When Courtship Persistence Becomes Intrusive Pursuit: Comparing Rejecter and Pursuer Perspectives of Unrequited Attraction

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Two hundred forty-one undergraduates described their experiences with unrequited love, both as pursuers (actors) and love interests (targets). As expected, targets and actors perspectives differed. As targets, participants reported being on the receiving end of more unwanted courtship tactics, violent and nonviolent, than they reported using as pursuers. Further, participants in the actor role—particularly men—tended to overreport receiving signals that their love interest was reciprocating, and to underreport receiving rejections. Meanwhile, targets—particularly women—claimed numerous attempts to reject, including explicitly stating "I am definitely not interested in you," and indicated minimal positive reactions to the unwanted pursuit. Implications of these differences, and others, in perspectives for understanding difficulties in differentiating persistence from stalking are discussed.

KEY WORDS: courtship persistence; unrequited love; stalking, rejection, and comparing accounts.

Intimate violence is a prevalent problem in the United States. It is recognized by the National Institutes of Justice and the National Institutes of Health as a leading health risk for women. However, the focus of much of the dialogue about and research on intimate violence is on battering, and, to a lesser extent, sexual assault. As a survey of texts on intimate violence and violence against women would show, an examination of stalking behavior is often neglected. Yet, stalking is a form of intimate violence (Coleman, 1997; Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Kurt, 1995), affecting approximately 1 million women and 400,000 men each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1997), who are primarily stalked by current or former love interests (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001, for review). Although the public stereotype of the stalker may be the crazed fan of a celebrity, the romantic context is actually the most common context in which stalking is likely to occur. The majority of stalking victims are stalked by an intimate or someone they know (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1997) often as a relationship is breaking up (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2002; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, Weaver, & Resick, 2000).

However, preceding the passage of California's first antistalking statute in 1990, "stalking," as it is presently known, lacked a name and definition. References to what would now fall under the label of stalking behavior were termed "obsession," "love sickness," "a form of sexual harassment," "infatuation," or "psychological rape" (Lowney & Best, 1995). California set a precedence with the first antistalking statutes; defining stalking as the "willful, malicious, and repeated following or harassing" of another person (National Institute of Justice, 1993, p. 13). Definitions vary state by state, as do prohibited acts.[4] (Definitions of stalking by researchers also lack consistency [Davis & Frieze, 2002]). Many states define stalking in terms of perspective. In many

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[4]Examples of stalking-related behaviors that are often included in the definitions include lying in wait, surveillance, harassment, intimidation, threats, and vandalism.

cases, the law intervenes whenever the victim claims to fear death or bodily harm at the hands of his/her stalker. In some states, the threshold for intervention is lowered to feelings of harassment and threat. Of course, as one would expect, what perpetrators see as threatening and what victims see as threatening vary widely.[5] The individuals involved as perpetrators in behaviors that might be labeled as "stalking" by legal professionals or by researchers may not themselves label these actions as "stalking." In fact, they may not even see the behaviors as negative (e.g., Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Dunn, 1999; Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 2000). However, it is not only among perpetrators and victims that accounts vary, but among legal officials, lay people, and even among different types of victims perceptions differ. In this study, we will examine some of the ways that gender interacts with the roles of pursuer and rejecter to influence differences in the perceptions of stalking-related behaviors and the consequences of persistent pursuit.

In order to better understand the phenomenon of stalking, the purpose of this study was to explore the existence of various types of behaviors that might be labeled as "stalking," and examine the perception of these behaviors from the perspective of both the potential victim and of the assailant, or, as we will label them, the target and the actor. As we examine these behaviors from both perspectives, we also address the possibility of gender differences in perceptions of targets and actors.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON STALKING-RELATED BEHAVIOR

In making this comparison between actor and target perspectives, we have chosen to focus on the behaviors that might be labeled as stalking that occur when the actor is interested in developing a relationship with the target. These behaviors are often labeled as obsessive relational intrusion (ORI; see Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, for review). ORI is akin to stalking, but includes a broader range of behaviors and always occurs in a relational context. The most common types of ORI behaviors are what might be seen as normal courtship tactics, such as calling someone, that are just done in high frequency and in contexts in which they are unwanted (e.g., when the target of the phone calls doesn't want to

hear from the pursuer) (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000). Accordingly, in this study we ask about the frequency of "courtship tactics" that may be seen as questionable, such as intimidation or spying, and clearly violent behavior (e.g., threats of aggression), as well as tactics that could be considered "normal." However, all behaviors occur within an unrequited romantic relationship context, as it is in this situation that it is acknowledged that the pursuit is unreciprocated, and hence the pursuit behaviors are likely to be unwanted. Thus, at minimum, the behaviors constitute "unwanted pursuit tactics" or "obsessive relational intrusion" which could become or could be considered stalking behavior (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000).

Further, we focus on a period before any sort of dating relationship developed. This focus further allows us to classify the actions as unwanted as they never resulted in any successful romantic connection. Although, as previously mentioned, much of stalking behavior occurs during or after a romantic relationship, there is evidence that prerelationship stalking does exist. In one sample of self-defined stalking victims recruited to participate in a study on stalking (Hall, 1998), 23% of stalkers were perceived as persons who were seeking a relationship. Also in Mullen and colleagues' (Mullen, Pathe, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999) clinical sample of stalkers, 49% were classified as attempting to seek some form of intimacy with a love interest.

In much of interpersonal violence research, the focus, like that of the legal system, is on the perspective of the victims (Frieze & Davis, 2000). Some research has begun to enhance our understanding of the pursuer (or actor), because "it is with the pursuer that perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior needs to be delineated and changed because it is the pursuer who should be prevented from crossing the line in a romantic pursuit" (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000, p. 38). But, as we begin to better understand what the actor is thinking, it is also important to keep in mind that the same actions may be perceived very differently by the actor and the target. Indeed, recent stalking theory has argued for the importance of examining stalking as a dyadic interaction, where the perspectives, goals, and actions of the players are interdependent (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001). In this study, we make an attempt to incorporate these different perspectives.

Examining differences in perspectives of the same event has a long history in social psychological research. As Jones and Davis (1965) showed us,

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[5]Making many antistalking laws subject to challenges that they are unconstitutional and should be "void for vagueness."

actors in any situation are more aware of their own actions than they are of the actions of others in the situation. One observes his or her own behavior in the context of things one has done in the past, and focuses on the particular things being done in this particular situation. When observing others, we tend to see their behavior in the context of what others in similar situations are doing or in terms of how they are reacting to us. For this reason, we may interpret an action we do very differently than the same action done by someone else. Perspective differences can be seen in other research too. One of the original purposes outlined to participants in the now infamous Stanford Prison Study was to examine how two different perceptions of the same event could emerge based on the different role each individual played (Haney & Zimbardo, 1976).

In other examinations of the role of perspective, differences in actor and target perceptions have been found in reports of incidents involving hurt feelings. The person hurting the feelings of another individual views the situation very differently than the person having his or her feelings hurt (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). Differing views depending on one's role can also be seen in studies of accident reports (Chaikin & Darley, 1973). In these studies, whenever a participant took the perspective of a perpetrator or recalled being a perpetrator, he or she typically recounted the incident in a light favorable to him/herself, sometimes attempting to blame the victim by alleging precipitating acts by the victim. In contrast, those in the victim role did not tend to acknowledge possible precipitating errors, and focused on how they were wronged. Consequently, depending on their role in the situation, participants exhibit a self-enhancing bias in their retelling of events, thus, not only exhibiting the actor-observer bias in making more external attributions for their behavior, but also skewing the telling of their tales so as to cast themselves in a positive light.

This same pattern of self-enhancing recollections can be seen in close relationships' research. For instance, Sillars and his colleagues (Sillars, 1998; Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000) have examined aggressive and nonaggressive married couple's arguments. They find that spouses in aggressive relationships underestimate their negative contributions to an argument (e.g., use of avoidance tactics) and overestimate their positive input (e.g., how constructive they were being). Thus, not only do aggressive individuals appear to see their actions as less negative than their partner or an outside observer might,

but they in fact view their acts as positive. This study extends this research to determine if similar differences exist for stalking-related behaviors.

Similar perceptual differences have been identified in research on the establishment of romantic relationships. Research comparing opposing accounts of initial attempts to establish a relationship finds that both parties recall incidents in a way that portrays them in a favorable way (Leary, 2000; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). It appears that targets of unwanted pursuit, believing they might be blamed for leading the actor on or for hurting the feelings of their "lovestruck" pursuer (a realistic concern, see Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993), tend to minimize or omit any aspects of an event that might be construed as a transgression on their part. Such concerns are similar to those seen in rape victims, who also tend to be blamed for leading the rapist on (see Koss et al., 1994, for review).

Meanwhile, pursuers, trying to present themselves favorably, may tend to minimize any negative impact of their actions. Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues (2000) reported that few pursuers were able to see the negative impact of their actions. Going beyond simply minimizing the impact of their actions, in Davis et al. (2000) study of stalking, male pursuers perceived their acts as noble or romantic. In this study, stalkers described their acts as "acting out of love," seeming to argue that they were trying to preserve an existing relationship or obtain a new relationship. Accordingly, it appears that the romantic context, and role as a romantic paramour, casts a rosy halo over how the pursuer sees his or her pursuit tactics. The romantic context has been shown to color the perception of observers as well, as legal decision-makers and research participants are less likely to label a behavior "stalking," and give the behavior a negative context, when it occurs between previous dating partners than when the same behavior occurs between strangers (Dunn, 1999; Sinclair, Chan, & Borgida, 2003).

Our first prediction, then, is that targets will see more negative aspects of actor behavior, and underreport any behavior of their own that could be seen negatively, such as displaying signs of interest that could later result in accusations of leading the pursuer on. Meanwhile, actors will minimize reports of any negative behavior, and overreport signs of reciprocity from the target. There is further empirical support for this prediction that comes from research looking at unwanted pursuit, although not specifically at stalking. For instance, according to

Baumeister and colleagues (1993), rejecters are far more likely to report that their pursuers used "unscrupulous" tactics in courting them (46% of rejecters claim this, while only 3.2% of pursuers admit to it). Meanwhile, pursuers claim to have rarely ever received a clear indication of lack of interest. In contrast, rejecters felt they were being quite explicit and their pursuers just didn't "get it"—seemingly exhibiting what Malamuth and Brown (1994) term "negativeness blindness" or some form of rejection *in*sensitivity (Sinclair, Borgida, & Collins, 2002). In fact, in Baumeister and colleagues' research (1993), rejecters felt that they had given the pursuer clear messages that they were not interested. Many of these rejecters may have expressed their disapproval of the pursuit in more than one way and more than once. Other research has noted that people use escalating rejection tactics, that start with attempts to "let him/her down easy" (de Becker, 1997), but when the rejection fails to deter pursuit, the rejecter resorts to alternate attempts (e.g., avoidance, ignoring, and explicit rejection attempts). Thus rejecter reports are expected to reflect having rejected the pursuer clearly and having tried to otherwise discourage pursuit (e.g., avoid, ignore). In contrast, pursuers are not expected to report having been rejected often, if at all.

In summary, differences in rejecter-pursuer accounts are expected to largely follow the pattern whereby both actors and targets attempt to present themselves in the best light possible. For actors, this means highlighting the positive, precipitating responses their actions elicited (e.g., s/he was flattered, s/he flirted, s/he played hard to get), minimizing any indicators of negative impact (e.g., s/he was afraid, s/he was uncomfortable, the behaviors were "too aggressive"). For targets, this means minimizing reports of any positive responses to the pursuit actions, while emphasizing the negative indications s/he gave as an attempt to end the pursuit (e.g., the different attempts to reject), the general negativity of the pursuit (e.g., that it was "too aggressive" or "went too far"), and the negative impact the incident had on him/her.

Gender and Perceptions of Stalking-Related Behavior

One of the issues that has emerged in stalking research is that the same actions done by a man may engender more fear in the victim than the exact same behavior done by a woman (Frieze & Davis, 2002).

In Tjaden and Thoennes' (1997) national survey of stalking victims, women were far more likely than men to report that the stalking behaviors had caused them fear. Such differences might also be seen on different measures of discomfort (e.g., uncomfortable, concerned). A similar finding can be seen in studies of opposite-sex sexual harassment that reveal that men are less likely than women to report feeling afraid of their pursuer (DuBois, Knapp, Faley, & Kustis, 1998; Koss et al., 1994; Pryor & Whalen, 1997).

A second gender difference might be evident in target accounts relating to the gender of the actor. It is believed that a female pursuer in a romantic relationship is viewed more negatively than a male (Dunn, 1999; Green & Sandos, 1983; Rose & Frieze, 1993). In particular, the female actor tends to be perceived as more aggressive because she is stepping out of the passive feminine role as the object of a pursuit by acting herself to seek a relationship (Baumeister et al., 1993; de Becker, 1997). Thus, while male rejecters may not feel afraid by the actions of a female pursuer, he may interpret her acts as more aggressive than female targets view the behaviors of their male pursuers. Consequently, when asked whether their pursuer "went too far," it is believed that male targets are more likely to agree than female targets.

In addition to influencing gender differences in their *reactions* to stalking-related behavior, one of the questions addressed in this research is whether males and females have differential *perceptions* of the frequency of stalking-related behavior itself. There are competing hypotheses with regard to whether men or women will report experiencing or perpetrating more stalking-related behaviors. On the one hand, one might expect that men would be more likely to notice the actions of women who are pursuing them because her stepping out of the expected female role would be more novel and therefore more memorable, and thus, perhaps, reported as more frequent in a retrospective account. But, there are also a number of studies showing that women are more likely to experience intimate violence and to notice violence generally in close relationships (e.g., Graham & Wells, 2001). Differences in *perception* may be because such aggression and violence leads to fear in women, whereas women's pursuit tactics, even if seemingly violent, do not elicit as much fear from men. As men's actions are more threatening to women than vice versa, women may report higher frequencies because one tends to attend to information in the environment that is

potentially threatening to one's survival. At the same time, there may be no gender differences in reports, as in a number of studies of the frequency of intimate violence, namely battering and stalking, it has been revealed that there are little to no gender differences in reports of the frequency of use of aggressive behavior in romantic contexts (see Archer, 2000, and Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001, for review). In the results presented below, we examine a number of types of stalking-related behaviors to determine if men and women report these differently.

Study Overview

The methodology utilized in the present study, originally outlined in Sinclair and Frieze (2000), follows that of Baumeister and colleagues (1993), and is also similar to Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues (2000). However, unlike Baumeister and colleagues (1993) we do not use a narrative response format, instead giving participants fixed responses. This format should supplement Baumeister and colleagues' (1993) findings, in particular, by specifically listing different rejection tactics that highlight the multiple forms and degrees of rejection utilized by rejecters. Also, following the suggestions of Baumeister and colleagues who recommended more work on the use of "unscrupulous" tactics in unrequited attractions, we examine the use of clearly aggressive intimidation and abusive behaviors. We also expand on the possibility of gender differences, in addition, to actor/target differences in reports. Further, unlike Langhinrichsen-Rohling and associates (2000), we examine the unwanted pursuits before a relationship has commenced—in the initial courtship stage. We asked participants to recall experiences in which they loved someone who did not love them in return and then asked that they tell of experiences in which they were loved but did not reciprocate. In both instances, oral and written directions stressed that their reports should only reflect behaviors, perceptions, and feelings *before* any mutual romantic relationship developed. Pursuers, those pursuing an uninterested love, were asked to report on how they felt when rejected, and what they perceived their love interest's response to be (e.g., did s/he flirt or somehow respond favorably? Did she seem afraid?). Rejecters had the same questionnaire format, except they reported on their own feelings and response to the attention of their pursuer, as well as noting how they perceived their pursuer to have felt.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 241 original study participants were student volunteers enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology course at the University of Pittsburgh who needed study participation credit as a course requirement. (In order to make the sample more homogenous, and to allow us to generalize about a young college student sample, all those involved in a homosexual relationship or who were over 26 were eliminated from the sample). To be included in the final sample, the study participants had to have at least one experience of loving someone who did not reciprocate those feelings *and* to have been the person who did not reciprocate the feelings of someone else. Of our original sample of 197 women, only one, who said she had never been loved by someone whose feelings she did not reciprocate, was omitted from the sample. For our original 47 men, three said they had never loved someone else who did not reciprocate the feelings, resulting in a sample of 44 men. Thus, most of our sample of both sexes had experienced both loving someone else who did not feel the same way and being loved by someone who they did not love. In fact, 75% of men and 79% of women reported loving someone else who did not reciprocate the feelings more than once. Eighty-four percent of the men reported having someone else love them who they did not love more than once. The comparable percentage for women was 95%. Because each person was describing a situation in which they were the actor, and another in which they were the target, the number of relationships being described is twice the number of individuals in the sample.

There were 197 women and 44 men in the final sample. The sample was 87% Caucasian, with a modal age of 18–19 (82% of the sample). There were 6% African Americans, 3% Asian, 2% mixed race, and 2% other. The disparity in gender and race is reflective of differences in the demographics of today's psychology majors.

Procedures

Students were recruited for a study of "Loving when your partner does not love back." Participants were asked to report on crushes, love interests, or passionate love they felt for another that was not reciprocated, then were asked to switch roles and to tell

us about a time when they were the focus of an unwanted pursuit. (We allowed students in the sample to self-define what they meant by "loving," beyond this very general description). Participants were reminded that in either scenario their reports should cover behaviors during a courtship phase, not a reconciliation attempt. Students were surveyed anonymously in mixed gender groups ranging from 5 to 20. The experimenter was a college-aged White female student. All participants were invited to ask questions and not to answer any items that made them uncomfortable. After completing the survey, participants were given oral and written feedback about the purpose of the study, and advised of resources for further information or counseling.

Measurement

Using the Courtship Styles survey that was originally used in Sinclair and Frieze (2000), actors were asked to report on stalking-related behaviors and how they perceived their love interest as responding to the pursuit and how they felt when rejected. Meanwhile, targets were asked to report on how they responded to the pursuit and what they perceived the pursuer's response to rejection to be.

Stalking-related behaviors were divided into four subcategories, based on previous factor analyses and the logical association of sets of items (see Sinclair & Frieze, 2000). The first category was labeled as "normal courtship approach behavior" and was created by computing the mean agreement level for six items (sending or giving notes, sending or giving gifts, doing unrequested favors, asking out as a friend, asking out on a date, and attempting communication). The alphas for this scale were .74 for the pursuer report and .75 for the rejecter report. The second category was surveillance. Items here were waiting outside class or home, driving by the residence, showing up at an event where the person would be, following the person, finding out information about the person, changing one's schedule to be nearer the person, asking friends about the person, and spying. Alphas for this scale were .80 for the pursuer and .83 for the rejecter. Intimidation items included secretly taking the person's belongings, manipulating the person into dating, trying to scare the person, leaving unwanted items for the person to find, giving the person "unusual parcels," not taking "no" for an answer, making unsolicited calls to the person, calling and hanging up, calling and leav-

ing a message on the person's machine, and making threats. Alphas for this scale were .72 for pursuers and .75 for rejecters. Finally, all items assessing psychological aggression and physical violence were combined into one scale. Items included harassing, forcing sexual contact, physically harming slightly or more than slightly, making threats, trespassing, threats (and actually attempting to and successfully doing), emotional hurt, damaging belongings, vandalizing the person's home or car, physically hurting someone known to the person, hurting oneself, and verbally abusing. The alphas for these 24 items were .93 for pursuers and .93 for rejecters.

The final 29 items of the survey tapped participant perceptions of their love interests, feelings, and reactions. Specifically, they were asked: "During the time you were interested in this person how did s/he react to your attempts to get his/her attention?" Using a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently, more than 10 times*), possible responses included rejection ("Say s/he was definitely not interested") and tactics to avoid or ignore the pursuer. The scale also allowed for positive reactions to the participant ("Say s/he was interested"), responses that indicate blame on behalf of the love interest ("Play hard to get"), and emotive reactions (e.g., "S/he seemed afraid"). Once again, this same scale was used in the rejecter's half of the survey, wherein rejecters were asked to report what their response was to the pursuers' actions. The complete list of 29 items is available from the authors.

To assess pursuer response when their affection was not returned, participants indicated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) "how much a given statement pertain[ed] to [their] feelings about [the love interest] at the time [their] feelings were not reciprocated." Examples of more positive reactions include "I learned something positive from the experience." Negative responses included "I felt I had been led on," and "I felt angry." The same list of 22 responses was given to rejecters, and they were asked to indicate what they thought their pursuers felt when rejected, "I" was replaced with "S/he." The complete list of 22 items is available from the authors.

RESULTS

Differential Perceptions of Pursuers and Rejecters

Study participants were required to have been in a relationship in which they were the target of being

Table I. Reports of Different Types of Stalking-Related Behavior

Type of Behavior	Pursuer role		Rejecter role	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Normal courtship approach behavior[a,d,e]	2.7	2.4	2.7	3.1
Surveillance[a,d]	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.4
Intimidation[b,d]	1.5	1.4	1.7	1.6
Verbal and physical aggression[c,d]	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.5

[a]Mean item score. Scale from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Frequently*
[b]Originally computed as in footnote [a]above, but transformed with a log transformation because of skewness and kurtosis.
[c]Very high skewness led to dichotomizing of this into *no violence* = 1, *any violence* = 2.
[d]Repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant effect ($p < .05$) for role (Pursuer versus Rejector).
[e]Repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant interaction for role by gender.

loved by someone and not loving them back, and also in a relationship in which they were the actor in loving someone else who did not love them back. These two relationships involved different people. When this situation had happened more than once to either the target or the actor, we asked them to focus on the most recent of these situations.

Within our data, we were able to compare people's perceptions of events and feelings when they were the pursuers and when they were the rejecters of another's pursuit, through the use of a mixed model ANOVA with gender as an independent between subjects variable and role as a repeated measure independent variable.[6] Of course, the reported incidents as actors and as targets were *not* the same events, only the same type of event (e.g., unrequited attraction). However, by looking at two related events from the point of view of one person taking each role, we are able to analyze the effect of role perspective, holding the individual constant.

We first used the role by gender design to see how overall perceptions of the event differed. We found that those in the actor role reported pursuing their love interest longer (mean = 3.11, "a few months") than those in the target role reported being pursued (mean = 1.73, "a few weeks") ($F[1, 236] = 178.96$, $p < .001$). There were no significant gender effects in pursuit length.

We next looked at the types of reported stalking-related behaviors. As shown in Table I, four different types of stalking-related behavior were

measured. Across all behaviors, there was a significant main effect of perspective, such that pursuers reported doing less than rejecters reported being the recipient of. The behaviors examined were all "unwanted"—in that they occurred in a context the respondent acknowledged was an unrequited interest in which they had been refused. The behavior types examined included normal approach tactics, surveillance (indirect courtship) tactics, intimidation tactics (psychological aggression and coercion), and clearly violent behavior (threats, verbal and physical attacks).

The first set of behaviors such as sending notes, giving gifts, doing favors was labeled as normal courtship approach behavior. Mean scores for these items was between rarely and occasionally. Women in the rejecter role reported the highest levels of this behavior in their male pursuers, as indicated by a significant role by gender interaction. There were no gender effects for the other measures. For surveillance (spying or showing up at events where the target was, for example), the mean level was around "rarely," and rejecters perceived more of this behavior than pursuers. Because of skewness, items measuring intimidation (taking belongings, trying to manipulate, etc.) were log transformed. Again, rejecters reported more of this behavior than pursuers. These behaviors were less common, with most scores between never and rarely. A number of items measuring psychological aggression and violence were summed into one score and this was dichotomized into none and at least one, since these actions were rarely reported. Overall, rejecters reported more of this violent behavior than pursuers, as they did for all other behavior measures. Other than "normal courtship" behaviors, there were no significant

[6]Limitations of SPSS did not allow us to do a repeated measures MANOVA with multiple repeated measures as dependent variables. Because of the necessity for many tests, we focus on results significant at the $p < .01$ level.

gender differences in how often the various types of stalking-related behaviors were done.

Reports of Rejecter Responses to Unwanted Pursuit

How did the targets of the people expressing romantic interest react to these expressions? And, how did the actors perceive the reactions of the target? For this analysis, we used a series of role by gender ANOVAs with several different emotional reactions as dependent variables. Once again, the actor/target role and gender were the independent variables for these analyses. Significant main effects for role are presented in Table II. The only variable on which we found no difference was on the item: "S/he felt afraid." We predicted that those in the target role might be more afraid than the actors thought they would feel, and of those in the target role, women might express more fear than men as targets. However, contrary to this prediction, there were no significant differences in reported fear by actor/target status or by gender. Mean fear ratings were less than 2 on a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Very much*, so few of the behaviors generated any fear in this sample. There were also no gender differences on reports of feeling uncomfortable, angry, or annoyed, only perspective differences. Accordingly, there does not seem to be support for the assertion that women feel more uncomfortable being persistently pursued than men do—at least not at these lower levels of potentially aggressive behavior. There were gender differences on other outcome variables of rejecter reactions, however, as discussed below.

As shown in Table II, when reporting on their role as an actor, both men and women were more likely to report that the target felt flattered, expressed interest in the actor, and played hard to get. When reporting on their role as a target, both sexes reported higher feelings of avoiding the actor, ignoring the actor, saying they were not interested, asking the actor to leave them alone, getting annoyed, getting angry, and feeling uncomfortable. All these results are consistent with our expectation that actors would be more positive about their behaviors than targets and that targets would more emphasize their actions to indicate a lack of interest.

In addition to main effects when comparing pursuer and rejecter perspectives, some items revealed gender main effects, and role by gender interactions. Men as pursuers were most likely to see their targets as feeling flattered (mean = 3.15), but as targets, men saw themselves as being less flattered by the attentions of their female pursuers (mean = 2.31). These results are seen in a main effect for gender ($F[1, 214] = 4.86$, $p < .05$), and a significant role by gender interaction ($F[1, 214] = 8.76$, $p < .01$). There was also a significant interaction with gender such that males in the actor role rated their female targets as most likely to play hard to get (mean = 2.44), while men in the target role saw themselves being less likely to lead on their female pursuers (mean = 1.85) (for the interaction, $F[1, 215] = 4.16$, $p < .05$). Finally, there was also a significant interaction for the variable "S/he [or I] said s/he [or I] was definitely not interested" ($F[1, 214] = 20.91$, $p < .001$), such that women in the target role rated themselves as most strongly saying they were definitely not interested (mean = 2.98), while women in the actor role were less likely to believe their targets had said they were not interested (mean = 1.58).

Table II. Actor and Target Reports of Rejecter Responses to Unwanted Pursuit Tactics

Participants in the ACTOR role were more likely to report	Actor Mean	Target Mean	F (df)	p-value
Target was flattered	3.09	2.94	$F(1, 214) = 8.76$	<.01
Target expressed interest	2.82	1.80	$F(1, 214) = 41.73$	<.001
Target played hard to get	2.04	1.93	$F(1, 215) = 4.49$	<.05
Participants in the TARGET role were more likely to report				
I avoided the pursuer	1.48	2.44	$F(1, 216) = 40.72$	<.001
I ignored the pursuer	2.14	2.83	$F(1, 214) = 21.79$	<.001
I said "Definitely not interested"	1.66	2.84	$F(1, 213) = 68.12$	<.001
I said "Leave me alone"	1.14	1.75	$F(1, 213) = 26.54$	<.001
I became annoyed	1.42	2.56	$F(1, 213) = 60.52$	<.001
I got angry	1.25	1.96	$F(1, 213) = 29.32$	<.001
I felt uncomfortable	1.40	2.19	$F(1, 212) = 32.38$	<.001

Table III. Actor and Target Reports of Pursuer Responses to Rejection

Participants in the ACTOR role were more likely to report	Actor Mean	Target Mean	F(df)	p-value
I felt I couldn't give up	2.83	1.85	$F(1, 233) = 20.19$	<.001
I felt jealous	3.10	2.76	$F(1, 230) = 4.61$	<.01
I felt led on	2.80	2.45	$F(1, 232) = 9.02$	<.003
Participants in the TARGET role were more likely to report:				
Pursuer learned something positive from the experience	2.84	3.72	$F(1, 218) = 32.68$	<.001

Reports of Actor Responses to Rejection

We also asked a series of questions about how the person felt in the actor role, and what targets thought the actor felt when rejected. Comparing actor reports of their feelings to target perceptions of actors' feelings yielded no differences for feeling deceived (mean = 2.1) or disappointed (mean = 3.6). There were also no significant differences for role on the variable of feeling angry, hurt, or on the item "I went too far." However, there were main effects of gender on these variables. There was a gender effect such that women, regardless of their role, perceived that actors were more angry about being rejected (mean = 2.77) than men did (mean = 2.33) $(F[1, 235] = 46.01, p < .02)$. A similar effect was found for women more than men to perceive that the actors felt more hurt (means of 3.47 versus 3.03, $F[1, 238] = 8.05, p < .005$). Again, there were no significant differences between main effects for role for feelings of being hurt or angry. Finally, we analyzed ratings of the actor "going too far" by role and by gender. There were no differences for role, but we did find that women agreed this was true more than men regardless of the role they were in $(F[1, 224] = 5.06, p < .03)$.

Significant main effects in the comparison of actor and target perspectives on actor feelings are presented in Table III. Actors were more likely to say they felt they could not give up than targets believed they felt. Also, on the item "I felt I couldn't give up" or "He/she wouldn't give up," there was a significant interaction for gender $(F[1, 233] = 8.75, p < .01)$, such that women as actors were most likely to say they could not give up (mean = 2.93), and women as targets saw their pursuers as least likely to give up (mean = 1.78).

Actors felt more jealousy than targets believed they felt. There was also a significant main effect for gender such that women reported more jealousy feelings in actors than men did, regardless of the role perspective they were taking $(F[1, 230] = 8.05, p < .005)$. Actors were more likely to feel they were being led on than targets believed they did, and women saw actors as believing they were being led on more than men $(F[1, 232] = 4.29, p < .05$, for the main effect for gender).

DISCUSSION

As expected, actors and targets did have different views of the same types of events. People in both roles saw their actions in a more positive light than they labeled the actions of the person in the other role. Expectations that targets would not perceive the negative responses of their love objects were also supported. Thus, actors did not report perceiving much in the way of negative responses from their love interest such as rejections or rejecter discomfort, and instead reported more positive reactions and evidence of reciprocation. In contrast, it was hypothesized that target reports would indicate more negative responses to their pursuer's attempts to win their affection, and little to no endorsement of items that would imply s/he had ever given the pursuer reason to hold out hope for a romantic relationship and thus have reason to continue the pursuit. This was confirmed as well. Further, targets tended to report that pursuers engaged in more courtship behaviors, aggressive and nonaggressive, than pursuers claim to.

These findings demonstrate an important divergence in perspective. If a pursuer does not perceive that his/her actions have negative effects and is oblivious to a love interest, reportedly, explicit rejections, s/he has no reason to stop. De Becker (1997) and other stalking survivor handbooks recommend to victims that they not try to let the pursuer down easily, and instead suggests they be explicit and direct. A

passive rejection such as "I just want to be friends" or "I'm not ready for a relationship right now" are open to reinterpretation. For instance, an ardent pursuer would focus on the "right now" and think "possibly later" in the latter example, and focus on the "friends" in "I just want to be friends" as an opportunity to be more than friends. Our data suggest that such advice may be ineffective. An explicit rejection can only work if the pursuer actually hears it. Instead it seems pursuers—particularly male pursuers—may experience some degree of "negativeness blindness" (Malamuth & Brown, 1994) in their romantic pursuits. Indeed, some degree of rejection *in*sensitivity might be necessary to continue to try and pursue an unrequited romantic relationship, where one risks being exposed to repeated and escalating rejections.

Of course, negativeness blindness presumes that participants actually didn't hear the rejection, as opposed to realizing they had been rejected but simply choosing not to report it in order to save face. It also presumes that if the pursuer had heard the rejection that s/he would stop. However, at this point, we do not have any empirical evidence that this is the case. De Becker (1997) believes that for certain "naive stalkers" that this would be so; an explicit rejection is what they need to shake them out of their lovestruck ambitions. Similarly, Pryor and Whalen (1997) believe certain sexual harassers engaging in perpetrating "unwanted sexual attention" suffer from "miscommunication," and also need some sort of emphatic "no." Yet, it seems equally plausible that a pursuer could hear that s/he was rejected but choose not to believe that the rejecter was sincere (e.g., s/he was exhibiting token resistance, playing hard to get) or simply ignore the rejection, believing that despite the rejection "love *still* conquers all." In fact, in research reported by Sinclair et al. (2002), they found that even when participant acknowledged being rejected and believing their rejecter had meant it, 60% of rejected pursuers still held out hope that the relationship would work.

Instead of miscommunication, e.g., the rejecter is not getting something across, it may be a case of misperception or misrepresentation on the part of the pursuer. In the former case, it is only to be expected that an individual who is relatively strongly attracted to another individual would be cognitively oriented to perceive indicators of reciprocation. After all, reciprocation is the "basic law of social interaction" (Brehm, 1992, p. 177), and thus it is both desired and likely expected. In fact, in a study by Sinclair and colleagues (2002) it was shown that

pursuers chronically high in courtship persistence were more likely than those low in courtship persistence to believe that they had a high likelihood of acceptance, instead of rejection, on a measure of rejection sensitivity. It is likely, then, that pursuers are motivated to see and recall evidence "that best support[s] [their] goals [that] may also enable [them] to construct causal theories that support desired beliefs" (Kunda, 1999, p. 227). Such is the nature of motivated cognition.

In the latter case, the low levels of rejection reported by pursuers could also be a function of self-presentational concerns while reporting on the event of unrequited love. When explaining why one may have persisted in pursuing a lost cause so long, perhaps even become violent, one likely feels obliged to explain and justify that behavior. Instead of making unfavorable internal attributions and reporting them, better to recall and report the ways in which one had a justifiable reason to act so. Future research, though no easy task, should try to parse the encoding versus recounting of incidents of unrequited love and stalking-related incidents to see where this overperceiving of interest and underperceiving of rejection occurs.

It was interesting to note that women seemed to be more concerned about someone being rejected by a love interest more than men were. This can be seen in the fact that women rated hurt and anger higher for the pursuer than men did, regardless of the role they were taking in the situation. Such perceptions may be one factor in explaining why women might be reluctant to hurt someone's feelings who is pursuing them, while men would expect that a woman who was not interested would simply tell him directly.

Gender also played an interesting role with regard to how gender might interact with the roles men and women typically play in courtship. Often, men are the pursuers, and women the pursued. In our study, gender effects primarily occurred when men were reporting about the pursuer role and women about the rejecter role. Though there was a general tendency for pursuers to ignore or underreport rejection, and exaggerate or overreport signs of acceptance, this was especially the case for men. Likewise, the general tendency for rejecters to minimize indicating interest, and emphasize providing rejection, was stronger for women. Accordingly, it appears that event recall may be shaded by familiarity of the role.

A disclaimer, of course, is that these accounts do not involve direct comparisons of the same event,

just different roles in the same type of event. Accordingly, it could be that these participants are making accurate reports, and there are other individuals (the participants' own pursuers) who receive all the rejections, but these participants-as-pursuers don't. Instead, these participants could have received only positive reciprocation from flattered love interest. Yet, it seems unlikely that of our sample of 241 all somehow escaped the experience of multiple rejections, only receiving affirmation.

It is also possible that the rejecter experienced similar perceptual and reporting biases, and may have underreported his or her own reactions that could be interpreted as positive, and overreported how much s/he was negatively affected and how often s/he rejected the advances. After all, rejecters might like to believe that their pursuers got something positive out of the experience, and underreports perceiving the rejection's negative impact on the pursuer, just like the pursuer overperceives positive response from the rejecter and underperceives negative reactions. However, in work by Sillars et al. (2000), it was the aggressor who overestimated positive contributions to the relationship, and underestimated the negative impact. Meanwhile third party observers did not see the same biased perceptions in the aggressor's spouse. It may be when reporting on how others are affected by one's actions the perceptual bias is greater than when reporting on how one was affected by the actions of others. This hypothesis merits further investigation.

However colored by one's role in a romantic context, it is likely that both pursuer and rejecter accounts hold some truth even if they differ. For instance, the target is the best judge of when he or she feels threatened. Also, the actor is liable to be the best reporter on his or her acts. This is especially true when examining stalking-related incidents because many of the behaviors that are often labeled as stalking, such as monitoring of the target's behavior, may be unknown to the target. Thus, we would expect that there would be differences in the perceptions of targets and pursuers.

In addition to this primary pursuer vs. rejecter differences in account, we also had a number of hypotheses regarding anticipated gender differences in reporting. We hypothesized that men were more likely than women to perceive positive responses from their opposite-sex love interests. As noted, this has been found before, and was replicated here. Thus, men believed the women they pursued were more flattered than women reported being as tar-

gets of this pursuit. Men also thought women were playing hard to get more than women felt they were. A suspicion schema (e.g., women are not honest about their expressions of romantic or sexual interest, Malamuth & Brown, 1994) and beliefs about token resistance (Muelenhard & Rodgers, 1998), allows men to believe that even when women say "no" they mean "yes." Accordingly, regardless of whether a rejecter may or may not have exhibited any actual positive signals, these cultural beliefs about a woman's "no" not meaning "no," allow negative signals to be completely disregarded or else reinterpreted as potentially positive indicators.

In contrast, women rejecters were more likely than male rejecters to have claimed to have explicitly rejected the pursuer. Perhaps, this is due to male pursuers being less likely to take no for an answer due to the aforementioned cultural beliefs that permit male pursuers to ignore or reinterpret rejections. Thus, given that men may not hear "no" the first, second, or third time, rejecters have to increase the frequency of rejections. Indeed, women as rejecters felt that their pursuer just wouldn't give up. It may be that men are, in fact, more relentless. It may also be that women feel more powerless to deter the pursuit. After all, women, more so than men, reported repeated attempts to dissuade the pursuer, all to little avail. Thus, taking a more interactionist perspective, the reporting of the incident is not a one-sided recall or coding bias, but is rather colored by both the actions of the pursuer and the unique perspective of the target.

Alternately, instead of men giving up later, it may be that female pursuers are more likely to give up earlier than male pursuers, perhaps because they are more rejection sensitive. However, this possibility is not supported in the present data, as women pursuers were the most likely to report feelings that they simply couldn't give up on the pursuit, and thus it doesn't seem the female pursuer gave up earlier. Indeed, there were no gender differences in actual pursuit length. Rather, it seems that the male pursuer, female target pursuit might be more intense, with more interactions (resulting in a greater opportunity for delivering rejections), than the female pursuer, male target pursuit. After all, the one gender difference found in courtship tactics was that men exhibited a higher frequency of approach tactics (e.g., actually interacting with their love interest) as opposed to indirect tactics.

Our anticipated gender difference, and pursuer/rejecter differences, in the perception of fear

was not confirmed. There were no differences in expressions or perceived expressions of fear. In fact, it seemed that everyone agreed that no fear was experienced. This is likely because these low-level relational intrusions may not be sufficient to elicit "fear," and hence would not legally merit the label "stalking." These behaviors did warrant anger, annoyance, and discomfort for both men and women. Whether this speaks to a need to expand the definition of stalking to include relational intrusions or, even, courtship persistence (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000), or merely warrants a name other than "stalking" has yet to be determined and is presently being empirically investigated (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

An unanticipated, but understandable, gender difference occurred in the reporting of rejecter feelings about rejection. Namely, women were overall more likely to report emotional reactions (e.g., feelings such as "I *felt* hurt," "I *felt* frustrated," etc.) than men. Similar findings have been reported in studies of gender differences in recounting episodic or autobiographical memories. Men are less likely to recall events in emotive terms (e.g., describing their feelings at the time) with the exception of feelings of anger (Bauer, Stennes, & Haight, 2003). Accordingly, gender differences on feeling items should be interpreted with caution, because they may not be due to actual gender differences within the context of unsuccessful courtships (e.g., that men feel less emotions in response to rejection). Rather this result may be a more general outcome of differences in gender socialization (e.g., that it is more socially acceptable for women to express their emotions, Cross & Madson, 1997).

This study was an initial examination into understanding not just pursuer and rejecter accounts of an unwanted pursuit, but differences in men and women's accounts as well. Further work needs to be done to address the questions of where the divergences in perceptions occur, and test theories of why. For instance, an issue that remains unexamined due to the retrospective nature of this study is whether the differences in perception occur during the pursuit or during the recall of the pursuit. Also, more work could explore reactions to types of rejection (Folkes, 1982) and the different means of "rejecting" a rejection (e.g., not hearing as opposed to disbelieving or disregarding). Further, similar to the position of Spitzberg and Cupach (2001), we believe that our understanding of courtship and courtship stalking could be benefited by conducting more research that incorporates an interactional or interde-

pendent perspective. For although the type of interactions in which individuals find themselves may be unwanted, it doesn't deny the fact that a relationship exists. "This back and forth of intrusion and pursuit, and response and counterresponse, in which both persons see their fulfillment of valued goals to be contingent in part upon the other's actions, constitutes a relationship" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001, p. 112). Thus relationships science theory, such as interdependence theory, could provide useful insights into understanding relationship dynamics, not just the violence, that underlie relationship violence.

Ultimately, understanding perceptions is an important element of understanding the how and the why of stalking. Legal definitions vary from state to state, but are often riddled with the perception-dependent requirements that the victim be afraid or that the perpetrator specifically intends to cause that fear. However, it is also important to acknowledge that even though the pursuer may think that s/he is acting out of love, and persisting in accordance with cultural ideals of courtship persistence and romanticism (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000), that perception should not provide justification for going too far in the name of love. No matter one's intentions to win one's love interest, the use of intimidation and aggression by, on average, 20–30% of pursuers (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000) should never been seen as just being persistent.

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