

Learning to Stalk?
The Relation Between Media Exposure and Beliefs About Stalking

by

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Dedicated to my parents, for their unwavering support and unconditional love.

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Chapter 1

Background and Literature Review

“Some call it stalking. I call it love.” So read a T-shirt that appeared on the shelves of Walmart in 2007. After sparking a protest, the T-shirt was pulled from the shelves. In 2012, Target introduced a new Valentine’s Day card. “Stalker is a harsh word,” read the front of the card. The text continued on the inside: “I prefer Valentine.” Once again, the product was pulled in response to public pressure. Still, the fact that two of the most prominent retailers in the country saw fit to introduce a product that conflates stalking and romance suggests that this conflation is a common cultural trope.

A central goal of feminism has been to convince legislators, prosecutors, police officers, and the general public that male-on-female violence is a grave social problem that deserves to be taken seriously. Common forms of male-on-female violence include rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. In spite of advances in knowledge about and support for victims of male-on-female violence in recent decades, it is still the case that all too often, victims of these forms of violence report that their complaints are not taken seriously. Researchers have convincingly argued that a primary reason for this minimization is because many people hold false, stereotypical beliefs about male-on-female violence (Burt, 1980). These false beliefs lead people to minimize both individual victims’ concerns and the scope of the problem of male-on-female violence more broadly, and people who do not see male-on-female violence as a serious concern are unlikely to offer support to victims of male-on-female violence.

Arguably, no form of male-on-female violence is more misunderstood than stalking, and researchers speculate that these misunderstandings stem, in part, from media representations of stalking (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002).¹ Policy experts make similar observations: Bea Hanson, Acting Director of the United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, characterized stalking as “misunderstood” and observed that:

The media too often trivializes it—portraying stalking as romantic or comedic rather than traumatizing and potentially lethal. We can all picture advertisements, songs and movies that send young people the insidious message that stalking is a way to express love. (2013)

She went on to note that she and others were “working to counteract these negative messages.” This work implies that these media portrayals affect audience members’ beliefs about stalking; if this were not the case, there would be no reason to counteract these messages. However, existing work that has examined stalking-related media content has stopped short of empirically demonstrating that this content influences people’s perceptions of stalking (e.g., Lowney & Best, 1995; Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). This dissertation seeks to fill this gap by examining the relation between media exposure and beliefs about stalking using survey and experimental data.

What is Stalking, and Why is it a Problem?

Stalking first gained widespread recognition as a social problem in the wake of the murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer, who was stalked and murdered by obsessed fan Robert

¹ This is not to deny the likely influence of other socializing agents (such as peers and parents) on beliefs about stalking. Although little is known about the sources of information that contribute to people’s beliefs about stalking, there is evidence that peers and parents are important sources of information for related domains, such as dating relationships (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002; Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg, 2002) and beliefs about the appropriateness of interpersonal violence against women (Swartout, 2013). However, a consideration of contributors to beliefs about stalking other than media is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Bordo in 1989. Pressure from the film industry led California to pass the first stalking legislation in 1990; by 1993, all 50 states and Washington D.C. had criminalized stalking (Tjaden, 2003).

Efforts to define stalking from a legal standpoint have proven challenging for several reasons. First, stalkers may employ a broad range of behaviors, ranging from calling the target repeatedly to following her² to posting information about her on the Internet to threatening to kill her. Effective laws need to be able to capture all of these. Furthermore, many of these behaviors may, in isolation, be benign. Finally, identical behaviors may elicit very different reactions depending on contextual factors or individual differences; what one person experiences as romantic, another may experience as terror-inducing. Although legal definitions of stalking in the United States vary from state to state, they typically define it as a course of conduct (usually defined as two or more incidents) that is intended to cause fear in the target (or that a “reasonable person” should have known would cause the target to experience fear) and that actually does lead the target, or would lead a “reasonable person,” to experience a high level of fear (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). These three elements (i.e., repetition, intent, and effect) may be seen as attempts to address the three concerns outlined above.

Reliable statistics on the prevalence of stalking are difficult to come by for a number of reasons. One major reason is that there is a lack of consensus over what constitutes stalking. As noted above, even within the United States, stalking laws are not uniform. Furthermore, the operationalizations of stalking that researchers employ in research on stalking vary enormously, making efforts to generalize across studies challenging at best (but see Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007 for a meta-analysis representing an attempt to do so). Further complicating the matter, this

² I will use feminine pronouns when referring to victims of stalking throughout this work, both to reflect both the statistical reality that females are more commonly targeted than males (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and because of my own theoretical interests.

conceptual murkiness is evident in the way in which people self identify: some people whose experiences do not meet the legal criteria for stalking self identify as victims of stalking, and, less commonly, some people whose experiences do meet these legal criteria do not (Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 2000). This means that simply asking people whether or not they have been stalked is not an especially valid measure. Finally, much of the existing research on stalking relies on extreme cases, clinical cases, and/or cases that are brought to the attention of legal authorities. None of these samples are likely to provide figures with especially good generalizability, as extreme cases are by definition atypical; clinical samples likely oversample both extreme cases and those on whom the behavior had a greater-than-average impact;³ and many stalking cases are never reported to the police (Baum et al., 2009).

With these caveats in mind, a few large-scale, nationally representative studies have been conducted, and all indicate that stalking is alarmingly common. The National Violence Against Women (NVAW) survey conducted from November 1995 to May 1996 was the first of these, using a sample of 8,000 men and 8,000 women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In this survey, 8.1% of women and 2.2% of men reported having been stalked at some point in their life, whereas 1.0% of women and 0.4% of men reported having been stalked in the last year.⁴ However, lowering the threshold of fear required to qualify as a stalking victim resulted in a dramatic increase in both sets of figures. When victims were only required to have been

³ There are at least two reasons this may be the case. First, perhaps most obviously, those who experience more distress in response to stalking behaviors are more likely to seek out help in the form of counseling. Second, those already in therapy, or those who enter therapy to deal with stalking behaviors whose enactment might not lead to significant distress in others, may be less well-equipped to deal with stalking when it does occur because of existing vulnerabilities and may therefore experience symptomology that is more severe than that which the “average” person would experience.

⁴ So as to ensure that people would be included in these figures even if they did not interpret the behavior directed at them as stalking, the word stalking was not used during the course of questioning (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

somewhat frightened, rather than “very frightened” or fearful that the stalker would cause bodily harm, the lifetime prevalence rate increased to 12% for women and 4% for men, and the annual prevalence rate increased to 6% for women and 1.5% for men. A somewhat smaller study was conducted as a follow-up a few years later ($N = 9684$) (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006). The results were similar: 6.94% of women and 1.99% of men reported a history of having been stalked. The most recent figures from a large-scale survey ($N=65,270$) come from the Supplemental Victim Survey, a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, and are based on data collected during the first half of 2006 (Baum et al., 2009). The findings were described in a press release heralding the study as “a wake-up call” (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2009). Based on the data collected, the researchers estimated that 3.4 million people are stalked in the United States annually, an increase of two million over the estimates based on statistics from the earlier NVAW survey.

Though estimates of prevalence vary, there is little question that the scope of the problem is vast. Even more conservative prevalence estimates, as are reported in Tjaden & Thoennes (1998), indicate that nearly 1.4 million Americans are stalked annually. And although people’s responses to stalking are as varied as stalkers’ repertoires, the literature indicates that being stalked is often hugely disruptive to victims’ lives. Stalking may lead to a host of negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidality, and these symptoms commonly persist even after the stalking has ceased (Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004; Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, & Freeve, 2002; Pathé & Mullen, 1997). Stalking not uncommonly forces victims to take time off work, and/or affects their job performance when they are physically present (Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Swanberg, 2007). Out-of-pocket expenses for victims of stalking, which may be

incurred for things ranging from attorney's fees to moving to repairing or replacing damaged property, can be considerable (Baum et al., 2009). Moreover, the effects of stalking extend far beyond its direct targets. Family members and friends may experience stress on the victim's behalf, and the inability to do anything to protect her from further victimization may lead to feelings of helplessness (Pathé, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Stalking victims may require assistance from the police, health providers, and the court system, all of which places a burden on systems that are typically already overburdened (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). In short, to extrapolate from the figures provided by the Baum et al. study that "only" 3.4 million Americans are *affected* by stalking each year is to vastly underestimate the scope of the problem.

Stalking as a Form of Aggression

Aggression may be defined as "behavior carried out with the proximal (i.e., immediate) intention to inflict harm on another person who is motivated to avoid the harm" (DeWall & Anderson, 2011, p. 18). Although some scholars argue that intent should not be a part of definitions of aggression (citing, for example, the difficulty of ascertaining others' motives), others argue that failing to include intent would erroneously capture accidentally causing another harm (e.g., accidentally slamming someone's hand in a car door) and would fail to capture acts of aggression that did not harm the target only by chance (e.g., someone whose punch only failed to connect because the person at whom the punch was directed ducked; Baron & Richardson, 1994).

Buss (1961) argued that aggression can vary with regard to three dichotomous variables—physical vs. verbal, active vs. passive, and direct vs. indirect—yielding a total of eight types of aggression. Placing stalking within this typology is somewhat difficult, however. Although stalking is unquestionably an active form of aggression, it may be, depending on the

particular case, any of the possible types of active aggression. For example, stalking may include active-physical-direct aggression (e.g., a sexual assault); active-physical-indirect aggression (e.g., killing the target's pet); active-verbal-direct aggression (e.g., threatening to harm the target), and/or active-verbal-indirect aggression (e.g., setting up a website falsely alleging that the target is willing to perform sexual services for pay).

More recent work argues that dichotomous models of aggression are inadequate, since they do not account for the range of circumstances that may lead to or accompany aggression, nor do they recognize that the factors set up in these models as dichotomies may in fact coexist (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003). Instead, it is argued that the attributes that have historically been used to categorize aggressive acts—such as the affect that accompanies them, the perpetrator's consideration of consequences, automaticity, the goal of the aggressive act, and whether the act can be attributed to personological versus situational factors—be considered as dimensional, rather than dichotomous, variables. Dimensional approaches allow for a more nuanced understanding of aggression. For example, stalking behavior may be driven both by a goal to rekindle a relationship (a benefit to the perpetrator) *and* by a goal to make the target “pay” for a perceived slight (to harm to the target), or by both an insecure attachment style (a personological factor) *and* rejection (a situational factor).

As a type of aggression, stalking has parallels with other forms of aggression. Huesmann and colleagues (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003; Bushman & Huesmann, 2010) argue that although physical aggressiveness in most people declines after the age of three, there is a subset of individuals whose aggressive tendencies increase with age. This subset can most likely account for violent crime statistics, which show that people are most likely to commit violent crimes (e.g., murder) between the ages of fifteen and thirty. The research on stalkers suggests

that stalkers may tend to be slightly older, on average. In one study, for example, 32% of stalkers were between the ages of 18 and 30, while 27% were in their 30s, 24% were in their 40s, and 15% were 51 years old or older (Hall, 1998).⁵ These findings are not necessarily at odds with the statistics on violent crime reported above, since the forms aggression take shift over the course of the lifespan (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003; Bushman & Huesmann, 2010). It may be that the man convicted for murder at 27 will go on to be a stalker at 50. In support of this supposition, one study that used as forensic sample of stalkers found that although 39% of the stalkers had a prior criminal conviction, only one of these people had previously been convicted of stalking (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999). Another overlap between stalking and aggression more generally relates to perpetrator gender. One of the most consistently demonstrated gender differences in the psychological literature is that males are higher in most forms of aggression (Hyde, 2005), and stalkers are disproportionately likely to be male (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Finally, stalking is often only one of the forms of aggression in the stalker's arsenal, suggesting that stalking is merely one expression of the aggression-prone individual's aggression. The NVAW study, for example, found that men who stalked current or former spouses or cohabiting partners were significantly more likely to assault their targets than men who did not. Specifically, relative to men who did not stalk their partners, men who did stalk their partners were four times more likely to physically assault their partners and six times more likely to physically assault them (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

A Problem of Interpretation?

Because stalking often consists of behaviors that would be benign if considered only in isolation, or acceptable or even desirable if replicated in a different relational context, Emerson,

⁵ The numbers do not add up to 100 because ages were based on victim estimates, and 2% did not know how old the stalker was.

Ferris, and Gardner (1998) describe “stalking”—which is to say, identifying a pattern of behaviors as such—as “an interpretive outcome” (p. 292). And it is an interpretive outcome of potential enormous consequence. Stalking victims who fail to identify their experience as stalking may fail to seek out needed support or take appropriate protective measures (Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004). The latter of these is particularly concerning given that stalking is known to be an escalative behavior (Emerson et al., 1998), which means that accepting intrusive behaviors earlier in a relationship may pave the way for future, more unequivocally problematic, violence (Williams & Frieze, 2005). Furthermore, it is not merely stalking victims’ interpretations that are of consequence, for at least two reasons. First, a history free of stalking victimization is, of course, no guarantee of a future free from stalking victimization, especially in light of statistics that indicate that 3.4 million Americans over the age of 18 are stalked annually (Baum et al., 2009). Second, if the people victims turn to for help—such as friends, family members, coworkers, therapists, and police, to name a few—fail to recognize a situation as stalking, they are unlikely to provide the support they are called upon to provide (Phillips et al., 2004).

Schemas and Scripts

One compelling explanation that has been advanced to explain why people do (or do not) identify a course of conduct as stalking concerns the schematic representations people hold of stalking. Fiske and Taylor (1984) define a schema as “a cognitive structure that represents organized knowledge about a given concept or type of stimulus [that] contains both the attributes of the concept and the relationships among other attributes” (p. 140). One’s schema about someone who is politically conservative, for example, may include someone who is somewhat older, relatively affluent, and is in favor of smaller government, against gun control, and opposed

to gay marriage. Schemata influence the way in which we perceive stimuli: if we are convinced that Mr. Jones is conservative we are more likely to notice behaviors that exemplify this orientation than those that do not. Schemata also influence the encoding of information in memory. Information that is consistent with existing schemata is more likely to be remembered than information that is not. Because of these biases, schemata are relatively resistant to change. Insofar as they simplify information processing, schemata are enormously useful. However, insofar as this simplification may sometimes come at the cost of accurately processing new information, schematic processing may in some cases be a liability.

The dangers of relying on schematic knowledge are highlighted in studies that examine the event schemas, or scripts, people hold of rape. If a person believes that a “typical” rape includes a man accosting a female stranger in an outdoor public setting and overcoming her through the use of physical force and/or weapons (i.e., a “real rape” or “classic rape”; Estrich, 1987; L. S. Williams, 1984), that person may fail to identify a rape (for example, a “date” rape) as a rape because it does not match this schematic knowledge. This belief system has at least two troubling implications. First, victims of rape who fail to identify their experience as rape (i.e., “unacknowledged victims”) are unlikely to seek out support, which is associated with worse long-term post-assault outcomes (Taylor & Harvey, 2009). They may also be at increased risk for revictimization (see Littleton, Rhatigan, & Axsom, 2007, for a review). Second, police may perceive cases that do not match their schematic knowledge as less serious and not worth prosecuting, which is likely to lead the victims who turn to them for help to experience “secondary victimization” (J. E. Williams, 1984). These potential implications are especially concerning because not only are the elements identified above as central to the “classic rape” schema not necessary for an interaction to be a rape, but such rapes make up only a small portion

of all rapes. Far more common are rapes in which the perpetrator is someone the victim knows (Basile, Chen, Black, & Saltzman, 2007), and rapes in which the rapist is someone the victim knows are significantly less likely than those in which the rapist is a stranger to involve a weapon or to take place outdoors (Ruback & Ivie, 1988). Furthermore, many states' rape laws now rightly employ a broader definition of rape that recognizes that rape of an acquaintance, friend, date, established romantic partner, or spouse is still rape; that previous consent with a partner does not imply blanket consent for all future sexual interactions with that partner; that men can be raped; and that someone who is unconscious or severely intoxicated is not capable of granting consent.

There is also the possibility that people may fail to accurately identify a behavior because they *misidentify* it as something else. This misidentification is especially likely if two scripts contain considerable areas of overlap. The scripts people described in free-writing tasks in which they were asked to write about either a "typical rape" or a "typical seduction," for example, were similar on several dimensions (Littleton & Axsom, 2003), including the use of manipulative tactics by the man; the woman in some way suggesting sexual interest at some point; and the description of either a non-existent or minimal pre-existing relationship between the two parties. Furthermore, the elements that appeared significantly more frequently in the descriptions of those asked to write about a "typical rape"—such as the use of physical violence by the male and resistance by the woman—are often not actually present in a rape. The areas of overlap between these two scripts introduces the possibility that a rape might be misinterpreted as a seduction—especially if the elements more commonly associated only with rapes are absent.

A substantial body of work within the literature on stalking highlights the importance of schematic knowledge to interpretations of stalking. One line of research within this body of

work seeks to identify the factors that affect the likelihood that people will identify behavior as stalking. A second line of research focuses specifically on stalking that occurs in the context of a desired, existing, or former romantic relationship, and posits that people may mistake stalking for romance because of the overlap between the scripts for each. This line of research recognizes that the behaviors some men might engage in when attempting to initiate or rekindle a romantic relationship with women often bear a striking resemblance to behaviors that would meet the legal criteria for stalking, since both scenarios prototypically involve male persistence in the face of female rejection.

Is it Stalking? Predictors of Perceptions

Studies conducted by Sheridan and colleagues suggest that there is a fairly high level of agreement between participants about what constitutes stalking (Sheridan, Davies, & Boon, 2001; Sheridan, Gillett, & Davies, 2000, 2002), which suggests that there may be a “cultural schema” (Nishida, 2005) of stalking. In these studies, researchers provided participants with a list of intrusive behaviors and asked them to determine which of them qualified as stalking. In each study, cluster analyses revealed a “stalking cluster” (comprised of items the majority of participants identified as stalking) and a “non-stalking cluster” (comprised of items the majority of participants believed were not examples of stalking). The clusters identified by female (Sheridan et al., 2001) and male (Sheridan et al., 2002) samples were overwhelming similar, suggesting that perceptions of what constitutes stalking are relatively stable across gender, at least in the aggregate (Sheridan et al., 2002).

However, describing the two clusters identified by Sheridan and colleagues as stalking and non-stalking clusters runs the risk of obscuring the fact that, for some items, at least, there was a fair amount of disagreement as to whether the behavior described was, indeed, stalking.

Although for some items, there seemed to be nearly universal agreement that the item did describe stalking (as high as 98.7%; Sheridan et al., 2000), some of the items included in the stalking cluster were only believed to be stalking by slightly more than half of the participants (as low as 53.3%; Sheridan et al., 2002). Similarly, there was no item in any of the non-stalking clusters that no participant selected as stalking (the lowest percentage was 3.8%; Sheridan et al., 2002), and a fairly sizable minority (as high as 46.7%; Sheridan et al., 2002) believed some items included in this cluster constituted stalking. Put another way, opinion on whether or not a behavior was stalking was in many cases nearly evenly split. These diverging perspectives point to a need to consider what might account for these differences when studying perceptions of stalking.

The factors examined in research seeking to identify predictors of labeling behaviors as stalking can be broadly grouped into two categories: those that have to do with the stalking incident itself, and those associated with participant individual differences. Factors in the former category include intent, persistence, repetition, the pre-existing relationship between the stalker and victim, the gender of the stalker and/or victim, and the behaviors engaged in by the stalker. Factors in the latter category include gender and personal experience with stalking.

Each of the three elements present in most American stalking laws—intent, persistence, and repetition—appear to increase the likelihood that an individual will identify a behavior as stalking. In general, vignette-based studies that manipulate explicit intent (i.e., the pursuer's explicitly stated intent to cause harm) find that the presence of explicit intent leads people to see the pursuer as posing a bigger threat. When explicit intent is present (as opposed to absent), participants are significantly more likely to believe that the pursuer described intended to cause fear or physical or mental harm (Dennison & Thomson, 2000; Dennison, 2007; Dennison &

Thomson, 2002) and to consider the behavior described illegal (Dennison, 2007). However, even though explicit intent may increase the likelihood that people will see the pursuer as posing a serious threat, research suggests that people are capable of identifying a course of conduct as stalking even in its absence (Dennison & Thomson, 2000), especially if they believe that pursuer intended to cause harm (Dennison & Thomson, 2002).

Persistence also affects perceptions of stalking. Intrusive behaviors described in a vignette as occurring repeatedly rather than a single time are more likely to be considered illegal and more likely to be seen as designed to cause fear (Dennison, 2007). Level of persistence, given repeated behaviors, matters, too: pursuers are more likely to be perceived as intending to cause physical or mental harm in vignettes describing moderate, as opposed to low, levels of persistence (Dennison & Thomson, 2002). The behaviors described in the moderate persistence conditions were also more likely to be identified as stalking. However, this effect was only visible when explicit intent was absent. When explicit intent was present, nearly all participants believed that the vignette describes stalking, regardless of persistence level.

The final criterion included in most legal definitions of stalking is that the target experience a high level of fear, or that a reasonable person in her shoes would. In one study of college women, having experienced fear increased the likelihood that a woman would self-identify as a victim of stalking and increased the likelihood that she would contact the police (Jordan, Wilcox, & Pritchard, 2007). As with intent, however, fear does not appear to be a necessary element of many people's stalking scripts: in one study, the majority of people who self-identified as stalking victims did not experience fear (Amar, 2007), while in another, 60% of participants who self-identified as stalking victims but did not meet the legal criteria for this classification failed to do because they did not experience the required amount of fear (i.e.,

feeling "very frightened" or thinking that "they or someone close to them would be seriously harmed or killed by their assailant; Tjaden et al., 2000). Consequently, some researchers argue that the fear requirement be dropped from stalking legislation (Dennison & Thomson, 2000; Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Tjaden et al., 2000). Instead, it is recommended, based on the research, that behaviors that a "reasonable person" should be able to anticipate would cause harm, distress, or repeated irritation be classified as stalking, regardless of the actual consequences of those behaviors (Dennison & Thomson, 2000). While this is already reflected in some states' stalking laws, there are still many states (including Michigan, where the current study was conducted) that require that the victim actually experience a high level of fear.

Characteristics of the stalking incident that are legally immaterial also affect perceptions of stalking. In general, when differences in perceptions of stalking due to the type of relationship between pursuer and target manifest, the closer the preexisting the relationship, the less likely the behavior is to be viewed as problematic. In one study, for example, participants were significantly less likely to believe that the behaviors described in a vignette were stalking when the pursuer was described as a former long-term intimate who had been rejected and was seeking reconciliation than when the pursuer was described as an acquaintance who desired—but had never had—a romantic relationship with the target (Phillips et al., 2004). An earlier study with similar experimental conditions, however, found that relationship type did not affect perceptions of stalking (Dennison & Thomson, 2000). This was likely due to ceiling effects: of the 540 participants, only ten did not believe that the behavior described was stalking. More typically, people see others with whom they have closer relationships as posing less of a threat. For example, participants asked to imagine they were being stalked by an ex-intimate were significantly less likely to say they would contact the police for assistance than those who were

asked to imagine they were being stalked by a stranger (Hills & Taplin, 1998). It is possible that these findings regarding police involvement can be explained by anticipated levels of fear, which tend to increase as the closeness of the hypothetical relationship decreases (Dunn, 1999; Hills & Taplin, 1998). These varying levels of fear may also explain why people are more likely to believe that confronting the stalker is an approach that makes sense when the stalker is a former intimate (Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips et al., 2004) than when the relationship is less close. These findings are especially concerning given that, in actuality, ex-intimate stalkers are the ones who are most likely to physically aggress against their targets (Sheridan & Davies, 2001; Thomas, Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2008).

The findings regarding the effect of pursuer and/or target gender on perceptions of stalking are more mixed. Vignettes describing a male pursuer/female target as opposed to a female pursuer/male target are equally likely to be perceived as stalking and as describing criminal behavior, and are seen as equally severe (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, & Patel, 2003). However, male pursuers are seen as more likely to physically harm the target, and police intervention is seen as more necessary in cases in which the pursuer is male (Phillips et al., 2004; Sheridan et al., 2003). Male targets, on the other hand, are seen as encouraging the pursuer's behavior to a greater extent than are female targets, and are seen as having greater power to put a stop to the pursuer's behavior (Sheridan et al., 2003). Although these findings regarding gender differences are provocative, it is impossible to know whether they are a function of perceptions of the pursuers or targets in the vignettes. Each of these studies only examined heterosexual dyads, and so responses believed to reflect perceptions of male pursuers, for example, could in fact reflect perceptions of female victims. For instance, police intervention might be seen as more necessary in the vignettes with a male pursuer because

male pursuers are seen as more dangerous than female pursuers, because female targets are seen as less able to take care of themselves than male targets, or both.

The individual differences that have received the most attention in studies examining perceptions of stalking are participant gender and personal experience with stalking. Although some studies have failed to detect gender differences in perceptions of stalking (Dennison, 2007; Phillips et al., 2004), those that have detected differences invariably find that women perceive the behavior as posing a bigger threat than do men. Hills and Taplin (1998) provided female participants with vignettes describing a male pursuer and female target, and male participants with vignette describing a female pursuer and male target; all participants were told to imagine themselves as the target. Female participants anticipated higher levels of fear, were more likely to say they would contact the police, and expected to experience more negative affect in response to the pursuit. Again, however, the design conflates gender of pursuer and gender of target, so the results should be interpreted with caution, especially in light of research that indicates that women are more fearful of becoming the target of a crime than are men (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009). A more recent study conducted by Dennison and Thomson (2002), however, suggests that there are indeed gender differences in perceptions of stalkers. The researchers provided participants of both genders with vignettes describing a male pursuer and female target. Female participants were more likely than male participants to believe that the behavior described was stalking, to believe the pursuer intended to cause fear, and to believe the pursuer intended to cause mental or physical harm.

Contrary to what might be expected, the effect of personal experience with stalking on perceptions of stalking appears to be minimal at best. Two separate vignette-based studies found that personal experience with stalking had no effect of beliefs about whether the target should

fear for his or her safety, whether the target should seek help from the police, and whether the target should confront the pursuer (Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips et al., 2004). Personal experience with stalking also had no effect on beliefs about whether or not the behavior described was stalking (Phillips et al., 2004). However, personal experience with stalking does appear to decrease the extent to which people of both genders perceive the pursuit as flattering (Hills & Taplin, 1998).

In sum, the three elements central to legal definitions of stalking—intent, persistence, and victim impact—do appear to affect lay perceptions of stalking, leading people to see the behaviors described in vignettes that include these elements as posing a bigger threat than otherwise identical vignettes that do not include these elements. Stalkers who are described as former intimates are perceived as posing less of a threat than non-intimates, whereas male stalkers are perceived as more threatening than female stalkers. Being female increases the extent to which stalking behaviors are seen as posing a threat, whereas personal experience with stalking has only a minimal impact on perceptions of stalking.

I Stalk Because I Care: The Overlap Between the Scripts for Heterosexual Courtship and Stalking

Stalking that occurs in the context of a desired or actual intimate relationship may be thought of as “a severe form”⁶ of obsessive relational intrusion, or ORI, which is defined as the “repeated and unwanted pursuit or invasion of one’s sense of physical and symbolic privacy by

⁶ It bears emphasizing that “severe” does not imply that the *types* of intrusive behavior are more severe. Even the most benign acts of ORI could easily become threatening in the right context. For example, if a pursuer visited someone at work, and did so every day, and continued to visit after being told repeatedly by both the person he was pursuing and her colleagues to stop visiting, and continued to visit after being escorted out by security on more than one occasion, and if the target was told that if her “friend” did not stop visiting her that her job would be in jeopardy, it is easy to see how this “benign” activity might be perceived by the target as posing a threat.

another person, either stranger or acquaintance, who desires and/or presumes an intimate relationship” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, p. 234-5). Cupach and Spitzberg conceptualize ORI as existing on a continuum of severity of intrusiveness, ranging from behaviors that are only mildly intrusive and might well be welcome in some circumstances (e.g., “asked if you were seeing someone,” “visited you at work”) to behaviors that are highly intrusive and would cause most people significant distress regardless of context (e.g., “broke into your home or apartment,” “forced sexual behavior”). Like stalking, ORI requires that the person perceive the pursuer’s behaviors as unwanted, does not require (but may include) physical intrusiveness, and must include a series of intrusive behaviors (as opposed to a single intrusive incident). Unlike stalking, ORI requires that the pursuer’s behavior be motivated by the desire for a relationship with the pursued, which may or may not motivate stalkers’ behaviors. ORI represents a broader understanding of intrusive behavior than does stalking, since it includes many relatively benign behaviors that are unlikely to produce anything more than mild annoyance. As such, it represents a significant shift away from treating stalking as a highly deviant act committed by individuals with severe psychological disturbances and toward treating stalking as something that may potentially result from innocent miscommunications or maladaptive (but not necessarily pathological) approaches to the adaptive behavior of courtship.

Also highlighting the fuzziness of the boundary between normative and problematic pursuit behaviors, Sinclair and Frieze (2000, 2005) note that there is a “thin line” between the dominant scripts for heterosexual courtship and stalking. In the dominant heterosexual script for courtship, men are expected and encouraged to aggressively pursue women, whereas women are expected to express their level of interest passively and indirectly (Kim et al., 2007). This may in some cases lead women to express “token resistance” (i.e., saying no when they mean yes) so

that they will not be in violation of the norms that govern “proper” female behavior (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). As a result, men must learn to differentiate between token resistance and actual resistance.

Stalking, ORI, and prototypical male heterosexual pursuit are all types of persistent pursuit. That is, all three involve pursuit behaviors that occur repeatedly. Furthermore, these pursuits continue even when the pursuer is explicitly told the pursuit is unwanted. The overlap between culturally sanctioned pursuit and potentially criminal behavior may contribute to male pursuers’ beliefs that their pursuits are genuinely wanted, even when they are explicitly told that they are not. Moreover, precisely because persistent pursuit is a feature of the cultural schema for male pursuit, men are likely to have myriad personal and vicarious experiences that reinforce its utility, thus increasing the likelihood they will see persistent pursuit as a valid and desirable pursuit tactic.

Dominant courtship scripts may also prevent women from seeing intrusive pursuit behaviors as problematic, and may in some cases even lead them to see these behaviors as desirable. Dunn cogently highlighted this tension in her (1999) study of sorority women’s responses to hypothetical “forcible interactions.” All the participants were told to imagine a man to whom they had communicated a lack of interest, but half were told to imagine a person they had been on one date with, and the other half were told to imagine a former long-term boyfriend. All read statements describing six different types of forcible interactions: non-romantic and non-contact (leaving messages every night for a week);⁷ non-romantic and contact (showing up at the woman’s school or job wanting to talk); romantic and non-contact (leaving a card and gift on the

⁷ It should be noted that this item was the only one that described a repetitive act, as opposed to an incident that only occurred a single time. Although this introduces a possible confound, since repetition leads to increased negative perceptions of intrusive behavior (Dennison, 2007; Dennison & Thomson, 2002), the findings reported here are not affected by this.

woman's doorstep); romantic and contact (waiting on the woman's doorstep with flowers); implicitly threatening and contact (following in a car); and explicitly threatening and non-contact (threatening to hurt and kill himself). Participants then rated each of these interactions on a 9-point scale (anchored by 0 = *not at all* and 8 = *extremely*) for how flattering, romantic, annoying, and frightening they would find the interactions.

Several key findings emerged. First, the presence of romantic gestures led the women to see the interactions as more romantic and flattering and as less annoying and frightening. Second, participants who were told to imagine a former long-term romantic partner provided significantly lower ratings of annoyance and fright than participants told to imagine a one-time date for all six hypothetical interactions. Finally, although in general there was a negative relationship between positive ratings (i.e., of how romantic or flattering the behavior was) and negative ratings (i.e., of how annoying or frightening it was), a number of women rated some of the interactions high on both positive and negative dimensions. This was especially true of ratings of the scenario that described the pursuer showing up on the woman's doorstep with flowers. Over one-quarter of participants said they would find this behavior both moderately or extremely frightening (3-5 and 6-8, respectively, on a 9-point scale anchored by 0 and 8) *and* moderately or extremely romantic, whereas over half the participants said they would be both moderately or extremely flattered *and* moderately or extremely annoyed. Among those participants who anticipated feeling extremely frightened, 25.2% said they would find the behavior at least moderately romantic and 36.7% said they would be at least moderately flattered. Among those participants who anticipated feeling extremely annoyed, 32.8% provided at least moderate ratings of romance and 43.9% provided at least moderate ratings of flattery. If, as De Becker (1997) argues, fear is a "gift" that provides important information—much of which

escapes conscious detection—about our personal safety, Dunn’s findings suggest that this gift of self-protective insight may be rejected if it is accompanied by roses.

The Trivialization of Stalking: Through the Victims’ Eyes

Both schematic knowledge and the overlap between the dominant scripts for heterosexual courtship and stalking can help explain why stalking victims commonly complain that their concerns aren’t taken seriously. One stalking victim who feared that her stalker would kill her reported:

I have told [people] I was concerned and they say, ‘Oh, he won’t do nothing.’ ‘He isn’t so bad.’ I thought, ‘Yeah, there’s probably people in the graveyard right now that thought that same thing. Like that they thought, ‘Well, my husband isn’t gonna kill me’ (Logan, Cole, Shannon, & Walker, 2006, p. 22)

This experience is concerning not only because it suggests that this victim did not feel that she was taken seriously, but also because research shows that victims’ predictions about future perpetrator violence are often accurate (Weisz, Tolman, & Saunders, 2000).

Also of concern are the responses stalking victims report from the police they turned to for help. Victims commonly report that the police minimized the situation or even accused the victim of being the perpetrator (Logan et al., 2006; van der Aa & Groenen, 2011). Other victims provide accounts that suggest that the police sympathized with the stalker because they thought he was just struggling to get through a breakup (van der Aa & Groenen, 2011) or trying to summon the courage to approach a romantic prospect. One victim, for example, reported that the police told her, “He probably just thinks you’re attractive and doesn’t know how to talk to you” (Cox & Speziale, 2009, p. 14). No surprise, then, that a fear of not being taken seriously was the second most common barrier to using the justice system stalking victims identified, cited as a concern by 65% of female stalking victims (Logan et al., 2006).

The Media and Persistent Pursuit

Theory

It remains unknown how exposure to media content that features persistent pursuit might affect beliefs toward stalking. However, it is possible to make predictions based on existing research on similar topics. Because persistent pursuit is often a feature of male courtship, and because learning about courtship is a key part of sexual socialization, the literature that looks at the media's role as a sexual socializer—that is, as capable of teaching lessons about attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and values concerning sexuality—is instructive.

The dominant theories researchers have used to explain how the media serve as a sexual socializer are cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, and priming (Ward, 2003). According to cultivation theory, cumulative exposure to television affects people's attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals, and causes them to adopt the worldview portrayed on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Early cultivation theorists conceptualized television content as relatively homogenous, thus allowing them to claim that the specific content to which people were exposed was irrelevant, since the same messages were posited to pervade virtually all television content. From this perspective, the focus was on total amount of television exposure, and the comparison of interest was between heavy and light viewers. More recent work, however, recognizes that the messages one is exposed to on television may vary depending on genre, and that these genre-specific differences in content are likely to lead to differences in effects (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Still, a substantial body of contemporary work illustrates that, in spite of an increasingly fragmented media market, total television exposure continues to be meaningfully related to outcomes of interest (e.g., Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Martins & Harrison, 2012).

Earlier cultivation work also faced heavy criticism for failing to specify the mechanisms by which the observed effects were believed to occur. Shrum (1996; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993) convincingly argues that construct accessibility can account for cultivation effects. When asked to estimate frequencies or probabilities of a given event, the ease with which one is able to call to mind an example of the event in question is positively correlated with these estimates, a phenomenon referred to as the “availability heuristic” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). For example, all else being equal, if two people are asked to estimate the percentage of people who are victims of violent crime in a given year, the person who can call to mind an example of a crime victim more quickly will provide higher estimates. Because both recent and frequent exposure can lead to increased construct accessibility (Higgins & King, 1981), and because heavy television exposure by definition includes more frequent (and likely more recent) exposure than light television exposure, this explanation can account for differences between heavy and light viewers.

Social cognitive theory suggests that viewers learn appropriate attitudes, values, behaviors, and scripts from television. Whereas earlier formulations of social cognitive theory (then social learning theory) focused exclusively on the modeling of behaviors through observational learning (e.g., Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963b), more recent work recognizes that the values and norms communicated by those behaviors and the responses they receive are important in their own right. In either case, exposure does not guarantee the imitation of behaviors depicted or adoption of values conveyed; rather, the likelihood of these responses depends on the ways in which behaviors are portrayed. Behaviors that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated, whereas behaviors that are punished are less likely to be imitated (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963a). Perceived characteristics of the observed actor are also

influential: if the model is perceived as realistic, as similar to the perceiver, or as having admirable qualities (e.g., physical attractiveness, popularity), there is a greater likelihood that his or her behavior will be modeled (Bandura et al., 1963a, 1963b).

The processes by which observational learning occurs are more fully elaborated in Huesmann's (1988, 1997, 1998) information processing model. According to this model, when a person encounters a new stimulus, s/he searches existing cognitive structures for scripts to guide behavior. Upon retrieving a script, the individual assesses the appropriateness of enacting that script. If this assessment leads the person to believe that behaving in a way indicated by the retrieved script is appropriate, he or she will act on it; if the assessment leads that individual to believe that behaving in this way is inappropriate, he or she will not act on it. Judgments of the "appropriateness" of scripts for a given situation are in large part informed by the individual's own values and perceived norms, which are, in turn, informed by the reinforcements of similar behaviors that individual has observed, or "observational learning." As applied to the current project, this suggests that regular exposure to media stimuli that show men engaging in aggressive, initially unwanted, pursuits of females that ultimately "pay off" will increase the likelihood that a man, if faced with a similar situation in his own life, will behave in a way consistent with that script. Similarly, it suggests that women who regularly see media content in which women are in happy relationships with men who won them over through persistent pursuit will, when pursued in a similar way, perceive this behavior a part of a script for romance rather than as stalking. Judgments of appropriateness are also informed by an actor's perception of the responses he has received to his own behaviors, or "enactive learning." This means that if a man succeeded in getting a girl to date him who initially had rejected his advances by persisting—a not unlikely possibility, given the courtship scripts described above—he is likely to choose a

similar course of conduct if presented with a similar situation in the future. Similarly, a woman who has already been in a generally happy relationship that began because of a man's persistent pursuit is likely to regard a man's persistent pursuit of her positively.

One reason scripts may be activated is because they have been primed. Priming refers to the activation of stored knowledge, which may include (but is not limited to) scripts (see Higgins, 1996, for a review). Once activated, this knowledge will exert a disproportionate influence on subsequent judgment tasks, which can, in turn, influence behavior. From this perspective, watching a romantic comedy in which the man's persistence in the face of initial rejections from a woman results in his winning that woman's affections should lead a "persistence is evidence of love" script to exert a temporarily augmented influence on subsequent interpretations of unwanted overtures that occur in real life. This process could have implications not only for female victims of stalking (who may take longer to recognize the behavior of a stalker as problematic if they are viewing the behavior through a primed "persistence is evidence of love" script), but also for the prosecution of stalking, since it could lead judges or jurors to see stalkers as overzealous suitors rather than as criminals.

The Gendered Nature of Media Content

Although my interest lies primarily with the effects of media content on beliefs about persistent pursuit, it is not possible to make convincing claims about media effects without a consideration of the content that is purported to produce them. In spite of recent advances in some types of media representations, it is still the case that much of the media content to which we are exposed perpetuates gender inequities and portrays both the individual sexes and the relationships between them in stereotypical (i.e., traditional) ways (Greenwood & Lippman, 2010). Central to these traditional representations are power differentials, with the male

portrayed as more powerful than the female. This differential manifests in everything from media depictions of labor (which show men more performing paid labor more frequently than women and women performing domestic labor more frequently than men) to physical appearance (in which the male cultural ideal is muscularity whereas the female cultural ideal is thinness).

This power differential is also evident in media content that features romantic and sexual relationships. Content analyses that examine what Holsti (1969) referred to as manifest content (i.e., surface-level content analyses, such as those counting the number of times a sexual intercourse is portrayed; see Eyal, Kunkel, Biely, & Finnerty, 2007, for an example) have provided valuable information about the frequency with which sexual behaviors are depicted as well as the contexts in which these behaviors take place. However, studies employing latent content analyses, which center their analyses on themes communicated by media texts, have been especially valuable to furthering our understanding of the ways in which the media may teach lessons about pursuit—and, more broadly, “appropriate” roles for men and women in romantic relational contexts. These latent content analyses are especially appropriate for furthering our understanding of complex relational dynamics because although beliefs, values, and morals may be enforced and reproduced through behavior, an approach that *starts* with a focus on behaviors is unlikely to recognize this.

Work that considers the frequency with which elements of the “heterosexual script” appear in the media is exemplary in this regard. The heterosexual script is conceptualized as a single script that contains complementary roles for men and women (Kim et al., 2007; Sorsoli, Ward, & Tolman, 2009). Based on a reading of existing literature, Kim et al. identified four themes central to the heterosexual script: the sexual double standard (men are consumed by and

powerless to control their sexual urges, whereas women are responsible for setting sexual limits); attitudes toward commitment (men aren't interested in commitment, but women necessarily are); homosexuality (men must not act in a way that suggests homosexuality, but women should engage in same-sex sexual activity to titillate men); and—most directly relevant to this project—courting strategies (men should actively pursue women, whereas women should use passive strategies like self-objectification to attract men). In a content analysis of twenty-five comedies and dramas popular among adolescents, they found that interactions portraying elements of the heterosexual script were commonplace, with a mean of 15.53 such interactions per hour. Male and female courtship strategies represented 8.84% and 13.39% of these interactions, respectively, and were equally likely to appear in comedies and dramas. These findings indicate that regular viewing of television comedies and dramas will tend to involve frequent exposure to these gendered courtship scripts.

Ward's work is similarly illuminating. Ward (1995) used the existing literature on sexuality to inform her thematic coding categories. This coding system yielded 17 themes grouped into five categories: male sexual role (e.g., "In sexual relations, men are the initiators and the aggressors"), female sexual role (e.g., "Women are responsible for setting sexual limits"), recreational orientation (e.g., "Sexual/romantic relations are a competition"), relationship orientation (e.g., "Openness and intimacy are keys to a successful relationship") and procreational orientation. Collectively, these messages were present in 29.4% of the interactions in the television shows popular among adolescents that Ward coded. Particularly relevant to the current project were some of the messages that exemplified the message that "openness and intimacy are keys to a successful relationship," which Ward characterized as "the upside of relationships." Although it is not possible to draw conclusions on the totality of messages

exemplifying this orientation based on the five examples Ward provided in her paper, it is worth noting that the three examples spoken by male characters—“I love Gina. I’ve been looking for her all my life. She is the girl of my dreams. I can’t see myself with anybody else. She’s all I think about”; “You’re funny. You’re everything. You’re perfect”; and “All I care about is her happiness”—are all in fact statements of hyperintimacy. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) define hyperintimacy as “excessive or inappropriate expressions of desire for relational enhancement or escalation” (p. 76), and they identify it as one of eight common tactics used in stalking and obsessive relational intrusion. By contrast, the two examples spoken by females that illustrate the use of this code—“Even if we had gone to the convention, spending time alone with you would have been worth it” and “Oh Homer, I love you just the way you are”—are not exaggerated expressions of devotion. Moreover, the relationships the men were in were less serious relationships (e.g., boyfriends), whereas both the women were speaking to their husbands. In other words, not only were the male characters more extreme in their statements of devotion, but these statements were taking place within the context of less serious relationships. Given that 8.8% of the messages about sexuality in the coded content fell into this category, and given that 62% of those were spoken by males, there is reason to believe that these male expressions of hyperintimacy are a relatively common feature of media content.

Stalking and Persistent Pursuit in Fictional Media Content

Less is known about how stalking and persistent pursuit are portrayed in the media. Anecdotal data presented in published work suggests that two patterns of representation predominate in fictional portrayals of persistent pursuit (Lowney & Best, 1995; Nicol, 2006). The first of these portrays the pursuer as deviant, as someone with obvious psychological disturbances whose behavior inspires terror. This archetype commonly appears in films

described as “psychological thrillers,” such as *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *Fatal Attraction*.

The second portrays the pursuer as romantic, as a sympathetic character whose pursuit is narratively justified because it is driven by love. This archetype commonly appears in romantic comedies, such as *There’s Something about Mary* and *Say Anything*.

Existing work suggests that the “romantic stalker,” in particular, is a common feature of the media landscape. Consider the following:

Movies, soap operas, and other media often demonstrate to viewers that stalking equals love and affection, and that persistence pays off; the stalker wins (or wins back) the desired object of their “affection.” The media very often paint a picture of the stalker as a kind and decent person who is simply misunderstood. (Brewster, 2003, p. 9.8)

My generation saw in *The Graduate* that there is one romantic strategy to use above all others: *persistence*. This same strategy is at the core of every stalking case. Men pursuing unlikely or inappropriate relationships with women and getting them is a common theme promoted in our culture. Just recall *Flashdance*, *Tootsie*, *The Heartbreak Kid*, *10*, *Blame it on Rio*, *Honeymoon in Vegas*, *Indecent Proposal*.

This Hollywood formula could be called Boy Wants Girl, Girl Doesn’t Want Boy, Boy Harasses Girl, Boy Gets Girl. Many movies teach that if you just stay with it, even if you offend her, even if she says she wants nothing to do with you, even if you’ve treated her like trash (and sometimes because you’ve treated her like trash), you’ll get the girl. Even if she’s in another relationship, even if you look like Dustin Hoffman, you’ll eventually get Katherine Ross or Jessica Lange. Persistence will win the war *Against All Odds* (another of these movies, by the way). Even the seemingly innocuous TV show *Cheers* touches the topic. Sam’s persistent and inappropriate sexual harassment of two female co-workers—eight years of it—doesn’t get him fired or sued. It does, however, get him both women.” (de Becker, 1997, p. 196)

In other words, these media texts communicate that—for men in particular—persistence is an effective courtship strategy. These texts suggest that however unlikely a relationship, it is nothing that cannot come to fruition with enough persistence.

Because the interpretation of the “romantic stalker” as a non-threatening character depends on gendered courtship scripts that cast men as pursuers and women as pursued, the romantic stalker is almost invariably male. When women pursue men, they are violating gender

stereotypes and thus are cast not as romantic but as monsters (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). As de Becker (1997) observes:

If a man in the movies wants a sexual encounter or applies persistence, he's a regular, everyday guy, but if a woman does the same thing, she's a maniac or a killer. Just recall *Fatal Attraction*, *The King of Comedy*, *Single White Female*, *Play Misty for Me*, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, and *Basic Instinct*. When the men pursue, they usually get the girl. When the women pursue, they usually get killed. (p. 198)

In other words, whereas men are rewarded for persistence, women are punished. These media representations of persistence, then, serve to reinforce traditional gendered courtship.

Anderson and Accomando (1999) provide further insight into the “romantic stalker” by conducting a critical analysis of a film that exemplifies this archetype: *There's Something About Mary*. They argue that in both reviews of the film and the film itself, stalking is presented as romantic and comedic, and that these features serve to normalize and trivialize stalking. Indeed, Ted (Ben Stiller) defends his stalker-like behavior actions as stemming from love; when Mary (Cameron Diaz) asks why he went to such lengths to pursue her, he replies “I did it because I never stopped thinking about you. And if I didn't find you, I knew that my life would never ever be good again.” The presentation of this pursuit as romantic is only reinforced when Mary decides that she is romantically interested in Ted and the two end up together. The authors also argue that the film frames Mary as responsible for men's pursuits of her. (Five different men pursue Mary during the course of the film.) This is perhaps best illustrated by promotional material once included on the movie's website that proclaimed, “There's something about Mary all right. Something that brings out the stalker in every guy she meets!” In other words, men pursue Mary in ways that sometimes terrify her not because, as agentic beings, they have decided to engage in these pursuits. Rather, this promotional material suggests that they pursue her because of some quality she possesses that compels them to act in this way.

Although some of the literature reviewed above indicates that persistent pursuit is commonly featured in popular media texts, systematic accounts of its prevalence are largely absent from the literature. One notable (unpublished) example is a content analysis of romantic pursuits in 222 films (MacArthur, Weiss, & Sinclair, 2010). Two hundred three (91.4%) of these films featured a romantic pursuit. The authors characterized a pursuit that was rebuffed on at least one occasion as an “unwanted pursuit.” Using this criterion, the vast majority of pursuits (86.2%) were “unwanted pursuits.” Furthermore, male pursuers were portrayed more frequently and more positively than female pursuers; their persistence was portrayed more positively than female pursuers’ persistence; and their pursuits were significantly more likely to be successful than were females’ pursuits. The message in these films is that it is common for men to pursue women even when those women initially express a lack of interest, and that doing so will be viewed positively by the woman, make her happy, and lead to a romantic sexual relationship that both like. Just as women’s arousal in response to sex that appears to be forced in pornographic films may teach men that women “really” want sex in spite of their initial resistance (Malamuth & Check, 1980), so, too, might media texts that portray romantic bliss as the payoff for ignoring a woman’s initial rejection lead some viewers to believe that rejection is a challenge to overcome rather than a limit to be respected.

Overview of the Current Study

The body of existing literature and theoretical perspectives reviewed above suggest several important questions whose answers would advance our theoretical understanding of the effects of media portrayals of persistent pursuit on viewers. These questions concern the effects of regular, prolonged exposure to persistent pursuit in the media on viewers’ beliefs; the differences in the effects of viewing persistent pursuit that is portrayed as romantic versus

viewing persistent pursuit that is portrayed as scary; moderators of these effects; and mechanisms by which these effects may occur. To answer these questions, I conducted two studies: a survey with high school students, and an experiment with college students.

The main aim of the survey was to examine the relation between naturalistic media exposure and beliefs about stalking. In particular, I was interested in determining whether heavier television exposure would be associated with a greater tendency to endorse beliefs that minimize the seriousness of stalking.

In the experiment, my primary goal was to examine whether there is a causal relation between exposure to media portrayals of stalking and attitudes toward stalking. I was interested in examining the effects of the two common portrayals of stalking identified earlier: stalking as scary and stalking as romantic.

Chapter 2

Survey-Based Evidence for a Link Between Media Exposure and Beliefs About Stalking

As I argued in the previous chapter, the dominant scripts for male heterosexual courtship and stalking share significant areas of overlap. Consequently, there is reason to believe that sexual scripts (which include scripts for male heterosexual courtship) and stalking scripts may develop in tandem – or that stalking scripts may even be a part of individuals' sexual scripts. Insofar as stalking, particularly stalking of female victims by current or former intimate male partners, stems from dysfunctional beliefs about relationships or gender-normative courtship behavior, the attitudes about gender and relationships people learn from the media may hold important implications for the acceptance of stalking behaviors. What is more, given that holding traditional gender role attitudes is associated with greater endorsement of rape myths, decreased sympathy for rape victims (Burt, 1980; Simonson & Subich, 1999), and increased tolerance of sexual harassment (Lonsway, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Russell & Trigg, 2004), it is reasonable to suspect that traditional gender role attitudes will also relate to beliefs about stalking.

To my knowledge, no research has considered how television exposure is related to beliefs about stalking, but existing research does show that heavier television exposure is associated with higher endorsement of stereotypical beliefs about gender and sexuality. For example, heavier television exposure is associated with holding more traditional gender role attitudes (Morgan, 1987; Ward, 2002). Heavier total television exposure is also associated with

more dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, including “mindreading is expected” and “the sexes are different” (Haferkamp, 1999).

Furthermore, there is evidence that it is not merely total television viewing amounts that are of consequence, but also viewers’ perceptions of the content they view. From a social cognitive perspective, perceiving content as realistic should lead it to exert a greater influence on beliefs, and this effect has been shown with violent content (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). Although this perspective suggests that perceived realism should also moderate the relation between television exposure and sexual beliefs, survey research has typically failed to find support for this. Rather, perceived realism more commonly appears as a main effect, predicting differences in endorsement of sexual stereotypes above and beyond the effect of mere exposure (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007).

Other research highlights the importance of viewing motivations to media effects (see Rubin, 2002, for a review). People may watch television for a variety of reasons, including to be entertained, to pass time, or for relaxation. People may also watch television to learn about the world, and research shows that watching television to learn predicts sexual beliefs. For both men and women, viewing to learn is correlated with endorsement of adversarial sexual beliefs, sexual double standards, and the belief that men are sex-driven (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006), and with holding traditional gender role attitudes (Ward, 2002; but see Ward & Friedman, 2006 for null findings).

Research on the relation between media exposure and sexual beliefs suggests that women are more affected than men, with many studies finding effects only for women. For example, Rivadeneyra and Ward (2005) found that television exposure was associated with endorsement of traditional gender roles for women only. They found a similar pattern of findings for

perceived realism: for female participants only, perceived realism was associated with holding more traditional gender role attitudes, and perceived realism was a significant predictor of these attitudes even when controlling for amount of television exposure. Other research has found that, for female participants only, viewing to learn is associated with believing that “men are sex driven,” “women are sex objects” (Ward, 2002), and “dating is a game” (Ward, 2002; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999), and with holding more traditional gender role attitudes (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005). Controlling for amount of television exposure and demographics, viewing to learn has also been shown to be a significant predictor of endorsing traditional dating norms (e.g., believing that sex should only occur in the context of a marriage) and believing that “dating is a game”—but, again, only for women (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Racial differences in the relation between media exposure and sexual attitudes have received less attention. Black adolescents consistently report heavier television exposure than White adolescents (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010), and they provide higher estimates of their male and female peers’ sexual experience (Ward, 2002; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). Because perceived peer norms predict sexual behavior (e.g., Miller et al., 1997), racial differences in estimates of peers’ sexual experiences may partially explain why Black adolescents also have more sexual experience than same-age White peers (Brown et al., 2006). However, the one study I located that examined racial differences in the effects of media exposure on sexual attitudes suggests that, if anything, Black adolescents are *less* affected by media exposure than their White peers. For White participants, heavier overall television exposure sometimes predicted a change in endorsement of sexual stereotypes, but the same was not true for Black participants (Walsh-Childers & Brown, 1993). Since the researchers examined change scores, however, it is possible that overall television exposure does affect

Black audience members during some developmental periods, but does not during the period the authors examined. Consequently, it is not possible to make predictions about racial differences in the relation between television exposure and beliefs about stalking with any degree of confidence.

The media may be especially influential as sexual socializers when relevant personal experience is lacking, which is especially likely to be the case for younger audience members. Although there is some debate on the matter, scholars generally agree that media effects are greatest when personal experience is limited (e.g., Calzo & Ward, 2009; Gentles & Harrison, 2006; but see Shrum & Bischak, 2001). There is evidence that adolescents with limited sexual experience actively seek out information from the media about how to act and what to expect in sexual and/or romantic contexts, and that they are especially likely to do so when they perceive a lack of other available information sources (e.g., parents, friends; Brown, Halpern, & L'Engle, 2005). However, selectivity in media exposure may mean that less developmentally advanced viewers will rarely if ever be exposed to sexual media content, and selectivity in reception may lead them to express disinterest or disgust if they are (Brown, White, & Nikopoulou, 1993). A qualitative analysis of nineteen 11-15-year old girls led Brown et al. (1993) to identify three patterns of sexual media use among this population: Disinterested (girls who did not consume media fare with sexual content or who did but described that content as “gross”), Intrigued (girls who actively sought out media content that they thought could teach them about how to behave in romantic or sexual contexts), and Resisters (girls who actively critiqued the sexual and romantic ideals to which they were exposed).

The findings from Brown et al.'s (1993) study concerning patterns of sexual media use among adolescents suggest that high scores on Ward's “viewing to learn” measure might differ

in the extent to which they indicate viewing to learn about gender, romance, and sexuality, versus learning about other domains (e.g., world events, careers). If this is the case, it may explain Ward and colleagues' inconsistent findings regarding the relation between viewing to learn and gender role attitudes. The sample items included in Ward's papers (to "learn about myself and about others"; "to help me understand the world") indicate that what was being assessed was learning more broadly construed, rather than learning to view about gender, romance, and sexuality specifically. Of course, when participants answer such items, they may consider the extent to which they view television to learn about these latter domains, but this is not certain. If, hypothetically, an Intrigued girl received a high score on the "viewing to learn" measure, it would likely reflect (and could potentially be reducible to) that girl's tendency to view television to learn about romance and sexuality. By contrast, if a Disinterested girl received a high score on the "viewing to learn" measure, it would almost certainly reflect that girl's perception that she used television to learn about *other* domains. These findings point to the importance of assessing the extent to which people watch television to learn about relationships in particular when the outcomes of interest are relevant to relationships.

There is limited survey research linking total hours of television viewing to beliefs about gendered violence. My research only uncovered two such articles, both of which focused on the relation between amount of television exposure and endorsement of rape myths (i.e., false beliefs about rape that serve to minimize its seriousness by blaming the victim and downplaying the perpetrator's culpability). The first of these, using a sample of college women, found that total amount of television exposure predicted higher endorsement of rape myths and increased estimates of the percent of rape accusations that are false (Kahlor & Morrison, 2007). A follow-up study using an older sample (average age 42, range 18-81) of both men and women replicated

the findings from the earlier study (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). To date, however, no research has considered how total amount of television viewing might be related to beliefs about stalking, a gap this study was designed to address.

The Present Survey

In order to establish that there is a link between total amount of television exposure and beliefs about stalking I conducted a one-time survey of high school students. Both social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 2001) and sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) suggest that higher amounts of exposure to typical American television fare should engender more stalking-supportive beliefs among viewers. As other research has documented (Kim et al., 2007; Ward, 1995), heterosexual courtship is commonly portrayed in mainstream television, and this courtship is depicted as highly gender-typed. That is, men actively pursue women they are romantically and/or sexually interested in, whereas women express interest passively and are expected to set limits. Social cognitive learning theory posits that television teaches powerful lessons about which behaviors and beliefs are appropriate and normative, and existing content analyses indicate that aggressive male pursuers and female limit-setters are a key part of the (normative) television landscape. Thus, television teaches viewers that these behaviors are not only acceptable, but—insofar as they lead to romantic success—desirable.

Sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) suggests that we learn how to behave in sexual encounters—and, indeed, to recognize sexual encounters as such—from sexual scripts. “Sex” is understood, in this context, to refer not only to sexual behaviors, but also to the relational configurations (e.g., courtship) that support it. Although there are individual differences in the sexual scripts people hold, individuals’ sexual scripts share a high degree of overlap because they are derived from “cultural scenarios” that contain messages about

sexuality. These cultural scenarios may include institutions such as religion and—more germane to the present inquiry—media. As television is a major purveyor of sexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007), it seems intuitive that greater amounts of exposure to television should lead to an increased tendency to endorse dominant sexual scripts. As noted earlier, however, the dominant sexual script for heterosexual courtship has a high degree of overlap with the script for stalking, and this overlap introduces the possibility that the lessons people learn about heterosexual courtship may bleed over into their beliefs about stalking.

To synthesize, I entered this project with the following hypotheses and research questions:

H1: Watching greater amounts of television will predict greater approval of stalking.

H2: The tendency to believe that television generally portrays the world realistically will predict greater approval of stalking,

H3: The tendency to view television to learn about romantic relationships will predict greater approval of stalking

RQ1: Will the associations described in H1 be mediated by endorsement of the heterosexual script?

H4: Positive beliefs about stalking will be related to total amount of television exposure, perceived realism, and viewing to learn for participants of both genders, and these relations will be stronger among girls than among boys.

RQ2: Will there be racial differences in the relation between beliefs about stalking and amount of television exposure, perceived realism, and/or viewing television to learn about relationships?

For several reasons, I was interested in examining these hypotheses and research questions among adolescents. First, given that adolescence is a critical time for the development of sexual scripts, and sexual scripts are relatively resistant to change over the lifespan (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), I feel that it is critical to identify which lessons are being learned at this critical juncture. Second, there are several reasons to suspect that the influence of media on sexual scripts and beliefs may be at a lifetime high during adolescence. Overall media use increases dramatically in adolescence: whereas 8-10-year-olds spend an average of 5 hours and 29 minutes per day with media, 11-14-year-olds average 8 hours and 40 minutes per day, and media use remains comparably high among 15-18-year-olds (Rideout et al., 2010). To the extent that total exposure is a meaningful predictor of cognitions, media should be expected to exert the greatest impact on beliefs during this period of increased exposure. Additionally, as noted above, there is evidence that media effects are greatest when personal experience is limited (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Gentles & Harrison, 2006), and adolescents are relatively limited in their personal experience with dating or sexual activity as compared to adults. Whereas younger adolescents are likely to limit their exposure to sexual media content, older adolescents are likely to seek it out as they develop an interest in sex (Brown et al., 2005; Brown et al., 1993). Thus, older adolescents are at a point in their lives when the media would theoretically be expected to have the greatest impact on sexual beliefs and scripts, and the messages they internalize are likely to endure for a lifetime.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 189 high school students (60 male, 129 female) with an average age of 16 ($SD = 1.31$, range 14-19). Half the participants ($N = 95$) identified as Black or African

American; 54 (28.6%) identified as White, Non-Hispanic; 12 (6.3%) identified as Black and White; five (2.6%) identified as Hispanic or Latino; four (2.1%) identified as Asian or Asian-American; and 18 self-identified as another race or combination of races (e.g., “Middle Eastern,” “Indian and Black”) or described themselves in terms that did not allow for easy categorization (“biracial,” “mixed”).⁸ Detailed information about the composition of the sample is included in Table 1.

The participants were all recruited from one high school in suburban Michigan. The principal agreed to participate after I explained my research project, and he introduced me to three health teachers at the school who agreed to assist with this research. Because many of the students in the population were under 18 and therefore not legally able to provide informed consent for themselves, the teachers distributed informed consent forms to students under the age of 18 four weeks in advance of the study. Students were told to bring the forms to their parents for them to sign and then return them to their teacher. Teachers issued regular reminders to students in an effort to increase the number of returned consent forms. For administrative ease, teachers distributed informed consent to students who were at least 18 years of age at the same time.

Prior research on media effects suggests that effect sizes are generally no larger than .30, and most of the studies reviewed above had effect sizes nearer to .20. I computed that my sample size of 189 provides a power of 79% to detect a correlation of .20 ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed test). Consequently, if the effect exists, I should detect it with high probability.

⁸ One participant did not provide a response to this question.

Procedure

A total of 365 students were asked to participate in this study, so the sample represents a response rate of 51.78%. Students under the age of 18 whose parents had not returned informed consent forms were brought to a different room that was monitored by one of the three teachers and given an alternate activity. Students who were 18 or older were asked to sign a consent form on the day of the study, and all agreed to sign one.

Participants completed the paper-and-pencil survey in their health classes. The other two teachers each presided over their own classes. I stayed in one of these classrooms to answer any questions that arose, and an undergraduate research assistant stayed in the other classroom. Before completing the survey, all participants under the age of 18 signed an informed assent form. All the students were able to complete the survey in the time allotted (50 minutes, or one class period). All the data were collected in a single day. Participants were mailed a \$5 check after completion of the study to compensate them for their time.

Measures

Television measures.

Amount of television viewing. Participants were asked to estimate the number of hours of television they watch on a typical weekday, a typical Saturday, and a typical Sunday using an 11-point scale that included all integers from 0 and 9 and “10 or more” hours. For all analyses, “10 or more” hours was coded as 10. The three scores were combined into a composite measure (with the weekday score weighted by 5, and sum of the three scores divided by seven) of total amount of television viewing.

Perceived realism. To assess the extent to which participants believed that television is generally realistic, participants completed a shortened version of the Perceived Realism on

Television scale (Rivadeneira & Lebo, 2008; Rivadeneira & Ward, 2005). Although the original 28-item scale has excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$), I was concerned that participants would experience fatigue. Furthermore, because I was primarily interested in pursuit behaviors, I was less interested in responses to statements that assessed the extent to which participants perceived, for example, the friendships on television as realistic. Consequently, I selected eight items from the original scale, including two reverse-scored items (e.g., “Television does *not* show life as it really is” (reversed); “People on TV shows are just like people in the real world). Participants rated these statements 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. One reverse-scored item (“If I see something on television, I can’t be sure it really is that way”) was removed to improve the reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .78$). The items used are in Appendix A.

Viewing to learn about romantic relationships. I created an 8-item measure for this study loosely based on Ward and Rivadeneira’s (1999) Viewing to Learn scale designed to measure the extent to which participants watch comedies, dramas, and reality television to learn about romantic relationships. These genres were specified because I wanted participants to think about their motives for viewing programming that would be likely to feature romantic scripts (as opposed to programming unlikely to contain these scripts, such as sports). Participants rated their level of agreement with eight statements (e.g., “I like to watch them to find out how to act in a romantic relationship” and “I like to watch them so I can learn how to attract people I am romantically interested in.” Reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .94$). The full scale is in Appendix B.

Heterosexual script. A 14-item measure assessed the extent to which participants endorse the heterosexual script. Sample items include “Men want sex; women want

relationships” and “Women should be more concerned about their appearance than men.” The wording of one item was switched so as to be more in line with the courtship strategies identified in the literature on the heterosexual script (“It is okay for a woman to pursue a man who is already taken. After all, all is fair in love and war” became “It is okay for a man to pursue a woman...”; Kim et al., 2007). Otherwise, the scale was left intact. Participants rated their level of agreement with each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the heterosexual script. This scale has previously been used with a sample including participants as young as fourteen, and had good reliability ($\alpha = .83$) with that sample (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). Reliability in the present sample ($\alpha = .79$) was slightly lower, but still good. The full scale is in Appendix C.

Stalking myths. The Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2006) is a 21-item scale modeled after the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980) that assesses participants’ endorsement of myths about stalking. Sample items include “A person who is willing to go to the extremes of stalking must really be in love” and “Being in love is not a reason to stalk someone” (reversed). Across five samples, the scale has shown consistently good reliability (range, $\alpha = .76$ to $.82$; Sinclair, 2006, 2012). Participants rate their level of agreement on a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The reliability of the full scale (alpha = $.64$) in this sample was considerably lower than has been reported elsewhere, perhaps because of the younger age of the participants. To improve the reliability of the scale, I deleted five items with negative item-total correlations, resulting in a 16-item scale with good reliability (alpha = $.75$). Higher scores reflect greater endorsement of stalking myths, and thus reflect more stalking-supportive beliefs. The full scale is included in Appendix D.

Demographics. Participants indicated their gender, school grade, age, and race. Race was dichotomized to facilitate analyses. Because half the sample was black ($N = 95$), I collapsed all participants who identified as another race or a combination of races into a single category ($N = 93$).⁹

Results

Preliminary Analyses.

Descriptive statistics and psychometric properties for the key variables are presented in Table 2, and gender and race differences for the key variables are reported in Table 3.

Participants reported watching an average of just over 4 hours of television per day. Consistent with existing research (Rideout et al., 2010), Black participants reported watching significantly more television (4.54 hours per day) than participants who did not identify as Black (3.73 hours per day). Mean scores for perceived realism, stalking myths, and endorsement of the heterosexual script hovered around the midpoint. There were no race or gender differences in perceived realism or stalking myth endorsement, and no racial difference in endorsement of the heterosexual script, but boys offered stronger endorsement of the heterosexual script than girls. Participants reported a low-to-moderate tendency to watch television to learn about romantic

⁹ The results for the “non-Black” participants should be interpreted with caution, because it includes participants of a variety of ethnicities, and media effects research highlights the importance of race to understanding media effects (e.g., Brown et al., 2006; Harrison, 2006). Furthermore, many of the participants who identified as bi- or multiracial listed “African-American” as one part of their racial self-identification. The decision to categorize participants as “Black” and “non-Black” was made for both practical reasons (i.e., the number of participants in most of the racial groups other than Black was too small to permit meaningful analyses) and theoretical ones. Relative to people who identify as White, people who identify as bi- or multiracial are *more* likely to report a history of stalking victimization, and people who identify as Black or African-American are *less* likely to report a history of stalking victimization (Baum et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). This pattern of findings suggests that, in the aggregate, “mixed Black and White” participants (for example) may hold very different beliefs about stalking than participants who identify (only) as Black.

relationships ($M = 2.55$ on a scale ranging from 1-6), and no race or gender differences were observed for this variable. Age was not significantly correlated with amount of television viewing, perceived realism, viewing to learn, stalking myth endorsement, or heterosexual script endorsement. Bivariate correlations among the major survey variables are displayed in Table 4. These correlations revealed that total amount of television viewing, stalking myth endorsement, heterosexual script endorsement, perceived realism, and viewing to learn about romantic relationships were all significantly correlated with one another.

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

My first three hypotheses predicted that greater amounts of television viewing, higher levels of perceived realism, and a greater tendency to view television to learn about relationships would predict higher levels of stalking-supportive beliefs. To test these predictions, I ran three hierarchical regressions with the variable of interest (i.e, total amount of television viewing, perceived realism, or viewing television to learn about relationships) in block 1 and demographics (age, race, and gender) in block 2.

Amount of television viewing was a significant predictor of stalking myth endorsement in block 1, $\beta = .18, p = .019$, and it remained a significant predictor when controlling for demographics, $\beta = .19, p = .015$, thus providing support for Hypothesis 1. This regression is presented in Table 5.

Perceived realism was a highly significant predictor of stalking myth endorsement, $\beta = .31, p < .001$, and the strength of this relation was unaffected by the addition of demographic variables in block 2, $\beta = .32, p < .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. This analysis is displayed in Table 6. Viewing television to learn about romantic relationships was also a highly significant predictor of stalking myth endorsement, $\beta = .35, p < .001$. As was the case in the

other reported regressions, controlling for demographics had virtually no effect on the strength of the relation between viewing to learn and stalking myth endorsement, $\beta = .34, p < .001$. This analysis, is displayed in Table 7.

I also entered this project with a research question: is the relation between media exposure and endorsement of stalking myths mediated by endorsement of the heterosexual script? I conducted an analysis in which amount of TV viewing was the predictor variable, endorsement of the heterosexual script was the mediator, and stalking myths was the criterion variable. This analysis is diagrammed in Figure 1. The direct path from amount of TV viewing to stalking myth endorsement was significant ($\beta = .18, p = .011$) before the indirect path through heterosexual script endorsement was added to the model, but this relation became non-significant after the path through heterosexual script endorsement was added ($\beta = .09, p = .219$). Both parts of the indirect path were significant, and the Sobel's z-value was significant ($z = 2.62, p = .009$) for this indirect path. Assuming neither endorsement of the heterosexual script nor endorsement of stalking myths caused the amount of TV viewing, this result indicates that heterosexual script endorsement significantly mediated the effect of amount of TV viewing on stalking myth endorsement. In sum, from a statistical standpoint, the relation between overall television viewing and endorsement of stalking myths could be explained by endorsement of the heterosexual script. Of course, because the survey is a one-time cross sectional survey, alternative path models relating the three variables, however implausible, (e.g., stalking myths lead to heterosexual script endorsement leads to television viewing, or heterosexual script endorsement causes both amount of TV viewing and stalking myth endorsement) cannot be absolutely ruled out.

To bolster confidence in the interpretation that television is contributing to the development of the heterosexual script, which in turn leads to increased expression of stalking myths, a reverse path model was tested. In this reverse model, stalking myth endorsement was treated as the independent variable, heterosexual script endorsement was the mediator, and total amount of television was the dependent variable. The direct path from stalking myths to overall television exposure was significant ($\beta = .17, p = .019$), but this relation became non-significant after the path through heterosexual script endorsement was added ($\beta = .10, p = .219$). Both parts of the indirect path were also significant. However, this model explained less variance ($R^2_{adj} = .04, F(2, 171) = 4.86$) than did the model in which television exposure predicted stalking myth endorsement through heterosexual script endorsement ($R^2_{adj} = .20, F(2, 171) = 22.21$). Thus, it appears that the relation between television exposure and stalking myth endorsement may be bidirectional; however, television appears to contribute more strongly to stalking myth endorsement than stalking myth endorsement does to television exposure.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that beliefs about stalking would be more strongly related to total television exposure, perceived realism, and viewing television to learn about relationships for girls than for boys. Bivariate correlations, separated by gender, revealed that stalking myth endorsement was positively associated with amount of TV viewing for girls, $r(120) = .25, p = .006$, but not for boys $r(56) = .06, p = .638$. However, the difference between these correlations was not significant ($z = 1.17, p = .120$, one-tailed). For both boys and girls, higher endorsement of stalking myths was strongly associated with perceiving television as more realistic and with viewing to learn about romantic relationships. Again, however, there were no significant gender differences in the strength of these relations. Thus, while there were some gender differences in the relations of interest in my sample, I cannot conclude that there are differences in the

population, as Hypothesis 4 proposed. Bivariate correlations, separated by gender, are displayed in Table 8.

As articulated in RQ2, I was also interested in investigating whether or not there were racial differences in the relations between beliefs about stalking and overall television exposure, perceived realism, and/or viewing television to learn about relationships. To examine these associations, bivariate correlations, separated by race, were run (Table 9). Paralleling the gender differences discussed in the previous paragraph, there initially appeared to be racial differences in the correlations between stalking myth endorsement and total television exposure.

Specifically, among Black participants, stalking myth endorsement was significantly associated with total amount of television exposure, $r(87) = .27, p = .010$. Among participants who did not identify as Black, however, this association was non-significant, $r(88) = .12, p = .279$. Again, however, these correlations were not significantly different ($z = 1.08, p = .282$, two-tailed).

Stalking myth endorsement was also positively correlated with perceived realism and viewing to learn about romantic relationships for both participants who identified as Black and those who did not, but there were not racial differences in the strength of these relations. Thus, while there were differences in the relations between races in the sample studied, I cannot conclude that in the population studied there are racial differences in the relations between beliefs about stalking and amount of television exposure, perceived realism, or viewing television to learn about relationships.

To further explore the relation between stalking myth endorsement and the viewer involvement variables, I ran post-hoc partial correlations that controlled for total amount of television viewing. These analyses, displayed in Tables 10-12, show that even when controlling for total amount of television exposure, stalking myth endorsement is significantly and positively

correlated with perceived realism and viewing television to learn about romantic relationships for the total sample, for females, for males, for black participants, and for non-black participants.

Discussion

This study offers support for the existence of an association between amount of television viewing and beliefs about stalking. Heavier television consumption predicted higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, and this relation held even when controlling for age, race, and gender. A mediation analysis suggested that the relation between television exposure and stalking myth endorsement might be explained by increased endorsement of the heterosexual script, but the cross-sectional nature of the study makes it impossible to reach a firm conclusion about causation or mediation. Viewing orientations were also significant predictors of stalking myth endorsement. In particular, the tendency to perceive television as realistic, and to view television in order to learn about relationships, both predicted higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, controlling for demographics.

The association between overall television exposure and beliefs about stalking is particularly significant, as it provides empirical evidence for a link between media exposure and beliefs about stalking. The mediation analysis suggests that this association may occur through heterosexual script endorsement. That is, one possible interpretation of these findings is that greater amounts of television exposure may lead people to hold more stereotypical gendered beliefs (as reflected in their endorsement of the heterosexual script), and stalking myths may be a part of these gender-typed schemata. Indeed, there is much conceptual overlap between the heterosexual script and stalking myths measures, as both have items that describe an adversarial relationship between men and women. It may be that people who endorse stereotypical notions of gendered differences in sexuality and courtship, as measured by the heterosexual script

measure, are more likely to see behaviors that others see as stalking as normative. Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, however, it is impossible to do more than speculate about causal mechanisms. In fact, another possible interpretation that fits the observed data could be that people who hold more stereotypical gendered beliefs watch more television because it fits with their stereotypes and also show higher endorsement of stalking myths because they fit with their stereotypes.

This survey offers empirical support for a link between media exposure and beliefs about stalking. Given the cross-sectional nature of the design, however, it is not possible to know whether media exposure *causes* changes in beliefs about stalking. The study described in the following chapter was designed to address this limitation.

Chapter 3

Experimental evidence for a causal relation between media exposure and beliefs about stalking

The survey described in the previous chapter demonstrates an association between media exposure and attitudes toward stalking. However, cross-sectional surveys do not permit insight into causality. The current study builds on the survey described in the previous chapter by employing an experimental design that will enable a look at the causal relation between media exposure and attitudes toward stalking.

Research suggests that many short-term media effects can be explained by priming.¹⁰ As described in Chapter 1, priming refers to the activation of stored knowledge, which—once activated—exerts a disproportionate influence on subsequent judgment tasks (see Higgins, 1996, for a review). Social-cognitive information processing theory (Huesmann, 1988, 1998) suggests that priming involves the activation of schemas, and the specific schemas (or scripts) activated depend on properties of the stimulus. The activated schemas, in turn, affect subsequent attributions. This model suggests that it is not just *that* stalking is portrayed in the media that should be relevant to subsequent beliefs about stalking, but *how* stalking is portrayed.

Although there is no research that has examined the ways in which media may affect beliefs about stalking, there is evidence that experimental exposure to media content can affect subsequent judgments of other forms of gendered violence. Most of this evidence comes from

¹⁰ This is not to discount the role of ‘mimicry,’ which also accounts for many short term ‘behavioral’ effects—particularly in children (Hurley & Chater, 2005).

studies focusing on the effects of exposure to sexist media content. These effects are particularly strong for cases of gendered violence that are typically considered to be more ambiguous (e.g., acquaintance rape as opposed to stranger rape, sexual harassment as opposed to rape). Less ambiguous forms of gendered violence are typically seen as problematic whether or not sexist schemas have been primed. For example, as compared to men in a control condition, men who watched scenes from R-rated movies that objectified women were more likely to believe that a female rape victim described in a fictitious magazine article got what she wanted and derived pleasure from the incident when the rape was described as an acquaintance rape (Milburn, Mather, & Conrad, 2000). When the rape was described as a stranger rape, on the other hand, the experimental prime had no impact on subsequent judgments.

In another study, men (but not women) who viewed images of sex-typed video game characters expressed significantly more tolerant attitudes toward sexual harassment than men who viewed images of male and female politicians, but the experimental primes had no influence on rape supportive attitudes (Dill, Brown, & Collins, 2008). A similar pattern of findings emerged in a study that manipulated type of sexual harassment (Ferguson et al., 2005). Participants watched a clip of the *Jerry Springer Show* that either did or did not depict a promiscuous woman and were then asked to evaluate one of three types of sexual harassment: physical display (the man squeezed the woman's buttocks), verbal request ("I sure would love to see your ass butt-naked in my bed"), and verbal comment ("Your ass sure looks good in that dress"). Participants who viewed the clip with promiscuous women saw the victim in the verbal request and verbal comment conditions as less traumatized and more responsible for her victimization than those who saw the clip without promiscuous women, but experimental

condition had no effect on ratings of the victim in the physical display condition. Collectively, these findings suggest that experimental primes should affect perceptions of stalking.

Less experimental research has considered how media content depicting gendered violence might affect beliefs about gendered violence. In one such study, participants watched a series of clips from *Law and Order: SVU* that portrayed sexual violence, physical (but non-sexual) violence, or no violence (control; Lee, Hust, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011). Level of rape myth acceptance was not affected by exposure to the sexual violence clips; however, exposure to the physical violence clips led to an increase in rape myth acceptance. It may be that the null findings for the sexual violence condition stem from the fact that participants were exposed to a series of short clips; the five clips participants in this condition watched totaled 8 minutes and 12 seconds, and ranged in length from 25 seconds to just under 3 minutes. Such short clips would not give participants time to form attachments with characters or become engaged with a narrative, both of which increase the strength of media effects (Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011). These forms of engagement may be particularly important for topics like rape, in which contextual factors play a larger role in shaping perceptions than they do for physical violence, which is more likely to be perceived as unequivocally negative (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Monson, 1998; Williams, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit, 2012). These findings also suggest that researchers interested in the effects of media portrayals of gendered violence should attempt to remove incidents of physical violence, since physical violence can independently affect perceptions of gendered violence.

A couple of key moderators increase the likelihood of observing media effects in an experimental context. One of these is perceived realism: Taylor (2005) found that while there was no main effect of viewing sexual content on participants' sexual attitudes, exposure to this

content did lead those participants who perceived the content as more realistic to endorse more permissive sexual attitudes. The extent to which one experiences transportation, which describes the experience of being absorbed in a narrative, also affects the likelihood of media exposure leading to attitude change, with greater attitude change among those who are more transported (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Insofar as attitudes are manifested in relevant beliefs (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), these findings are relevant to the present inquiry into beliefs about stalking. Both moderators are also consistent with a social-cognitive information processing perspective, which suggests that salience will increase the likelihood of script retrieval (Huesmann, 1998). A media text that is seen as *unrealistic*, or from which one maintains distance, is unlikely to be seen as salient.

The Present Experiment

The limited body of research that has considered the ways in which stalking is portrayed in the media has found that when men are shown pursuing desired, current, or former female intimates, two patterns of representation are common (de Becker, 1997; Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). The first of these portrays the stalking as scary, and features a man who is clearly psychologically troubled pursuing a woman who tries desperately to escape his reach. The second of these portrays the stalking as romantic—and, in fact, is not likely to be recognized as stalking by either the characters or the audience. This second type of narrative typically features a love-struck man who persistently (but not menacingly) pursues a woman he desires, and who continues to pursue her even in the face of repeated rejection. This pursuit “pays off” when the object of his affection realizes his persistence is an indication that they are meant to be together, and the two presumably live happily ever after.

The research reviewed above suggests that watching a romantic comedy in which a man continues to pursue a woman after repeated rejections and ultimately wins her affections should prime a “persistence is evidence of love” schema, and this schema should consequently exert a greater influence than it normally would on judgments of stalking. Conversely, watching a film in which a man is portrayed as terrorizing an intimate partner should prime a “persistence is scary” schema, and this schema should consequently exert a greater influence than it normally would on judgments of stalking. Furthermore, these effects should be stronger among those who perceive the film as more realistic, or who experience higher levels of transportation into the film.

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Participants who view a film that portrays stalking as scary will express less approval of stalking than those in a control condition.

H2: Participants who view a film that portrays stalking as romantic will express greater approval of stalking than those in a control condition.

H3: Participants who view a film that portrays stalking as romantic will express greater approval of stalking than those who view a film that portrays stalking as scary.

H4: The effect of condition on beliefs about stalking will be moderated by perceived realism, with greater effects observed among those who perceive the film as more realistic.

H5: The effect of condition on beliefs about stalking will be moderated by transportation into the film, with greater effects observed among those who experience higher levels of transportation.

There is reason to believe that there would be significant gender differences in the nature

of the hypothesized effects. Experiments examining media effects on sexual stereotypes (Ward, 2002), adversarial sexual beliefs (MacKay & Covell, 1997), and level of acceptance of violence against women (Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995) all find that media only affect these outcomes for female participants. Other experimental work finds that popular films depicting sexual violence lead to increased levels of acceptance of interpersonal violence among male participants, and trend toward decreased levels of acceptance among female participants (Malamuth & Check, 1981). These studies suggest that gender is likely to be an important moderator of the effects of interest in this study. Furthermore, there are documented gender differences in perceptions of stalking (Dennison & Thomson, 2002). For these theoretical reasons (i.e., the hypothesized effects are more likely to be observed among women) and practical ones (i.e., the Communication Studies participant pool is overwhelmingly female and obtaining a sample size sufficient for reasonable power to test the hypotheses would be easier if the sample were limited to women), I decided to study only women in this experiment.

Because this study represents an early attempt to examine whether media portrayals of stalking are causally related to beliefs about stalking, I was also interested in exploring possible mechanisms by which this might occur. In particular, given evidence that perceptions of both the perpetrator and victim can affect perceptions of cases of gendered violence (Alicke & Yurak, 1995), I was interested in exploring the possibility that perceptions of either the pursuer or target depicted in the media might explain the relation between media exposure and stalking myth endorsement. Social-cognitive information processing theory suggests that the extent to which one perceives observed behaviors as normatively appropriate is one process through which media exposure might affect beliefs about stalking, because behaviors that are seen as deviant are likely to lead individuals to reject the beliefs and behavioral paths suggested by activated schemas. For

similar reasons, another mechanism by which condition might affect beliefs about stalking is through global perceptions of characters. Specifically, people whose overall impression of a character is more negative should more strongly reject beliefs they presume the character holds. Finally, because we tend to believe that “what is beautiful is good” (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972), it is possible that the physical attractiveness of depicted actors might explain the effects of condition on stalking myth endorsement. Indeed, several studies highlight the effect of the victim’s and/or perpetrator’s physical attractiveness on perceptions of rape, and find that people attribute less culpability to physically attractive perpetrators and more culpability to physically attractive victims (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984; Gerdes, Dammann, & Heilig, 1988; Jacobson, 1981; Jacobson & Popovich, 1983). This proposed mechanism is also consistent with social cognitive theory, which suggests that we are more likely to learn from attractive models (Bandura, 1986). The relations described above are encapsulated by the following research question:

RQ: Can perceptions of the pursuer and/or target depicted in a film explain the relation between media exposure and beliefs about stalking?

Methods

Design and Procedure

The design was a three-condition between-subjects experiment in which each participant watched one of three kinds of videos: a romantic stalking video, a scary stalking video, or a control video that did not depict stalking at all. To help control for between-condition variability on dimensions not relevant to the hypotheses, there were two different videos in each of the three conditions, for a total of six videos. Participants were recruited either through the Communication Studies participant pool or through flyers that were posted around campus that

advertised a study on “media and attitudes.” Participants were greeted in a reception area and brought to a private room with a computer, where they were given a consent form to sign. Once consent had been granted, each participant watched one of the six videos. A video was randomly assigned to the participant before she arrived. Immediately after watching the clip, the participant completed a series of measures on a computer. Upon completion of these measures, she was debriefed and thanked for her time. Participants recruited through the participant pool received credit toward a course requirement, and participants recruited through flyers were sent a \$15 Visa gift card.

Participants

Participants were 426 undergraduate women ($M_{\text{age}} 19.45$, $SD = 1.65$). The majority (69.2%) were of European American descent, although a significant minority (19.5%) identified as Asian or Asian-American. The remaining participants identified as Black or African-American (6.8%), Hispanic or Latino (2.1%), or self-identified in some other way (e.g., “Arab,” “mixed race”; 2.3%). One-third of the 426 participants were randomly assigned to each condition (control, scary stalking, romantic stalking), giving a sample size of 142 per condition. A power analysis assuming a .05 significance level, using a one-sided test (because the hypotheses are directional), revealed that this sample size would provide a power of .80 to detect an effect size of $d = .30$. The two-tailed tests reported below have a power of .80 to detect an effect size of $d = .33$.

Stimulus Materials

Six films, each edited down to about half an hour, were used as stimuli (brief summaries of each are included in Appendix E). As reviewed in Chapter 1, several factors may affect perceptions of stalking. These include the pursuer’s perceived intent to cause harm, the effect of

the pursuer's behaviors on the target, the pursuer's level of persistence, the relationship between the pursuer and target, and the gender of the pursuer. To the extent possible, these were held constant across experimental conditions. To be considered for use as stimuli, the romantic and scary films needed to feature a narrative in which a man was pursuing a woman. This pursuit had to occur within the context of a former, existing, or desired relationship, and the pursuit had to be driven—at least in part—by the man's desire to be in a romantic relationship with the woman. However, it was not possible to control for pursuer intent or the effects of the pursuit on the target, because these features would change the nature of the portrayal from scary to romantic (or vice versa).

To be considered as stimuli, films also had to be relatively recent (post-1990) and in English. For the experimental conditions, the pursuer and target needed to be human, white, and to appear to be in their 20s or 30s. The control stimuli could not feature human characters, and they needed to be at least moderately engaging. For films considered for the scary condition, it needed to be possible to edit the film into a coherent narrative that did not contain physical violence, so that physical violence would not be confounded with the negativity of the portrayal. *There's Something About Mary* (Beddor, Steinberg, Thomas, Wessler, Farrelly, & Farrelly, 1998) and *Management* (Kimmel, Godfrey, Bowen, & Belber, 2008) were the stimuli in the romantic stalking condition; *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Golberg & Ruben, 1991) and *Enough* (Winkler, Cowan, & Apted, 2002) were the stimuli in the scary stalking condition; and *Winged Migration* (Perrin, Barratier, Cluzaud, & Debats, 2001) and *March of the Penguins* (Darondeau, Lioud, Priou & Jacquet, 2005) were the control stimuli.

Measures

Manipulation check. To ensure that participants had paid attention to the video, participants were asked to provide a 1-3 sentence summary of the video they had just seen. All participants provided summaries consistent with what they had seen. As a further check on the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants in the two experimental conditions were asked “How scary did you think the film was?” Responses were given on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all or scary*) to 4 (*extremely scary*).

Mood. Mood was assessed using a 9-point semantic differential anchored by “bad” and “good,” with higher scores indicating a more positive mood.

Media measures.

Perceived realism. Perceived realism was assessed with five items ($\alpha = .82$), three of which were drawn from Tal-Or and Cohen (2010). Sample items include “The events in the scenes resemble ones in the real world” and “The film reflects problems couples encounter in their relationships.” Participants rated their level of agreement with each of the items using a seven-point scale anchored by *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating that the person perceived the film as more realistic. This measure is included in Appendix F.

Transportation. (adapted from Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010) Five items ($\alpha = .72$) assessed the extent to which participants felt transported into the film. Sample items include “I could imagine myself in the scenes I was watching” and “While watching the movie, I found that my mind wandered (reverse-scored).” Participants rated each item using a seven-point ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating higher levels of transportation. This measure is included in Appendix G.

Perceptions of pursuers and targets. Three items assessed participants' perceptions of the pursuers and targets featured in the experimental conditions. Perceived appropriateness of the pursuers' and targets' actions were rated using 7-point Likert scales ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Participants rated the physical attractiveness of the pursuer and target using 9-point semantic differentials anchored by *very unattractive* and *very attractive*. Participants were also asked to provide an overall assessment of how positively they viewed the pursuer and target using 9-point semantic differentials anchored by *very negatively* and *very positively*.

History of unwanted persistent pursuit. Personal history of being the target of unwanted persistent pursuit was assessed using a measure based on items developed by Cupach and Spitzberg (2004). The measure asks participants to indicate whether they have ever been "undesirably and obsessively pursued" in any of eight ways (e.g., "Communicating with you in an excessively needy or demanding way (e.g., pressuring you to see him/her, arguing with you to give him/her 'another chance,' etc.); "Sabotaging' or attempting to sabotage your reputation with untrue or distorted information about you, your relationships, or your activities"). Although Cupach and Spitzberg's measure asks participants to indicate the frequency with which they have experienced each type of persistent pursuit, the measure used in the present study simply asked participants to indicate whether or not they have ever experienced each type of persistent pursuit. The total number of items endorsed became the participant's score on a history of unwanted pursuit measure, with higher scores indicating a history of being on the receiving end of a greater number of unwanted pursuit tactics. The full text of these items, along with the number and percent of participants who endorsed each item, is included in Table 13. The Cronbach's α for this measure was just below conventional levels of acceptability ($\alpha = .68$);

however, one would not necessarily expect a high degree of internal consistency for an index of discrete events. Although 183 participants did not endorse any items, a greater number of participants ($N = 241$) endorsed at least one. In the full sample, the mean number of items endorsed was 1.32 ($SD = 1.57$); among those who had been the target of at least one pursuit tactic, the mean score was 2.32 ($SD = 1.42$). Supplementary information about the nature of these pursuits – including the gender of the pursuer, whether or not the participant considered the pursuit to be stalking, the nature of the relationship with the pursuer prior to the pursuit, and adjectives characterizing participants' felt experiences of the pursuit – are provided in Table 14.

Stalking myths. The same Stalking Myths Scale (Sinclair, 2006, 2012) was used as in the survey above. The reliability in this sample, with the full 21-item scale, was slightly higher than has been reported elsewhere ($\alpha = .84$). The score used is the mean score of items for participants who responded to 19 or more items.

Demographics. Participants were asked to provide their age and race.

Results

Analytic Plan

The design of my experiment included three conditions, each of which had two films. To account for within-condition variance, hypotheses were tested by including a nested random-effect term (film nested within condition) in general linear models.

It was not possible to administer some of the measures to participants in the control condition. For example, one moderator of interest was perceived realism. However, the experimental and control stimuli differed in that the former were fictional narratives, while the latter were documentaries. Consequently, comparing the extent to which participants perceived

the films as “realistic” would not have been meaningful. As a result, all analyses testing the impact of perceived realism and transportation exclude participants in the control group.

Preliminary Analyses

Independent-samples t-tests showed that the participants perceived the films in the scary condition as significantly more scary than the films in the romantic condition ($M=2.67$, $SD = .64$ vs. $M = 1.19$, $SD = .46$, $t(257.31) = 22.25$, $p < .001$). One-way ANOVAs looking at differences between the three conditions on age, race, and history of unwanted pursuit served as a check on randomization. All these tests were non-significant ($F_{Age}(2,422) = .306$, $p = .736$; $F_{Race}(2,423) = .077$, $p = .926$; $F_{History\ of\ unwanted\ pursuit}(2,420) = .272$, $p = .762$), indicating that the experimental conditions did not differ on these variables.

A one-way ANOVA revealed that, as expected, there were significant differences between conditions on mood after viewing the film, $F(2, 423) = 160.89$, $p < .001$. Because a Brown-Forsythe test revealed that the conditions did not have equal variances $F(2,423) = 4.353$, $p = .013$, post-hoc tests were conducted using the Games-Howell procedure. Results indicated that participants in the romantic condition ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 1.59$) reported a significantly more positive mood than participants in the control condition ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 1.94$), who reported a significantly more positive mood than participants in the scary condition ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.71$). All differences were significant at the $p < .001$ level.

There were also significant differences between the romantic and scary conditions in levels of perceived realism and transportation. Participants in the scary condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.04$) provided significantly higher ratings of perceived realism than participants in the romantic condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.19$; $t(282) = 9.54$, $p < .001$). Participants in the scary

condition ($M = 5.25$, $SD = .92$) also experienced significantly higher levels of transportation than participants in the romantic condition ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.12$; $t(272.13) = 8.12$, $p < .001$).

The pursuer was believed to have acted more appropriately in the romantic condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.51$) than in the scary condition ($M = 1.21$, $SD = .78$), $t(211.67) = -12.84$, $p < .001$. The pursuer was also perceived more positively in the romantic condition ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 2.12$) than in the scary condition ($M = 1.19$, $SD = .52$), $t(157.81) = -26.24$, $p < .001$. Between-condition differences in ratings of the pursuer's physical attractiveness approached, but did not reach, statistical significance, with participants in the romantic condition ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.74$) seeing the pursuer as marginally more attractive than participants in the scary condition ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 2.26$), $t(262.33) = 1.86$, $p = .064$.

The target of the stalking was believed to have acted more appropriately in the scary condition ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.27$) than in the romantic condition ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.52$; $t(272.84) = 8.08$, $p < .001$). The target of the stalking was also perceived more positively in the scary condition ($M = 7.46$, $SD = 1.35$) than in the romantic condition ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 1.94$; $t(251.93) = 4.48$, $p < .001$). However, targets in both conditions were considered equally attractive ($M_{scary} = 7.16$, $SD = 1.54$; $M_{romantic} = 7.20$, $SD = 1.30$, $t(281) = -.285$, $p = .776$).

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

The mean scores on stalking myth endorsement for the three experimental conditions are shown in Figure 2. To test the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement, a general linear model was run with condition and the nested term (film nested within condition). Stalking myth endorsement was the dependent variable. There was no significant effect of film nested within condition, $F(3,416) = 1.80$, $p = .146$. There was a marginally significant effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement, $F(2,416) = 8.68$, $p = .057$. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD

revealed that participants in the scary condition ($M = 2.36$) endorsed significantly lower levels of stalking myths than participants in the control condition ($M = 2.66$), $p < .001$, thus providing support for H1. However, participants in the romantic condition ($M = 2.73$) did not differ significantly from the control condition in their endorsement of stalking myths ($p = .560$), thus failing to provide support for H2. Endorsement of stalking myths was significantly lower in the scary condition than the romantic condition ($M = 2.36$ vs. $M = 2.73$, $p < .001$), thus providing support for H3.

As a further test of the relation between condition and stalking myths, the effect of condition on stalking myth scores was retested with age, race, history of unwanted pursuit, and mood as covariates. The overall effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement was relatively unaffected by the addition of these variables, $F(2, 412) = 5.81$, $p = .063$, as was the difference between the estimated marginal means for the scary and control conditions ($p = .001$) and scary and romantic conditions ($p = .001$). This finding indicates that mood, which often affects the retrieval of scripts (Huesmann, 1988), cannot explain the observed results. Race, $F(1, 412) = 20.88$, $p < .001$, and a history of unwanted pursuit, $F(1, 412) = 5.81$, $p = .016$, emerged as significant predictors of stalking myth scores, with Black participants and those with a history of unwanted pursuit expressing greater endorsement of stalking myths. There were no main effects for age, $F(1, 412) = 1.58$, $p = .210$, or mood, $F(1, 412) = .17$, $p = .681$.

Unplanned post-hoc analyses were conducted to further examine the surprising finding that those who had a history of unwanted pursuit scored higher on stalking myth endorsement. The bivariate correlation between unwanted pursuit history and stalking myth endorsement was highly significant, $r(423) = .13$, $p = .009$, and the relation remained highly significant when controlling for the effect of condition, $r(399) = .15$, $p = .002$. The results of these analyses

indicate that a history of unwanted pursuit is positively associated with stalking myth endorsement, and this effect is independent of the effect of condition.

An unplanned post-hoc independent samples t-test provided further insight into racial differences in stalking myth endorsement. Participants who did not identify as White ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .65$) endorsed significantly higher levels of stalking myths than participants who did identify as White ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .58$, $t(227.18) = 4.41$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 proposed that perceived realism would moderate the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement, such that the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement would be greater among those who perceived the film as more realistic. This hypothesis was tested by adding the interaction of condition and a centered variable of perceived realism to the general linear model analysis. This hypothesis was strongly supported, $F(1, 277) = 8.02$, $p = .005$. This interaction is displayed in Figure 3. Among those in the bottom quartile of perceived realism, the between-conditions difference on stalking myth endorsement was non-significant, $t(76) = -.37$, $p = .713$. Among those in the top quartile of perceived realism, however, the between-conditions difference on stalking myth endorsement was significant, $t(77) = -2.27$, $p = .026$. Analyses of the slopes revealed that perceived realism was associated with significant increase in stalking myth endorsement among participants in the romantic condition ($\beta = .14$, $p = .001$), but it was not associated with stalking myth endorsement among those in the scary condition ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .406$).

Hypothesis 5 proposed that transportation would moderate the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement, such that the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement would be greater among those who experienced higher levels of transportation. This hypothesis was also tested by adding the interaction of condition and a centered variable of amount of

transportation to the general linear model analysis. This hypothesis was also supported, $F(1, 276) = 6.21, p = .013$. This interaction is displayed in Figure 4. Among those in the bottom quartile of transportation, level of stalking myth endorsement did not vary as a function of condition, $t(73) = -1.492, p = .140$. By contrast, there were highly significant between-conditions differences in level of stalking myth endorsement among those in the top quartile of transportation, $t(76) = -3.55, p = .001$. As was the case with perceived realism, transportation was associated with an increase in stalking myth endorsement among participants in the romantic condition ($\beta = .13, p = .004$), but it was not associated with stalking myth endorsement among those in the scary condition ($\beta = -.04, p = .440$).

To test if perceptions of the pursuer and/or target portrayed in the film could at least partially explain the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement, moderated mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012). These analyses treated condition as the independent variable, a character perception (i.e., perceived pursuer appropriateness, perceived pursuer positivity, perceived pursuer attractiveness, perceived target appropriateness, perceived target positivity, or perceived target attractiveness) as the mediator, and stalking myth endorsement as the dependent variable. Condition was also treated as a moderator of the mediated relation described in the previous sentence. This analysis allowed for the possibility that the mechanisms explaining the relation between media exposure and stalking myth endorsement might vary depending on the type of media exposure (i.e., the condition to which the participant was assigned). The interactive effects of stalking myth scores between condition and three of the mediators (pursuer positivity, $p < .001$; target positivity, $p = .013$; and target appropriateness, $p = .012$) were all significant, indicating that the relation between the mediator and stalking myth endorsement varied between conditions. Pursuer

positivity ($z = 4.00, p < .001$), target positivity ($z = 2.12, p = .033$), and target appropriateness ($z = 2.32, p = .020$) were all significant mediators of the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement for the scary condition, but not for the romantic condition ($z = 1.75, p = .08; z = -.79, p = .429; z = -1.00, p = .318$, respectively). The analyses are displayed in Figures 5-7.

Because there were no interactions between condition and pursuer appropriateness, pursuer attractiveness, or target attractiveness, the mediating roles of these three variables were retested without condition as a moderator of their relations to stalking myth endorsement. Pursuer appropriateness was found to be a significant mediator of the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement for both conditions, $z = 3.25, p = .001$. Neither perceived pursuer attractiveness ($z = .25, p = .800$) nor perceived target attractiveness ($z = .11, p = .914$) mediated the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement. The models are depicted in Figures 8-10.

In sum, in the scary condition, the effect of condition on stalking myth endorsement was mediated by perceived appropriateness and positivity of both the pursuer and target. In the romantic condition, by contrast, only perceived pursuer appropriateness mediated the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement.

Discussion

The present experiment demonstrates a causal relation between media portrayals of stalking and beliefs about stalking. Exposure to a film that portrayed stalking as scary led to lower levels of stalking myth endorsement. Although exposure to a film that portrayed stalking as romantic did not significantly raise levels of stalking myth endorsement for all participants, it was associated with significantly higher levels of stalking myth endorsement among those who perceived the films as more realistic or who experienced higher levels of transportation.

This pattern of findings is consistent with existing work examining the effect positive and negative portrayals of a single topic have on attitudes. Using a pre-test/post-test design, Eyal and Kunkel (2008) found that although watching television in which sexual intercourse led to a negative consequence led to more negative attitudes toward sex, watching television in which sexual intercourse led to a positive consequence did not lead to more positive attitudes toward sex. They speculated that because sexual intercourse is so rarely negatively reinforced—and so commonly positively reinforced—on television, it might be difficult to produce experimental effects above and beyond the effect of everyday viewing. Similarly, existing evidence suggests that portrayals of persistent pursuit in movies are exceedingly common (MacArthur et al., 2010), and the prevalence of this type of representation may make it difficult to show experimental effects.

Another possible explanation for the failure to observe a significant increase in stalking myths for the romantic condition over the control condition are the relatively low levels of perceived realism and transportation among participants in this condition. Recall that participants in the scary condition reported significantly higher levels of both these constructs. Because romantic stalking did lead to higher endorsement of stalking myths among those who saw the film as more realistic or who experienced higher levels of transportation, it is possible that a romantic portrayal of stalking that produced higher mean levels of perceived realism and/or transportation would have a significant main effect on attitudes toward stalking.

It is also possible that arousal of the participants contributed to the greater effects for the scary condition. Higher levels of arousal tend to produce greater priming effects (Hansen & Krygowski, 1994), and although arousal was not directly assessed in the present study, there is reason to believe that participants in the scary condition experienced higher levels of arousal than

those in the romantic condition. As reported in Chapter 3, participants in the scary condition experienced moderate-to-high levels of fear (as assessed by ratings of the scariness of the film), whereas those in the romantic condition experienced virtually no fear. Since fear is an emotion that involves high levels of arousal (Russell, 1980), it is possible that this arousal contributed to the magnitude of the effect among those in the scary condition. If true, the failure of perceived realism and transportation to increase this effect might be because arousal levels enhanced the effects observable from these stimuli to the extent possible.

Mediation analyses suggested that perceptions of the pursuer and target engendered by the films can partially explain the effect of film exposure on stalking myth endorsement. Specifically, among those in the scary condition, acquiring stronger negative global perceptions of the pursuer, or coming to see his actions as more inappropriate, was associated with lower levels of stalking myth endorsement. Additionally, coming to perceive the target more positively, or coming to see her actions as more appropriate, was associated with lower levels of stalking myth endorsement. In the romantic condition, only perceptions of pursuer appropriateness mediated the relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement. That is, as was the case for the scary condition, coming to perceive the pursuer's actions as less appropriate was associated with lower endorsement of stalking myths.

This experiment demonstrates that media exposure can produce an increase or decrease in stalking-supportive beliefs. The direction and nature of this effect is dependent on the type of media content to which people are exposed and individual differences in perceptions of that content.

Chapter 4

General discussion

Taken together, the two studies reported in this dissertation suggest that media contribute to the beliefs people hold about stalking. The survey described in Chapter 2 illustrated that higher levels of total television exposure are associated with higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, thus reflecting an increased tendency to see stalking as trivial. Chapter 3 provided experimental evidence for a causal relation between media exposure to certain types of material and seeing stalking as trivial. Watching a film that portrayed stalking as scary led people to endorse lower levels of stalking myths, whereas watching a film that portrayed stalking as romantic led some people to endorse higher levels of stalking myths. Researchers had previously suggested that the media contribute to beliefs about stalking (Sheridan et al., 2000; Yanowitz, 2006), but that possibility had remained untested. This dissertation provides survey and experimental evidence that the media do, indeed, contribute to beliefs about stalking.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Although a substantial body of research has examined the relation between media exposure and beliefs about forms of gendered violence such as sexual harassment (Dill et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2005) and rape (Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Lee et al., 2011), the studies reported here extend that work to examine the effect media exposure has on beliefs about stalking.

One common complaint in stalking victims' narratives is that people did not take them seriously when they described their experiences (Logan et al., 2006; van der Aa & Groenen,

2011). The studies reported here suggest that media effects are one possible reason for this. The survey demonstrated that heavier levels of regular television exposure are associated with higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, and the experiment demonstrated that media are capable of *causing* higher levels of stalking myth endorsement. That exposure to romantic stalking in the experiment led to increased endorsement of stalking myths for some participants is particularly noteworthy. Although in most contexts hiring a private investigator to track down a prom date from over a decade prior (as in *There's Something About Mary*) or flying across the country to declare one's undying devotion to a woman who has repeatedly made her lack of interest clear (as in *Management*) would be (at a minimum) troubling, in movie-land, these grand, romantic gestures are often framed as unequivocal signs of true love. Indeed, they may be seen as reflecting one of the great cultural myths of romantic love: that no matter how big the obstacle, love will conquer all (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The experiment reported here demonstrates that these romanticized pursuit behaviors can in fact have a clear and negative impact, in that they can lead people to see stalking as a less serious crime than they otherwise would.

However, the story is not an entirely gloomy one; the experiment also demonstrated that media are capable of leading to a *decrease* in stalking myth endorsement. Specifically, watching a film that depicted stalking as scary led to lower levels of stalking myth endorsement. These findings are in line with those from a recent study that found that, as compared to those who watched clips from *Law & Order: SVU* that depicted physical violence against women, those who watched clips from the show that depicted sexual violence against women endorsed lower levels of rape myths (Lee et al., 2011). The authors of that study suggested that these findings provided support for the argument that sexually violent media can lead to prosocial effects; however, the non-significant difference in rape myth endorsement between participants exposed

to sexual violence and a control group suggests that a more accurate interpretation is that exposure to physical violence against women led to increased levels of rape myth acceptance. By contrast, in this study, participants who saw a scary portrayal of stalking endorsed significantly lower levels of stalking myths than participants in the control condition, thus suggesting that media portraying gendered violence can indeed have prosocial effects. This is not to suggest that depictions of gendered violence will necessarily have prosocial effects; for example, research shows that violent pornography leads men to act more aggressively toward female confederates, especially if the woman in the pornographic film is depicted as enjoying the experience (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981). In this study, by contrast, the movies used for the scary stalking condition featured a woman who was terrified of the man who was pursuing her. Thus, the way in which gendered violence is depicted may be key to understanding the nature of media effects.

The finding that exposure to scary stalking led to a decrease in stalking myth endorsement suggests that the media may hold promise for use in interventions designed to reduce stalking-supportive beliefs. Further research is needed, however, to determine the boundary conditions of this effect. At a minimum, all the participants in the experiment self-identified as women, and the participants who saw a scary portrayals of stalking saw ones in which women were targeted. In addition, they saw the targeted women as physically attractive and regarded them very positively, whereas their perceptions of the male pursuers were extremely negative. Would these films have been as effective in reducing stalking myth endorsement if the participants had regarded the target less positively, or the pursuer more positively? Would these films be as effective in reducing stalking myth endorsement among men?

Mediation analyses suggested that the observed experimental effects can be partially explained by perceptions of the pursuer and target depicted in the film. Of particular theoretical importance is the finding that the extent to which the pursuer was believed to have acted appropriately mediated the relation between film exposure and stalking myth endorsement, with higher levels of perceived appropriateness predicting higher levels of stalking myth endorsement. This suggests that challenging perceptions of persistent pursuit as normative is critical for reducing stalking myth endorsement. However, given that some forms of persistent pursuit *are* in fact collectively normative and therefore socially sanctioned, this would be a difficult battle. To the extent that the media perpetrate the perception of persistent pursuit as normative—whether through sheer frequency (MacArthur et al., 2010) or through contextual factors (e.g., portraying persistent pursuit as romantic)—they contribute to the perception that men who persistently pursue women are acting appropriately. The data reported here suggest that in doing so, they may be leading to increases in stalking myth endorsement.

The survey study reported here also contributes to the literature by linking total amount of real-world television viewing by adolescents to their beliefs about gendered violence. The only other sources my search uncovered that examined the association between total amount of television viewing and beliefs about gendered violence focused on people over the age of 18 (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007). The focus on adolescents is particularly important, as adolescence is a critical time for the development of sexual scripts. Adolescence is also the period of life during which people typically begin dating, and people are especially likely to rely on schematic knowledge when navigating novel experiences (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). If that schematic knowledge includes endorsement of stalking myths like “it is just part of human nature for people to pursue love interests love interests who aren’t receptive...we

always want what we can't have,” and “many instances of stalking by would-be lovers could be avoided if the alleged victim would have just told his/her stalker clearly that s/he was definitely not interested in a romantic relationship,” it is not much of a leap to think that these beliefs might lead people to engage in problematic courtship behavior. Indeed, there is evidence that stalking perpetrators and stalking victims are more likely than people who have not perpetrated stalking or been stalking victims, respectively, to believe there are some circumstances in which stalking is appropriate (Fox, Nobles, & Akers, 2011).

Consistent with this argument, evidence from the experiment suggested that stalking myth endorsement may indeed be a risk factor for stalking victimization. Specifically, people who had been the recipient of a greater number of unwanted pursuit tactics endorsed higher levels of stalking myths, and this relation held when controlling for the effect of condition. Although the design of the experiment does not permit causal claims regarding the nature of this relation, the reverse causal argument (i.e., that being the victim of unwanted pursuit would lead one to endorse more stalking myths) has less face validity. It seems more plausible that women who endorse higher levels of stalking myths are less likely to see aggressive pursuit behaviors as problematic and more likely to see these behaviors as a normal ^{and} even desirable part of heterosexual courtship—especially earlier in the pursuit. They may also be less likely to communicate their lack of interest in a way that is clearly understood by the pursuer, since stronger endorsement of items like “Many alleged stalking victims are actually people who played hard to get and ‘changed their minds’ afterwards” and “In any case where stalking is alleged, one would have to ask whether the victim was flirting too much or sending ‘mixed messages’” would lead them to score higher on stalking myth endorsement. Recall, too, that heterosexual script endorsement—which include endorsement of a passive role for women—was

strongly correlated with stalking myth endorsement in the survey. These beliefs seem even more likely to serve as a risk factor when one considers men's documented tendency to read friendliness or passively-issued rejections as indicators of sexual interest (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996; Shotland & Craig, 1988). An extensive body of work stresses that unequivocally stating a lack of interest in a pursuer early in the pursuit and refusing to engage with him any further can be an effective tactic in short-circuiting a stalker's harassment (e.g., de Becker, 1997); thus, women who do not do this may be more likely to be the target of a greater number of unwanted pursuit tactics. It is worth emphasizing, however, that even women who do everything "right" may still be—and often are—victimized.

The tendency to perceive television as realistic, and to view television to learn about relationships, also predicted higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, controlling for demographics and total amount of television exposure. These findings are consistent with earlier work examining the relation between these viewer involvement variables and stereotypical gender beliefs (Ferris et al., 2007; Ward, 2002; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006), and offer further support for the importance of viewer involvement variables. To my knowledge, previous work had not examined how these viewer involvement variables might relate to beliefs about a form of gendered violence; the findings reported here suggest that they are an important consideration in studies of the relation between media exposure and beliefs about gendered violence.

Limitations

Several key limitations of the studies reported here should be noted. First, although the survey reported in Chapter 2 demonstrated an association between amount of television viewing and stalking myth endorsement, it may be that this association is spurious. One possibility, for example, is that socioeconomic status predicts both amount of television exposure and stalking

myth endorsement. In support of this possibility, there is evidence that people of lower socioeconomic status watch greater amounts of television (Rideout et al., 2010), and lower socioeconomic status also predicts greater endorsement of traditional gender roles (Marciniak, 1998), which—as the survey demonstrated—is associated with greater endorsement of stalking myths. However, because I did not collect data on SES, I was not able to examine this possibility. The experiment reported in Chapter 3 demonstrated that it is possible for media content to lead to higher levels of stalking myth endorsement, but this does not rule out the contributions of other factors (like socioeconomic status) to the development of stalking myths.

Second, in both studies, it is unclear what specific features of the content produced an effect on stalking myth endorsement. The survey assessed total amount of television viewing, but it may be that only certain genres or television shows are responsible for the association between total amount of television viewing and stalking myth endorsement. The experiment focused on the “romantic” and “scary” nature of the portrayals of stalking in the experimental stimuli, but there may be other features of this content driving the observed effects. In particular, both films in the romantic condition are comedies. The humorous presentation of these pursuits could explain why there was no main effect of the romantic condition on stalking myth endorsement *or* why those who perceived these films as realistic or who were more heavily transported by them were less bothered by stalking. On the one hand, humorous messages are in some cases “discounted” precisely because they are humorous and thus fail to exert an influence on beliefs (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007; Young, 2008). This logic could explain why the romantic condition did not have a main effect on stalking myth endorsement. On the other hand, humor may serve as a contextual factor that teaches viewers that the behavior depicted is “not that bad.” The pairing of comedy and aggression on television may “camouflage” or “trivialize”

the aggression depicted, especially non-physical forms of aggression like verbal hostility and intimidation (Potter & Warren, 1998), and this humor may communicate to audiences that the aggressive behaviors depicted are not only acceptable but desirable (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). It is possible, therefore, that the increase in stalking myth endorsement seen among some participants in the romantic condition was not because of the romanticized nature of the pursuits, but because of their comedic presentation.

Finally, the sample in the experiment was exclusively female. There is reason to believe that men and women may not be equally affected by persistent pursuit featuring a male pursuer and female target given both the gendered nature of the behavior and the different allegiances male vs. female viewers are likely to form with the depicted characters. Consequently, it would be unwise to assume that the findings from the experiment would generalize to men.

Future directions

Several important future directions are suggested by the research presented in this dissertation. Broadly, these involve further inquiry into the types of media content capable of causing effects in stalking-relevant domains; consideration of a wider range of stalking-relevant outcomes; closer attention to individual differences in effects; and a focus on the longer-term processes by which these effects occur.

Expansion to different types of media content.

The survey reported here demonstrated that total amount of television exposure is associated with higher levels of stalking myth endorsement. This finding leaves open questions about whether television genres or specific television shows differentially affect stalking myth endorsement. Theoretically, only genres that contain messages relevant to pursuit should affect beliefs about stalking. Thus, some genres (e.g., sports, skills-based reality shows such as *Project*

Runway and *American Idol*) should not be related to stalking myth endorsement, but other genres (e.g., situation comedies, romantic dramas) should be. This prediction is consistent with cultivation research highlighting the predictive power of genre-specific—rather than just total—television exposure (Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

There may also be significant within-genre differences in the relation between television exposure and stalking myth endorsement. For example, although *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and *The Mentalist* are both crime dramas, the former focuses on cases of sexual violence (which are likely to include stalking) and the latter does not. Thus, one might expect regular exposure to *Law & Order SVU* to lead to a decrease in stalking myth endorsement, whereas exposure to *The Mentalist* might be unrelated to stalking myth endorsement. A content analysis, linked to survey data, would provide insight into these within-genre differences. Just as adolescents' "sexual media diets" predict sexual behavior and behavioral intentions (Pardun, L'Engle, & Brown, 2005), so, too, might adolescents' "stalking media diets" predict their beliefs about stalking.

It also remains unknown how cumulative effects from media other than television relate to stalking myths. Movies, music, magazines, and Internet content all contain messages relevant to sexual socialization that might affect beliefs about stalking. On the one hand, adolescents spend far more time per day with television than they do with any other medium (Rideout et al., 2010), which could mean that television has a greater influence on beliefs about stalking than other media by virtue of frequency of exposure. On the other hand, adolescents may consume television more passively than they do other media, which would be expected to produce weaker effects. Music often contains lyrics that might be expected to affect beliefs about stalking (e.g., "I'll follow you until you love me" from the chorus of Lady Gaga's "Paparazzi"), but many

people do not remember lyrics of songs that are familiar to them (Desmond, 1987), which may limit the effects music lyrics can have on beliefs about stalking. In short, future research is needed to determine if cumulative exposure to media other than television relates to beliefs about stalking.

Expansion to different stalking-related outcomes.

Future work should also examine the relation between media exposure and stalking-related outcomes with greater real-world applicability. Some example of this might include verdicts rendered in a mock jury, willingness to donate money to an organization that provides support for stalking victims, and types of support one would be willing to offer to a hypothetical friend who was being stalked. If there is a relation between media exposure and these outcomes, it would be worth examining whether this relation is mediated by stalking myth endorsement. Consideration of the effect romantic depictions of pursuit in the media have on perceptions of ambiguous scenarios would also be valuable. This line of inquiry is important because perceiving a potentially dangerous pursuit as romantic or flattering might lead to an increased vulnerability to stalking victimization. In her person perception study, Dunn (1999) found that a sizable minority of women saw intrusive pursuits in both positive (i.e., romantic, flattering) and negative (i.e., annoying, frightening) terms. However, her study did not examine how the media might contribute to individual differences in perceptions of pursuits. One possibility future research could explore is that heavier levels of real-world media exposure leads to a greater tendency to see intrusive pursuits as both frightening or annoying and romantic or flattering. The effect of media exposure on perceptions of intrusive pursuits could also be examined in an experimental setting. I would expect that watching a film that features a romanticized pursuit (such as *There's Something About Mary*) would lead to an increased tendency to interpret an

intrusive pursuit as more romantic and flattering, and possibly also to a decreased tendency to perceive the pursuit as annoying or frightening.

Another important area for future inquiry is an examination of the ways in which media affect female viewers' perceptions of pursuits that involve a female pursuer and male target. A primary assumption of this project has been that the dominant scripts for heterosexual courtship and stalking overlap, in that both normatively include a male pursuer and female target. Thus, as noted in the opening chapter, when male pursuers are depicted in the media, their pursuits are often depicted as romantic because they are acting in ways that are consistent with the dominant script for courtship. If a female character was portrayed as a romantic pursuer, she would be acting in violation of these scripts, which proscribe a more passive role for women in heterosexual courtship. Because of these scripts, it is likely that viewers would see a female pursuer who engaged in the exact same behaviors as a male pursuer as having acted less appropriately, and the experiment reported here found that perceptions of pursuer appropriateness mediate the relation between media exposure and stalking myth endorsement, with higher ratings of pursuer appropriateness predicting higher levels of stalking myth endorsement. Viewers might also see a romantic pursuit that featured a female pursuer and male target as less "true to life" precisely because it runs counter to the dominant gendered courtship scripts. Believing a portrayal of a pursuit is less "true to life" would be expected to inhibit media effects, since, as reported in the experiment, level of stalking myth endorsement was unaffected among participants who saw a romantic pursuit as relatively unrealistic.

Expansion to different populations.

Future research should also seek to expand our understanding of the populations for whom media affects beliefs about stalking. As noted above, one significant limitation of the

experiment reported here is that the participants were all female. The survey did include male participants and found that there were no gender differences in the relation between total television exposure and stalking myth endorsement. Collectively, however, these studies do not provide solid causal evidence of a relation between media exposure and stalking myth endorsement for boys or men. It is possible that experimental exposure to pursuits differentially affects men and women, a possibility future research should explore.

There might also be within-gender differences in effects. For example, the extent to which one is sex-typed might be expected to moderate the relation between media exposure and stalking myth endorsement.¹¹ People who are highly sex-typed see traits stereotypically associated with their own sex as highly relevant to their self-concepts and traits stereotypically associated with the opposite sex as largely irrelevant to their self-concepts (Bem, 1981). Highly sex-typed people process information through gender schemas, and incorporate information culture tells them is important to their sex into their own self-concept. This logic suggests that highly sex-typed men are likely to internalize persistent pursuit messages as central to masculinity, and are therefore more likely to see persistent pursuit as an appropriate way for a man to “get a girl.” Highly sex-typed women, on the other hand, are likely to internalize cultural messages about female passivity, which would lead them to believe that being persistently pursued signals their desirability. In short, because people who are highly sex-typed are more likely to internalize gendered messages, they are also more likely to endorse stalking myths, because the myths are in many cases exaggerated expressions of gender roles. It is also possible that individuals who are more sex-typed would experience higher levels of identification with

¹¹ My thanks to Jochen Peter for this suggestion.

media personae who enact persistent pursuit behaviors, and identification has been shown to facilitate media effects (Huesmann et al., 2003).

Expansion to longer-term processes.

The data presented in the dissertation are consistent with the argument that a) greater amounts of television exposure during adolescence b) leads adolescent girls to endorse higher levels of stalking myths, which c) leads them to be the target of unwanted pursuit by the time they are emerging adults. This causal chain would lead the college women in the experiment to report having been the target of a greater number of unwanted pursuit tactics. Because scripts are relatively stable (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), it would also lead them to report higher levels of stalking myth endorsement. However, this causal chain is purely speculative at this point. Longitudinal work is needed to explore this theoretical proposition.

Longitudinal work could also help establish whether total amount of television exposure causes an increase in stalking myth endorsement over time, higher levels of stalking myth endorsement lead to higher amounts of television exposure, or both. Longitudinal work could also help disentangle the processes by which total television exposure leads to an increase in stalking myth endorsement. The survey reported here suggested that one path by which this might occur is through endorsement of the heterosexual script. However, the cross-sectional data do not permit claims about temporal order. If it is indeed the case that television exposure ultimately leads to higher levels of stalking myth and heterosexual script endorsement, longitudinal work could establish whether a) beliefs about stalking myths and the heterosexual script develop in tandem, or b) television exposure leads to higher levels of heterosexual script endorsement, which in turn leads to higher endorsement of stalking myths.

Concluding Remarks

The studies presented in this dissertation suggest that the media are a significant contributor to beliefs about stalking. Of particular concern are the findings that total amount of television viewing is associated with higher levels of stalking-supportive beliefs, and that portrayals of romanticized pursuits in the media are capable of causing an increase in stalking-supportive beliefs. Future research should continue to explore the conditions under which these effects occur, and work to identify interventions capable of reducing them.

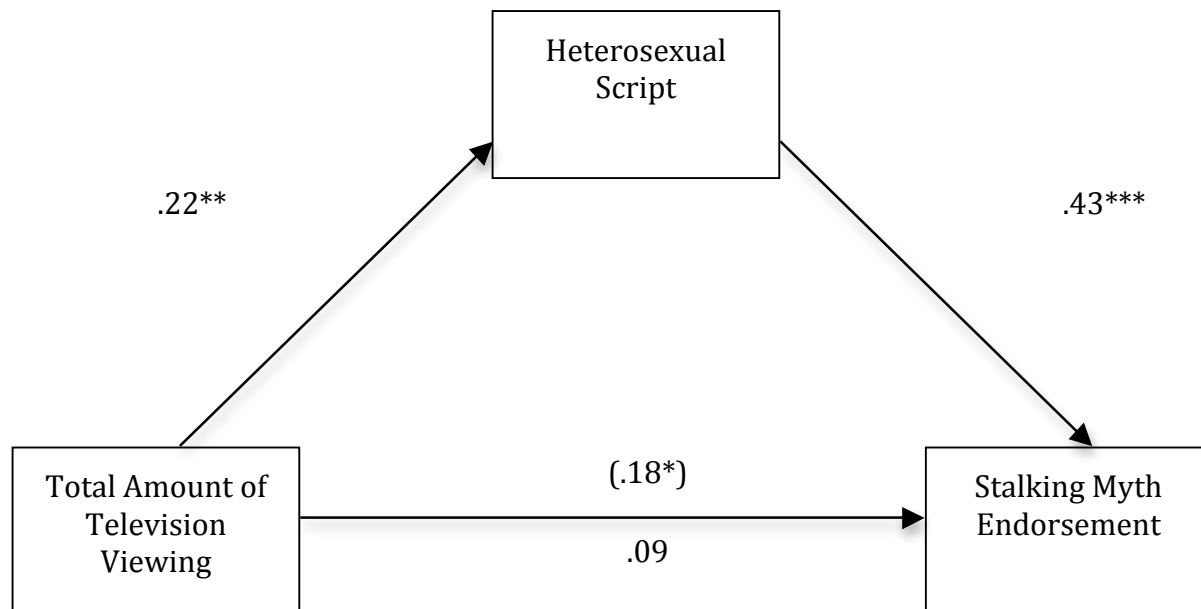


Figure 1. Study 1: The relation between total amount of television viewing and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by endorsement of the heterosexual script. Paths are standardized coefficients. The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between total amount of television viewing and stalking myth endorsement.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .0001$.

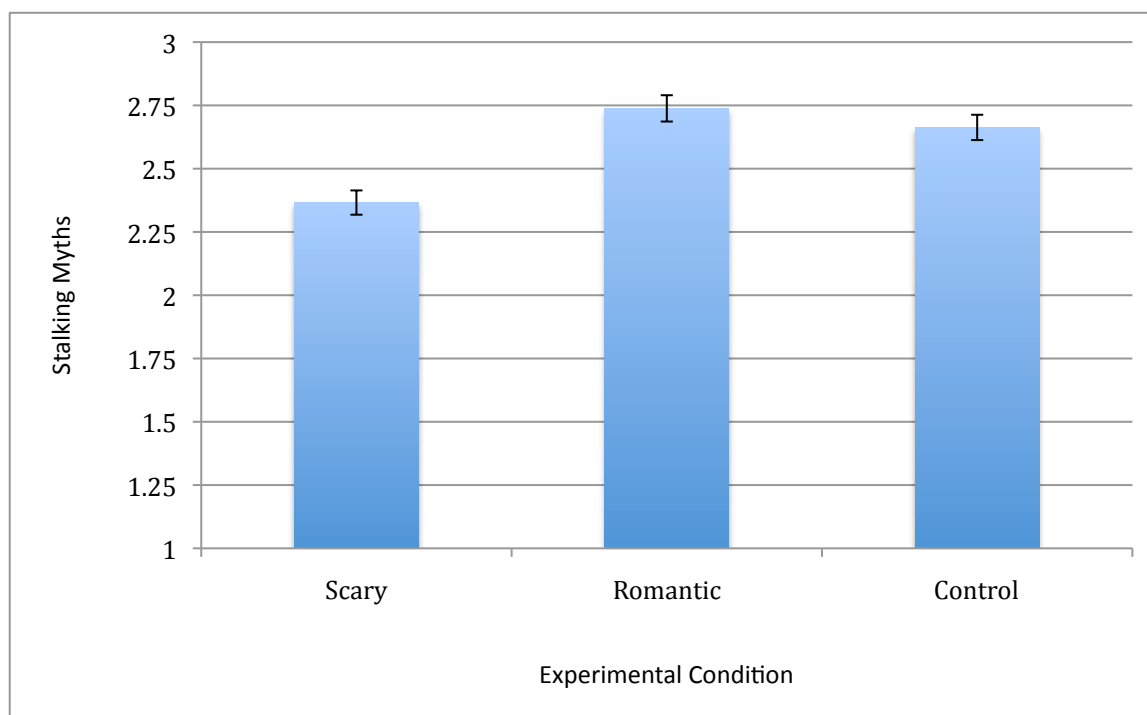


Figure 2. Study 2: Mean level of stalking myth endorsement by condition. The stalking myths measure has a possible range of 1-6, with higher scores reflecting greater approval of stalking. Error bars represent standard errors.

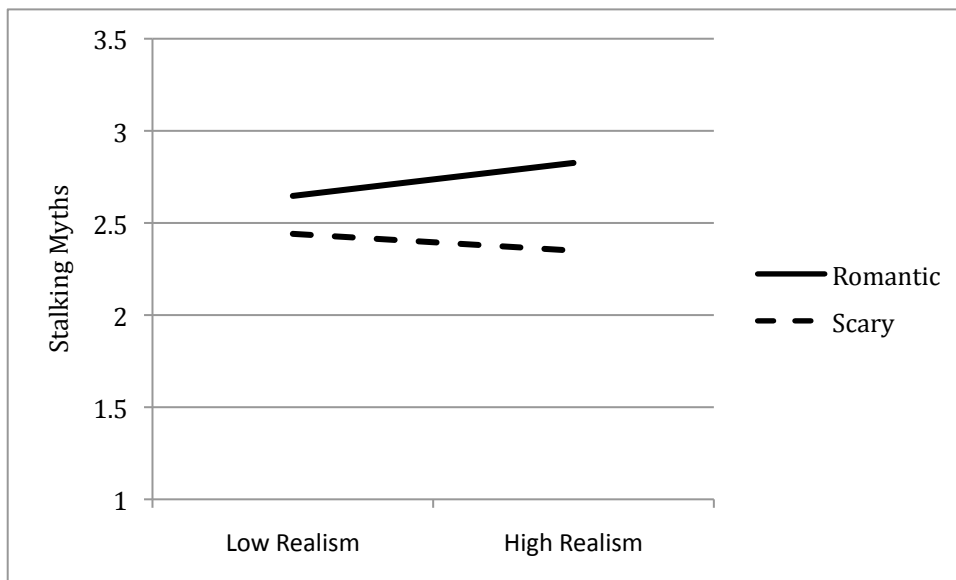


Figure 3. Study 2: Predicted values for the interactive effect of condition and perceived realism on stalking myth endorsement. The stalking myths measure has a possible range of 1-6, with higher scores reflecting greater approval of stalking. Predicted values are for low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) perceived realism.

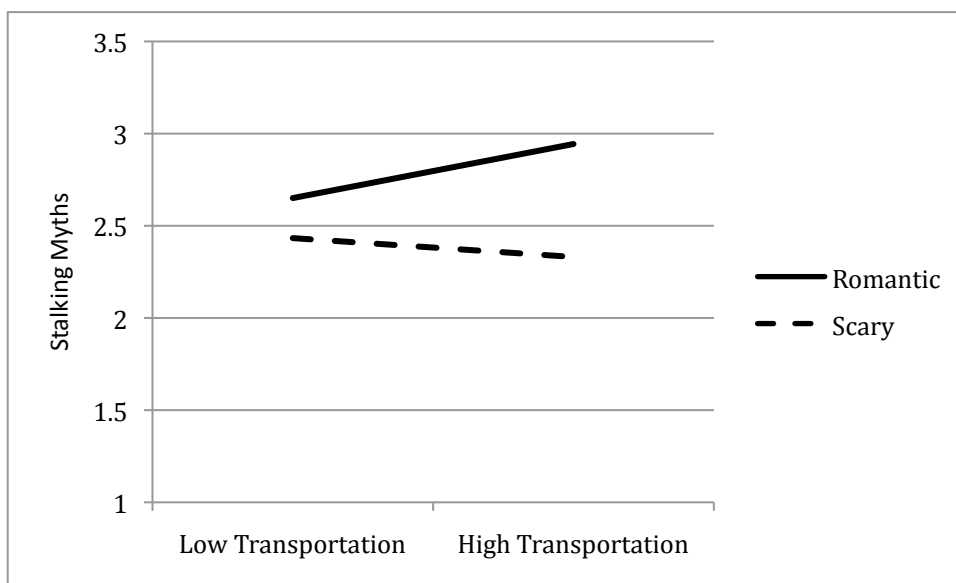


Figure 4. Study 2: Predicted values for the interactive effect of condition and transportation on stalking myth endorsement. The stalking myths measure has a possible range of 1-6, with higher scores reflecting greater approval of stalking. Predicted values are for low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) transportation.

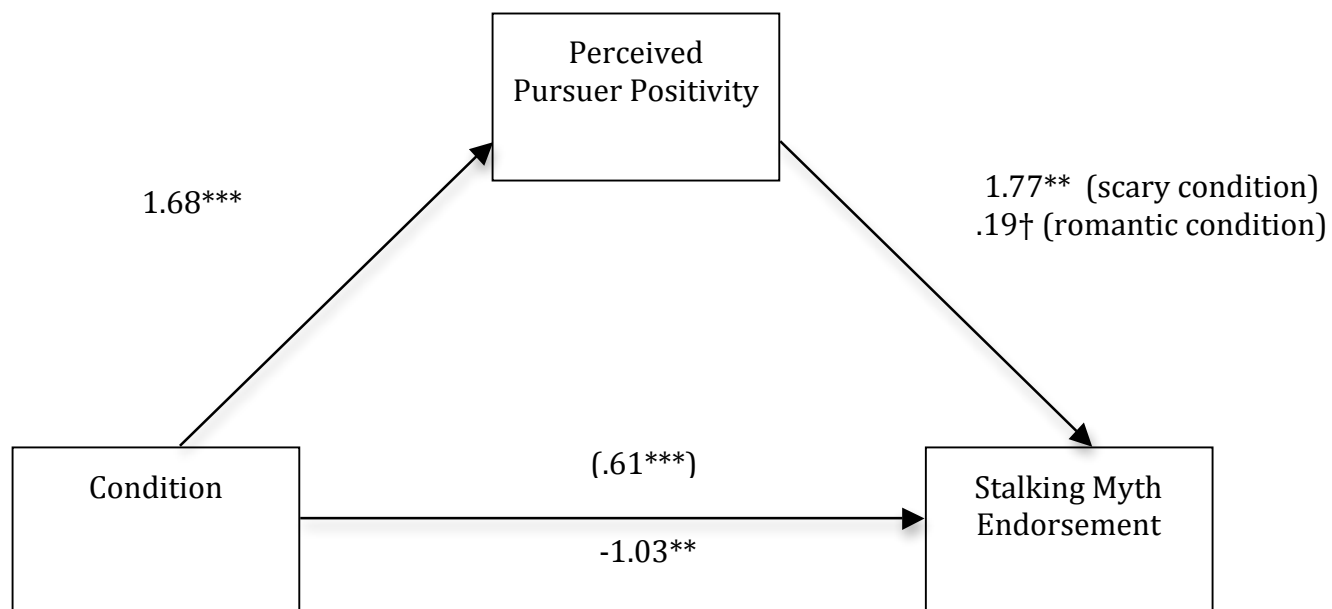


Figure 5. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived pursuer positivity. As illustrated in the path model, the relation between perceived pursuer positivity and stalking myth endorsement varies as a function of condition. Paths are standardized coefficients. Although standardized coefficients greater than 1 are not commonly seen, they can legitimately occur, particularly in the presence of multicollinearity (Deegan, 1978). The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement.

† $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

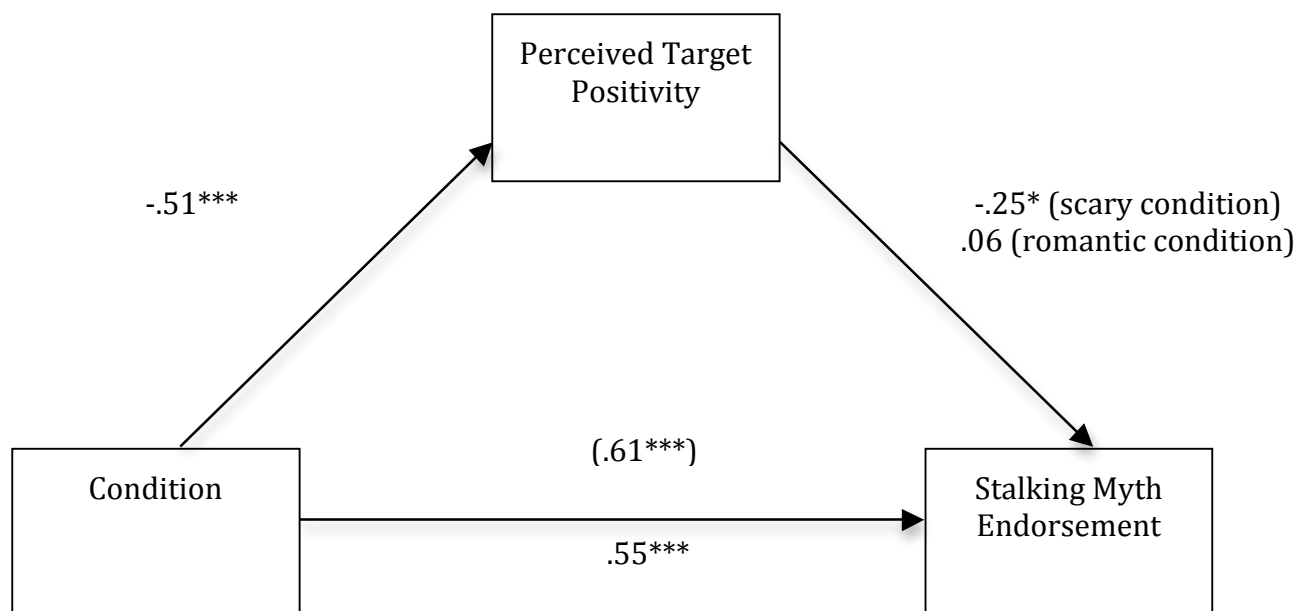


Figure 6. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived target positivity. As illustrated in the path model, the relation between perceived target positivity and stalking myth endorsement varies as a function of condition. Paths are standardized coefficients. The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement.
 $*p < .05$. $***p < .001$.

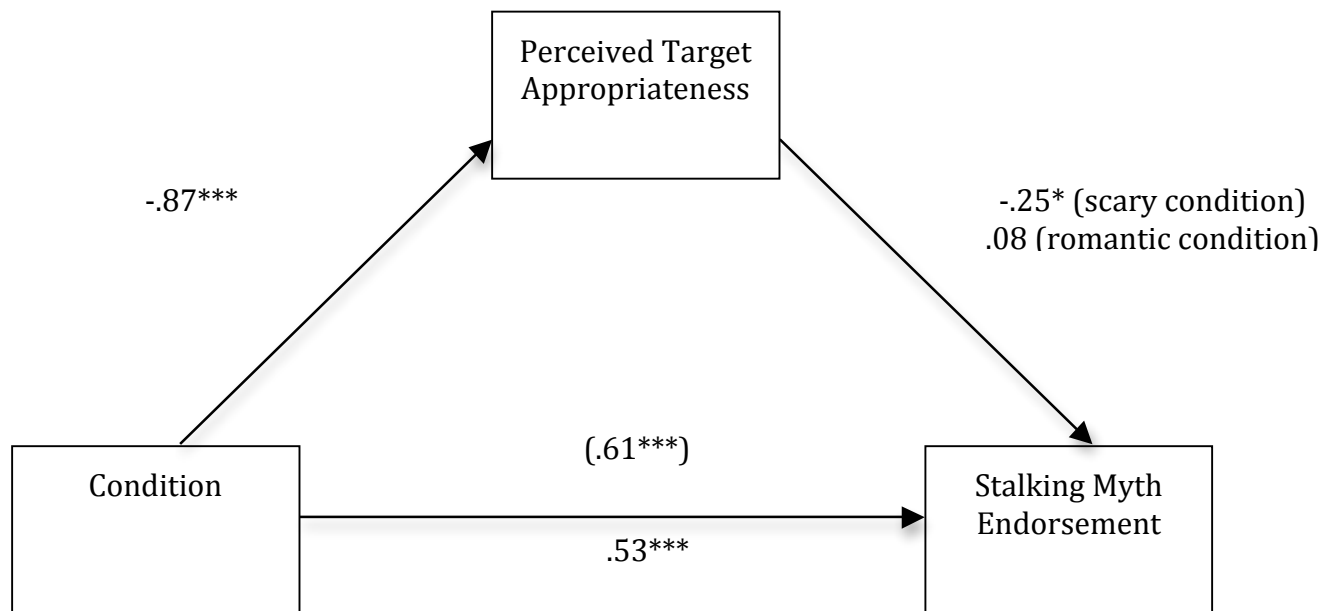


Figure 7. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived target appropriateness. As illustrated in the path model, the relation between perceived target appropriateness and stalking myth endorsement varies as a function of condition. Paths are standardized coefficients. The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

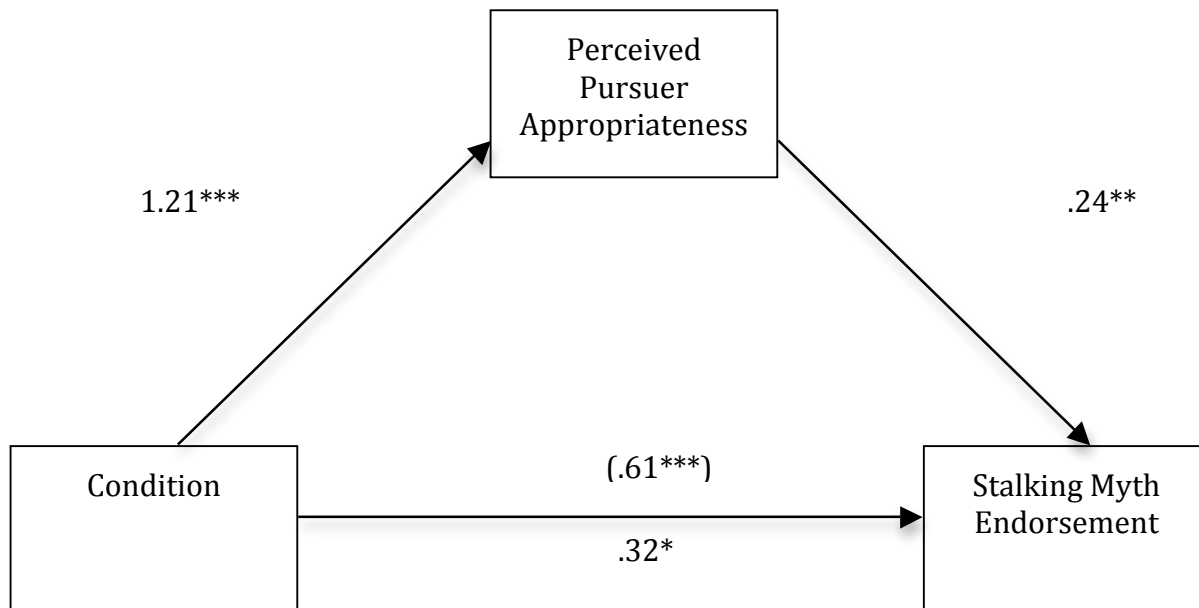


Figure 8. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived pursuer appropriateness. Paths are standardized coefficients. Although standardized coefficients greater than 1 are not commonly seen, they can legitimately occur, particularly in the presence of multicollinearity (Deegan, 1978). The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

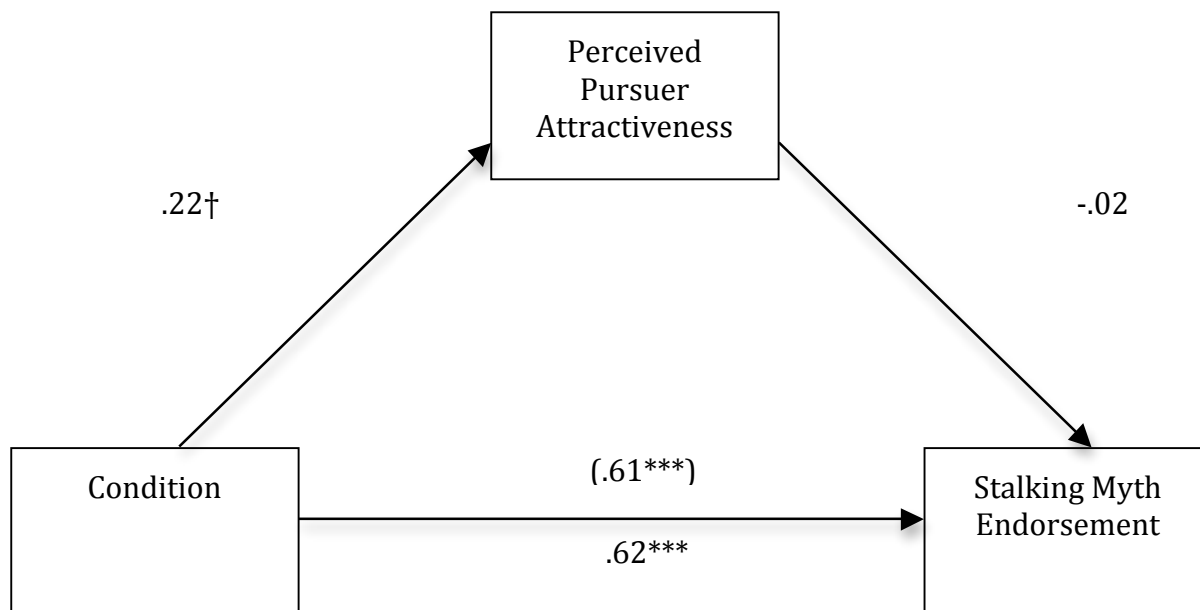


Figure 9. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived pursuer attractiveness. Paths are standardized coefficients. The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement.

† $p < .10$. *** $p < .001$.

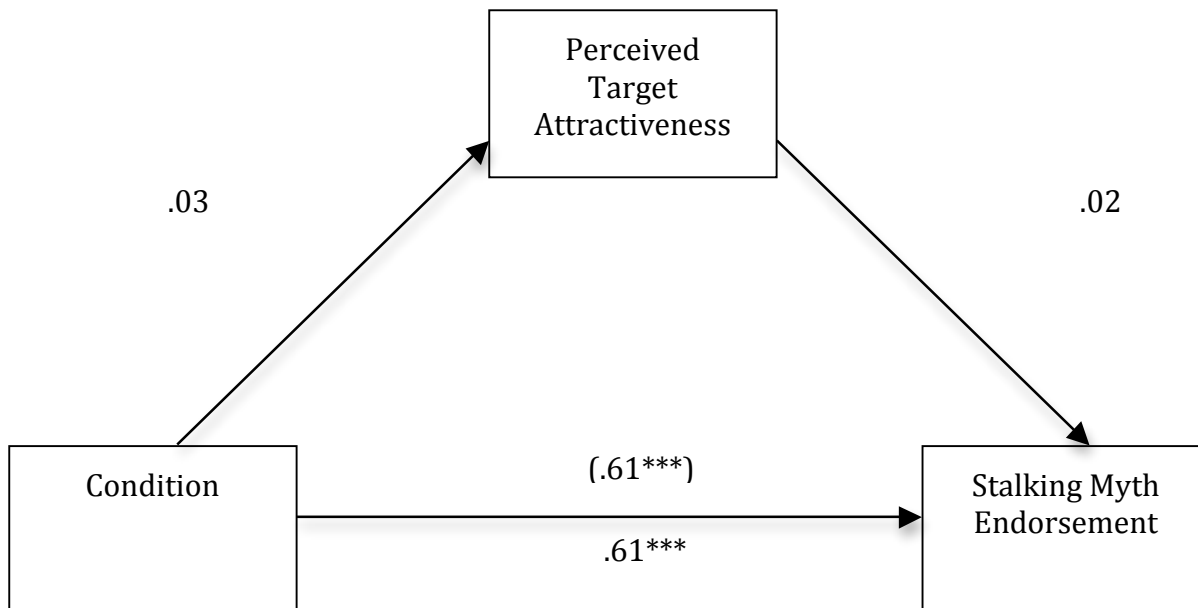


Figure 10. Study 2: The relation between condition and stalking myth endorsement as mediated by perceived target attractiveness. Paths are standardized coefficients. The coefficient in parentheses is the direct path between condition and stalking myth endorsement. *** $p < .001$.

Table 1

Demographic Variables from Study 1: Frequencies and Percentages

Demographic Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender (<i>N</i>=189)		
Male	60	31.7
Female	129	68.3
Race (<i>N</i>=189)		
Asian or Asian-American	4	2.1
Black or African-American	95	50.3
Hispanic or Latino	5	2.6
White, Non-Hispanic	54	28.6
Mixed Black and White	12	6.3
Other	18	9.5
(Missing)	1	0.5
Age (<i>N</i>=189)		
Fourteen	21	11.1
Fifteen	47	24.9
Sixteen	49	25.9
Seventeen	34	18.0
Eighteen	34	18
Nineteen	2	1.1
(Missing)	2	1.1
Grade in School (<i>N</i>=189)		
Ninth	49	25.9
Tenth	56	29.6
Eleventh	32	16.9
Twelfth	51	27.0
(Missing)	1	0.5

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Major Variables from Study 1

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>		<i>α</i>
					Potential	Actual	
TV ^a							
Weekday	1	183	4.11	2.56	0-10	0-10	
Saturday	1	187	4.29	2.82	0-10	0-10	
Sunday	1	186	4.16	2.74	0-10	0-10	
Total	3	182	4.13	2.29	0-10	0-10	
Perceived Realism ^b	7	187	2.91	0.71	1-5	1-5	.78
Viewing to Learn ^c	8	187	2.64	1.29	1-6	1-6	.94
Stalking Myths ^d	16	187	3.55	0.71	1-6	1.63-5.13	.75
Heterosexual Script	14	184	3.55	0.80	1-6	1.36-5.14	.79

^aNumbers for TV variables are hours per day. ^bPerceived realism ranges from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting a greater tendency to perceive television as realistic. ^cViewing to learn ranges from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to view television to learn about sex and relationships. ^dStalking myths and heterosexual script are rated on scales ranging from 1 to 6. Higher scores for stalking myths reflect greater approval stalking, and higher scores for the heterosexual script reflect stronger endorsement of the heterosexual script.

Table 3

Gender and Race Differences for Major Variables from Study 1

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>Black</i>	<i>Not Black</i>	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)		<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
TV ^a						
Weekday	4.10 (2.50)	4.14 (2.70)	-.08 (181)	4.46 (2.60)	3.77 (2.50)	-1.81† (180)
Saturday	4.54 (2.94)	3.75 (2.46)	1.80† (185)	4.84 (2.83)	3.74 (2.72)	-2.71** (184)
Sunday	4.40 (2.85)	3.64 (2.42)	1.77† (184)	4.76 (2.85)	3.57 (2.50)	-3.04** (183)
Total	4.19 (2.28)	4.01 (2.31)	.51 (180)	4.54 (2.31)	3.73 (2.22)	-2.43* (179)
Perceived Realism ^b	2.91 (0.73)	2.89 (0.66)	.15 (180)	2.98 (0.65)	2.83 (0.77)	-1.41 (184)
Viewing to Learn ^c	2.68 (1.32)	2.55 (1.22)	.649 (185)	2.65 (1.37)	2.63 (1.21)	-.13 (184)
Stalking Myths ^d	3.50 (0.75)	3.65 (0.63)	-1.326 (185)	3.52 (0.74)	3.56 (0.68)	.367 (184)
Heterosexual Script	3.46 (0.81)	3.73 (0.77)	-2.17 (186)*	3.63 (0.76)	3.47 (0.85)	-1.37 (185)

Note. All *p* values are two-tailed.

^aNumbers for TV variables are hours per day. ^bPerceived realism ranges from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting a greater tendency to perceive television as realistic. ^cViewing to learn ranges from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to view television to learn about romantic relationships. ^dStalking myths and heterosexual script are rated on scales ranging from 1 to 6. Higher scores for stalking myths reflect greater approval of stalking, and higher scores for heterosexual script reflect stronger endorsement of the heterosexual script.

†*p* < .10 **p* < .05 ***p* < .01

Table 4

Bivariate Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1 for Full Sample

Scale Items	Total TV	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Total Amount TV	1				
Stalking Myths	.18*	1			
Heterosexual Script	.21**	.45**	1		
Perceived Realism	.16*	.31**	.33**	1	
Viewing to Learn	.17*	.35**	.38**	.34**	.1

Note. $N = 174$.

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed) ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Stalking Myth Endorsement From Amount of Television Viewing (Study 1)

Predictor	Predictors of stalking myth endorsement		
	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Step 1		.03	.03
Total amount of TV	.18*		
$F(1,172) = 5.58^*$			
Step 2		.07	.04
Total amount of TV	.19*		
Age	-.14†		
Race (not Black)	.04		
Sex (female)	-.12		
$F(4,169) = 3.01^*$			

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Stalking Myth Endorsement From Perceived Realism (Study 1)

Predictor	Predictors of stalking myth endorsement		
	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Step 1		.10	.10
Perceived realism	.31***		
$F(1,172) = 18.77***$			
Step 2		.13	.11
Perceived realism	.23***		
Age	-.13†		
Race (not Black)	.04		
Sex (female)	-.11		
$F(4,169) = 6.41***$			

† $p < .10$ *** $p < .001$

Table 7

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Stalking Myth Endorsement From Viewing to Learn About Romantic Relationships (Study 1)

Predictor	Predictors of stalking myth endorsement		
	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Step 1		.12	.12
Viewing to learn	.35***		
$F(1,172) = 23.81***$			
Step 2		.15	.13
Viewing to learn	.34***		
Age	-.11		
Race (not Black)	.02		
Sex (female)	-.12		
$F(4,169) = 7.33***$			

*** $p < .001$

Table 8

Bivariate Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1, Separated by Gender

Scale Items	Total Amount TV	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Total Amount TV		.25**	.35**	.25**	.24**
Stalking Myths	.06		.44**	.30**	.32**
Heterosexual Script	.04	.46**		.26**	.34**
Perceived Realism	-.07	.30*	.54**		.32**
Viewing to Learn	-.02	.41**	.42**	.38**	

Note. Bivariate correlations for girls (n range 122-128) are presented above the diagonal, and bivariate correlations for boys (n range 58-59) are presented below the diagonal. Bolded values indicate significant gender differences at the $p < .05$ (two-tailed) level.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 9

Bivariate Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1, Separated by Race

Scale Items	Total Amount TV	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Total Amount TV		.27**	.29**	.17	.20
Stalking Myths	.12		.37**	.31**	.26*
Heterosexual Script	.17	.56**		.15	.21*
Perceived Realism	.10	.30**	.45**		.29**
Viewing to Learn	.12	.45**	.50**	.38**	

Note. Bivariate correlations for Black participants (n range 89-93) are presented above the diagonal, and bivariate correlations for non-Black participants (n range 90-92) are presented below the diagonal. Bolded values indicate significant race differences at the $p < .05$ (two-tailed) level.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 10

Partial Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1 for Full Sample

Scale Items	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Stalking Myths	1			
Heterosexual Script	.42	1		
Perceived Realism	.29	.31	1	
Viewing to Learn	.30	.34	.32	1

Note. Partial correlations control for total amount of television viewing. $df = 171$. All correlations significant at $p < .001$.

Table 11

Partial Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1, Separated by Gender

Scale Items	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Stalking Myths		.37***	.28**	.26**
Heterosexual Script	.46***		.20*	.28***
Perceived Realism	.30*	.55**		.28***
Viewing to Learn	.40***	.47**	.40***	

Note. Partial correlations control for total amount of television viewing. Partial correlations for girls are presented above the diagonal, and partial correlations for boys are presented below the diagonal. *df* for girls = 115; *df* for boys = 53. All significance tests are one-tailed.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Table 12

Partial Correlations Among Major Variables from Study 1, Separated by Race

Scale Items	Stalking Myths	Heterosexual Script	Perceived Realism	Viewing to Learn
Stalking Myths		.29**	.32**	.20†
Heterosexual Script	.55***		.13	.17
Perceived Realism	.29**	.43***		.27*
Viewing to Learn	.43***	.51***	.38***	

Note. Partial correlations control for total amount of television viewing. Partial correlations for Black participants are presented above the diagonal, and partial correlations for non-Black participants are presented below the diagonal. *df* for Black = 82; *df* for non-Black = 85. All significance tests are two-tailed.

† $p < .10$ level. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 13

Experiences with Unwanted Pursuit Among College Women (Study 2)

<i>For each question, please answer "yes" if you have experienced this type of pursuit and "no" if you have not. Has anyone ever undesirably and obsessively pursued you by...</i>	Number of responses		
	Yes	No	Percent yes
Leaving unwanted messages (e.g., hang-up calls, notes, cards, letters, voice-mail, e-mail, messages with friends, etc.)?	146	280	34.3
Monitoring you and/or your behavior (e.g., following you; frequently communicating with you to establish your whereabouts; contacting friends, family, or other personal contacts in an effort to learn more about where you are or what you are doing, etc.)? ^a	72	353	16.9
Engaging in regulatory harassment (e.g., filing official complaints, obtaining a restraining order on you, etc.)?	3	423	0.7
Communicating with you in an excessively needy or demanding way (e.g., pressuring you to see him/her, arguing with you to give him/her "another chance", etc.)? ^a	151	274	35.5
Issuing concrete or implied threats (e.g., stating or implying that something bad will happen to you, threatening to personally hurt you or him/herself, etc.)? ^a	33	392	7.8
Exposing accurate but private and embarrassing information about you to others?	56	370	13.1
"Sabotaging" or attempting to sabotage your reputation with untrue or distorted information about you (e.g., spreading rumors about you, your relationships, or activities)?	50	376	11.7
Taking over your electronic identity or persona (e.g., representing him or herself to others as you in chat rooms, bulletin boards, pornography or singles sites, etc.)?	52	374	12.2

^aTotal *N* for these items = 425. *N* for all other items = 426.

Table 14

Characteristics of Experiences with Unwanted Pursuit Among College Women (Study 2)

		<i>N</i>
Sex of pursuer	Male	226
	Female	14
Considers unwanted pursuit stalking	Yes	48
	No	193
Relationship with pursuer prior to pursuit	Serious dating relationship	66
	Casual dating relationship (hook-up, friend with benefits, short-term relationship)	^a 54
	Friend	49
	Acquaintance	47
	Stranger	7
	Family member or relative	4
	Other (please specify) ^b	3
	Spouse or ex-spouse	2
	(no response)	2
Feelings elicited by pursuit (free responses) ^c	Annoyed/annoying	68
	Uncomfortable	34
	Scared/scary	17
	Angry	12
	Guilty	8
	Frustrated	7
	Bad, Embarrassed, Irritated, Upset, Worried	4
	Awkward, Confused, Flattered, Mad, Terrified	3
	Betrayed, Creeped out, Gross, Helpless, Nervous, Sad, Stressed, Uneasy, Unhappy, Unsafe, Weird	2
	Afraid, Aggravated, Alone, Anxious, Ashamed, Awful, Concerned, Controlled, Depressed, Disappointed, Disgusted, Enraged, Exasperated, Exhausted, Exposed, Frightened, Happy, Hurt, Loved, Normal, Overtrying, Paranoid, Pissed off, Spotlighted, Threatened, Trapped, Untrusted, Violated, Vulnerable, Weak	1

Note. These questions were only asked of participants who answered “yes” to at least one of the items presented in Table 10. The prompt read as follows: “In response to the following questions, please keep in mind your experience with your unwanted pursuer. If you have experienced unwanted pursuit from more than one person, please think about the pursuer who seems the most significant to you.”

^aThis total includes the addition of two participants who selected “other.” These participants identified their pursuers as “hook up once” and “a guy I met at a party and made out with for 10 min.” ^bResponses were “tour guide for a week on vacation,” “coworker,” and “friend online.”

^cParticipants were prompted to “please pick three words that best characterize how this pursuit made you feel.”

Appendix A
Perceived Realism Scale (Study 1)

Think about your current and general attitudes about TV characters and portrayals. Check the item that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. People on TV shows are just like people in the real world.
2. TV shows things as they really are in life.
3. The people on my favorite programs are just like real people.
4. Television does not show life as it really is. (reverse-scored)
5. When bad things happen to TV characters, their reactions are similar to the reactions real people would have.
6. People on TV have the same feelings and emotions as real people.
7. The way boys and girls act with each other on TV is similar to how they act with each other in real life.
8. If I see something on television, I can't be sure it really is that way. (reverse-scored)*

Shortened version of Perceived Realism on Television scale, Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005. All items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

*This item deleted to improve reliability of measure.

Appendix B
Viewing to Learn About Romantic Relationships Scale (Study 1)

Listed below are a number of reasons that some people like to watch comedies, dramas, and reality TV. Rate how much you agree or disagree with each reason by checking the answer that best describes how you feel.

1. I like to watch them to learn what it will be like to be in a romantic relationship when I'm older.
2. I like to watch them so I can learn what people are looking for in a romantic partner.
3. I like to watch them to find out how to act in a romantic relationship.
4. I like to watch them because it teaches me about romantic relationships and dating.
5. I like to watch them to learn about sex.
6. I like to watch them to learn how I should behave when I'm with somebody I'm interested in romantically.
7. I like to watch them so I can learn how to attract people I am romantically interested in.
8. I like to watch them to learn what to expect from a romantic partner.

All items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Appendix C
Heterosexual Script Scale (Study 1)

1. Most women are sly and deceptive when they are out to attract a man, often hiding their flaws, and playing it sweet.
2. Women are most attracted by a muscular body and a handsome face.
3. A man will be most successful in picking up women if he has “game” or uses flattering, sexy, or cute pick-up lines.
4. Being with an attractive woman gives a man status.
5. What women find most attractive about a man is his money, job, or car.
6. There is nothing wrong with men whistling at shapely women.
7. Using her body and looks is the best way for a woman to attract a man.
8. Women should be more concerned about their appearance than men.
9. Dating is basically a game, a battle of the sexes, where both males and females try to gain the upper hand and manipulate each other.
10. Something is wrong with a guy who turns down a chance to score with a woman.
11. Men want sex; women want relationships.
12. Women should not be afraid to wear clothes that show off their figure. After all, if you’ve got it, flaunt it.
13. It is okay for a man to pursue a woman who is already taken. After all, all is fair in love and war.
14. Women should do whatever they need (for example, use make-up, buy attractive clothes, work out), to look good enough to attract a man.

From Ward, Hansbrough, & Waker, 2005. All items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Appendix D Stalking Myths Scale

1. People usually don't intend to harass or stalk others, but sometimes they get too carried away.
2. Many instances of stalking by would-be lovers could be avoided if the alleged victim would have just told his/her stalker clearly that s/he was definitely not interested in a romantic relationship.
3. Stalking isn't really violence until the stalker has tried to commit a physical assault.
4. People tend to exaggerate how much stalking affects them.
5. *Stalkers often suffer from mental illness.*
6. Many alleged stalking victims are actually people who played hard to get and "changed their minds" afterwards.
7. *No matter how a person acts, it should not be assumed that s/he led someone to stalk him/her. (reverse-scored)*
8. An individual in a committed relationship has the right to keep tabs on his/her partner in whatever way s/he wants.
9. *A person never enjoys being followed or watched by another person. (reverse-scored)*
10. It is just part of human nature for people to pursue love interests who aren't receptive to them. After all, we always want what we can't have.
11. Real stalking occurs when the stalker is a stranger.
12. Even though someone may call it stalking, s/he probably felt flattered by all the attention.
13. In any case where stalking is alleged, one would have to ask whether the victim was flirting too much or sending "mixed messages."
14. *People rarely lie about having been stalked. (reverse-scored)*
15. *A stalker is usually someone the victim knows well. (reverse-scored)*
16. Being in love is not a reason to stalk someone. (reverse-scored)
17. Victims of stalking are usually public figures, like celebrities or politicians.
18. Stalking doesn't really occur within committed relationships like a marriage.
19. A person who is willing to go to the extremes of stalking must really be in love.
20. Being stalked has a serious, lasting impact on the victim. (reverse-scored)
21. Some people will go overboard when they think they are in love, but that shouldn't be labeled "stalking."

From Sinclair, 2006. Items in *italics* were dropped from the scale in Study 1 to improve reliability. Study 2 used the full 21-item scale.

Appendix E

Descriptions of Experimental Stimuli

Scary stalking condition

Enough: The clip starts by depicting a seemingly happy married couple (Mitch and Slim). However, Mitch’s controlling nature soon becomes apparent. To escape him, Slim slips out of the house middle of the night, bringing her young daughter, Gracie, with her. Slim spends the duration of the clip desperately trying to escape Mitch. Slim goes so far as to change her name and appearance, but Mitch always seems to find her. In the final scene, Slim is shown in what seems to be a peaceful home. Suddenly, Mitch appears, saying, “I want you back.” Slim gasps, and the final frame shows her horrified face.

Sleeping with the Enemy: Laura is under the control of an abusive husband (Martin). She is so desperate to escape him that she fakes her own death. She attempts to start a new life for herself, but Martin learns that she is alive. Laura becomes aware that Martin knows she is alive, and she goes to great lengths to try to avoid him. In the final scene, Laura sees signs that Martin has been in her house. She panics and tries to run, but it is too late. The final shot shows Laura’s tear-stained terrified face and Martin approaching from behind. Martin greets Laura in a sinister voice: “hello, princess.”

Romantic stalking condition

There’s Something About Mary: Ted goes on a prom date with Mary. Thirteen years later, Ted is lying on his therapist’s couch, fondly recalling a woman he has not seen in over a decade. He hires a private investigator to locate Mary and heads to Florida from Rhode Island for the sole purpose of finding her. Ted and Mary start dating. Their relationship hits a temporary snag when Mary discovers their “chance” meeting in Florida was actually carefully orchestrated, and she tells Ted she never wants to see him again. Mary quickly forgives Ted after he tells her, “I did it because I never stopped thinking about you. And if I didn’t find you, I knew that my life would never ever be good again.” The end of the clip shows Ted and Mary kissing.

Management: Mike meets Sue when she checks into the motel in Phoenix where he is employed. He is immediately infatuated with her, but she does not return his affections. Mike follows Sue around the country in the hopes of winning her affection—first to Maryland; then to Washington State, where she is engaged to a man whose baby she is carrying; then back to Maryland when he learns that Sue’s relationship with the other man has ended. At this point, Sue realizes that she is meant to be with Mike, and the clip ends with them in each others’ arms.

Control condition

March of the Penguins: This documentary chronicles the complicated process penguins go through to ensure that an egg successfully hatches.

Winged Migration: This documentary shows the migration patterns of different species of birds.

Appendix F
Perceived Realism Scale (Study 2)

1. The events in the scenes resemble ones in the real world.
2. The film reflects problems couples encounter in their relationships.
3. The relationship between [pursuer] and [pursued] resembles relationships between people in the real world.
4. [Pursuer's] actions seemed similar to how someone in his situation would act in real life.
5. [Pursued's] actions seemed similar to how someone in her situations would act in real life.

Adapted from Tal-Or and Cohen, 2010. All items rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Appendix G
Transportation Scale (Study 2)

1. I could imagine myself in the scenes I was watching.
2. I was mentally involved in the scenes I was watching.
3. The scenes affected me emotionally.
4. While watching the movie, I found that my mind wandered. (reverse-scored)
5. While watching the movie, I was eager to see what would happen next.

Adapted from Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010. All items rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

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