Are female stalkers more violent than male stalkers? Understanding gender differences in stalking violence using contemporary sociocultural beliefs.

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Abstract

This study investigated gender differences in the perpetration of stalking violence and how

sociocultural beliefs may account for these differences/similarities. A sample of 293 Australian

undergraduate and postgraduate students classified as relational stalkers completed a self-report

questionnaire assessing violence perpetration (no/moderate/severe violence) and sociocultural

beliefs (justifications for relational violence; assessments of target fear). Female relational stalkers

perpetrated elevated rates of moderate violence; however, there were no gender differences for

severe violence. Both male and female relational stalkers were more supportive of justifications

for female-perpetrated relational violence than male-perpetrated relational violence. Violent male

relational stalkers were more likely to believe they caused fear/harm than their female

counterparts. These findings are interpreted in the context of sociocultural beliefs that view male-

to-female violence as more unacceptable and harmful than female-to-male violence.

Key words: stalking, gender, violence, relational stalking, fear, sociocultural beliefs

2

Introduction

While there may be an assumption that males perpetrate more stalking violence than females (e.g., Mullen, Pathe & Purcell, 2000), there is limited evidence to support this. In fact, the majority of research indicates that males and females perpetrate comparable rates of stalking violence (e.g., Harmon, Rosner & Owens, 1998, US forensic psychiatric referrals; Meloy & Boyd, 2003, cross-national mental health and law enforcement cases; Thomas, Purcell, Pathe & Mullen, 2008, Australian citizens) and there is some evidence that females perpetrate higher rates of moderate violence (Sinclair & Frieze, 2002, US students). These findings are inconsistent with patriarchal views often applied to stalking violence. However, there is a co-existing belief among young western cultures that males should not be physically violent against females. Accordingly, violence perpetrated by males against females is viewed as more unacceptable and damaging than violence perpetrated by females against males. Although these attitudes have not been investigated in stalking research, it is possible that they are associated with comparable or elevated rates of female-perpetrated stalking violence.

This study constitutes the first attempt to examine gender differences in stalking violence using self-reports of moderate and severe physical violence and to explore how sociocultural beliefs may account for these differences/similarities. The present research will investigate these variables in a sample of Australian university students to contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between gender, sociocultural beliefs and stalking violence perpetration. Two overarching research questions will be investigated: (1) Do male and female relational stalkers perpetrate different rates of moderate and severe stalking violence? and (2) What sociocultural beliefs may account for these gender differences/similarities?

Stalking violence encompasses physical violence perpetrated by a stalker against their target or a third party during the course of stalking. Violence has been estimated to occur in

between 30% and 40% of stalking cases (Mullen, Pathe, Purcell & Stuart, 1999, Australian forensic psychiatric referrals; Roberts, 2005, UK students; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002, US forensic psychiatric referrals; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, cross-national meta-analysis). These figures are alarming given that conservative estimates suggest that approximately one million women and nearly 400,000 men in the United States of America (USA) are victims of stalking each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). If one third of these escalate to violence, almost half a million adults will be subjected to stalking violence annually in the USA alone. Although stalking that escalates to violence is not necessarily more frightening or damaging than non-violent stalking (Mullen et al., 2000), violence has been demonstrated to exacerbate the psychological impact of stalking (Thomas et al., 2008, Australian citizens) in addition to causing physical injuries (e.g., Brewster, 2002, US victims; Pathe & Mullen, 1997, Australian victims). Consequently, it is important to understand how gender and sociocultural beliefs influence stalking violence perpetration to gain a better understanding of the nature and causes of this phenomenon.

Gender differences in stalking violence

Although male gender is typically identified as a risk factor for violence (Mullen et al., 2000), there is currently little evidence to suggest that male *stalkers* perpetrate higher rates of violence than their female counterparts. Although a British study indicated that male stalkers perpetrated higher rates of severe violence than female stalkers (e.g., James & Farnham, 2003), the majority of studies have reported no gender differences in the perpetration of stalking violence, including studies conducted in Australia (e.g., Purcell, Pathe & Mullen, 2001; Purcell, Powell & Mullen, 2005; Thomas et al., 2008), USA (e.g., Harmon et al., 1998; Meloy, Davis & Lovette, 2001; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Schwartz-Watts & Morgan, 1998) and cross-national samples (e.g., Meloy & Boyd, 2003, USA, Australia & Canada). Moreover, one study conducted in the

USA reported higher rates of violence by female stalkers than male stalkers (Dutton & Winstead, 2006).

Furthermore, it is possible that those studies examining gender differences in stalking violence underestimate rates of stalking violence perpetrated by females to males. To date, this phenomenon has largely been examined in studies of self-identified victims (e.g., Purcell et al., 2005, Australian psychologists), forensic or clinical populations (e.g., James & Farnham, 2003, UK forensic psychiatric referrals; Purcell et al., 2001, Australian forensic psychiatric referrals), or studies requiring targets to experience fear (e.g., Thomas et al., 2008, Australian citizens). These studies may not be representative of stalking behaviour perpetrated by females against males as males are less likely to (a) self-identify as stalking victims (see Tjaden, Thoennes & Allison, 2000, US community; Williams, Frieze & Sinclair, 2007), (b) report stalking behaviour to the police (e.g., Bjerregaard, 2002, US students; Haugaard & Seri, 2000, US students; Hills & Taplin, 1998, Australian community) and (c) experience and/or report feeling fearful (e.g., Budd, Mattinson & Myhill, 2000, UK community; Davis, Coker & Sanderson, 2002, US community; Dietz & Martin, 2007; Hills & Taplin, 1998, Australian community). Accordingly, victim and legally-defined samples typically comprise disproportionate numbers of male stalkers (i.e., between 80%-90%., e.g., James & Farnham, 2003, UK forensic psychiatric referrals; Thomas et al., 2008, Australian citizens) and females victims (i.e., 70-90%., e.g., Sheridan & Davies, 2001, UK victims; Thomas et al., 2008, Australian citizens). This gender asymmetry has been upheld across victim and legally-defined samples in Australia (Purcell, Pathe & Mullen, 2002), USA (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), UK (Budd et al., 2000) and Germany (Dressing, Gass & Kuehner, 2007). Analogous gender patterns have been identified in the intimate partner violence literature whereby males' intimate partner violence victimisation is thought to be underestimated for similar reasons (e.g., Cercone, Beach & Arias, 2005, US students; Fontes, 2007; Sarantakos, 1999, Australian review; Stewart & Maddren, 1997, Australian police officers; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, US community). Consequently, it is possible that female-to-male stalking behaviour may be underestimated in victim and legally-defined samples even when this behaviour escalates to violence. This may result in comparable rates of stalking violence or even higher rates of male-perpetrated stalking violence than female-perpetrated stalking violence in these samples. Studies investigating victim and legally-defined samples for stalking violence in Australian (e.g., Purcell et al., 2001), American (e.g., Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002) and cross-national samples (e.g., Meloy & Boyd, 2003) have typically reported comparable rates of stalking violence. Additionally, higher rates of male-perpetrated stalking violence was reported in a British sample of stalkers referred to a forensic psychiatric service (James & Farnham, 2003).

Studies investigating the frequency of *relational* stalking behaviours perpetrated by university students and community members that omit the fear requirement are not influenced by targets' responses or subjective experiences. These studies have reported gender symmetry in *stalking behaviour* across Australian (Dennison & Stewart, 2006) and US samples (e.g., Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Haugaard & Seri, 2004; Sinclair & Frieze, 2002; Spitzberg, Nicastro & Cousins, 1998). The few studies that have investigated *stalking violence* using this methodology have utilised student samples from the USA and have reported either comparable (Sinclair & Frieze, 2002) or higher rates of *female-perpetrated violence* (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). Dutton and Winstead (2006) did not offer an explanation for why females may perpetrate more stalking violence and this research finding is yet to be replicated. Nevertheless, similar trends have been reported in intimate partner violence research whereby community and student surveys indicate that females perpetrate higher, or at least comparable, rates of intimate partner violence even though victim and legally-defined samples typically comprise disproportionate numbers of male perpetrators (see Archer, 2000, cross-national meta-analysis; de Vries Robbe, March, Vinen,

Horner & Roberts, 1996, Australian emergency patients; Headey, Scott & De Vaus, 1999, Australian community; Sarantakos, 1999, review of Australian and international research; Stewart & Maddren, 1997, Australian police officers). Therefore, it is possible that community and student perpetration surveys identify hidden rates of both female-perpetrated stalking and violence, at least in the context of relational stalking. This study examines gender differences in relational stalking violence perpetration in a sample of university students in an attempt to uncover these hidden rates.

Hidden gender differences in stalking violence may also be identified by differentiating the severity of the violence perpetrated. When Sinclair and Frieze (2002, US students) examined gender differences for mild aggression in relational stalking, no gender differences were identified. However, their classifications also incorporated non-physical violence such as verbal abuse, threats and property damage. This may have masked potential differences for females perpetrating more attempted (16%) and actual moderate *physical* violence (9%; i.e., slapping, a single punch, grabbing, pushing or shoving), than their male counterparts (2% and 2%, respectively). This is consistent with intimate partner violence research across Western countries that indicates that women perpetrate elevated rates of minor forms of intimate partner violence, such as slapping and pushing or shoving (e.g., Archer, 2002, cross-national meta-analysis; Krahe & Berger, 2005, German community; Williams & Frieze, 2005b, US community). Given the overlaps between stalking and intimate partner violence (see Dennison & Thomson, 2005; Melton, 2007) and the trends identified in Sinclair and Frieze's (2002, US students) research, *it is possible that women perpetrate more moderate stalking violence than their male counterparts*.

Gender differences are more ambiguous for severe stalking violence. No gender differences were identified in a sample of university students from the USA (Sinclair & Frieze, 2002). However, men were reported to perpetrate elevated rates of serious violence in a British

sample of forensic psychiatric cases (James & Farnham, 2003). Similar ambiguity has been reported in the intimate partner violence literature (Cercone et al., 2005, US students; de Vries Robbe et al., 1996, Australian emerency patients; Headey et al., 1999, Australian community; Krahe & Berger, 2005, German community; Williams & Frieze, 2005b, US community). This study investigates gender differences across both moderate and severe stalking violence to clarify ambiguous findings and thus contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon.

This study examines gender differences in relational stalking violence perpetration in an Australian sample of university students. Although gender differences are examined in the Australian cultural context, there is no reason to believe that Australian findings will contradict research conducted in samples from the USA and the UK given the similarity of findings regarding (a) gender differences in stalking violence in studies of victim and legally defined samples (e.g., James & Farnham, 2003, UK forensic psychiatric referrals; Purcell et al., 2001, Australian forensic psychiatric referrals; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002, US forensic psychiatric referrals; Thomas et al., 2008, Australian citizens) (b) discrepancies in gender differences for stalking behaviours across samples sources and stalking definitions (Budd et al., 2000, UK community members; Dennison & Stewart, 2006, Australian students; Haugaard & Seri, 2004, US students; Purcell et al., 2002, Australian citizens; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, US community members) and (c) discrepancies in gender differences for intimate partner violence across samples sources (for example see Archer, 2000, cross-national; Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur & Harding, 1996, Australia; Headey et al., 1999, Australia).

Sociocultural Beliefs

The finding that females perpetrate similar rates of stalking violence, and potentially higher rates of moderate violence, than their male counterparts is inconsistent with traditional views of violence as a male perpetrated phenomenon (see Herzog, 2007). Researchers frequently present

cultural patriarchal beliefs as a useful explanatory framework to understand stalking, intimate partner violence and more recently, stalking violence (e.g., Brewster, 2003; Davis, Ace & Andra, 2000; Morewitz, 2003). According to this explanatory framework stalking violence is a gendered phenomenon perpetrated by males against females as a means to exercise power and control over women (Brewster, 2003). Here, violence against women is perceived to be justified in a range of contexts, including sustaining, establishing or re-establishing power and control (Brewster, 2003). While this explanatory framework has been demonstrated to be useful for understanding some stalking violence (e.g., Brewster, 2003, US victims; Davis et al., 2000, US students; Morewitz, 2003, US protection orders), it cannot account for the potentially high rates of female-perpetrated stalking violence.

Another sociocultural belief prevalent in young western societies is that men should not physically assault women (see Archer, 2000; 2002, cross-national meta-analyses; Indermaur, 2001, Australian community), the 'chivalry norm'. Accordingly, violence perpetrated by males against females is viewed to be unacceptable and potentially more damaging than violence perpetrated by females against males (Archer, 2000; Williams & Frieze, 2005a). However, violence perpetrated by females against males may be trivialised and deemed more acceptable than the reverse (see Archer, 2000; Fontes, 2007; Kernsmith, 2005). To illustrate, a female university student commented "even if I hit him [i.e., her intimate partner] my hardest there is no way I could hurt him" (Miller & Simpson, 1991, p. 352, US students). Likewise, a male in this sample stated that "no woman would be arrested for hitting her partner" (Miller & Simpson, 1991, p. 352, US students). Consequently male victims of female violence may be expected to exhibit greater physical and emotional strength than female victims (Fontes, 2007). It is likely that these beliefs are associated with expected gender differences in the impact of violence, whereby females are perceived to be more vulnerable and males are perceived to be stronger and more capable of

defending themselves (Fontes, 2007; Kernsmith, 2005; Miller & Simpson, 1991). Consistent with this, research suggests that community members and university students view male stalking victims and domestic violence victims as more capable of defending themselves (Cass, 2007, US students; Dennison & Thompson, under review, Australian community members; Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw & Patel, 2003, UK students) and female stalking victims and domestic violence victims having a greater need for police assistance (Cass, 2007, US students; Dennison & Thompson, under review, Australian community members; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld & O'Connor, 2004, US students; Sheridan et al., 2003, UK students). This explanatory framework can account for the findings that male victims may be underrepresented in victim and legallydefined samples because male victims of stalking and stalking violence may experience less fear, be less likely to identify themselves as a victim and more reluctant to report the behaviour to the police. Although much of the aforementioned research was conducted in the USA (see Archer, 2000; Fontes, 2007; Kernsmith, 2005), evidence of similar sociocultural beliefs have been documented in Australian studies of domestic violence (e.g., Dennison & Thompson, under review; Indermaur, 2001) and stalking (Dennison, 2007).

Although the chivalry norm has not been applied to stalking violence, this sociocultural belief has four implications for stalking violence. First, males may be more inhibited from perpetrating stalking violence due to the social stigma and the anticipated severity of the consequences associated with male-to-female violence. Females, on the other hand, may be less inhibited from perpetrating stalking violence because the effects of such violence can be minimised and they may have less fear of reprisal.

Second, support for justifications for violence are likely to differ according to the perpetrator's gender. As violence perpetrated by males against females is viewed to be more unacceptable and damaging, while violence perpetrated by females against males may be

trivialised, there is likely to be greater support for female-perpetrated stalking violence in comparison to male-perpetrated stalking violence. Moreover, females who are more supportive of female-perpetrated relational violence may be more likely to perpetrate violence in the context of relational stalking. Third, as violence perpetrated by males against females is viewed to be more damaging than the reverse, violent female stalkers may perceive that the impact of their behaviour is less serious than violent male stalkers, including whether the stalker perceives that his/her behaviour frightens, intimidates or harms the target. Fourth, if the harm caused by male stalking violence is perceived to be greater than female stalking violence and if females perceive that their violence is relatively harmless, violent male stalkers may be more likely to intend to frighten, intimidate or harm their target than their female counterparts. This study will investigate each of these implications to contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between gender, sociocultural beliefs and stalking violence.

Two overarching research questions are investigated;

- (1) Do male and female relational stalkers perpetrate different rates of moderate and severe stalking violence? Given the trends identified in Sinclair and Frieze's (2002) research that females perpetrate more attempted and actual moderate *physical* violence than their male counterparts, it was hypothesised that female relational stalkers will perpetrate more moderate violence than their male counterparts (Hypothesis 1). Due to inconsistent findings for gender differences in severe stalking violence, no hypothesis was proposed for gender differences in the perpetration of severe violence.
- (2) What sociocultural beliefs may account for these gender differences/similarities? Four hypotheses were tested for the second research question on the basis of the implications of the chivalry norm. Hypothesis 2 predicts that participants will be

more accepting of females' justifications for using relational violence than males' justifications for using relational violence. Hypothesis 3 predicts that violent stalkers will have greater support for justifications for using violence than their non-violent counterparts. Specifically, (a) violent female stalkers will have greater support for justifications for females using violence than their non-violent counterparts (b) violent male stalkers will have greater support for justifications for males using violence than their non-violent counterparts. Hypothesis 4 predicts that violent male relational stalkers will have greater intentions to frighten, intimidate or harm the target than their female counterparts. Hypothesis 5 predicts that violent male relational stalkers will be more likely to believe that their behaviour frightened, intimidated or harmed the target than their female counterparts. Findings for hypotheses 2 and 3b also test the applicability of patriarchal beliefs, whereby support for justifications for male-perpetrated violence is consistent with patriarchal beliefs that such violence can be used as a means to establish, sustain or re-establish power and control.

The present study examines self-reported stalking violence perpetration in a sample of university students from Queensland, Australia. This research methodology was adopted to identify potentially hidden rates of stalking violence that may not be evident in victim and legally-defined samples. Gender differences in stalking violence and associated sociocultural beliefs will be examined in the context of stalking that occurs after relationship terminations and in the pursuit of relationships. This context was selected as (a) this context is most relevant to the sociocultural beliefs reviewed previously (b) much stalking behaviour and stalking violence occurs in the context of relationship dissolutions or relationship pursuits (e.g., Pathe & Mullen, 1997, Australian victims; Purcell et al., 2002, Australian community; Tjaden et al., 2000, US community) and (c) as

this study is largely informed by intimate partner violence literature, the links between intimate partner violence research and stalking are likely to have the biggest overlaps in this context.

Method

Participants

Seven hundred and twelve graduate and undergraduate students from Griffith University in Queensland, Australia participated in the present research (28.2% male, 71.8% female). Only those participants classified as relational stalkers (N = 293, 41.2%), however, were included in the current study (24.2% male, 75.8% female). Although females were more likely to be classified as relational stalkers (n = 222, 43.4%) than their male counterparts (n = 71, 35.3%), χ^2 (1, N = 712) = 3.93, p = .047, $\phi = 0.07$, the phi co-efficient indicates that the strength of this association was weak. The ages of relational stalkers ranged from 17 to 49 years (M = 23.5 years, Mdn = 21 years, SD = 6.0, missing n = 2). The mean age of males was 23.1 years (SD = 5.9), and the mean age of females was 23.7 years (SD = 6.1), t(289) = -0.61, p = .54. Most of the relational stalkers were either single (n = 131, 44.7%) or in a dating relationship (n = 82, 28.0%). Relatively few relational stalkers were married (n = 24, 8.2%), in a defacto relationship (n = 44, 15.0%) or divorced/separated/widowed (n = 12, 4.1%). There was no significant variability between males and females in relation to marital status (χ^2 [4, N=293] = 4.22, p=.38, Cramer's V=.12). Participants were treated in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee and the ethical principles of the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Materials

The present study was part of a larger project examining violence in relational stalking (see Thompson, 2009). A self-report questionnaire was utilised to assess participants' engagement in relational stalking, stalking violence and other factors associated with this behaviour. Only the relevant portions of the questionnaire will be described, including scales used to assess gender differences in (a) relational stalking, (b) stalking violence, and (c) sociocultural beliefs, including a scale measuring justifications for relational violence and questions measuring assessments of target fear (scale items are available in Thompson, 2009).

The entire questionnaire took between 30 and 60 minutes to complete, depending on the answers supplied by the participant. Two versions of the questionnaire were available; a webbased version (n = 619; 86.9%) and a paper-based version (n = 93; 13.1%). Consistent with much previous research (e.g., Knapp & Kirk, 2003; Richman, Kiesler, Weisband & Drasgow, 1999), none of the independent or dependent variables significantly differed across questionnaire formats.

Relational Stalking

To measure participants' perpetration of relational stalking, participants were asked whether they had *ever* engaged in any of 25 behaviours that they *knew were unwanted* after they had *broken up with an intimate partner* or had been *rejected by someone they wanted a relationship with* (scored never, once, two or more, five or more, or ten or more times). The behaviours included in the list were largely derived from Spitzberg and Cupach's (1997) Relational Pursuit – Pursuer Short Form (Version 2). To be consistent with behaviours typically used in stalking legislation and research (e.g., Brewster, 2003; Criminal Code [Stalking] Amendment Act 1999 [Queensland]., Davis et al., 2000; Dennison & Stewart, 2006; James & Farnham, 2003; Purcell, Pathe & Mullen, 2000; Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a, 2001b), this scale was amended to exclude some items (e.g., making exaggerated expressions of affection), combine similar items and to include some additional behaviours (e.g., unwanted telephone calls). Examples of the items incorporated in the checklist include following him/her around and stealing or damaging his/her possessions (amended scale is available in Thompson, 2009). Those

participants who had engaged in behaviours towards multiple people were asked to select one person who "had the biggest impact on them" and complete the checklist again for this person only. This ensured that the data were obtained for relational stalking perpetrated against one person, as opposed to an accumulation of behaviours perpetrated against multiple people. The relational stalking checklist had a Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of .83.

Participants who perpetrated five or more intrusions from the relational stalking checklist were defined as relational stalkers. The number of intrusions perpetrated by participants was calculated by adding the frequency score for each type of stalking behaviour. For example, two different stalking behaviours each performed five times resulted in a total score of '10 or more' intrusions. The decision to use a threshold of five or more intrusions was informed by research conducted by Thompson and Dennison (2008, Australia) that compared cut-points of two, five and ten or more intrusions on sample size and severity of behaviour. This research indicated that two or more stalking intrusions were relatively normal, perpetrated by two thirds of the sample (Thompson & Dennison, 2008). Ten or more intrusions resulted in a more restrictive sample (i.e., 22.4%) and higher rates of threats and violence than the sample attained with a cut-point of two (see Thompson & Dennison, 2008). However, many participants perpetrated threats and violence but did not engage in at least ten intrusions and most legal definitions require a minimum of just two intrusions. A cut-point of five or more intrusions balanced these issues. This cut-point classified 40% less participants as stalkers than a cut-point of two intrusions, limiting relatively common behavioural patterns. At the same time this cut-point identified 50% more violent participants than a cut-point of 10. As the present study focuses on violence, it was deemed more purposeful to select a larger sample that included more violent behaviour, but was not too encompassing. Therefore, relational stalking is operationally defined in the present research as *five* or more unwanted intrusions perpetrated against any one person after the dissolution of an intimate relationship, or in the pursuit of an intimate relationship (see Thompson & Dennison, 2008).

Stalking Violence

To assess violence, participants who had engaged in relational stalking behaviours were asked whether they had ever attempted to, or actually did, a range of physically violent acts to the person to whom the unwanted behaviours were targeted towards, or towards someone for whom this person cared, during the course of stalking (scored never, once, two or more, five or more, or ten or more times). The violence checklist was an amended version of two subscales from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2., Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996), the physical assault and sexual coercion subscales. Additional violent acts commonly reported in stalking violence research were incorporated in the checklist, including running the target's car off the road (original scale is available in Straus et al., 1996; amended scale is available in Thompson, 2009). The physical violence checklist included two sub-scales, a moderate violence sub-scale (e.g., slapping and grabbing) and a severe violence sub-scale (e.g., choking and kicking). The severity of behaviours was classified according to the CTS2 and the probable severity of the consequences of the behaviour. Relational stalkers were classified into three mutually exclusive categories; 'not violent', 'moderately violent' or 'severely violent'. Participants were classified according to the most severe form of violence they perpetrated. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .78 for the moderate violence subscale and .68 for the severe violence subscale.

Sociocultural Beliefs

Justifications for using relational violence. Justifications for using relational violence was measured using an amended version of Mazerolle's (1999) Intimate Partner Violence Justification Scale (IPVJS). The scale assessed participants' agreement with justifications for using violence against an intimate partner (scored agree/disagree). While the original scale only measures

justifications for males using relational violence, the scale was presented twice to assess justifications for males (i.e., participants' agreement with nine justifications for violence perpetrated by men against their intimate partner) and justifications for females (i.e., participants' agreement with nine justifications for violence perpetrated by women against their intimate partner). For example, participants were asked if they agreed with the statement "It is okay for a man to hit or slap his partner if his partner stays out past midnight without telling him where she/he is" (original scale available in Mazerolle, 1999; amended scale available in Thompson, 2009). Scores were then calculated by adding the number of items participants agreed with across the respective scales. IPVJS had a Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of .78 for justifications for male-perpetrated relational violence and .81 for justifications for female-perpetrated relational violence.

Assessments of Target Fear. Assessments of fear were measured using two non-standard questions devised for the present research. To measure the participants' intention to cause fear and harm, participants were asked "Did you <u>intend</u> to frighten, intimidate or harm this person?" (scored yes/no). To measure perceived target fear or harm, participants were asked "Do you think your behaviour <u>did</u> frighten, intimidate or harm this person?" (scored yes/no).

Procedure

Participants were recruited between July 2006 and May 2007 through several sampling techniques, including (1) research participation schemes in three undergraduate criminology courses, (2) a university-wide student e-mail, (3) an advertisement on the university computer laboratory homepage, and (4) attending five undergraduate lectures to invite student participation. All participants entered a draw to win one of three \$100 cash prizes for their participation. Where applicable, students also obtained credit points for undergraduate courses for their participation.

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to examine the behaviours and tactics used by individuals after breaking up from an intimate relationship or in the pursuit of a

new intimate relationship. At no time was the behaviour labelled 'stalking'. This decision was made to circumvent error that may arise from individuals' preconceived notions of what constitutes stalking.

Results

Analyses

In the present study, gender differences were examined in relation to (1) stalking violence (2) justifications for using relational violence (3) intentions to frighten, intimidate or harm the target and (4) perceived target fear, intimidation or harm. Chi-square analyses were used to examine between subject differences. For chi-square analyses with variables with greater than two possible outcomes, cells with adjusted residuals exceeding absolute 2.0 were deemed to significantly differ (Cooksey, 2007). When the assumptions of chi-square analyses were violated due to expected frequencies below 5, exact tests were utilised (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar, 2006) to provide preliminary support or rejection of hypotheses. Fisher's exact tests were used for 2 x 2 tables (reported as 'Fisher's exact test p') and standard exact tests were used for tables with more levels of analysis (reported as 'exact p'). McNemar's tests were conducted to test within subject differences across dichotomous variables (Norusis, 2000). Analyses were conducted using the statistical package SPSS for Windows, Version 15.0.

The nature of stalking perpetration in the sample

Most relational stalkers engaged in more than the minimum of five intrusions (n = 256; 87.4%), whereby the average number of intrusions committed was 16.8 (Mdn = 11; SD = 15.9; range = 1 - 118). Participants classified as relational stalkers primarily targeted persons of the opposite gender (n = 271, 92.5%). Same-gender relational stalking was reported by similar proportions of males (n = 6; 8.5%) and females (n = 16; 7.2%). The majority of relational stalkers reported behaviour that followed the dissolution of an intimate relationship (n = 264; 90.1%).

Approximately 10% of relational stalkers reported behaviours that occurred in the pursuit of an intimate relationship (n = 29, 9.9%), for example pursuing relationships with acquaintances, casual dates, friends or work colleagues.

The vast majority of respondents classified as relational stalkers reported neither police involvement nor the issuance of a restraining order or a domestic violence order (n = 289, 98.6%). Only three respondents disclosed that their behaviour had been reported to the police and three respondents disclosed that their behaviour resulted in the issuance of a restraining order or a domestic violence order.

Stalking violence perpetration

Of the 293 relational stalkers, 44.4% (n = 130) reported the actual or attempted perpetration of violence during the course of stalking. The median number of violent acts was three (M = 6.1; SD = 8.3; range = 1 - 60). Most of the violence reported in the sample was moderate violence perpetrated in the absence of severe violence (n = 75; 57.7%). Over 40% of stalking violence perpetrated was severe (n = 55; 42.3%), most of which was perpetrated in conjunction with moderate violence (n = 51; 92.7%).

Research Question 1: Do male and female relational stalkers perpetrate different rates of stalking violence (i.e., no violence, moderate violence or severe violence)?

Stalking violence varied significantly across gender, χ^2 (2, N=293) = 6.33, p=.042, Cramer's V=.15. Consistent with hypothesis 1, females (n=64, 28.8%) were more likely to perpetrate actual or attempted moderate violence than their male counterparts (n=11, 15.5%; adjusted residuals = 2.2 and -2.2, respectively). No hypothesis was proposed for gender differences for severe violence. Males (n=12, 16.9%) and females (n=43, 19.4%) did not significantly differ in the perpetration of actual or attempted severe violence (adjusted residuals = -0.5 and 0.5, respectively).

Research Question 2: What sociocultural beliefs may account for these gender differences/similarities?

Four hypotheses were tested for the second research question on the basis of the implications of the chivalry norm. Hypotheses 2 and 3 tested gender differences in support for males' justifications for using relational violence versus females' justifications for using relational violence. Hypotheses 3 and 4 tested gender differences in intended and perceived target fear, intimidation and harm.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will be more accepting of females' justifications for using relational violence than males' justifications for using relational violence

The majority of participants did not believe that men were justified to use violence against their partner under any of the nine circumstances assessed (n = 223, 76.1%). A smaller proportion of participants did not believe that women were justified to use violence against their partner under any of the nine circumstances assessed (n = 120, 41.0%). Due to highly skewed data for justifications for both females (M = 1.5, SD = 1.9, range = 1 - 9) and males (M = 0.4, SD = 1.0, range = 1 - 9) using violence, both variables were recoded into dichotomous variables for this and all subsequent analyses, scored as supportive of no justification for intimate violence (scored 0) or supportive of one or more justification for intimate violence (scored 1). Consistent with hypothesis 2, participants were more supportive of justifications for females using violence against their partners than males using violence against their partners (McNemar's Test, N = 293, p < .001; see Table 1). This finding was upheld across non-violent stalkers (McNemar's Test, N = 163, p < .001), moderately violent stalkers (McNemar's Test, N = 75, p < .001) and severely violent stalkers (McNemar's Test, N = 55, p < .001) as well as across both males (McNemar's Test, N = 71, p < .001) and females (McNemar's Test, N = 222, p < .001).

INSERT TABLE 1

Hypothesis 3a: Violent female stalkers will have greater support for justifications for females using violence than their non-violent counterparts.

Due to the dichotomisation of justifications for using violence, it was only possible to investigate the relationship between any support for justifications for using relational violence and associated levels of stalking violence. Consistent with hypothesis 3a, there was a significant relationship between support for justifications for females using relational violence and females' levels of stalking violence (χ^2 [2, N=222] = 6.5, p=.038, Cramer's V=.17, see Table 1). Specifically, severely violent female stalkers reported the greatest support for females using relational violence (74.4%; adjusted residual = 2.5). There was no significant difference between non-violent female stalkers (53.9%; adjusted residual = -1.0) and moderately violent female stalkers (51.6%%; adjusted residual = -1.1) and these rates fell below those reported by severely violent stalkers. Therefore, hypothesis 3a was partially supported with the exception of no significant difference between non-violent female stalkers and moderately violent female stalkers. There was no relationship between support for justifications for males using relational violence and females' levels of stalking violence (χ^2 [2, N=222] = 2.5, p=.288, $\phi=.11$, see Table 1).

Hypothesis 3b: Violent male stalkers will have greater support for justifications for males using violence than their non-violent counterparts.

As was the case with hypothesis 3a, the dichotomisation of justifications for using violence meant that it was only possible to investigate the relationship between any support for justifications for using relational violence and associated levels of stalking violence. Due to a small sample of male relational stalkers, exact tests were conducted. Contrary to hypothesis 3b, there was no significant relationship between support for justifications for males using relational violence and males' levels of stalking (χ^2 [2, N = 71] = 4.06, exact p = .139, Cramer's V = .24, see

Table 1). However, the relationship between support for justifications for males using relational violence and males' levels of moderate violence approached significance (adjusted residual = 1.9), with 63.6% of moderately violent male stalkers supporting justifications for males using relational violence compared to 31.3% of non-violent male stalkers and 41.7% of severely violent male stalkers. An examination of the relationship between males' support for female-perpetrated relational violence and males' stalking violence indicated that more violent behaviour was associated with greater levels of support (non-violent stalkers = 54.2%, moderately violent stalkers = 81.8%, severely violent stalkers = 91.7%), χ^2 (2, N = 71) = 7.58, exact p = .02, Cramer's V = .33.

Hypothesis 4: Violent male relational stalkers will have greater intentions to frighten, intimidate or harm the target than their female counterparts

Few relational stalkers reported that they intended to frighten, intimidate or harm the target (n=26;~8.9%). Due to the low endorsement of such intentions, Fisher's exact tests were conducted. Consistent with hypothesis 4, male moderately violent stalkers were more likely to report an intent to frighten, intimidate or harm the target (n=4;~36.4%) than their female counterparts (n=4;~6.3%), Fisher's exact test, $p=.01,~\phi=-.35$. Contrary to hypothesis 4, male severely violent stalkers were no more likely to report an intent to frighten, intimidate or harm the target (n=3;~25.0%) than their female counterparts (n=11;~25.6%), Fisher's exact test, p=1.00, $\phi=.01$. A similarly small proportion of male (n=2;~4.2%) and female (n=2;~1.7%) non-violent stalkers reported that they intended to frighten, intimidate or harm the target, Fisher's exact test, $p=.58,~\phi=-.07$.

Hypothesis 5: Violent male relational stalkers will be more likely to believe that their behaviour frightened, intimidated or harmed the target than their female counterparts.

Few relational stalkers believed they frightened, intimidated or harmed the target (n = 59; 20.1%). Consistent with hypothesis 5, male moderately violent stalkers were more likely to believe they frightened, intimidated or harmed the target (n = 6; 54.5%) than their female counterparts (n = 10; 15.6%), Fisher's exact test, p = .009, $\phi = -.34$ and male severely violent stalkers were more likely to believe they frightened, intimidated or harmed the target (n = 10; 83.3%) than their female counterparts (n = 16; 37.2%), χ^2 [1, N = 55] = 8.0, p = 0.005, $\phi = -.38$. Male non-violent stalkers were no more likely to believe they frightened, intimidated or harmed the target (n = 7; 14.6%) than their female counterparts (n = 10; 8.7%), χ^2 (1, N = 163) = 1.3, p = .262, $\phi = -.09$, however, there was a trend in the expected direction.

Discussion

This study investigated gender differences in stalking violence in a sample of student relational stalkers. Two overarching research questions were investigated: (1) Do male and female relational stalkers perpetrate different rates of moderate and severe stalking violence? and (2) What sociocultural beliefs may account for these gender differences/similarities? This is the first stalking study to systematically examine these gender differences using self-reports of the perpetration of moderate and severe physical violence. This study also constitutes the first attempt to interpret these gender differences/similarities in the context of sociocultural beliefs that view male-perpetrated violence as more unacceptable than female-perpetrated violence. Contrary to the assumption that males perpetrate more stalking violence than their female counterparts (e.g., Mullen et al., 2000), female relational stalkers perpetrated elevated rates of moderate violence and there were no gender differences for severe violence. Consistent with sociocultural beliefs that view male-perpetrated violence as more unacceptable than female-perpetrated violence, both male and female relational stalkers were more supportive of justifications for female-perpetrated

relational violence than male-perpetrated relational violence. Consistent with sociocultural beliefs that view male-perpetrated violence as more harmful than female-perpetrated violence, males who perpetrated moderate or severe stalking violence were also more likely to believe that their behaviour frightened, intimidated or harmed the target than their female counterparts. There was little support for justifications for male-perpetrated relational violence in this sample.

Stalking violence was common in the present study, whereby close to half of the student relational stalkers reported actually or attempting to perpetrate violence during the course of stalking. As 99% of relational stalking behaviour in the present study had not been reported to the police, the relational stalking and associated violence measured in this study primarily comprises 'hidden' behaviour that has not been addressed in the criminal justice system. These hidden rates of relational stalking and violence may differ from those attained from the criminal justice system. Despite this, the rate of violence attained in the present study is consistent with stalking violence research conducted in Australia, USA and UK, including that from forensic and clinical samples, which typically report prevalence rates of between 30% and 50% (James & Farnham, 2003, UK forensic psychiatric referrals; Mullen et al., 1999, Australian forensic psychiatric referrals; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002, US forensic psychiatric referrals; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, crossnational meta-analysis). The fact that the majority of violence perpetrated was moderate in nature is also consistent with stalking violence research conducted in Australia (McEwan, Mullen, Mackenzie & Ogloff, 2009), USA (Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002) and UK (James & Farnham, 2003). Interestingly, however, this was due to elevated rates of moderate violence amongst females only (moderate violence = 29%; severe violence = 19%). Males, on the other hand, perpetrated similar rates of moderate and severe violence (16% and 17%, respectively).

The value of differentiating the severity of violence was confirmed in the present study, with gender differences varying across moderate and severe violence. Consistent with intimate

partner violence research (e.g., Archer, 2002, cross-national meta-analysis; Williams & Frieze, 2005a, US community sample), female stalkers were more likely to perpetrate moderate stalking violence than male stalkers (such as slapping, throwing something at the target and pushing and shoving). In fact actual/attempted moderate violence was common amongst females. Since almost all severe violence was perpetrated in conjunction with moderate violence, almost half of the female stalkers perpetrated moderate violence either alone or in conjunction with severe violence. Although this is the first stalking study to examine significant gender differences in the perpetration of moderate *physical* violence, similar trends have been identified in previous research using a US student sample (Sinclair & Frieze, 2002).

There were no gender differences in the perpetration of severe violence. This is consistent with trends reported in Sinclair and Frieze's (2002) research regarding extreme harm in a sample of students from the USA. Furthermore, although findings vary, a number of studies have reported similar rates of severe intimate partner violence across gender (e.g., Headey et al., 1999, Australian community; Krahe & Berger, 2005, German community). The gender symmetry in the present study is inconsistent with James and Farnham's (2003) stalking violence research. However, this research was conducted in a British sample of forensic psychiatric cases. It was previously argued that legal samples may underestimate female-to-male stalking and stalking violence. As the present research has utilised a university sample and a behavioural definition of relational stalking, it is possible that sampling methods can account for these conflicting results. Alternatively, the definition of serious violence utilised by James and Farnham (2003) was largely contingent on the violence inflicting serious injuries on the victim, which was not measured in the present study. It is possible that severely violent male stalkers in the present study inflicted more serious injuries than their female counterparts. The severe violence reported in James and Farnham's (2003) research (e.g., murder, attempted murder, wounding) was also likely more serious than that attained in the present study. Therefore, gender differences may be more pronounced at the extreme end of the severe violence continuum.

Together, these findings provide no support for the assumption that males perpetrate higher rates of violence (e.g., Mullen et al., 2000). Instead, females were more likely to perpetrate moderate violence, whereby this form of violence was relatively normal among female stalkers. Therefore the application of sociocultural beliefs that explain stalking violence as a male-perpetrated phenomenon will provide an incomplete understanding of the relationship between stalking violence and gender. However, sociocultural beliefs that can also account for female-perpetrated stalking violence, like the chivalry norm, may have greater explanatory power. This study examined the relationship between gender and stalking violence in relation to support for justifications for using relational violence, intentions to cause fear and harm and perceived fear and harm.

There was little support for justifications for using relational violence in the present study, despite moderate rates of stalking violence perpetration. This is consistent with research investigating community attitudes towards violence and intimate partner violence in Western countries (e.g., Anderson, Benjamin, Wood & Bonacci, 2006, US students; Indermaur, 2001, Australian community). Non-violent, moderately violent and severely violent relational stalkers were all more supportive of relational violence perpetrated by females than relational violence perpetrated by males. These attitudes were consistent across both male and female relational stalkers. The fact that identical situations were interpreted as more or less acceptable on the basis of the perpetrators' gender gives credence to the proposition that young Western cultures support a sociocultural belief that is more disapproving of violence perpetrated by males towards females than females towards males (Archer, 2000, 2002; Fontes, 2007). Furthermore, severely violent female stalkers were more likely to support justifications for female-perpetrated relational violence

than moderately violent and non-violent female stalkers. While there was no difference between non-violent and moderately violent female stalkers, support for these justifications was high in both of these groups. It is plausible that those females perpetrating stalking itself may have more support for female-perpetrated violence than non-stalkers due to the intrusiveness of this phenomenon. Therefore it is possible that acceptance of female-perpetrated violence disinhibits females from engaging in stalking and stalking violence. This is consistent with the chivalry norm.

The differential support for female-perpetrated relational violence and male-perpetrated relational violence, and the low level of support for justifications for male-perpetrated relational violence, also indicates that there was little evidence of patriarchal beliefs that support males being justified in using violence against their partners. Additionally, preliminary evidence suggested males' support for justifications for violence in general (i.e., male and female) was associated with moderate and severe stalking violence, rather than justifications for male violence only. In fact between 80%-90% of violent male stalkers reported support for justifications for female-perpetrated relational violence. Again, this preliminary finding provides little evidence that violent stalkers foster patriarchal views in this sample. However, due to a small sample of males in the present study these findings are only preliminary. It is important that future research re-examines the relationship between males' support for justifications for relational violence and moderate and severe stalking violence.

The examination of participants' perceptions of the impact of their behaviour provides further support for the applicability of aspects of the chivalry norm. While participants who perpetrated more violent behaviour perceived their behaviour to have more of an impact on the target, both moderately and severely violent males believed their behaviour caused more fear, intimidation and harm than their female counterparts. In fact, very few female stalkers believed

that their behaviour frightened the target or caused harm, even when females perpetrated severe violence.

It is possible that gender differences in perceptions of fear/harm are a reflection of differences in actual fear or harm displayed by targets as a function of the perpetrator-target gender composition. This argument is consistent with research that suggests that male perpetrators of intimate partner violence inflict greater injuries than female perpetrators (Archer, 2000, cross-national meta-analysis). Moreover, male victims of stalking and intimate partner violence may experience less fear than their female counterparts (e.g., Bjerregaard, 2002, US students; Budd et al., 2000, UK community; Cercone et al., 2005, US students; Davis et al., 2002, US community; Dietz & Martin, 2007; Pathe & Mullen, 1997, Australian victims; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, US community). Alternatively, males may be reluctant to display fear/harm due to social norms that suggest that males should display strength both physically and emotionally, particularly in response to female violence (Fontes, 2007).

It is also plausible that gender differences in perceptions of fear/harm reflect perceived gender differences in victim impact, as opposed to actual victim impact. Consistent with this, research suggests that stalking and intimate partner violence perpetrated by females against males is trivialised as males are perceived to be stronger and more capable of defending themselves (Dennison & Thompson, under review, Australian community; Miller & Simpson, 1991, US students; Molidor & Tolman, 1998, US students). Stalking and intimate partner violence perpetrated by males against females, on the other hand, is interpreted as more threatening and fear-provoking (Dennison, 2007, Australian community; Phillips et al., 2004, US students; Sheridan et al., 2003, UK students). Consequently, perpetrators may interpret the impact of their behaviour in accordance with these social perceptions. Importantly, while these findings are consistent with the chivalry norm, these findings may also be explained by patriarchal

sociocultural beliefs that view women's violence as less impactful due to patriarchal stereotypes of women as weak, submissive and of lower status (Brewster, 2003).

Preliminary findings regarding perpetrators' intentions to cause fear or harm also provide support for the chivalry norm. Female moderately violent stalkers were less likely to intend to frighten, intimidate or harm the target than their male counterparts; however, males' and females' intentions did not differ for severe violence. Additionally, males' intent to cause fear/harm were actually higher for moderate violence than severe violence, although this may be a product of small sample size. Nevertheless, it appears that males' intentions are at least comparable across moderate and severe violence. Each of these findings can be interpreted using the chivalry norm. Due to a perception of female perpetrated violence as trivial and likely to cause low levels of fear/harm in general, females may believe that moderate violence will have very little effect, particularly on males. Therefore, moderate violence may not be perpetrated to cause fear, intimidation or harm. Instead, females with these intentions may be more likely to perpetrate severe violence. It is important that the intentions of moderately violent female stalkers are examined to provide a better understanding of the causes of this phenomenon and, in turn, drive preventive strategies. As male moderately and severely violent stalkers are both considered more threatening and more likely to cause fear/harm, males may be more likely engage in either of these behaviours with the intent to cause fear, intimidation or harm. Importantly, due to a small sample of males and the low endorsement of intentions to cause fear or harm, these findings are only preliminary. Future research should re-examine gender differences in intentions to cause fear or harm using larger sample sizes. Further investigations are also required to examine whether low endorsement of intentions to cause fear/harm are due to participants' reluctance to report such intentions or the fact that violent stalkers have alternative intentions (see Dennison & Thomson, 2005).

Limitations and future research

The present study contributes to the growing body of research that attempts to elucidate the extent and nature of gender differences in stalking violence. However, these findings need to be interpreted according to the limitations of this study. First, the present sample is not representative of relational stalkers in the community. The student sample was relatively young, highly educated and comprised a disproportionately small number of male stalkers. Consequently, future research should replicate this research in a more representative community sample with greater numbers of male participants. Second, the student sample utilised in this research is older than student samples typically used to examine relational stalking. However, there were only 19 participants aged over 35 years (6%) and the results did not differ when these participants were excluded. Third, due to small numbers of male participants exact tests were used to analyse hypotheses 3b and 4 (i.e., violent male stalkers will have greater support for justifications for males using violence than their non-violent counterparts and violent male relational stalkers will have greater intentions to frighten, intimidate or harm the target than their female counterparts). Consequently, the findings for these hypotheses are preliminary only and should be investigated in samples with sufficient numbers of male participants. Only then will it be possible to confidently support these hypotheses.

Fourth, it is impossible to estimate the proportion of stalking in the present study that could be prosecuted as unlawful stalking. This is difficult to address given the complexities associated with simulating legislative criteria in operational definitions of stalking used in self-report perpetration studies (see Thompson & Dennison, 2008). Fifth, the sample was restricted to stalking behaviours perpetrated following a relationship termination or in the pursuit of a relationship. It is possible that the current findings are applicable to relational stalking but not necessarily stalking in other contexts. That is, females may be more reluctant to perpetrate stalking

violence in non-relational contexts. Future research should examine gender differences in non-relational stalking using community samples and investigate whether sociocultural beliefs are applicable across types of stalking.

Sixth, although there may be little support for male-perpetrated relational violence in student samples of stalkers (and potentially community samples) due to contemporary sociocultural beliefs that view male-perpetrated violence as more unacceptable and harmful than female-perpetrated violence. Patriarchal beliefs that support males being justified in using violence against their partners may be more prevalent in stalking cases sampled from victim services, refuges or intimate partner violence intervention programs (e.g., Brewster, 2003, US victims). Similar trends have been identified in the intimate partner violence literature (e.g., Archer, 2000, cross-national meta-analysis; de Vries Robbe et al., 1996, Australian emergency patients; Headey et al., 1999, Australian community; McHugh, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). For example, common couple forms of domestic violence predominate surveys of community members and university students, whereas patriarchal terrorism is more prevalent in samples from victim services, refuges or intimate partner violence intervention programs (see Archer, 2000, crossnational meta-analysis; McHugh, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Therefore, similar to the intimate partner violence literature, both the chivalry and patriarchal explanations may be valid in the contexts of relational stalking and should be considered in future research.

In the present research gender differences and sociocultural beliefs were examined in an Australian cultural context. However, there is no reason to believe that these findings will contradict research conducted in samples from the USA given the similarity of findings across Australia and USA in relation to gender differences in stalking, stalking violence, intimate partner violence and sociocultural beliefs. Nevertheless, as this study constitutes the first attempt to apply

these sociocultural beliefs to gender differences in stalking violence, it is important that this study is replicated in other cultural contexts, as well as in additional Australian samples.

Conclusion

In the present study, female relational stalkers perpetrated elevated rates of moderate violence; however, there were no gender differences for severe violence. These findings were interpreted according to a sociocultural belief supported in this sample that female-perpetrated violence is less damaging and more justifiable than male-perpetrated violence. This norm may promote particularly high rates of moderate violence among female relational stalkers as this behaviour has greater social support than male-perpetrated violence. Additionally, as femaleperpetrated moderate violence is perceived to have an especially low impact on victims it may be particularly easy for females to justify. Possibly due to the perceived minimal impact of femaleperpetrated moderate violence, very few females (5%) engaging in this behaviour intended to cause fear/harm. If victims share the perceptions that female-perpetrated moderate violence is innocuous this behaviour may not be reported to the police and thus may be undetected in forensic samples. The gender symmetry attained for severe violence is in contrast to the assumption that males perpetrate more violence, including stalking violence, than females. It is possible that this was due to such behaviour simultaneously being inhibited in males and disinhibited in females, whereby male-perpetrated severe violence was perceived to be particularly damaging as well as socially unacceptable.

These findings have several implications. (1) If male victims of stalking violence are less fearful, and/or they believe females are justified to use violence against them, they may be less likely to report their victimisation to the police. Consequently, gaining a comprehensive understanding of stalking violence requires an investigation of both legal and community and student samples. (2) If police officers also hold sociocultural beliefs that are more accepting of

violence perpetrated by females against males than violence perpetrated by males against females, police officers may be less likely to respond to male victimisation, especially with female perpetrators (for example see Kamphuis et al., 2005, European cross-national police officers; Sheridan et al., 2003, UK students; Stewart & Maddren, 1997, Australian police officers). These potential biases should be investigated and, if necessary, strategies devised to minimise gender biases in criminal justice responses. (3) As the majority of research addressing violence intervention and prevention programs are tailored towards male perpetrators, the frequency of female-perpetrated violence in the present study suggests that there is a need to ensure stalking violence intervention and prevention programs are applicable across gender. (4) If moderate violence perpetrated by females is rarely perpetrated with the intention to cause fear/harm, it is important to understand the intentions of these individuals to gain a better understanding of the nature and causes of stalking violence.

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