyd & Emery, 2000) and significantly contribute to psychological harm (Anderson, 2008), are also found in same-sex relationships (Frankland & Brown, 2014). Thus, same-sex IPV represents a significant and important social issue.

Intimate partner violence is often seen as being unidirectional with men as perpetrators and women as victims (Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Walsh, 1996). Clear physical and social power differentials make it easier to identify victim and perpetrator and fit nicely into preconceived notions about gender and relationships. Heterosexual IPV in which a man is abusing a woman can be understood with, and integrated into, norms regarding the vulnerability of women and the dominance of men (Bem, 1981, 1993). However, the gender-based power imbalance does not exist in same-sex IPV. Thus, outsiders may assume that there is a match in power between partners and may ignore other forms of inequality. Outsiders may trivialize same-sex violence, unable to see the potential for serious harm in same-sex IPV. Beliefs about mutual violence (Johnson, 2011) may also prevent victims of same-sex IPV from being taken seriously (McClennen, 2005; Potoczniack et al., 2003). Victims and abusers may also fall into these gender expectations and perceive the abuse as less serious and less requiring of help

(Barnes, 2010; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Renzetti, 1997; St. Pierre & Senn, 2010; Walsh, 1996).

IPV among gay men is often seen as reciprocal or simply another expression of sexual deviance (i.e., sadomasochism; Brown, 2008; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Walsh, 1996). Men also may be perceived as capable of defending themselves and may therefore be made to feel responsible for their abuse (Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). On the other hand, lesbian IPV is often eroticized (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009) or simply not seen. Lesbian couples are often depicted as free from aggression and violence (Barnes, 2010). Moreover, any violence experienced by lesbians is often not perceived as being that serious because women are not believed to have the physical capabilities to do any real damage (Brown, 2008; Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Hassouneh & Glass, 2006; Renzetti, 1997). Women involved in same-sex relationships are at greater risk of minority stress given their dual status as both women and sexual minorities (Brown, 2008). There also is evidence to suggest that victims of lesbian partner abuse are perceived differently on the basis of perceived gender roles.

In a study of 287 students from a Midwestern university in the United States, victims who appeared more feminine (based on photographs presented following a hypothetical IPV incident) were considered less blameworthy than victims who appeared more masculine (Little & Terrance, 2010). Masculine victims were also perceived to be more capable of helping themselves, which indicates that even within lesbian IPV, perceived gender roles influence perceptions of IPV. No study to date (to the researchers' knowledge) has examined perceptions of same- and cross-sex stalking or harassment behaviour following the break-up of a romantic relationship. Given the relation between

former intimate stalking and other forms of IPV (Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007), research on perceptions of same- and cross-sex harassment by a former partner may provide insight into differential perceptions of stalking relationships based on gender.

### **Perceptions of Same- and Cross-Sex IPV**

Several studies investigating the role of actor sex on perceptions of IPV have found that partner abuse is considered more serious, more likely to result in injury, requiring greater help, and more likely to result in conviction when the situation involves a male perpetrator and a female victim (M-W; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Poorman, Seelau, & Seelau, 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005; Sorenson & Thomas, 2009). A possible explanation for differences in the perception of IPV on the basis of gender may be due to the perception (and often reality) that women hold less (physical, social, economic, institutional) power than men. Participants in a study of 181 undergraduate students from a southeastern U.S. college indicated that differences in physical size were the primary cause of victim fear, but only in the man-woman condition (Hamby & Jackson, 2010). In the remaining three conditions (woman-man, woman-woman, man-man), victim fear was primarily attributed to personality or relationship factors. Expected size differences may lead participants to anticipate greater harm for female victims of male perpetrators (M-W), thus causing increases in perceived seriousness. As with cases of female-perpetrated violence against a male partner (W-M), instances of same-sex IPV (M-M; W-W) do not align with notions of power associated with traditional gender roles (Anderson, 2005; Butler, 1997) and thus may be perceived differently than male-perpetrated violence against a female partner (M-W). Victims of

heterosexual IPV were considered more believable than victims of same-sex IPV in a study by Poorman and colleagues (2003), supporting beliefs that same-sex IPV is taken less seriously than heterosexual IPV (Brown, 2008; Gillis & Diamond, 2006; Hassouneh & Glass, 2006; McClennen, 2005; Rohrbaugh, 2006).

A large scale study of 3,679 adults representing a diverse sample of ethnicities (only 17% of respondents identified as White) and languages (English, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese) residing in California found that compared to male victims of cross-sex IPV, gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual women were perceived as more “worthy victims” (Sorenson & Thomas, 2009). Thus, individuals who possess less structural power were considered more worthy of help by Californians. Participants were also more likely to respond that the behaviour should be illegal when the scenario described same-sex or male-perpetrated cross-sex IPV. There was no evidence to suggest that sexual identity influenced perceptions of IPV, indicating a shift in attitudes. The researchers caution that findings may not reflect attitudes in other regions or countries.

In addition to differential perception of IPV based on the sex of the victim and perpetrator, there is evidence that men and women perceive IPV differently. Female participants in a study of university students’ perceptions of cross-sex and same-sex IPV were more likely to recommend that the victim press charges compared to male participants (85% versus 65%; Poorman et al., 2003). Men and women were equivalent in their support of criminal justice intervention of male-perpetrated IPV of a female victim (M-W). However, for the remaining three conditions (woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman), men were significantly less convinced of the need for criminal justice involvement (Poorman et al.). The research supports findings from the stalking literature,

which suggest that sex of the perceiver (i.e., participant sex) plays an important role in predicting perceptions of violent relationships. Together, the research on perceptions of same-sex and cross-sex IPV indicate a nuanced influence of gender on perceptions of violence among intimate relationships and support the need for continued investigations into the unique role of gender on perceptions of IPV and other forms of partner aggression. The current research used four hypothetical scenarios (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) to investigate the role of actor and participant sex on university students' perceptions of harassment following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

### **Perceptions of Stalking and Harassment**

Intimate partner stalking is very common among college students, supporting the notion that it exists as a “normal” part of dating relationships (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007). A Statistics Canada (2005) report states that 4% of men and 9% of women reported that they were stalked by a current or former partner. Given the high prevalence of stalking behaviours among romantic partners and acquaintances, stalking must be socially or culturally reinforced as appropriate, or at least expected, in the context of courtship behaviour (Duntley & Buss, 2012). Research investigating the role of relationship context on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour indicates that when the pursuit behaviour occurs within a romantic relationship it is perceived differently than when the same behaviour is perpetrated by a stranger or acquaintance.

**Relationship context.** Stalking by a former partner is often more dangerous than other stalking relationships (Dutton & Spitzberg, 2007; Logan et al., 2007; McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009). Ex-partners are more likely than acquaintance or

stranger stalkers to become violent (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). However, there continues to be a misperception regarding the actual prevalence and seriousness of ex-partner stalking. Despite research findings that former partners engage in more serious forms of harassment behaviour at higher rates compared to other types of perpetrators, harassment is perceived as more dangerous and more likely to result in harm if the perpetrator is an acquaintance or a stranger (Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips et al., 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott, Nixon, & Sheridan, 2013; Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Weller, Hoe, & Sheridan, 2013). Thus, the current research investigated perceptions of stalking by a former partner, which has already been shown to be susceptible to misperception. Given the disparity between beliefs about the dangers of stalking and findings regarding the actual nature of stalking, a greater understanding of factors involved in perceptions of ex-partner stalking behaviour is essential. Participant sex is one such factor.

**Participant sex.** Several studies have investigated the impact of perceiver (i.e., participant) gender on perceptions of stalking. Female participants in a study of 102 (59% female) college students' perceptions of specific stalking behaviours were significantly more likely to judge approach and surveillance behaviours as stalking compared to male participants (Yanowitz, 2006). In another study, first-person stalking scenarios were presented to 172 adults from the community living in a large Australian city (Hills & Taplin, 1998). Participants were asked to provide ratings based on their impressions, including their emotional reaction to the scenario. Compared to men, women indicated that they were more likely to talk to friends or family, rely on community supports, apply for a restraining order, and contact law enforcement. Women also were more likely to

report that they would experience concern, worry, fear, anxiety, and anger in response to be stalked whereas men were more likely to report that they would feel flattered or indifferent (Hills & Taplin, 1998). Participant sex findings have been supported by other research (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Dunlap, Hodell, Golding, & Wasarhaley, 2012; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert, Smith, Geistman, Cluse-Tolar, & Jiang, 2013; Phillips et al., 2004), including results from a large-scale meta-analysis (Spitzberg et al., 2010). On average, men seem to provide lower ratings on measures of stalking perception than women. To extend previous research, the current study examined how men and women in this sample saw same- and cross-sex pursuit behaviour and whether this pattern of results holds for same-sex pursuit.

**Actor sex.** In addition to participant sex, the impact of actor sex on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour has been examined empirically. Scenario based research suggests that perceptions of seriousness and harm, concern for the target, and perceived need for help-seeking tend to be higher for unwanted pursuit that involves a male pursuer and a female target, whereas the determination of whether the behaviour constitutes stalking is unaffected by actor sex (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Kinkade, Burns, & Fuentes, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, & Patel, 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). For example, a predominantly female (71%) sample of 168 undergraduate students living in the United Kingdom was presented with a hypothetical vignette, which described pursuit of a cross-sex individual (Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003). When the vignette described male pursuit of a female target, participants reported that bodily harm was more likely, police intervention was more necessary, and victims were less responsible for encouraging the behaviour and less able to alleviate the

situation than when scenarios depicted a woman pursuing a man. Given that stalking victims are more often women (Bjerregaard, 2000; Lyons, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a) who tend to experience more negative outcomes than male victims (Johnson & Kercher, 2009), participants' perceptions are consistent with the real risks for female victims of stalking behaviour.

On the other hand, participants were equally as likely to indicate that the scenario described stalking and provided similar ratings on severity of the situation, regardless of actor sex (Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003). The findings have been replicated in subsequent studies (Cass 2008; Cass & Rosay, 2012; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al. 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Together, the findings indicate that although potential harm to the target, need for help-seeking, and criminal justice response are perceived as greater when a scenario describes a male pursuer and a female target compared to a female pursuer and a male target, judgments regarding the nature of stalking are not affected by actor sex. However, no known study has examined perceptions of same-sex stalking. Given the dearth of research in this area, reliance on the literature regarding perceptions of IPV in same- and cross-sex relationships was used to form hypotheses on the role of gender on perceptions of same-sex stalking.

### **The Current Research**

Previous research on the effects of gender on perceptions of stalking have investigated stalking and harassment in the context of heterosexual dating relationships, but none to the author's knowledge have examined stalking in nonheterosexual relationships to date. Although an examination of harassment in the context of all intimate relationship dyads (i.e., transgender, genderqueer) is beyond the scope of the



present study, the present study intends to expand previous research by investigating the role of gender on perceptions of harassment in the context of same- and cross-sex relationships. Scenarios that described harassment (i.e., repeated conduct without a statement of fear; Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose., 2009) were used rather than scenarios that met the legal definition for stalking in order to extend previous research (i.e., Finnegan & Fritz, 2012) and to investigate the role of gender on perceptions of scenarios that do not explicitly state that the target experienced fear. Thus, participants' perceptions of same- and cross-sex ex-partner pursuit rely on factors other than target fear.

None of the studies described above explicitly measured participants' attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, which may have influenced perceptions of same-sex IPV (Poorman et al., 2003). Therefore, the current study extended previous research by including a measure of homonegativity in order to control for possible confounding effects. In addition, because experience as the perpetrator of stalking has been shown to influence recommendations for help-seeking in heterosexual stalking scenarios (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012), a measure of pursuit behaviour perpetration also was included.

The specific research questions to be addressed include the following:

- (1) To what extent does actor sex influence students' decisions regarding perceived seriousness of a stalking situation, concern for the targets of stalking behaviour, anticipated harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and the determination of stalking?
- (2) To what extent does participant sex influence students' decisions regarding perceived seriousness of a stalking situation, concern for the targets of stalking

behaviour, anticipated harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and the determination of stalking?

Perceived seriousness was included to assess participants' general beliefs about the gravity of the harassment behaviour. Concern for the target assesses the extent to which the behaviour would elicit feelings of worry if the target was a friend of the participant. Anticipated harm assesses participants' beliefs about the likelihood that the target will be hurt as a result of the behaviour. Help-seeking recommendations assess likely response to the behaviour. The determination of stalking assesses the extent to which participants label the behaviour as stalking. Based on the research questions and the literature review presented above, the following hypotheses were tested to examine the effects of gender on perceptions of same- and cross-sex stalking among university students following the break-up of a romantic relationship:

**Hypothesis 1.** Scenarios that depicted a male pursuer and female target would be considered more serious compared to scenarios that depicted female-perpetrated or same-sex pursuit (i.e., woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios) based on previous findings (Cass, 2008; Cormier & Woodworth, 2008; Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005) that reported that male-perpetrated IPV of a female victim was perceived as more serious, more likely to result in injury, and more deserving of help than other gender permutations. I also predicted that female participants would provide higher ratings compared to male participants (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Finnegan & Fritz, 2002; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).

**Hypothesis 2.** Scenarios that depicted a male pursuer and a female target would elicit greater concern for target compared to scenarios that depicted female-perpetrated or

same-sex pursuit (i.e., woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios) based on the research findings described in hypothesis 1, and female participants would provide higher ratings relative to male participants.

**Hypothesis 3.** Scenarios that depicted a male pursuer and a female target would result in greater anticipated physical and nonphysical harm compared to scenarios that depicted female-perpetrated or same-sex pursuit (i.e., woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios) based on the research findings described in hypothesis 1, and female participants would provide higher ratings relative to male participants.

**Hypothesis 4.** Scenarios that depicted a male pursuer and a female target would elicit greater recommendations for help-seeking compared to scenarios that depicted female-perpetrated or same-sex pursuit (i.e., woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios) based on the research findings described in hypothesis 1, and female participants would provide higher ratings compared to male participants.

**Hypothesis 5.** Actor sex would not influence the determination of whether stalking had occurred based on findings by Phillips and colleagues (2004), Cass (2008), Sheridan and Scott (2010), and Finnegan and Fritz (2012) who noted that regardless of the sex of the actors described in the vignettes, participants were just as likely to consider a given behaviour as stalking. I also predicted that female participants would provide higher ratings compared to male participants.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 384 undergraduate students (185 males, 197 females, 2 undisclosed) enrolled in psychology courses at the University of Windsor. Participants

ranged from 17 to 47 years of age ( $M = 21$  years), and were predominantly White/European (72%), single (50%), and heterosexual (93%). Key demographic information is presented in Table 1. Men and women were recruited using separate advertisements on the Psychology Department Participant Pool Website to ensure approximately equal numbers of each. The Participant Pool is an online system that recruits students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses who have registered as participants. Participants received credit towards a course requirement for their participation. All of the participants provided informed consent.

Table 1

*Demographic Information (N = 384)*

Variable	N (%)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	185 (48.2)
Female	197 (51.3)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (0.5)
<b>Version</b>	
M-W	91 (23.7)
W-M	98 (25.5)
M-M	97 (25.3)
W-W	98 (25.5)
<b>Year of Study</b>	
First year	92 (24.0)
Second year	103 (26.8)
Third year	99 (25.8)
Fourth year	74 (19.3)
Fifth year	10 (2.6)
Other	5 (1.3)
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White/European	276 (71.7)
Chinese	6 (1.6)
South Asian	14 (3.6)
African American	12 (3.1)
Filipino	5 (1.3)
Latin American	3 (0.8)
Southeast Asian	7 (1.8)
Arab	30 (7.8)
West Asian	6 (1.6)

Japanese	1 (0.3)	
Aboriginal	3 (0.8)	
Other	20 (5.2)	
<b>Sexual identity</b>		
Heterosexual	358 (93.2)	
Lesbian or Gay	10 (2.6)	
Bisexual	11 (2.9)	
Other	2 (0.5)	
<b>Relationship status</b>		
Single	192 (50.0)	
Casual dating	12 (3.1)	
Dating exclusively	160 (41.7)	
Engaged	7 (1.8)	
Married	11 (2.9)	
<b>Mother's educational background</b>		
University	127 (33.2)	
College	138 (35.9)	
High School	101 (26.3)	
Don't Know	16 (4.2)	
<b>Father's educational background</b>		
University	138 (35.9)	
College	117 (30.5)	
High School	107 (27.9)	
Don't Know	22 (5.7)	
<b>Ever been involved in abusive romantic relationship</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
No	167 (90.3)	173 (88.3)
Yes, as the victim	12 (6.5)	19 (9.7)
Yes, as the perpetrator	2 (1.1)	0 (0.0)
Yes, as both victim and perpetrator	4 (2.2)	4 (2.0)

*Note.* M-W = man pursuing woman; W-M = woman pursuing man; M-M = man pursuing man; W-W = woman pursuing woman.

## Design

An experimental 4 (actor sex) x 2 (participant sex) between subjects design with random assignment to the actor sex condition was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions (viz., man pursuing woman, woman pursuing man, man pursuing man, and woman pursuing woman).

## Materials

**Scenarios.** A vignette was created based on scenarios used in previous studies on perceptions of stalking (e.g., Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Yanowitz, 2006), as well as commonly identified stalking and harassment behaviours (e.g., Ben, 2000; Davis & Frieze, 2000; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000). The scenario described a relationship that had been dissolved by one partner, followed by a series of unwanted pursuit behaviours by the other partner. Rather than reporting a specific number of incidents, the scenario was created using general terms such as “several” and “repeatedly” to encourage participant interpretation. The scenario described an initial mild pursuit behaviour (i.e., calling several times, repeatedly sending flowers and other gifts) followed by a surveillance behaviour (i.e., following target, showing up at place of work) and an attempt to reconcile (i.e., asking to give the relationship another chance or take pursuer back). However, the scenario did not include a statement of fear by the target. Thus, the behaviour described in this study meets criteria for harassment but not stalking (Baum et al., 2009). The present study also chose to limit the scope to the most commonly identified pursuit behaviours (Amar, 2007; Baum et al., 2009; Davis & Frieze, 2000) rather than include behaviours like threats of self-harm (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998) or cyber-stalking (Melander, 2010; Menard & Pincus, 2012) in order to focus on how gender shapes perceptions of “typical” harassment behaviours in same- and cross-sex pursuit relationships.

Four versions of the scenarios were created, although participants only read one version: a man pursuing a woman (M-W; see Appendix E.1), a woman pursuing a man (W-M; see Appendix E.2), a man pursuing another man (M-M; see Appendix E.3), and a woman pursuing another woman (W-W; see Appendix E.4). Thus a total of four

experimental scenarios were used for data analysis in this study. In addition, a nonstalking scenario was developed in which the “pursuer” sent the “target” a birthday card several months after the break-up of their relationship. Given concerns regarding participants’ accurate responding to survey measures (Rosenbaum & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2006), the purpose of this distractor scenario was to act as a manipulation check for participants who may not actually have read the scenario(s), and therefore responded inappropriately, as well as for those participants who perceived stalking even where there was none (ceiling effects). Thus, all participants read the distractor scenario, which was not analyzed, and one of the four experimental scenarios.

**Perceived seriousness.** Participants were asked to rate “How serious is this situation?” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all serious* to 7 = *very serious*).

**Concern for target.** “How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all concerned* to 7 = *very concerned*).

**Anticipated harm.** “How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?” and “How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?” on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*).

**Recommendations for help-seeking.** “How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends and family?” (informal help-seeking) and “How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?” (formal help-seeking) on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*).

**Determination of stalking.** “Is this a case of stalking?” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely*).

**Homonegativity.** The Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS; Morrison & Morrison, 2002) was used to assess participants' attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. The MHS consists of 12 items which ask participants to provide ratings to such questions as “Gay men and lesbians should stop shoving their lifestyle down other people's throats” on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Items 3, 6, and 9 are reverse scored. Sum composite scores can range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater homonegativity. Internal consistency in the current study was good ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Internal consistency scores reported by Morrison and Morrison (2002) were .91 for both men and women on the gay men (MHS-G) version and .89 and .85 for men and women, respectively, on the lesbian (MHS-L) version of this scale. The authors reported positive correlations between the MHS and self-reported political conservatism, self-reported religious behaviours, and religious self-schema, but reported that there was no association between the responses on the MHS and a measure of social desirability (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). The MHS is a credible measure of negative attitudes towards same-sex relationships (Rye & Meaney, 2010).

**Sex and gender roles.** The Social Roles Questionnaire (SRQ; Baber & Tucker, 2006) was used to assess participants' attitudes towards gender and social roles. The SRQ consists of 13 items. The first five items correspond to an underlying “Gender Transcendent” factor. An example of an item from this factor is “People should be treated the same regardless of their sex.” These items have acceptable reported internal consistency ( $\alpha = .65$ ; Baber & Tucker, 2006) and good internal consistency in the current study ( $\alpha = .75$ ). The second factor consists of eight items termed “Gender-Linked,” and had good reported internal consistency ( $\alpha = .77$ ; Baber & Tucker, 2006) and good



internal consistency in the current study ( $\alpha = .82$ ). An example of an item from this factor is “Girls should be protected and watched over more than boys.” Items are rated from 0 to 100% (0% = *strongly disagree* to 100% = *strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating more traditional beliefs. The SRQ has good convergent, discriminant, content, and face validity, and is moderately correlated with the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Fischer & Anderson, 2012) and significantly correlated with rape myth acceptance and hostile sexism, as well as assault severity and victim blaming attributions (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). Past research suggested that there was no association between the responses on the SRQ and a measure of social desirability (Baber & Tucker, 2006).

**Perpetration of pursuit behaviours.** The Courtship Persistence Inventory (CPI; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000) was used to examine pursuit behaviour perpetration. It is 41-item measure with six subscales. Sinclair and Frieze (2000) reported good internal reliability, which is consistent with reliability scores in the current study, respectively: Approach (5 items;  $\alpha = .77; .79$ ), Surveillance (8 items;  $\alpha = .80; .77$ ), Intimidation (5 items;  $\alpha = .76; .89$ ), Harm-Self (3 items;  $\alpha = .87; .93$ ), Verbal Abuse and Mild Aggression (7 items;  $\alpha = .84; .88$ ), and Extreme Harm/Physical Violence (13 items;  $\alpha = .92; .97$ ). Ratings are made on 5-point rating scales with 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Rarely (once or twice)*, 3 = *Occasionally (more than twice)*, 4 = *Repeatedly (more than 5 times)*, and 5 = *Frequently (more than 10 times)*. The three less severe subscales (Approach, Surveillance, and Intimidation) are scored by adding up the values of all the items in the subscale and dividing by the number of items in the subscale (i.e., by calculating the mean scores). To score the items in the three more severe subscales (Harm-Self, Verbal Abuse and Mild Aggression, and Extreme Harm), item responses are dichotomized (1 =

1; 2 through 5 = 2). The dichotomized items are then summed and divided by the number of items in the subscale to create a mean score for each severe subscale. Higher scores indicate greater levels of persistence.

**Demographic questionnaire.** A brief demographic questionnaire was included, which asked about age, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, relationship history, program of study, and parent's educational background (see Appendix F).

### **Procedure**

Permission to conduct the present study was requested and received from the Research Ethics Board (REB) and the University of Windsor Psychology Participant Pool. Participants were directed to an internet web page after signing up for the experiment on the Psychology Department Participant Pool website. The online survey was created using SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). They were asked to click "Next," indicating their consent to participate in the research and told to print the consent form (see Appendix G). Participants had the option to withdraw at any time without penalty by clicking "Withdraw" at the top of the page. Upon clicking "Next," participants were sent to another page. After providing consent, they were asked to read the scenarios on the subsequent pages and respond to the questions based on their impressions. Participants were asked to provide seven ratings on five different dimensions in the following order: perceived seriousness, concern for target, anticipated harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and determination of stalking.

Participants were presented with two scenarios: one describing a harassment behaviour that does not meet the legal definition of stalking (i.e., no statement of fear) and one nonstalking distractor scenario. Experimental and distractor scenarios were

counterbalanced by actor sex, yielding four different versions of each kind of scenario. Actor sex was systematically varied such that approximately one fourth (23.7%; M-W) of participants read a harassment scenario describing a man pursuing a woman, one fourth (25.5%; W-M) read a harassment scenario describing a woman pursuing a man, one fourth (25.3%; M-M) read a harassment scenario describing a man pursuing another man, and one fourth (25.5%; W-W) read a harassment scenario describing a woman pursuing another woman. Counterbalancing was used to ensure that each version was presented an approximately equal number of times across participants.

Sex of the participant was counterbalanced so that an approximately equal number of male (47.1%) and female (52.3%) participants contributed data to each condition. Male and female participants were recruited separately using separate participant pool advertisements. Upon agreeing to participate, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions for both the experimental and distractor scenarios. For example, a female participant might have been presented with a harassment scenario that described a man pursuing a man (M-M; to which she would be asked to provide seven ratings based on her perceptions of the scenario), and then she might be presented with a distractor scenario that described a woman sending a birthday card to a man (W-M; followed by the same seven rating scales). Once participants provided ratings on the seven questions for each scenario (for a total of 14 ratings), they were asked to complete a demographic information sheet, followed by (in order) the measures of homonegativity (i.e., the MHS) and unwanted pursuit behaviour (i.e., the CPI). Measures were presented based on number of items (least to most) to minimize missing data caused by boredom or fatigue. Following the completion of the study, participants were provided with an

information sheet about resources in the community (Appendix H), as well as instructions on maintaining internet security.

### **Results**

The independent variables were actor sex (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) and participant sex (man, woman). The dependent variables were (a) perceived seriousness (rating on perception of seriousness of case), (b) concern for target (rating on how concerned participant would be if scenario were happening to a friend), (c) anticipated physical harm (rating on likelihood that target will be physically harmed), (d) anticipated other harm (rating on likelihood that target will experience another form of harm – e.g., emotional, psychological, economic), (e) recommendations for informal help-seeking (ratings of likelihood of recommending help from friends and family), (f) recommendations for formal help-seeking (rating of likelihood of recommending help from the police), and (g) determination of stalking (rating on whether pursuer is stalking target).

### **Preliminary Analyses**

All data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed with the Statistical Program for Social Scientists (SPSS) 21.0. The original data set included 394 data points. Variables were checked for missing data, outliers, univariate and multivariate normality, homogeneity of variances, and multicollinearity. Five cases were removed to avoid inclusion of repeat data from a single participant ( $N = 389$ ). Aberrant cases were identified by the presence of substantial missing data on the dependent variables, as well as an identical internet protocol (I.P.) address and demographic information as the preceding or following case, which indicate that the participant exited the survey

prematurely and then returned to finish and obtain credit. Four of the five cases identified appeared to be from the same participant and no data were retained. Data from the fifth case was merged with data from the case just following it. Ratings from the distractor scenario were used to identify individuals who were prone to identify even seemingly innocent actions as stalking, as well as those who did not read the scenarios. Five such individuals were removed from the dataset based on ratings of six or seven (on a 7-point scale) on more than half (4/7) of the dependent variables ( $N = 384$ ) when responding to the distractor scenario.

After removing 5 cases based on identical internet protocol addresses with repeat data ( $N = 389$ ) and 5 cases based on aberrant control data ( $N = 384$ ), the dataset was analysed for missing data. Five of the seven dependent variables had cases with 0.3-1.0% missing data. Missing value analysis revealed the data were not missing completely at random (MCAR; Enders, 2010; Little, 1988),  $\chi^2(33) = 72.2, p < .001$ . In order to find the maximum likelihood estimate, missing values were imputed using expectation-maximization (Enders, 2010).

**Statistical assumptions.** Evaluation of normality revealed a negatively skewed distribution of data ( $N = 384$ ), although specific outliers varied by dependent variable. Thirteen multivariate outliers were identified based on a Mahalanobis score of greater than 25 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Visual inspection of the cases confirmed an unusual pattern of responding, but also revealed that outlier data were predominantly collected from young, ethnically diverse men in a major other than psychology. Although the removal of outlier data improved normality, the demographics of participants with multivariate outlier data indicate that deletion of outlier data may remove meaningful

information and limit the generalizability of conclusions drawn about perceptions of harassment behaviour. Thus, the final dataset included  $N = 384$  in an effort to take a more inclusive approach to data analysis. Subsequent analyses were based on a sample of 384 undergraduate students. There were no issues with multicollinearity or singularity, and the variances of individual variables were approximately equal. See Table 2 for the mean, standard deviation, and range for each dependent variable and covariate.

Table 2

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range for each Variable*

Dependent Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Perceived seriousness	5.32	1.24	1 – 7
Concern for target	5.54	1.30	1 – 7
Anticipated physical harm	4.09	1.40	1 – 7
Anticipated other harm	5.52	1.30	1 – 7
Informal help-seeking	5.50	1.44	1 – 7
Formal help-seeking	4.53	1.69	1 – 7
Is it stalking?	5.72	1.38	1 – 7
Covariate	Mean	SD	Range
MHS sum score	26.74	9.52	9 – 60
SRQ gender linked	37.00	15.82	7 – 86
SRQ gender transcendent	47.90	7.45	10 – 55
CPI approach	1.96	0.77	1 – 4.4
CPI surveillance	1.61	0.52	1 – 3.6
CPI intimidation	1.14	0.42	1 – 4
CPI self-harm	1.09	0.38	1 – 4
CPI verbal abuse	1.08	0.29	1 – 3
CPI extreme harm	1.05	0.28	1 – 3.5

*Note.* Number values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1 to 7 scale for each dependent variable. *SD* = standard deviation; CPI = Courtship Persistence Inventory (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000); SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire (Baber & Tucker, 2006); MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2002).

**Bivariate correlations.** Participants' scores on the seven dependent variables were correlated with their scores on the CPI and MHS to determine whether experience as the perpetrator of pursuit behaviour and attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, respectively, were associated with individuals' determination of stalking and ratings of seriousness, concern, anticipated harm, and help-seeking recommendations (see Table 3).

Lower levels of perceived seriousness, concern for target, and anticipated other harm were correlated with higher scores on the intimidation, verbal abuse, and extreme harm subscales of the CPI, whereas higher levels of the three variables were correlated with higher scores on the gender transcendent score of the SRQ. Lower levels of concern for the target were also correlated with higher scores on the self-harm subscale of the CPI. Informal help-seeking was negatively correlated with the gender linked sum scores of the SRQ. Covariates were controlled for in subsequent analyses.

Table 3

*Bivariate Correlations between Dependent Variables and Covariates*

Variable	Perceived seriousness	Concern for target	Anticipated physical harm	Anticipated other harm	Informal help seeking	Formal help seeking	Is it stalking?
Perceived seriousness							
Concern for target	.770**						
Anticipated physical harm	.478**	.491**					
Anticipated other harm	.617**	.607**	.538**				
Informal help seeking	.564**	.568**	.537**	.597**			
Formal help seeking	.492**	.441**	.569**	.395**	.503**		
Is it stalking?	.597**	.584**	.496**	.504**	.495**	.588**	
MHS sum	-.010	-.097	-.083	-.055	-.079	-.122	-.085
SRQ gender linked	-.048	-.067	-.062	-.123	-.142**	-.039	-.048
SRQ gender transcendent	.132**	.155**	.008	.169**	.095	.034	.108
CPI approach	-.034	-.040	-.039	-.039	-.013	.014	-.058
CPI surveillance	-.070	-.039	-.012	-.004	-.033	.037	-.066
CPI intimidation	-.191**	-.229**	-.002	-.228**	-.1.05	.051	-.107
CPI self-harm	-.123	-.170*	.003	-.126	-.045	.014	-.080
CPI verbal abuse	-.164*	-.232**	.025	-.192**	-.083	.036	-.082
CPI extreme harm	-.162*	-.231**	.030	-.186**	-.092	.039	-.090

*Note.* CPI = Courtship Persistence Inventory (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000); SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire (Baber & Tucker, 2006); MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2002).

\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed). \*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

**Main Analyses**

To assess whether participants' ratings of perceived seriousness, concern for the target, anticipated harm to the target, recommendations for informal and formal help-seeking, and determination of stalking differed across scenario type (i.e., actor sex effects) and by participant sex (i.e., participant sex effects), I conducted a series of 4

(man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVAs.

**Perceived seriousness.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA, controlling for the gender transcendent subscale of the SRQ and the intimidation, verbal abuse, and extreme harm subscales of the CPI, revealed no difference in mean ratings by actor sex,  $F(3, 366) = 1.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .009$ , power = .29 or participant sex,  $F(2, 366) = 0.57$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .003$ , power = .15. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. Findings are based on confidence intervals with a high proportion of overlap (Cumming & Finch, 2005) for man-woman, woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios (see Table 4), and for male participants ( $M = 5.36$ , 95% CI [5.15, 5.57]) and female participants ( $M = 5.32$ , 95% CI [5.16, 5.47]), which represent a range of values that are plausible estimates of the population mean for perceived seriousness (Cumming, 2012). There was no interaction for actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 366) = 1.92$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .021$ , power = .58. Men and women did not perceive harassment scenarios as more or less serious on the basis of gender. See Table 5 for means and standard deviation by actor and participant sex.

**Concern for target.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA, controlling for the gender transcendent subscale of the SRQ and the intimidation, self-harm, verbal abuse, and extreme harm subscales of the CPI, revealed no difference in mean ratings by actor sex,  $F(3, 365) = 1.57$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .013$ , power = .41, or participant sex,  $F(2, 365) = 0.03$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .012$ , power = .35. Findings are based on confidence intervals for man-woman, woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios (see Table 4), and for male ( $M = 5.49$ , 95% CI [5.29, 5.72]) and female



participants ( $M = 5.63$ , 95% CI [5.48, 5.80]) with a high proportion of overlap on concern for the target. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported. There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 365) = 1.73$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .012$ , power = .35.

Table 4

*Variable Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals by Actor Gender*

Variable	M-W		W-M		M-M		W-W	
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI
Perceived seriousness	5.48 (1.27)	[5.21, 5.76]	5.19 (1.18)	[4.93, 5.42]	5.35 (1.13)	[5.11, 5.58]	5.26 (1.36)	[5.00, 5.53]
Concern for target	5.73 (1.30)	[5.47, 5.98]	5.41 (1.25)	[5.16, 5.66]	5.58 (1.12)	[5.35, 5.79]	5.55 (1.49)	[5.25, 5.83]
Anticipated physical harm	4.39 (1.32)	[4.13, 4.67]	3.65 (1.37)	[3.39, 3.93]	4.18 (1.47)	[3.88, 4.46]	4.20 (1.40)	[3.91, 4.47]
Anticipated other harm	5.61 (1.25)	[5.33, 5.87]	5.23 (1.20)	[4.99, 5.46]	5.55 (1.33)	[5.27, 5.82]	5.74 (1.36)	[5.47, 6.00]
Informal help-seeking	5.56 (1.45)	[5.25, 5.86]	5.28 (1.38)	[5.01, 5.56]	5.53 (1.58)	[5.21, 5.85]	5.65 (1.39)	[5.35, 5.94]
Formal help-seeking	4.93 (1.45)	[4.64, 5.23]	4.31 (1.64)	[3.98, 4.64]	4.56 (1.83)	[4.19, 4.91]	4.34 (1.71)	[4.00, 4.69]
Is it stalking?	5.87 (1.40)	[5.60, 6.16]	5.72 (1.24)	[5.48, 5.98]	5.75 (1.39)	[5.47, 6.02]	5.54 (1.52)	[5.23, 5.86]

*Note.* Values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1 to 7 scale. Confidence intervals calculated using SPSS bootstrapping. Results based on 1000 bootstrap samples. M-W = man harassing woman; W-M = woman harassing man; M-M = man harassing man; W-W = woman harassing woman; *M* = mean rating; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval

**Anticipated physical harm.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA revealed a difference in mean ratings on anticipated physical harm by actor sex,  $F(3, 374) = 2.72$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .021$ , power = .66, but not participant sex,  $F(2, 374) = 0.70$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ , power = .17. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported (see Table 5). Findings are based on confidence intervals, which indicate that plausible values of the population mean for ratings of anticipated physical harm for the woman-man scenario do not include plausible values of the population mean

for man-woman scenario. There was also little overlap between the range of plausible population mean ratings of anticipated physical harm for the woman-man scenario and the range of plausible mean ratings on woman-woman and man-man scenarios (see Table 4). Thus, the woman-man scenario elicited lower mean ratings on likelihood of physical harm than man-woman ( $d = 0.54$ ; medium effect), woman-woman ( $d = 0.38$ ; medium effect), and man-man ( $d = 0.36$ ; medium effect) scenarios. However, there was substantial overlap between confidence intervals for man-woman, woman-woman, and man-man scenarios (see Table 4), and for male ( $M = 4.06$ , 95% CI [3.84, 4.27]) and female participants ( $M = 4.11$ , 95% CI [3.92, 4.29]). There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 374) = 0.78$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .008$ , power = .25.

Table 5

*Variable Means and Standard Deviation by Actor Sex and Participant Sex*

Variable	Men <i>M (SD)</i>			
	M-W	W-M	M-M	W-W
Perceived seriousness	5.28 (1.45)	5.20 (1.36)	5.65 (1.07)	5.29 (1.49)
Concern for target	5.46 (1.48)	5.30 (1.49)	5.63 (1.17)	5.56 (1.57)
Anticipated physical harm	4.20 (1.18)	3.59 (1.56)	4.33 (1.46)	4.12 (1.48)
Anticipated other harm	5.53 (1.52)	5.26 (1.41)	5.58 (1.44)	5.60 (1.51)
Informal help-seeking	5.35 (1.70)	4.96 (1.63)	5.63 (1.59)	5.52 (1.50)
Formal help-seeking	5.08 (1.60)	4.17 (1.84)	4.71 (1.88)	4.39 (1.81)
Is it stalking?	5.90 (1.57)	5.91 (1.17)	6.00 (1.31)	5.58 (1.58)
Variable	Women			
	M-W	W-M	M-M	W-W
Perceived seriousness	5.64 (1.10)	5.22 (1.01)	5.09 (1.14)	5.33 (1.12)
Concern for target	5.94 (1.11)	5.55 (0.95)	5.51 (1.08)	5.52 (1.40)
Anticipated physical harm	4.53 (1.42)	3.69 (1.18)	3.98 (1.45)	4.23 (1.29)
Anticipated other harm	5.70 (1.00)	5.24 (0.96)	5.45 (1.32)	5.87 (1.19)
Informal help-seeking	5.73 (1.20)	5.59 (1.04)	5.43 (1.56)	5.77 (1.24)
Formal help-seeking	4.96 (1.26)	4.45 (1.47)	4.30 (1.80)	4.34 (1.59)
Is it stalking?	5.86 (1.26)	5.59 (1.28)	5.53 (1.44)	5.50 (1.43)

*Note.* Values in the table are based on Likert-type ratings on a 1 to 7 scale. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; M-W = man pursuing woman; W-M = woman pursuing man; M-M = man pursuing man; W-W = woman pursuing woman.

**Anticipated other harm.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA, controlling for the gender transcendent subscale of the SRQ and the intimidation, verbal abuse, and extreme harm subscales of the CPI, revealed a difference in mean ratings on anticipated other harm (emotional, psychological, economic) by actor sex,  $F(3, 366) = 3.52$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .028$ , power = .78, but not participant sex,  $F(2, 366) = 0.20$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .001$ , power = .08. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported (see Table 5). Findings are based on confidence intervals, which indicate that plausible values of the population mean for ratings of anticipated other harm for the woman-man scenario do not include plausible values of the population mean for woman-woman scenario (see Table 4). Thus, the woman-woman scenario elicited higher mean ratings on the likelihood of emotional, psychological, and economic harm than the woman-man scenario ( $d = 0.39$ ; medium effect). On the other hand, the proportion of overlap between woman-man and ratings for man-woman and man-man scenarios (see Table 4), as well as between male participants ( $M = 5.51$ , 95% CI [5.30, 5.74]) and female participants ( $M = 5.56$ , 95% CI [5.40, 5.72]) indicated little to no difference in population mean ratings on anticipated other harm. There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 366) = 0.34$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ , power = .13.

**Recommendations for informal help-seeking.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA, controlling for the gender linked subscale of the SRQ, revealed no difference in mean ratings on recommendations to seek help from friends and family by actor sex,  $F(3, 373) = 0.88$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , power = .24 or participant sex,  $F(2, 373) = 0.76$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ , power = .18. Thus, hypothesis 4 was not supported (see Table 5). Findings are based on confidence intervals

with a high proportion of overlap for man-woman, woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios (see Table 4), and for male participants ( $M = 5.37$ , 95% CI [5.15, 5.60]) and female participants ( $M = 5.63$ , 95% CI [5.44, 5.81]), which represent a range of values that are reasonable estimates of the population mean for informal help-seeking recommendations. There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 373) = 1.20$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .013$ , power = .38.

**Recommendations for formal help-seeking.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA, revealed a difference in mean ratings on recommendations to seek help from the police by actor sex,  $F(3, 373) = 2.72$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .021$ , power = .66, but not participant sex,  $F(2, 373) = 0.06$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ , power = .06. Thus, hypothesis 4 was partially supported (see Table 5). Findings are based on confidence intervals, which indicate that the range of plausible values of the population mean for ratings of formal help-seeking recommendations for the woman-man scenario do not include plausible values of the population mean for man-woman scenario (see Table 4). There was also a low proportion of overlap between the range of mean ratings of recommendations of formal help-seeking for the man-woman scenario and the range of mean ratings on woman-woman scenario (see Table 4). Thus, the man-woman scenario elicited higher mean ratings on formal help-seeking than woman-man ( $d = 0.42$ ; medium effect) and woman-woman ( $d = 0.39$ ; medium effect) scenarios. However, the high proportion of overlap between confidence intervals for man-woman and man-man scenarios (see Table 4), and for male participants ( $M = 4.54$ , 95% CI [4.27, 4.79]) and female participants ( $M = 4.54$ , 95% CI [4.33, 4.76]) on formal help-seeking

recommendations, indicate no difference in population mean ratings. There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 374) = 0.68$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , power = .22.

**Determination of stalking.** A 4 (man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman) x 2 (male, female) univariate ANOVA revealed no difference in mean ratings on the determination of stalking by actor sex,  $F(3, 374) = 1.08$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .009$ , power = .29 or participant sex,  $F(2, 372) = 2.00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .011$ , power = .41. Thus, hypothesis 5 was partially supported (see Table 5). Findings are based on confidence intervals with a high proportion of overlap for man-woman, woman-man, man-man, and woman-woman scenarios (see Table 4), and for male participants ( $M = 5.83$ , 95% CI [5.62, 6.03]) and female participants ( $M = 5.62$ , 95% CI [5.43, 5.81]), which represent a range of values that are reasonable estimates of the population mean for the determination of stalking. There was no interaction between actor and participant sex,  $F(4, 374) = 0.41$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ , power = .15. See Table 6 for a summary of main findings by hypothesis.

## Discussion

### Key Findings and Implications

The present study investigated the role of gender on perceptions of same-sex and cross-sex harassment following the dissolution of a romantic relationship using a university sample, which represents an important addition to the literature by extending romantic relationships to include same-sex couples. Five main hypotheses were examined. The first and second hypotheses, which stated that both actor and participant sex would have an effect on (a) ratings of perceived seriousness of the case and (b) ratings of concern for the target of the behaviour, were not supported. Specifically, participants responding to the M-W scenario did not perceive the case as more serious

and did not express more concern for the target than participants responding to W-M, W-W, or M-M scenarios and female participants did not provide higher ratings than male participants. Although the findings suggest that men and women do not differ in their concern for the target or their perception of the seriousness of a potential stalking situation based on the sex of the target and pursuer, the actor sex effects were in the expected direction (i.e.,  $M-W > W-M$ ).

Nevertheless, university students in the current study perceived harassment of a man by a woman (W-M) and cases of same-sex harassment (M-M; W-W) as being similarly serious as M-W harassment, and expressed similar levels of concern for the target of each couple gender pairing. Finding no difference in ratings based on actor gender on perceived seriousness and concern for the target contradict the claim that male targets of intimate partner aggression, including stalking and harassment behaviour, do not receive adequate attention or concern. Although the results cannot necessarily be generalized to other samples, the data are based on perceptions of approximately equal numbers of men and women, which is more representative of the general population. Health care and law enforcement professionals reviewing cases with similar patterns of harassment might express similar levels of concern for the target, and perceive the cases as equally serious, regardless of their own sex or the sex of those involved in the case.

There are several possible explanations for why the present study's findings differ from past research's findings. First, unlike previous research which is based on samples primarily composed of women, the current findings are based on an equal number of women and men. Past research suggests that men tend to provide lower ratings on domains related to stalking than women (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013;

Phillips et al., 2004; Spitzberg et al., 2010; Yanowitz, 2006), which may help explain why gender effects were not found. Second, previous research has tended to describe behaviour that meets the legal definition of stalking (i.e., includes a statement of fear). It may be that fear mediates the relation between gender and perception (e.g., Sheridan & Lydon, 2012), which is consistent with the finding that participants who read a scenario without a statement of fear showed no effect for actor sex on perceived seriousness, but those same participants perceived a scenario that met the legal definition as less serious when it described W-M compared to M-W pursuit behaviour (Rorai, Finnegan, & Fritz, 2013). Finally, the results may reflect evolving attitudes about gender as it relates to experiences of harassment and other forms of IPV, and may challenge claims that victimization of men is not taken seriously. Nevertheless, the results of the current research indicate that when presented with hypothetical harassment scenarios, gender does not influence ratings of perceived seriousness or concern for the target.

**Differential expectations of harm.** The current study also investigated the role of gender on perceptions of anticipated physical and other (emotional, psychological, economic) harm. The third hypothesis, which stated that both actor and participant sex would have an effect on ratings of anticipated harm, was partially supported. Female participants did not provide higher ratings than male participants. Thus, men and women did not differ in their expectations of harm. However, participants responding to the W-M scenario had lower ratings on the likelihood of physical harm than participants responding to M-W, W-W, or M-M scenarios, and lower ratings on the likelihood of other harm than participants responding to the W-W scenario. The pattern of results is

consistent with previous research on perceptions of cross-sex ex-partner stalking (Cass, 2008; Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010).

Table 6

*Summary of Results by Hypothesis*

Hypothesis	Supported/Not supported	Main Finding
1a. M-W scenario will be considered more serious compared to W-M, W-W, and M-M scenarios.	Not supported	Men and women did not perceive hypothetical harassment scenarios as more or less serious on the basis of gender.
1b. Female participants will provide higher ratings than male participants.		
2a. M-W scenario will elicit more concern compared to W-M, W-W, and M-M scenarios.	Not supported	Men and women did not express differential concern for the target on the basis of gender.
2b. Female participants will provide higher ratings than male participants.		
3a. M-W scenario will elicit more anticipated harm compared to W-M, W-W, and M-M scenarios.	Partially supported	3a. W-M scenarios elicited less anticipated physical harm than M-W and less other harm than W-W. 3b. Men and women did not anticipate different likelihood of harm.
3b. Female participants will provide higher ratings than male participants.		
4a. M-W scenario will elicit more recommendations compared to W-M, W-W, and M-M scenarios.	Partially supported	4a. M-W scenario elicited more formal recommendations compared to W-M. 4b. Men and women did not differ in their help-seeking recommendations.
4b. Female participants will provide higher ratings than male participants.		
5a. The determination on whether stalking has occurred will not differ by actor sex.	Partially supported	5a. Participants were no more likely to identify the behaviour as stalking based on the sex of the actors. 5b. Men and women did not differ in their determination of stalking.
5b. Female participants will provide higher ratings than male participants.		



Inclusion of same-sex harassment scenarios allowed for a richer understanding of the mechanism by which gender shapes perception. By casting men and women as both pursuer and target simultaneously, it is possible to examine the relational nature of gender and how the match (i.e., same-sex pursuit) or mismatch (i.e., cross-sex pursuit) in actor sex influences participant ratings. Both lesbian (W-W) and gay male (M-M) harassment scenarios were perceived as more likely to result in physical harm than scenarios describing cross-sex harassment perpetrated by a woman against a man (W-M). In other words, when women were cast as the pursuer and men as the target (W-M), participants did not anticipate the same degree of physical harm relative to W-W and M-M harassment. The lesbian (W-W) scenario was also perceived as more likely to result in other (economic, psychological, emotional) harm compared to female pursuit of a male target (W-M).

The finding that  $W-W > W-M$  on likelihood of both physical and other harm may mean female targets are perceived as more vulnerable to harm than male targets. However, the presumption of masculinity of lesbians may also explain the results. Research suggests that lesbians are perceived as more masculine than heterosexual women (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). A female pursuer may be perceived as more masculine by the presence of a female target, and thus perceived as more likely to inflict harm given that masculinity is associated with aggression and dominance. Social norms about masculinity and femininity and the roles of men and women in relationships may have led participants to perceive a heterosexual woman pursuing a male target (W-M) as more traditionally feminine and less likely to inflict harm. Thus, participants may have

anticipated that the likelihood of harm would be greater for a woman pursued by another woman (W-W) than a man who was pursued by a woman (W-M).

Although consistent with the reality that male victims of female perpetrated IPV do not, on average, experience the same level of harm as victims of same-sex IPV (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009) or female victims of male-perpetrated IPV (Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Johnson & Kercher, 2009), the finding has implications for the perception and subsequent treatment of pursuers and targets by support services, law enforcement, and the public. Given the observed effect of actor sex on anticipated physical and other forms of harm, it may be that health care and law enforcement professionals will expect that less harm will come to a man being pursued by a woman (W-M) compared to harm to targets of same-sex (M-M; W-W) and male perpetrated cross-sex harassment (M-W). Acknowledgement of the potential dangers to male targets of stalking is particularly important given empirical data from 293 Australian university students, which suggest that male and female targets of relational stalking are equally likely to experience severe violence as a part of a course of stalking (Thompson, Dennison, & Stewart, 2012). The results of the current study also demonstrate the importance of evaluating both physical and nonphysical (i.e., emotional, psychological, and economic) harm when investigating perceptions of stalking behaviour.

**Seeking help from law enforcement.** Given differential expectations of physical and nonphysical harm to the target based on the sex of the pursuer and target, it follows that recommendations for help-seeking would also differ based on the sex of the actors. However, the fourth hypothesis, which stated that both actor and participant sex would have an effect on recommendations for informal and formal help-seeking, was only

partially supported. Participants responding to the M-W scenario were no more likely to recommend seeking help from family and friends (informal) than participants responding to W-M, W-W, or M-M scenarios and female participants were no more likely to recommend help-seeking than male participants. Thus, male and female targets of same and cross-sex harassment are encouraged to seek support from friends and family at similar rates. On the other hand, participants who read the M-W scenario were more likely to recommend seeking help from the police (formal) than participants who read the W-M and W-W scenarios. The findings are consistent with published research on the role of gender on perceptions of stalking (i.e., Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004), which found that individuals are more likely to recommend help from formal sources when presented with scenarios describing a man pursuing a woman (M-W) than participants who read the same scenario describing a woman pursuing a man (W-M).

The results are also consistent with same-sex violence research, which has found that expectations for formal help seeking in cases of same-sex and cross-sex IPV were less when the perpetrator was a woman (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). Unlike M-W harassment, male and female targets of female pursuers (W-M; W-W) do not perpetuate inherent power differentials based on sex. The perceived need for police intervention may be contingent on perceptions of the power dynamic between the target and pursuer, and possibly expectations of subsequent fear. Female targets of female pursuers (W-W) may also be viewed as masculine based on their lesbian identity. Thus, both male and female targets of female pursuers may be seen as more capable of defending themselves and less worthy of help compared to female targets of male pursuers (M-W). Police intervention may also be perceived as more necessary for male compared to female pursuers,

especially given police officers are typically men. The results of the current study indicate that the dynamic between the target and pursuer based on their respective genders alters perceptions of the need for police intervention in cases of harassment.

Findings from the current study reflect, at least in part, the reality of violence against women. Women account for approximately 70% of partner homicides in the United States (Saunders, 2002) and a meta-analysis of partner aggression found that more women were injured by their partners than men (Archer, 2000). According to Johnson and Dawson (2011), women are more likely to experience depression and/or anxiety, feelings of shame, and changes in sleep as a result of IPV compared to men, which can have a negative impact on work performance, therefore limiting the ability of women to maintain gainful employment. Women are also more likely than men to experience negative consequences as a result of being stalked. Compared to 3% to 7% of female victims only 0.4% to 1% of male victims reported that they had been hurt badly enough to seek medical attention (Saunders, 2002). In 2004, 13% of female victims but only 2% of male victims reported seeking medical attention as a result of IPV related injuries, although those numbers may, in part, reflect social stigma and men's underutilization of social supports based on feelings of shame and embarrassment (Tsui et al., 2010). Thus, the perception that women are more vulnerable to physical, economic, and emotional harm is consistent with an unfortunate reality. However, high rates of violence against women perpetrated by men can mask the harm done to male victims of interpersonal violence (Archer, 2002).

Recognition of the reality that women are differentially and often more seriously affected by stalking does not negate the importance of appropriately acknowledging and

assessing risk for male targets of stalking behaviour. Although female victims of IPV and stalking often experience more significant costs than male victims (Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Saunders, 2002), male victims of IPV often face substantial social stigma and shame, which can prevent men from seeking support to mitigate the costs associated with victimhood (Cheung, Leung, & Tsui, 2009; Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010). Male targets of female pursuers may be stigmatized for seeking services and the potential dangers of the situation may be downplayed. Traditional views about gender roles and masculinity, including homophobic attitudes, contribute to the stigma around male victimization. Stigmatization of male victims stems from patriarchy and social norms around the relative power of men and women. Thus, both women and nontraditional men suffer as a result of the hegemony of masculinity (Butler, 2004).

A study of obsessional relational intrusions (ORI) among college men and women found that perceived social support reduced participants' perceptions of negative trauma (Nguyen, Spitzberg, & Lee, 2012). In other words, knowing they have support protects victims against the negative effects of being stalked. Thus, targets of W-M harassment probably perceive fewer social supports, which may result in more negative consequences. It is worth noting that female participants in Nguyen and colleagues' (2012) study were more likely to express fear, and male pursuers (as reported by targets in the study) were more likely to evoke fear, supporting the notion that female targets of male pursuers (M-W) do experience greater distress. However, the perception that W-M stalking relationships are not equivalent to other stalking relationships diminishes perceived social support and may leave male targets of female pursuers experiencing significant but unacknowledged emotional, psychological, and physical distress.

Nevertheless, the reality is that female victims are at greater risk of serious harm than male victims.

**Is it stalking?** Confirmation of the fifth hypothesis for actor sex effects on the determination of stalking is consistent with previous research by Cass (2008), Finnegan and Fritz (2012), and Phillips and colleagues (2004), which all used cross-sex stalking scenarios only. Regardless of the sex of the pursuer and target, participants in both past studies and the current study had similar ratings on the identification of stalking. Findings from the current study further indicate that the inclusion of same-sex couples does not lead to actor sex effects on ratings of whether a scenario constitutes stalking. Given that the sex of the actors in same- and cross-sex harassment does not influence university students' perception of whether stalking has occurred, individuals involved in the identification, enforcement, and prosecution of stalking may be equally as likely to label a course of conduct as stalking, regardless of the sex of the pursuer and target. Taken together, the current study has implications for understanding perceptions of same-sex relationship violence as well as the nature of gender on perceptions of relational behaviour.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study is limited in several ways. First, the research was conducted in Canada, which has a different social and political context than other nations (e.g., U.S.A. and U.K.), particularly around issues of gender and sexuality. It may be that respondents were more sensitized by virtue of being a Canadian. Also, although the sample was 50% male and thus, more representative of the general population (representing a strength relative to previous research on the role of gender on perceptions of stalking and IPV),

university students' perceptions of same-sex and cross-sex harassment scenarios may not be consistent with perceptions of the general population. University students tend to be younger ( $M = 21$  years) and may hold less rigid beliefs about gender, sexuality, social roles, and men's and women's relative power. As young persons, university students are also likely to have greater exposure to media and popular culture than the average Canadian, and thus may actually be more likely to see stalking behaviour through a socially-constructed gender lens, or dismiss ex-partner harassment as "normal courtship behavior."

On the other hand, university students may be more informed than the average Canadian, and may therefore be less susceptible to actor sex effects. Students often have direct experience with (as a victim or perpetrator) or are exposed to (as a bystander) violence and harassment. Thus, it is important to assess student perceptions of such behaviour. Fortunately, the inclusion of a measure of modern homonegativity (MHS; Morrison & Morrison, 2002) represents a strength of the study and provides information about the sample. Future research should investigate whether the findings can be replicated in other regions and with samples that may express different levels of homonegativity or hold different beliefs about gender and violence (i.e., LGBTQ\*, older adults, Aboriginal, African, and immigrant/refugee populations).

Second, the methodology used in the current research is limited in that it approaches participants as objects to be manipulated and measured, which is a traditional and patriarchal approach to the study of human behaviour (Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992). Rather than allowing participants to explain the processes that led them to perceive and subsequently provide ratings about the potential stalking behaviour, the

ratings alone were used to draw conclusions about how participants process gender in the context of stalking behaviour. Interpretation of ratings through the researchers' own cultural and gender lens (etic) may not accurately represent participants' actual perceptions (emic; Landrine et al.). In order to understand the specific pathway through which a given individual processes gendered information, future research should include a qualitative component that allows participants to detail the processes involved in their perception of stalking and harassment behaviour. Discourse analysis of participant narratives may reveal underlying assumptions or motivations. By taking a feminist and person-centered approach, researchers may be better able to speak to the ways in which the gender lens influences perception of relational behaviour across different cultures.

Third, the current study used commonly used pursuit behaviours such as unwanted phone calls, unexpected visits, and surveillance behaviour. An investigation of perceptions of various types of harassment behaviour by couple gender pairing may provide information on how gender influences perceptions of various pursuit behaviours. Gender based differences in the perception of stalking may reflect differential expectations of the behaviours used by men and women to re-acquire a mate. Future research should investigate whether the type of behaviour described in the scenario alters the actor sex effects found in the current study. Inclusion and counterbalancing of different pursuit behaviours would help to understand whether certain behaviours elicit different ratings and if actor sex effects differ based on pursuit behaviour. Variations in the description of targets and pursuers to highlight masculinity or femininity would also provide additional information regarding the role of perceived gender roles on ratings.



Future research should also investigate differences in perception of overt versus cyber harassment behaviour (Menard & Pincus, 2012; Sheridan, 2007). Cyber-stalking is becoming more prevalent and research on the role of gender on perceptions of online harassment would provide further understanding of how gender influence perceptions of aggressive relational behaviour. In addition to the directions for future research noted above, in-depth interviews of stalkers, experimental simulations of the course of the pursuit behaviour, and additional gender permutation conditions (i.e., transman pursuit of a transwoman) would go a long way to elucidating the role of gender on perceptions of harassment and stalking behaviour.

### **Summary**

The current study revealed that, in evaluating a case of harassment following the dissolution of romantic relationships, the sex of the actors being perceived had an effect on participants' ratings of anticipated harm and formal help-seeking, which is consistent with previous research. However, previous research has focused on cross-sex ex-partner stalking. Thus, the genders are always cast in opposition to one another, making it impossible to determine whether it is the male victim, female perpetrator, or the perceived relationship between the two that reduces participants' perception of threat and harm. Given the relational nature of gender (Butler, 2004; Sedgwick, 2003), it follows that the gender dynamic between target and pursuer plays a more significant role than the specific sex of either target or pursuer.

The results of the current study suggest that the relative power dynamics between target and pursuer based on gender have a more significant impact than the actual gender itself, which fits with feminist theories regarding the role of power on interpersonal

aggression (Anderson, 1997; Butler, 2004; Cavanaugh, 2012; Fraser, 1989/2004; Lloyd & Emery, 2000). Harassment by a less powerful pursuer (W-M) was perceived as less likely to result in harm to the target compared to harassment by an equivalent (M-M; W-W) or more powerful pursuer (M-W). A more powerful pursuer (M-W) also elicited a greater likelihood of formal help-seeking recommendations than harassment perpetrated by a less powerful pursuer (W-M; W-W). Differences may be based on the individual actors' gender (i.e., a male target) or on the relationship between the actors (i.e., female pursuer and male target). The socially-constructed concept of gender and the perceived relationship between "male" and "female" led to differential expectations of power and the use of power through aggression and violence.

Variations in the perception of interpersonal violence on the basis of gender alter the actions taken in response to violence. The results of the current study suggest individuals' perceptions of anticipated harm and recommendations for formal help seeking are influenced by the sex of the actors. Thus, the extent to which physical and nonphysical harm to the target is permitted to continue may depend on the sex of the pursuer and target.

## **Chapter 5: General Discussion**

The aim of the present research was to understand the effect of a specific social norm on perceptions of reality by investigating the role of gender on perceptions of harassment behaviour following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Harassment represents a significant social problem. More than 20,000 incidents of criminal harassment were reported by Canadian police services in 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2011). Despite the potential for harm and the overlap between stalking and other forms of IPV (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a), stalking legislation is often ambiguous and inconsistently applied, which allows for differential perception and subsequent treatment of individuals involved in stalking and harassment behaviour (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Lydon et al., 2012; Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003). One factor that has been shown to alter perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour is gender (Finnegan & Fritz, 2012; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Sheridan, Gillett et al., 2003; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Gender refers to the social roles assigned to the identities of “male” and “female” (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004). No study to date to the author’s knowledge has investigated the role of gender on police officers’ perceptions of cross-sex criminal harassment behaviour or university students’ perceptions of same- and cross-sex harassment behaviour. Thus, the present research extended understanding of how social norms around gender shape perceptions of harassment behaviour.

### **Constructing Reality**

The inability to differentiate between one’s own reality and the way that one’s culture interprets reality is known as native consciousness (Bem, 1993). Cultural natives

are created in part by social norms and roles. Social roles are often static (i.e., women as primarily caregivers and domestic workers), but identities can be multiple, heterogeneous, and fluid. Gender, sexual preference, race, and class are just a few identities that intersect (Moore, 1994). Social roles create internalized expectations for appearance and behaviour based on socially-defined identities (Bem, 1993; Butler, 1997). An individual's identity is constructed based on the social norms that exist prior to the construction of that identity. Thus, identity is inexorably tied to culture. There can be no social recognition of an individual's "personhood" without an identity constructed and understood through social norms (Butler, 1997, 2004). Gender is a social construction that shapes the way individuals perceive and react to the world. Social recognition of gender is a source of power as it aids in the construction of a "person" (Butler, 2004).

Identities based on social roles allow for social recognition of personhood, but they also communicate an individual's power within society (Butler, 2004). Identity hierarchies and differential levels of power associated with different identities contribute to discourse about the relation between gender, power, and violence (Moore, 1994). Identities that do not adhere to social norms around sexuality and romantic relationships (i.e., lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities) are often stigmatized or simply dismissed, leaving individuals who identify as nonheterosexual without a socially-acknowledged identity (Butler, 2004). Given the choice between complete rejection of culturally-defined norms and identities and recognition as a "valid" person within society, most individuals would choose personhood. However, individuals are rarely provided the opportunity to make such a choice. Social and cultural norms shape reality creating cultural natives (Bem, 1993).

Social roles are dictated by culture, and cultural groups are organized around knowledge. Dominant knowledge structures privilege some ideologies and demoralize others, often creating binaries (Gergen, 1994). Patriarchal knowledge structures privilege masculine traits and mechanisms for knowledge acquisition and place women and feminist theorists as the “other.” Individuals who use language to support the dominant culture may take on a position of authority, which supports existing privileges (Gergen, 1994). Mass media contributes to the continuation of gender polarization through enculturation by adhering to historic portrayals of women as objects of domestic, reproductive, and sexual functions (Bem, 1993). In 1787, Mary Wollstonecraft argued society encourages women to conform to social roles that place them in inferior positions to men (Moore, 1999). Men and women are placed in dramatically unequal roles, which shape their daily interactions, and in turn, their expectations for and understanding of their realities. Even the use of masculine pronouns as the standard reinforces the idea that men are the standard and women are the other (Bem, 1993). Wollstonecraft argued that notions of femininity perpetuate the degradation and subjugation of the female sex. She wrote that women’s futures must not be dictated by past roles (Moore, 1999).

Both feminist and queer theorists tend to take a social constructivist approach to understanding reality. Social constructivists posit that the social world plays a substantial role in the internal processing of information. Rather than conceptualizing knowledge as arising from within the individual, social constructivism conceptualizes knowledge as socially constructed and arising from communal processes. In other words, what individuals think they know is really a product of their surroundings and other social and cultural processes (Gergen, 1994). Queer theory attempts to deconstruct social norms

around gender and sexuality by emphasizing the importance of culture. In particular, queer theory asserts that socially-constructed identities fail to capture the range of human experiences (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Rudy, 2000; Valocchi, 2005). The language individuals use to describe others and to convey knowledge is enmeshed in the social context in which it exists. Community and cultural standards dictate how a given piece of text is read and interpreted (Gergen, 1994). Language and ideology that support traditional gender roles reinforce the cultural expectations for men and women and ignore alternative ways of perceiving these individuals. Language also creates meaning through differentiation; “man” only has meaning insofar as it is the opposite of “woman.” Thus, the language used to construct self-narratives is limited by the social and cultural norms within which the language exists.

### **Building Narratives**

Individuals create meaning by constructing narratives for their life story. Peak experiences that elicit a sense of drama are more likely to be integrated. Therefore, incidents involving conflict or tension are more likely to be included in self-narratives (Gergen, 1994). Law enforcement officers may have self-narratives that include cases they had worked as well as cultural messages they have received. Self-narratives might have included stories of domestic disputes, intimate partner violence, and criminal harassment. A well-formed narrative strives for consistency between characters, or identities (Gergen, 1994). The salient features of a given case of criminal harassment may be that an imposing man has been spying on his timid and frightened ex-girlfriend. Although the next case of criminal harassment may not fit this mould, the self-narrative attempts to maintain this prototype across time. A female aggressor and a victimized ex-

boyfriend do not fit within the narrative. From the perspective of the typical narrative for law enforcement, and based on statistical probability, men are perpetrators and women are victims. Thus, the social roles assigned to men and women lead to differential expectations of behaviour. Although the expectation stems from a reality that is often consistent with a male perpetrator and female victim narrative (Hamby, 2009), it places male victims of female aggression in a position that is inconsistent with the standard narrative. Thus, male victims may be ignored because they cannot be understood within the story that individuals construct for their lives.

Social roles and identities are also reciprocal in that they exist in relation to one another. This may include intimate roles such as “mother,” “grandfather,” and “lover,” or professional roles such as “doctor,” “secretary,” and “taxi driver.” In either case, the role exists only in relation to another individual. Mothers need children and doctors need patients. Similarly, an individual cannot be a perpetrator unless there is a victim. The narrative of a male perpetrator elicits the most common victim—a woman. Thus, identities are not individual, but situated within a relational context (Gergen, 1994).

Narratives like the scenarios used in this line of research, which include roles of a pursuer and a target, are understood through the relationship between pursuer and target. This may help to explain why ex-partner stalking is perceived as less dangerous despite findings that targets of partner stalking are four times more likely to be physically harmed than targets of stranger or acquaintance stalking (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). The scenarios used in the current research describe ex-partners. Heteronormative attitudes help to construct a relationship that includes cross-sex partners (a man and a woman). Traditional gender roles and notions about courtship situate men in

the role of the pursuer and women in the role of the target. A heterosexual narrative is consistent with “typical” intimate relationship aggression scripts. Scenarios that do not conform to this script (i.e., W-M, M-M, and W-W) may be perceived as atypical and may therefore be evaluated differently.

Narratives rely on support from others. If other individuals within a social or cultural group agree with a given narrative (i.e., male perpetrators and female victims) then it is more likely to be upheld and adopted by others (Gergen, 1994). Cultural narratives that are consistent with traditional gender roles and heteronormativity serve to support and propagate narratives that involve the victimization of women by men, and ignore narratives that involve same-sex and female-perpetrated victimization. In the current research, socially constructed narratives about criminal harassment and gender led participants to frame the language used to describe the narratives in the harassment scenarios differently based on the sex of the actors. Thus, although the act itself is perceived as analogous (regardless of actor sex, participants were similar in their determination of whether stalking had occurred and their perception of the seriousness of the case), the consequences are perceived as different (i.e., anticipated harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and expected response from a judge).

The findings from study 1 and study 2, as well as previous research findings, support the theory that relational narratives constructed based on polarizing and androcentric gender lenses (Bem, 1993) lead individuals to perceive the same behaviour similarly and differently based on the sex of the actors. Further research is needed to understand the nature of this perceived gender difference and how it plays out in different forms of intimate partner aggression. One factor that seems to be related to both gender



and violence is power. Researchers have found that a loss of control (i.e., the loss of a romantic partnership) is more likely to result in attempts to control others (i.e., unwanted pursuit behaviour; Stets, 1995).

### **Deconstructing Power Dynamics**

Power can be broadly defined as the ability to exercise control over another individual (Schmid Mast, 2010). Perceived power influences the construction and maintenance of hierarchies and may vary based on a variety of observable factors and behaviours. There is evidence that women who act in ways that are inconsistent with expected gender roles experience more negative evaluations than women who conform to traditional gender roles. Foucault (1982) conceptualizes power as an action that alters other possible actions and defines the relationship between individuals. He notes that power is both conditional on, and results in, differentiation. Physical, social, cultural, and economic differences are examples of differentiation that allow the actions of one person to alter possible actions of another person. Given that gender is one of the primary ways individuals are differentiated, the classification and differentiation of individuals by gender produces gender based power dynamics and reinforces perceived differences based on gender. The current research demonstrates the role that gender can play when interpreting interpersonal behaviour, particularly when power is not equally distributed.

***Power in a patriarchy.*** Power regulates human life (Butler, 1997; Fraser, 1989/2004). In order to survive, children must attach to a guardian and become subject to their power. Similarly, in order to be recognized as a socially viable being, an individual must accept assigned social roles based on identities like “woman,” “poor,” “gay,” or “Black” (Butler, 1997, 2004; Moore, 1994). Social roles and norms are ubiquitous and

gradually become part of an individual's psychic framework (Butler, 1997). Men and women learn to behave in ways that are consistent with observed gender roles in order to exist in society. Eventually the behaviour becomes automatic, which supports the gender binary and helps to perpetuate gender roles (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2004). Thus, power acts upon the subject and also brings the subject into existence. Patriarchal societies produce and reproduce power differentials through the internalization of norms that produce, restrict, and maintain social identities (Butler, 1997).

Men are socialized to believe that they should have more power than women. A movement towards violence may occur more readily or rapidly, and may be more severe, as a result of implicit power differentials. Women who try to leave male partners are subject to men's use of violence and harassment (M-W) in an attempt to regain power and control. Thus, violence against women can be seen as largely an issue of men's need to regain power. Whether the loss is economic (i.e., the loss of a job), physical (i.e., injury or accident), or emotional (i.e., loss of a loved one), power can be regained through the exertion of control over another individual (Stets, 1995; Stets & Burke, 1996). Wives and girlfriends are often the most available option, although children also make easy targets. Women who are responsible for the emotional loss (i.e., dissolution of a romantic relationship) are at even greater risk given that their partner is likely to see a direct path to regaining power through the pursuit of, and aggressive acts towards, his ex-partner. Thus, there is an increased risk of death when ending a relationship with a male abuser (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

Patriarchy hurts. Men hurt women in part because they learn that they need to wield power over women. Although women often use violence defensively (Johnson &

Dawson, 2011), when women do victimize men, patriarchy hurts men by making it shameful to seek help (Cheung, Leung, & Tsui, 2009; Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010). It is through social stigma of W-M violence that patriarchy hurts men, especially ones who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Gay men also suffer in a patriarchy. For example, gay men are often blamed for sexual assaults (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Although the results of study 2 suggest that M-M harassment scenarios were not perceived as being different from M-W scenarios in terms of identification of stalking, perceived seriousness, concern for target, or recommendations for help seeking, participants were not asked to provide ratings related to blame or fault. It is also possible that the findings reflect changes in the perception and treatment of gay men in Canada. It is also worth pointing out that some claims about gender and power do not necessarily apply to all groups (e.g., racialized men). Thus, “men” and “woman” are heterogeneous identities that have different meanings based on the intersection of sex and gender with race, class, and culture. Nevertheless, patriarchy supports gender polarization and contributes to discrimination, heterocentrism, and stressors associated with identities that do not adhere to traditional gender roles.

***Relative power.*** Men and women are not granted equivalent levels of power or social status, which may influence perceptions of behaviour that have a clear power differential, such as stalking and harassment behaviour. A study of the influence of expressions of anger on the conferral of status found that women and men who expressed anger in similar ways were perceived differently – men were seen as more powerful and more competent, and were provided larger salaries compared to their female counterparts (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Although the women and men described in the scenarios in

the current research engaged in identical behaviour, the results of study 1 and study 2 supports the notion that gender influences perceptions of power. A review of 120 studies regarding the association between interpersonal hierarchy (i.e., situational power, socio-economic status, impressions of assertiveness, and dominant personality traits) and nonverbal behaviour revealed that compared to studies that measured the effect of an actual hierarchy on nonverbal behaviours (i.e., postural openness), studies that measured perceptions of the interpersonal hierarchy had a greater effect on nonverbal behaviour (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005). In other words, perception of power and social status had a greater effect than the power or status itself.

Stalking that places men in the position of the pursuer (dominant) and women in the position of the target (subordinate) supports the gender binary and highlights the hegemonic power differential between the genders (Butler, 2004; Fraser, 1989/2004). In the case of male-to-female harassment, the apparent vulnerability of the target is amplified because the woman is already in an inferior position. Male pursuit of a female target (M-W) creates a larger gender gap in power and may signal to the perceiver that the potential to use that power to the detriment of the target is likely. In the case of same-sex harassment, pursuer and target begin in relatively equal position of power. Given that M-M and W-W pursuit relationships do not have a pre-existing gender-based power differential, a pursuit relationship creates a power differential where none was before and may signal to the perceiver the potential to use that power to do harm.

On the other hand, in female-to-male harassment, the target begins in a relative position of power as a result of male privilege. The power acquired by a woman through the unwanted pursuit of a man (W-M) may reduce the pre-existing gender-based power

differential such that the female pursuer is perceived to have more power than her male target. However, the pursuer-target power discrepancy will never be as great as male-perpetrated cross sex (M-W) or same-sex (M-M; W-W) pursuit relationships. Therefore, W-M pursuit scenarios do not produce the power dynamics of M-W, M-M, and W-W scenarios. The gender lens also exaggerates differences in physical power between men and women (Bem, 1993). Given that 181 U.S. undergraduate students attributed victim fear of IPV perpetrated by a man against a woman to differences in physical size (Hamby & Jackson, 2010), acknowledgement of average differences in physical size and strength between men and women, and thus the ability to defend against a physical attack, likely contribute to the differential ratings based on couple gender profile.

Stalking and control balance theory may also explain the role of power in the perception of interpersonal aggression like stalking and harassment (Nobles & Fox, 2013). Violence often ensues when power is threatened (Levine, 2003). When one group of individuals (i.e., men) have more power relative to another group (i.e., women) they will act to maintain that power (Nobles & Fox, 2013). Individuals with less power (i.e., women) are kept in positions of subordination in order to maintain masculine hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Ex-partners experience a loss of power when they are rejected. Given that control balance theory posits that deviant behaviour stems from an imbalance in power (Nobles & Fox, 2013), it follows that M-W stalking may result from a desire of the male pursuer to maintain power over a female target, particularly following a loss of power resulting from the rejection of a romantic relationship by the female target. Women rejected by cross-sex partners (W-M) and men and women rejected by same-sex partners (M-M; W-W) may also seek to regain lost power through

the pursuit and control of a former lover. However, the loss of power, and the impetus to rely on aggression to re-acquire power, is likely perceived as less given the lack of a pre-existing power differential that needs to be re-established. Although same-sex stalking (M-M; W-W) does not have any inherent gender-based power differential, same-sex pursuers may be motivated by factors like minority stress (i.e., feelings of powerlessness related to experiences of discrimination; Derlega et al., 2011), in addition to the loss of power resulting from rejection by a same-sex target.

***Power and harassment.*** In cases of harassment, the target of the behaviour is in a vulnerable position given that they are being acted upon, whereas the pursuer is in a position of influence given that they are enacting the harassing behaviour. When the pursuit power dynamic lines up with traditional gender roles (i.e., male pursuer, female target), police officers in study 1 provided higher ratings of concern for target, likelihood of harm, and likelihood that the pursuer will be sentenced to prison time by a judge, compared to officers in the W-M condition. Likewise, university students in study 2 who responded to the M-W scenario had higher ratings on anticipated physical and other harm as well as recommendations for formal help-seeking compared to W-M respondents. Police officers and students in the W-M condition were faced with a dynamic that is counter to traditional gender roles: as the aggressor, the female pursuer is in the dominant position and the male target is in a position of vulnerability. It is likely that participants' expectations of vulnerability and strength for men versus women led them to perceive a female perpetrator as less powerful than a male perpetrator, and a male target as less vulnerable than a female target. Therefore, men and women who engage in harassment behaviour following a heterosexual romantic relationship breakup are perceived

differently on the basis of their gender, perhaps as a result of differences in perceived power and vulnerability.

The picture is a little different when considering harassment following the break-up of a same-sex relationship. Participants responding in the M-M and W-W conditions in study 2 provided ratings on perceived seriousness, concern for target, anticipated harm, recommendations for help-seeking, and determination of stalking that were not different from one another. It appears that when the power differential based on the sex of the actors is not a factor, participants are more similar in their ratings. Nevertheless, the picture changes when comparing same- and cross-sex stalking relationships. Male perpetrated harassment of another man (M-M) elicited higher ratings on anticipated physical harm than female perpetrated harassment of a man (W-M). Thus, women who perpetrate harassment behaviour after the break-up of a heterosexual romantic relationship were perceived as less capable of inflicting physical harm than men who engaged in the same behaviour following the break-up of a same-sex relationship. Although differential expectations of harm may not be accurate in all cases, and may influence treatment of male targets of female pursuers, data on men's and women's perpetration of IPV support differential perceptions.

Similarly, female perpetrated harassment of another woman (W-W) elicited higher ratings on anticipated physical and other harm compared to female perpetrated harassment of a man (W-M). A woman who perpetrated harassment behaviour against another woman (i.e., same-sex harassment) was perceived as more capable of inflicting physical and emotional/psychological/economic harm than a woman who engaged in an identical pattern of behaviour with a man (i.e., cross-sex harassment). Thus, men are

perceived as more dangerous than women when cast in the role of the pursuer (M-M vs. W-M) and less vulnerable than woman when cast in the role of the target (W-M vs. W-W). The pattern of results support the notion that participants perceive the scenario through a socially constructed gender lens which places the men described in this narrative in a relative position of power. Another explanation for the observed effect is that gender nonconforming women (i.e., lesbians) are perceived as masculine based on the presence of a female partner. Thus, pursuit by a lesbian woman is perceived as more likely to result in harm than pursuit by a heterosexual woman by virtue of her presumed masculinity.

Although there were no differences between ratings on male perpetrated harassment of a female target (M-W) following the break-up of a heterosexual relationship and ratings on male perpetrated harassment of a male target (M-M) following the break-up of a same-sex relationship, participants who read about female perpetrated harassment of a female target (W-W) were less likely to recommend seeking help from the police than participants who read the male perpetrated cross-sex harassment (M-W). The findings indicate that when the pursuer is a man, female and male targets are perceived as having similar power. Given that gay men do not conform to traditional gender roles, male targets may be perceived as more feminine based on the presence of a male pursuer, and thus, seen as equivalent to female targets. On the other hand, the results of study 2 revealed that a woman pursued by a same-sex partner (W-W) is less likely to elicit recommendations to seek help from the police compared to a woman pursued by a cross-sex partner (M-W). As with differential expectations of harm, it may be that a female target of a female pursuer is perceived as more masculine and more



capable of defending herself than a heterosexual target based on her status as a lesbian. Additionally, a female pursuer may not be perceived as threatening enough to warrant contacting the authorities. Thus, gender role expectations based on sexual identity may play a larger role than the sex of the actors.

The current study examined perceptions of violence and not the violence itself. Thus, it cannot speak to differential motivations and cognitions associated with different actor sex permutations. Participants' perceptions suggest that power dynamics may have influenced the differential perception of harassment scenarios based on gender. Regardless of whether same-sex partners do engage in harassment that is different from M-W harassment, participants did not perceive any differences. The results of the studies described indicate that a woman pursuing a man is perceived as distinct from other permutations of actor sex (M-W; M-M; W-W). It may be that perceived power differentials between men and women led participants to anticipate that compared to the other permutations, women were less likely to (a) be motivated by a desire to regain lost power, given a relatively lower level of power prior to the breakup; (b) choose to engage in acts of aggression as a means of regaining power; and (c) successfully harm a man as part of an aggressive course of conduct. Regardless of why participants perceived W-M harassment differently than M-W, M-M, and W-W harassment, the findings support a power-based explanation.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The present research extended previous research through the investigation of police perceptions of criminal harassment and consideration of how actor sex alters perceptions of nonheterosexual pursuit relationships. Consistent with stated hypotheses,

actor sex had no effect on the identification of criminal harassment (study 1) and the determination of stalking (study 2), and an effect on ratings of anticipated harm (physical and nonphysical) and recommendations for formal help seeking. However, contrary to previous research, no actor sex effects were found for ratings of perceived seriousness (study 1 and two), concern for target (study 2), recommendations for informal help seeking (study 2), and likelihood of jury conviction (study 1). It may be that the law enforcement (study 1) and university (study 2) samples investigated in the current research differ from samples from previous research. Both samples came from the same Canadian city – thus, participants in the studies may hold beliefs about gender and violence that differ from participants in other regions.

Findings from study 1 and study 2 have direct implications for law enforcement officers, health care and support workers, and researchers. Results of study 1 indicate that law enforcement officers perceived M-W harassment as more likely to result in physical and nonphysical harm than W-M harassment, which has implications for individuals involved in the legal system. Results of study 2 indicate that university students perceive W-M harassment as less likely to result in physical harm compared to M-W, W-W, and M-M harassment, and less likely to result in emotional, psychological, or economic harm compared to W-W harassment. Together, the findings indicate a tendency to perceive harassment perpetrated by a woman towards a man (W-M) as less likely to result in harm (physical or nonphysical), which is consistent with reality but likely to contribute to the shame experienced by male victims of partner aggression (Cheung et al., 2009; Tsui et al., 2010).

Police officers, social workers, nurses, and counsellors often come into contact with individuals involved in cases of criminal harassment. It may be possible to reduce differential treatment of pursuers and targets on the basis of gender by educating service providers about differential expectations of harm for male and female targets of stalking. Acknowledging the reality that women tend to experience more and inflict less harm than men does not mean that cases in which the pursuer is female, or the target is male, necessarily fit the pattern. Rather, evaluation of factors like threats of violence and expressions of fear are better indicators of potential harm. Research findings could be used to inform programs designed to educate individuals working with victims and perpetrators of stalking and harassment behaviour about gender and violence. Integration of information on power dynamics and social roles (Butler, 1997, 2004) may help to explain how gender creates a lens that shapes individuals' perception of reality (Bem, 1993; Gergen, 1994).

Individuals involved in law enforcement, the judicial system, and social services are not the only ones that may benefit from education. Bystanders have come to the attention of feminist researchers as an area for potential intervention (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Foubert, Brasfield, Hill, & Shelley-Tremblay, 2011; Levine, 2003). Although understanding bystander perceptions does not allow for increased bystander responding, innovative programs like "Bringing in the Bystander" allow research to be utilized in the hopes of preventing or reducing violent acts (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Katz & Moore, 2013; Levine, 2003). Participants in study 2 were drawn from a university population in which the "Bringing in the Bystander" initiative had been implemented (Senn & Forest, 2013). Although it is unlikely that the program had any meaningful

effect on participants' ratings given the small number of individuals engaged in the program at the time of data collection, it is possible that some participants were exposed to materials that influenced their perceptions of gender and violence, which may help to account for differences between reported findings and previous research.

In addition to the implications for service providers, the findings from studies 1 and 2 have implications for researchers. Research on contextual factors such as the sex of the victim and perpetrator allow for greater understanding of differential perceptions of violence and aid in the successful implementation of bystander programs. In addition to ongoing research on prevention and education based programming, there are a variety of avenues for future studies. The current research focused on perceptions of law enforcement officers and university students. Use of a student population can be seen as a potential pitfall of the current research. However, students are often exposed to, and at risk for, stalking and overtly violent behaviour, and thus provide valuable information about perceptions of stalking behaviour (Levine, 2003). Nevertheless, evaluation of perceptions of stalking among different samples (i.e., juvenile/adolescent stalking; Evans & Reid Meloy, 2011; Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2010) would allow for greater understanding of factors related to the perception of stalking and harassment behaviour. Study 2 included participants who mostly identified as heterosexual (93.2%) and Caucasian (71.7%), which are privileged identities in the dominant culture. Sexual and cultural minorities are at an advantage in this instance in that the higher levels of discrimination they experience places them outside the dominant culture and therefore make such individuals better able to observe the lenses that shape social perception rather than see through them (Bem, 1993).

Efforts to recruit diverse participants from different cultural groups, gender identities, and sexual identities would allow for an appreciation of the intersection of gender with other factors like race and cultural beliefs. Cultural background, gender identity, and sexual identity of the perceiver may influence perceptions of gender, violence, and harassment and thus alter the effect of actor sex. Future research should attempt to recruit individuals from nondominant groups in order to investigate whether the effects found in this study hold for different cultural and sexual identities. Future research on gender and intimate partner stalking should explore actor sex effects on perceptions of harassment following the breakup of a variety of romantic dyads using a variety of populations.

Differences in typology of cyber-stalking, predictors of harassment and stalking behaviour perpetrated online (Melander, 2010), and strategies for increasing awareness and utilization of internet safety (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) are a few examples of areas where more research is needed on the use of technology in harassment. Other directions for future research come from the authors of existing research. Davis and colleagues (2012) suggest the use of longitudinal research in the service of investigating the merits of relational goal theory, coercive control, and attachment theory for understanding stalking behaviour. Patton and colleagues (2010) investigated the usefulness of attachment theory in predicting stalking perpetration, and found that anxiously attached individuals and individuals with a history of anger problems were more likely to perpetrate stalking behaviours. Thus, future research could recruit and divide participants based on attachment style to determine whether participant attachment influences perception of and attribution biases towards male and female pursuers and targets.

Finally, as noted in Chapter 4, a replication of previous research using alternative harassment behaviours, such as threatened or actual harm to self and threatened or actual release of damaging information, would allow for an investigation of differential perceptions of covert (and more traditionally “feminine”) harassment behaviours on the basis of actor sex.

Although the results of study 1 and study 2 represent a unique and important extension of research examining the role of gender on perceptions of stalking, future research might benefit from taking a more qualitative or feminist approach to the study of how gender influences the perception of relational behaviour like intimate partner aggression and harassment behaviour (Dietz, 2003). For example, participants could be asked to articulate the role of perceived threat and expressed fear in their ratings of perceived seriousness, anticipated harm, and help-seeking recommendations. Exploration of participants’ unique, socially-constructed narratives around gender, relationships, and aggression might reveal a more complex cultural picture and provide insight into the dynamics that drive the actor and participant sex effects found in the current research, as well as many of the studies described in this document. Future research could include additional experimental conditions to elicit differential perceptions of power (i.e., employment status, physical size, height disparity, expressed fear). Manipulation of power dynamics and relational context would aid in the understanding of how social, cultural, and environmental factors influence perceptions of gendered information, particularly if a person-centered approach is used in conjunction with a quantitative component in order to provide a richer understanding of any effects.

In addition to the specific implications discussed above and in Chapters 3 and 4, the current research has several broad implications. Given the association between gender, power, and violence (Cavanaugh, 2012; Fraser, 1989/2004), deconstruction of the gender binary has the potential to significantly reduce acts of interpersonal aggression. Programs aimed at educating individuals about gender socialization, mutual aggression, and the dyadic nature of IPV may help to prevent gender-based violence (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Capaldi, 2012). Deconstruction of gender polarity also reduces stressors related to gender nonconformity (Bem, 1993; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Rudy, 2000; Valocchi, 2005) and minority status (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Derlega et al., 2011), which can lead to a loss of power or personhood (Butler, 2004; Sedgwick, 2003) and increase the need to re-acquire power through aggression (Nobles & Fox, 2013). Thus, the current investigation into the role of gender on perceptions of ex-partner harassment promotes critique of the existing gender binary, provides information regarding the specific role of gender polarity on perceptions of harassment, offers explanations for differential perception on the basis of power and social roles, and suggests possibilities for implementing programs aimed at reducing violence through increased understanding of gender and gender roles.

### **Conclusion**

The present research aims to highlight a cultural bias. The intent is not to diminish the issue of male perpetrated violence against women, but rather to acknowledge other forms of interpersonal violence and recognize the impact of socially constructed belief systems on perceptions of violence. Critique of the gender lens allows for greater understanding of how individuals process interpersonal and gendered information, and

may increase support for victims who do not fall within traditional narratives of male perpetrator and female victim. By applying a social constructivist approach, the intent is to encourage discourse about the social processes that influence the internal and external world. By understanding the unique experience of individuals within different social and cultural groups, individuals extend their ability to acquire knowledge and relate to other individuals within and outside the dominant culture.



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## Appendix A: Law Enforcement Sample Advertisement



Research Study on OFFICER PERCEPTIONS of  
BEHAVIOUR following a RELATIONSHIP BREAK-UP

All officers are invited to participate in an important research initiative conducted through the University of Windsor. This research has received clearance from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board ([ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)). Officers will be addressed during line-up on [days/times] and asked to complete a very short survey (no more than 5 minutes) regarding their perceptions of a single case describing behaviour following a relationship break-up. Participation is requested but completely voluntary and no identifying information will be collected. Your involvement will help to increase understanding of law enforcement perceptions and decision-making. Please contact Heather Finnegan, the PhD student undertaking the research study, ([finnegah@uwindsor.ca](mailto:finnegah@uwindsor.ca)) or her supervisor, Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz ([pfritz@uwindsor.ca](mailto:pfritz@uwindsor.ca); (519) 253-3000, ext. 3707) if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration with this study.

## Appendix B: Law Enforcement Sample Letter of Information



**LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN  
RESEARCH**

**Officer Perceptions of Behaviour Following a Relationship Break-up**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Heather A. Finnegan (Ph.D. student) and her supervisor Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz (Assistant Professor), from the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Heather Finnegan at [finnegah@uwindsor.ca](mailto:finnegah@uwindsor.ca) or Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz at [pfritz@uwindsor.ca](mailto:pfritz@uwindsor.ca) or (519) 253-3000, ext. 3707.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study will investigate officers' perceptions of behaviours following the break-up of a romantic relationship.

**PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to take part in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Read a one page Charge Summary and fill out a questionnaire

Total time spent: 5 minutes

Location: Windsor Police Headquarters (150 Goyeau Street, Windsor, ON)

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study does not have any major risks, except that you may have some negative feelings in response to some of the things that you will be asked to think about. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you can stop participating in this study at any time without penalty.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Information obtained from this study will add to our knowledge about law enforcement perceptions of behaviours that can occur following romantic break-ups, including unwanted or aggressive behaviours.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

You are not asked to provide identifying information besides department and years of experience, which allows for anonymity. In accordance with the American Psychological Association, your data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer. If you choose to participate, you have the right to discontinue your participation at any time during this experiment. However, information that has been collected cannot be removed as there is no way to connect a specific individual with their data. Research findings for this study will be available by August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013 on the University of Windsor REB web site: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb>.

### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date

## Appendix C.1: Law Enforcement Sample Scenario Version 1 (Man-Woman)

**CHARGE SUMMARY****Relationship History:**

Mary and John Smith were married for four years and have a seven year old child Jamie. They have been divorced since March 2009. There have been numerous calls for domestic issues and on July 12, 2010 John Smith was arrested for threatening Mary and her now fiancé William Jones. He was later released on a recognizance with several conditions including not communicating or associating with Mary or Smith or William Jones.

\*\*\*\*\*

On January 1, 2011 at around 2:40 p.m., Mary was at home when the phone rang. Her call display showed "Ontario Government". Mary knew this was the phone number for the County Jail as it had come up before when one of John's friends had called. Mary did not answer the phone. It rang again 30 seconds later and then again another 30 seconds later. Mary finally answered the phone and said "Hello". A voice which she recognized to be that of her ex-husband John said "Is Jamie there?" She replied "Jamie is unavailable." John then said "okay bye" and she hung up. She immediately called the police.

In February 2011, John began to send Mary letters. In March 2011, Mary contacted the Windsor Police Family Violence Unit as the letters started to become more disparaging in nature against her now fiancé William and alluded to the fact that there would be some kind of reconciliation between Mary and John. The letters continued and in April 2011, John began sending letters stating that he and Mary should get back together, and he even suggested that they get remarried on July 15, 2011.

Mary is very afraid of John. She fears that John will try to harm her and her fiancé William. John does not appear to acknowledge that Mary has moved on in her life and still believes there is a chance of them remarrying.

## Appendix C.2: Law Enforcement Sample Scenario Version 2 (Woman-Man)

**CHARGE SUMMARY****Relationship History:**

John and Mary Smith were married for four years and have a seven year old child Jamie. They have been divorced since March 2009. There have been numerous calls for domestic issues and on July 12, 2010 Mary Smith was arrested for threatening John and his now fiancée Theresa Jones. She was later released on a recognizance with several conditions including not communicating or associating with John Smith or Theresa Jones.

\*\*\*\*\*

On January 1, 2011 at around 2:40 p.m., John was at home when the phone rang. His call display showed "Ontario Government". John knew this was the phone number for the County Jail as it had come up before when one of Mary's friends had called. John did not answer the phone. It rang again 30 seconds later and then again another 30 seconds later. John finally answered the phone and said "Hello". A voice which he recognized to be that of his ex-wife Mary said "Is Jamie there?" He replied "Jamie is unavailable." Mary then said "okay bye" and he hung up. He immediately called the police.

In February 2011, Mary began to send letters. In March 2011, John contacted the Windsor Police Family Violence Unit as the letters had started to become more disparaging in nature against his now fiancée Theresa and alluded to the fact that there would be some kind of reconciliation between John and Mary. The letters continued and in April 2011, Mary began sending letters stating that she and John should get back together, and she even suggested that they get remarried on July 15, 2011.

John is very afraid of Mary. He fears that Mary will try to harm him and his fiancée Theresa. Mary does not appear to acknowledge that John has moved on in his life and still believes there is a chance of them remarrying.

Appendix D: Law Enforcement Sample Perceptions of Charge Summary

a) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At Serious						Very Serious

b) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

c) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e. psychological, emotional, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

d) To what extent does this case describe criminal harassment as you understand it?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

e) How likely is it that a jury would convict the perpetrator in a court of law?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

f) If convicted, how likely is it that a judge would recommend a prison sentence?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

Demographic Information

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Assignment (current & past): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of harassment cases worked (approx): \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix E.1: University Sample Scenarios Version 1 (Man-Woman)  
Harassment Scenario (Man-Woman)

Andy and Jane had been dating for several months when Jane realized that things were not working out in the relationship and she decided that it would be best to break up with Andy. Andy, however, wanted to continue the relationship. Since their breakup, Andy has called Jane several times, but Jane no longer answers Andy's phone calls. Andy has also shown up at Jane's work on more than one occasion asking Jane to take him back. Jane has seen Andy sitting in his car outside Jane's house on several occasions since their breakup.

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Distractor Scenario (Man-Woman)

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

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Appendix E.2: University Sample Scenarios Version 2 (Woman-Man)  
 Harassment Scenario (Woman-Man)

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 Andy no longer answers Jane’s phone calls. Jane has also shown up at Andy’s work on more than one occasion asking Andy to take her back. Andy has seen Jane sitting in her car outside Andy’s house on several occasions since their breakup.

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Distractor Scenario (Woman-Man)

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 in contact since the break-up, Mary sent Tom a card on his birthday.

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Appendix E.3: University Sample Scenarios Version 3 (Man-Man)  
Harassment Scenario (Man-Man)

Joe 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 Joe. Joe, however, wanted to continue the relationship. Since their breakup, Joe has called Andy several times, but Andy no longer answers Joe’s phone calls. Joe has also shown up at Andy’s work on more than one occasion asking Andy to take him back. Andy has seen Joe sitting in his car outside Andy’s house on several occasions since their breakup.

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Distractor Scenario (Man-Man)

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

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Appendix E.4: University Sample Scenarios Version 4 (Woman-Woman)  
Harassment Scenario (Woman-Woman)

Jane and Andrea had been dating for several months when Andrea realized that things were not working out in the relationship and she decided that it would be best to break up with Jane. Jane, however, wanted to continue the relationship. Since their breakup, Jane has called Andrea several times, but Andrea no longer answers Jane's phone calls. Jane has also shown up at Andrea's work on more than one occasion asking Andrea to take her back. Andrea has seen Jane sitting in her car outside Andrea's house on several occasions since their breakup.

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely

Distractor Scenario (Woman-Woman)

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

1) How serious is this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Serious						Very Serious

2) How concerned would you be if this were happening to a friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Concerned						Very Concerned

3) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will be physically harmed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

4) How likely is it that the target of this behaviour will experience some other form of harm (i.e., emotional, psychological, economic)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

5) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from other friends or family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

6) How likely is it that you would recommend seeking help from the police?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Likely						Extremely Likely

7) Is this a case of stalking?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Definitely Not						Definitely



## Appendix F: Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age (in years)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your sex/gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Transgender Male
  - Transgender Female
  - Genderqueer
  - Prefer not to disclose
3. What is your current year of study?
  - First year
  - Second year
  - Third year
  - Fourth year
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your current major? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What race or cultural group do you identify with the most?
  - Caucasian
  - Chinese
  - South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
  - African American
  - Filipino
  - Latin American
  - Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.)
  - Arab
  - West Asian (e.g., Afghan, Iranian, etc.)
  - Japanese
  - Korean
  - Aboriginal
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your country of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your mother's educational background?
  - University
  - College
  - High School
  - Don't Know
8. What is your father's educational background?
  - University
  - College
  - High School
  - Don't Know
9. What is your current sexual identity?
  - Heterosexual (straight)
  - Lesbian or Gay
  - Bisexual
  - Other

10. What is your current relationship status?
- Single
  - Casually Dating (different people at same time)
  - Dating exclusively (single person, short term, long term or serious)
  - Engaged
  - Married
11. Have you ever been involved in an abusive romantic relationship?
- No
  - Yes, as the victim
  - Yes, as the perpetrator
  - Yes, as both victim and perpetrator

**Thank you for providing us with some background information.**

## Appendix G: University Sample Letter of Information



## LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### Perceptions of Potential Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour in Romantic Relationships

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Heather A. Finnegan (Ph.D. student) and Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz (Associate Professor), from the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor. The results of this study will contribute to Ms. Finnegan's dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Heather Finnegan at [finnegah@uwindsor.ca](mailto:finnegah@uwindsor.ca) or Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz at [pfritz@uwindsor.ca](mailto:pfritz@uwindsor.ca) or (519) 253-3000, ext. 3707.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to assess university students' perceptions of relationship break-ups. We are specifically interested in the perception of certain behaviours following the break-up of a romantic relationship that could be considered unwanted pursuit behaviour.

### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to take part in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Read brief scenarios and fill out a series of questionnaires that will take about 25 minutes in duration.
- Provide your name and uwindsor ID (5 min) in order to receive credit for your participation.

Once the completed survey has been electronically submitted, your responses will be automatically sent to the researchers over the Internet. Your name and uwindsor ID will be collected separately and stored in a different file from survey responses.

Total time spent: 30 minutes

Location: This survey can be completed in any location

You will not be contacted for follow-up sessions and will not be permitted to participate in related studies.

### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study does not have any major risks, except that you may have some negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, sadness, embarrassment, anger) in response to some of the things that you will be asked to think about. Participation in this study may remind you about past relationship break-ups. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you can stop participating in this study at any time without penalty. Should you experience any form of distress after being in this study, please either contact someone from the community resource list that will be provided to you upon exiting the study or contact Dr. Patti Timmons Fritz.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Information obtained from this study will add to our general knowledge about the types of behaviours that can occur following romantic break-ups, including unwanted or aggressive behaviours. Such information could be used to help develop prevention and treatment programs aimed at helping individuals build healthy relationships.

#### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

If you are enrolled in a psychology course that offers bonus credit points for participating in psychology research studies, you will receive **.5 bonus credit point** for completing this 30-minute survey.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. You will be asked to provide their name and uwindsor ID at the conclusion of the study in order to receive credit, which will be the only means of identification. The data collected will be hosted by the Survey Monkey web server and will be stored on a secure computer. For information please see Survey Monkey's Privacy Policy (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy/>) and Security Statement (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/>). Any other possible identifying information like IP address will be removed so as to maintain confidentiality. Questionnaire data will be stored separately from identifying information in a separate data file. No information that discloses the identity of the participants will be released or published without your specific consent to the disclosure. Identifying information (name and uwindsor ID) will be destroyed once the project is complete in August 2014, although the psychology participant pool will retain information on your participation. The participant pool has protocols in place to protect the identity of participants and in the destruction of this data. In accordance with the American Psychological Association, your data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse

to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the right to discontinue your participation at any time during this experiment by clicking the "withdraw" button, even after agreeing to this form. Should you choose to stop once you have begun, you will still receive your credits. However, any data that has been collected cannot be removed from the file given that there is no way to connect a specific individual with their data.

#### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The results of the study will be posted on the REB website. This information will be available in June of 2014.

#### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used to in subsequent studies, in publications, and in presentations.

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

#### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Heather A. Finnegan, M.A.  
University of Windsor

Date: July 16, 2012

#### **PRINT THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS**

If you agree to the terms above and would like to continue with your participation please click "Next".

## Appendix H: Student Information Sheet

It is not uncommon for individuals to experience conflict following the break-up of a romantic relationship. The study you completed will help us learn more about perceptions of conflict following a break-up, as well as allow us to make inferences about potential stalking behaviour.

We would like to thank you for participating in our study today and for helping us find out more about this topic. We hope that research studies like this one will allow us to find ways to help individuals who experience distress and/or unwanted pursuit after the break-up of a romantic relationship.

Stalking is defined as any repeated behaviour that causes the target of the behaviour to reasonably fear for their safety or the safety of those they care about. Repeatedly contacting (calling, emailing, text messaging) or following another person, showing up at their home or place of work/school, harassing friends and family, and making threatening or disparaging comments are all examples of stalking and/or harassment behaviour. Although these types of behaviours commonly occur following a relationship break-up, they may represent an escalating series of aggressive acts or a continuation of controlling behaviours that occurred during the relationship and should be taken seriously.

Sometimes when people have questions or problems they may not know who to talk to or where to get help. We have included a list of services that are available to individuals in your area. If you, a friend, or a family member have questions, would like someone to talk to, or need help with a problem, one of these resources may be able to help.

<b>Student Counselling Centre</b> 293 CAW Centre, 401 Sunset Ave. Windsor, ON N9B 3P4 Tel: (519) 253-3000 Ext. 4616	<b>Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex County Branch (CMHA-WECB)</b> 1400 Windsor Avenue Windsor, ON N8X 3L9 Tel: (519) 255-7440
<b>Sexual Assault Crisis Centre of Essex County</b> 1407 Ottawa St., Unit G, Windsor, ON Email: <a href="mailto:sacc@wincom.net">sacc@wincom.net</a> Tel: (519) 253-9667 (24 hours)	<b>Mental Health Helpline</b> Information about mental health services in Ontario; Service is 24/7 1-866-531-2600
<b>Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Trt Centre</b> Windsor Regional Hospital, Metropolitan Campus 1995 Lens Ave, Windsor, ON Tel: (519)255-2234	<b>Distress Centre of Windsor-Essex County</b> Crisis Phone: (519) 256-5000 (12 noon – 12 midnight) For persons in distress
<b>Psychological Services and Research Centre (PSRC)</b> 326 Sunset Avenue Windsor, ON N9B 3A9 Tel: (519) 973-7012	<b>Windsor Addiction Assessment &amp; Outpatient Service</b> Windsor Regional Hospital, Western Campus 1543 Prince Rd, Windsor, ON Tel: (519) 257-5220
<b>Lesbian Gay Bi Youth Line</b> Tel: 1-800-268-YOUTH (Can call from anywhere in Ontario)	<b>Counselling for LGBTIQ</b> Free support groups <a href="http://ok2beme.ca/Windsor">ok2beme.ca/Windsor</a>

	Tel: (519) 254-3426
<b>Mood and Anxiety Disorders Treatment Program</b> Windsor Regional Hospital – Western Campus 1543 Prince Rd., Windsor, ON Tel: (519) 257-5125 (Referral from physician required)	<b>Community Counselling Alliance</b> Short-term counselling, subsidized Tel: (519) 254-3426
<b>Windsor Essex Community Health Centre  Teen Health Centre (THC)</b> 1585 Ouellette Ave. Windsor, ON N8X 1K5 Tel: (519) 253-8481	<b>Hiatus House</b> 250 Louis Ave. Windsor, ON N9A 1W2 Tel: (519) 252-7781 (Intervention for families experiencing domestic violence)

VITA AUCTORIS

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PLACE OF BIRTH: Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1985

EDUCATION: Silver Heights Collegiate, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1999-2003  
University of Manitoba, B.A. (Hons)., Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2003-2007  
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