

Creepiness in relation to harassment in the workplace

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Declaration of Authorship

The content of this thesis is my own work, except for where indicated, and has not been submitted for examination as part of a degree at any other institution.

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Abstract

Creepiness is an emotion experienced when a person detects an indirect or ambiguous threat. Previous studies have predominantly investigated creepiness in relation to technological advances, which primarily occurs when the technology's use conflicts with acceptable social norms in society. Interpersonal creepiness has not been examined to the same extent, and there has been frequent use of "creeps" to refer to harassers both inside and outside of the workplace. Feelings of creepiness can also be taken as evidence of a hostile work environment, which also constitutes harassment.

This thesis explores how creepiness is related to harassment in the workplace across nine quantitative studies ($N = 1520$), and one semi-structured interview study ($N = 20$). The results find clear empirical evidence that creepiness is related to harassment, and also provide support for the idea that creepiness is a form of harassment in itself.

Studies 1 and 2 present evidence that four different kinds of harassment are considered creepy, and that creepiness helped rather than hindered identification of said harassment. These findings were supported by interviews involving people's real-life experiences with harassment and creepiness in the workplace, including the other emotions they experienced and how they behaved in those situations.

Studies 3 – 6 utilised appraisal theory to investigate how interpretations of creepiness differed depending on the directness of the harassment, and whether the gender and sexual or nonsexual behaviour of the harasser had an impact. Studies 3 and 4 discovered that direct threats evoked less creepiness than indirect threats, and that both sexual and non-sexual harassing behaviours inspired creepiness. Male harassers were also appraised as creepier than female harassers. Studies 5 and 6 showed that creepiness was identified as creating a hostile

work environment and thus was seen as constituting harassment in itself and demonstrated a difference between feelings and judgements of creepiness.

Studies 7 – 9 explored how incidental creepiness influenced perceptions of harassment using an association framework and tested whether punishment of harassment changed depending on whether the harasser conformed to stereotypes of creepiness. The results indicated that creepiness was evaluated separately from general negativity, and that non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness increased interpretations of a character as a harasser and of said character's behaviour as harassment. Furthermore, stereotypically creepy harassers received harsher punishments than non-creepy harassers even if their behaviour was identical.

Overall, this thesis adds to the literature surrounding creepiness by examining it in the context of interpersonal interactions, and these studies were the first to investigate creepiness in relation to harassment in the workplace. The findings support the idea that creepiness is an emotion that responds to ambiguous threats, can be triggered by instances of workplace harassment, and does not impair or undermine identification of harassment. Further, there is evidence that creepiness is a form of harassment, not just elicited by it. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and applied implications, limitations, and future avenues for research.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 What is creepiness?

Creepiness is an emotion that has received little consideration in psychological research, and as a result much of its elicitors and functions are under-explored. McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) suggested that creepiness could have evolved as an adaptation to safeguard us against danger by assisting our ability to maintain vigilance during times of uncertainty. Therefore, creepiness can be conceptualised as a weakened form of fear that engenders discomfort and unease when around a potential threat. A key point to make here is that we only feel ‘creeped out’ in response to the *potential* presence of a threat, which could be from another individual or the environment.

For example, a person who violates expectations and social norms would trigger feelings of creepiness because their behaviour would be difficult to predict, encouraging uncertainty during social interactions (Watt, Maitland, & C. E. Gallagher, 2017). Research suggests that people prefer to avoid creepy people, or if they cannot avoid, to act normally until able to leave or take another form of action (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017). Indeed, confronting a creepy person could also be costly to the individual if the threat is never realised (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007), and vice versa, outright fleeing could be considered rude and embarrassing (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016). Therefore, a creepy person is unpleasant but inspires avoidance or vigilance rather than direct action.

1.2 How does creepiness relate to harassment?

Despite being rarely mentioned in psychological literature, this is not the case with regards to the media. At the height of the #MeToo movement, news articles were inundated with reports of “creepy” behaviour and “creeps” in the workplace. Surely, as many of these perpetrators are being referred to with the same language, it should be obvious that something was going on behind the scenes? Apparently not, as it has been noted that many of these

comments are modified by using justifications such as “boys will be boys” (Moosa, 2017). If the same word is being used for all these harassers then perhaps creepiness is a way to signal that a person is a potential harasser and is someone you should be wary of.

Mentions of creepiness abound in the media – for example, one word that is often used in news reports to describe sexual harassment is “creepy” and perpetrators of sexual harassment are often referred to as being “a creep”, particularly in response to 2017’s #MeToo movement (e.g. CBCnews, 2018). Exploring this concept of creepiness may give additional insights into responses to harassment and effective ways of dealing with it.

1.3 Interpersonal versus technological creepiness

While interpersonal creepiness has suffered from a lack of study, a similar sensation has not had this issue – a phenomenon known as the ‘uncanny valley’. This occurs when almost humanlike characteristics elicit a negative reaction (often described as a feeling of ‘wrongness’ or ‘eeriness’) than those that are overtly human or non-human (Mori, 1970). As the uncanny feeling is triggered by a sense of ambiguity about human-like stimuli it is possible that research into this phenomenon could bear some relation to creepiness. McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) suggested that creepiness could be related to an ‘agency-detection’ mechanism, which is where people behave as though there is a wilful ‘agent’ ready to harm you in potentially threatening scenarios. Therefore, if a robot or other humanlike construct appears to be human enough to act as a wilful agent but does not quite behave or look as a person should, this could induce a sensation of creepiness as they are unpredictable and thus a possible danger. This concept can be applied to interpersonal creepiness, where the hint of potentially threatening behaviour can also induce creepiness due to unpredictability. Investigations into the uncanny valley and other forms of technological creepiness, although not the focus of this thesis, could therefore be used as a hint to how interpersonal creepiness can be elicited.

1.4 Frameworks to explore creepiness

Two main theories used to explain emotions are appraisal and association. Appraisal theory explains emotions as being elicited by evaluations of events and situations (Lazarus, 1991), and often depend on a goal. Association theory, however, involves the automatic elicitation of emotions which do not depend on a specific goal (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Associations are functionally distinct from complex appraisals as they are more primitive and harder to change. This thesis will use both appraisal and association frameworks to explore creepiness, as this will provide a more exhaustive analysis of how it functions both unconsciously and intentionally in response to harassment.

Communication is another lens through which creepiness can be examined. While appraisals and associations function to regulate an individual's behaviour, emotions can also signal social motivations to others (Hareli & Hess, 2012). For example, emotions can convey information about the disposition of the interaction partner, their opinion of the situation, and the best way for their partner to respond. Expressing fear shows that the fearful individual is scared, that the situation is dangerous, and that the best response would be to flee. On the other hand, expressing anger suggests that the person has been wronged in some way and that the ideal response would be confrontation. As creepiness has not yet been examined in this way, the communication framework will be used alongside appraisal and association to provide a comprehensive analysis of this emotion.

1.5 Focus and structure of the thesis

Despite the prominent examples of creepy harassment in the media, little empirical research has been conducted to explore the common traits and warning signs these harassers surely display. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to examine how creepiness is elicited through appraisals and association, and the function of its communication. This will then be used to examine what creepiness can contribute to harassment research.

Chapter Two will explore the existing literature on creepiness and sexual harassment. It will first cover creepiness as an entirety, including subjects of creepiness unrelated to harassment, such as the uncanny valley. It will also provide justification for the classification of creepiness as an emotion, and explain how elicitation of creepiness can follow appraisal, association, and communication framework. It will also provide support for different hypotheses about creepiness based on the literature. Afterwards, it will concentrate on the sexual harassment literature and discuss how creepiness ties in with hostile work environment harassment, and how creepiness could also act as a cue towards potential future quid pro quo harassment.

Chapter Three will cover two mixed-method experiments with both scaled and open-ended responses, designed to explore whether harassment behaviours were seen as creepy. It will further explore whether more subtle harassment behaviours are more likely to be identified as creepy compared to overt harassment. These studies also shed light on what emotions creepiness can be linked with – namely fear and disgust – and identify likely behavioural responses to creepy behaviour in the workplace. Chapter Four presents an interview study that investigated lived experiences with creepy people in the workplace and utilises thematic analysis to identify key themes related to creepy behaviour and reactions to creeps.

Chapter Five follows on from these results and covers four experiments using similar structures to those in Chapter Three, exploring appraisals of creepiness in relation to direct and indirect sexual and nonsexual harassment. Scenarios developed from the previous two chapters vary cues to creepiness and measure creepiness, fear, disgust, and anger, as well as action tendencies and categorisation of the behaviour as harassment. As in Chapter Three, there will be an investigation into whether indirect (subtle) forms of harassment are more likely to be identified as creepy compared to direct (overt) forms. The importance of the gender of the harasser will also be examined.

Chapter Six presents three experiments which examine how creepy stereotypes influence perceptions by varying incidental creepiness to test whether this intensifies or diminishes identification of harassment. These studies will be structured around the associative function of emotion, and will also test whether harassment is connected more with creepiness than it is with general negativity. This chapter will also briefly cover how creepiness is communicated.

Finally, Chapter Seven will summarise the overall findings and conclusions discussed in the previous chapters. It will then discuss potential limitations of the work and explore implications for this subject in psychology as a whole as well as organisational research and cover potential areas for future investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 How can creepiness be understood?

What makes someone creepy? McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) reported several traits that people believed to be characteristics of a creepy person, such as a preoccupation with death, unusual sexual behaviour, or exhibition of other non-normative behaviour. While most creepy traits appear to be rooted in fear, some researchers have highlighted attributes that would be more accurately categorised as inspiring disgust, such as unclean teeth or general poor hygiene (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017).

In the first half of this chapter, the literature regarding creepiness will be reviewed to explore its elicitors and relationship to other emotions. While there is a great deal of research into the uncanny valley and other threats that relate to fear and disgust, there is not so much about the causes and actions related to *social* creepiness. Concepts from these related emotions and sensations will then extrapolated to create a foundation upon which to build an understanding of creepiness. These insights will then be used to determine how it links to sexual harassment in the second half.

2.1.1 Understanding creepiness through fear

Fear is defined as an emotion produced by the perception of present or impending danger (Marks, 1987), and motivates actions rooted in personal protection, such as avoidance (Frijda, 1986). It also serves to heighten vigilance of threatening stimuli (LoBue & DeLoache, 2008) and has been widely studied. It is believed that fear first evolved as a mechanism to aid in identification of and protection against threats such as predators (Öhman & Mineka, 2001) or other humans (Mallan, Lipp, & Cochrane, 2013). Various traits of a stimulus can make it more fear-inducing, such as the danger it presents (Coelho & Purkis, 2009), as well as how unpredictable and uncontrollable it is (Armfield, 2006).

Unpredictability is a key factor in fear responses; the more unpredictable a stimulus is

perceived to be, the more fear people report feeling (Armfield, 2007). Furthermore, events that are unpredictable and uncontrollable are viewed as worse than the same events when they are predictable and controllable (Mineka & Zinbarg, 1996).

McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) suggest that creepiness is anxiety aroused by the ambiguity of whether there is something to fear. However, it is important to clarify here that while anxiety and fear are often viewed as interchangeable (Izard & Ackerman, 2000), they are two distinct emotions. Fear is triggered in response to the presence of an aversive stimulus, while anxiety is more of an extended state elicited by a sustained expectation that an aversive event is likely to occur (Daniel-Watanabe & Fletcher, 2022). Therefore, while creepiness may be felt in response to frightening situations or people, it should be conceptualised as an emotion similar to anxiety due to its ostensible purpose of vigilance in the face of a *potential* threat, rather than fear which promotes rapid action in the face of a *present* threat.

2.1.2 Understanding creepiness through disgust

One of the definitions of creepiness is “having or causing a sensation of repulsion, horror, or fear, as of creatures crawling on the skin” (Collins English Dictionary, 2009; Shklovski, Mainwaring, Skúladóttir, & Borgthorsson, 2014). Three studies have found that people associated itchy and skin-crawling sensations and urges to brush and shake things off the skin with an emotional response colloquially known as the ‘heebie jeebies’ and ‘feeling creeped out’ (Blake, Yih, Zhao, Sung, & Harmon-Jones, 2017). A sensation of repulsion is classically considered to be disgust-based, which suggests that the ‘heebie jeebies’ are rooted in disease avoidance, although some research proposes that this sensation is separate from traditional pathogen disgust and would be better framed as a specific defence against ectoparasites (Kupfer et al., 2021). Whether the heebie-jeebies is a defence against pathogens

or ectoparasites, it is clear that disgust could also be used to explore dimensions of creepiness.

Pathogens have been some of the most influential forces behind human evolution for thousands of years, and those with more robust immune systems were the ones most likely to survive and thus pass on their genes (Gruijters, Tybur, Ruiter, & Massar, 2016). If a person or a place exhibits cues that indicate the presence of pathogens, such as mould, open sores, or foul smells, we experience disgust which motivates avoidance and thus diminishes the chance of infection. Disgust has therefore been proposed to act as a behavioural immune system that reduces exposure to infections (Curtis, de Barra, & Aunger, 2011). In this manner, if a person demonstrated cues that indicate the possible presence of pathogens, such as uncleanliness or clammy and pale skin, they could trigger the sensation of being ‘creeped out’, which encourages caution around this person to prevent infection. Therefore, experiencing creepiness could still be considered as an adaptive reaction, seeking to intensify awareness around an uncertain threat, but the threat could come from disease as well as from more recognisable danger, which would be based in fear.

Returning to the ‘heebie-jeebies’, it is important to note that disgust is most effective as an oral-rejection response and does not tend to produce the described skin-crawling sensations. Therefore, it has been proposed that the ‘heebie jeebies’ instead stimulate avoidance of other vectors of disease - namely macroparasites, which transmit pathogens primarily via the skin (Blake, Yih, Zhao, Sung, & Harmon-Jones, 2017). As skin-barrier threats from macroparasites have been hazardous to humans for thousands of years (Gonçalves, Araújo, & Ferreira, 2003), individuals who avoided relevant stimuli such as insects (Lorenz, Libarkin, & Ording, 2014) and other macroparasites would have a selective advantage due to the costs associated with infection (Macpherson, 2005). This could manifest in behaviours distinct from typical disgust-induced responses to threats, as protecting the skin from touching or being touched by the elicitor would better protect against skin-transmitted

pathogen threats than oral rejection (Blake, Yih, Zhao, Sung, & Harmon-Jones, 2017). Appropriately, it has been found that the presence of parasites can induce self-grooming behaviours that may function to reduce parasite load (Prokop, Fančovičová, & Fedor, 2014). Skin-transmitted pathogens have also been found to evoke fear (Lorenz, Libarkin, & Ording, 2014), although they do not pose an immediate threat to survival, which is unusual for fear-related stimuli (Marks, 1987; Prokop, Usak, & Fančovičová, 2010). This finding could be due to not having words available like anxiety or creepiness, as people will use the most appropriate word even if it is not the most accurate. However, it is possible that this fear is translated into creepiness, which the sensation of the ‘heebie jeebies’ feeds into when the stimulus that triggers it is a person. As a result, individuals have negative emotional reactions to people with skin conditions that resemble parasites or infectious diseases (Park, van Leeuwen, & Chochorelou, 2013). This even extends to those who hold death-associated occupations (such as funeral directors), which are viewed as some of the most creepy professions (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016). Therefore, it is possible that when individuals display cues that skin-to-skin contact with them might communicate disease, the sensation of creepiness is aroused by this ambiguous threat, which manifests as the sensation of the ‘heebie jeebies’.

2.1.3 Using the uncanny valley to explore creepiness

While there are relatively few studies investigating creepiness (particularly as it relates to interpersonal interactions), a similar sensation has not had this issue – a phenomenon known as the ‘uncanny valley’ (Mori, 1970). This occurs when almost humanlike characteristics elicit a negative reaction (often described as a feeling of ‘wrongness’ or ‘eeriness’), but not those that are overtly human or non-human (Gray & Wegner, 2012). This feeling is primarily associated with fear but is also related with disgust and dislike (Burliegh, Schoenherr, & Lacroix, 2013). As the uncanny feeling is triggered by a

sense of ambiguity about human-like stimuli it is possible that research into this phenomenon could bear some relation to creepiness.

McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) suggested that creepiness could be related to an ‘agency-detection’ mechanism, which is where people behave as though there is a wilful ‘agent’ ready to harm you in potentially threatening scenarios. Therefore, if a robot or other humanlike construct appears to be human enough to act as a wilful agent but does not quite behave or look as a person should, this could induce a sensation of creepiness as they are unpredictable and thus a possible danger. One mechanism through which this could be possible is the ‘perceptual mismatch’ hypothesis, where facial features that are inconsistent with each other, such as enlarged eyes on an otherwise normal face (Kätsyri, Förger, Mäkräinen, & Takala, 2015) provoke this eerie feeling. Likewise, Leander, Chartrand, and Bargh (2012) suggested that creepy or otherwise non-normative nonverbal behaviour signals a social mismatch that puts us on our guard, as it could indicate deception and therefore a potential threat.

Information gained from facial expressions can be used to gain information about people’s perceptions of their situation and also their personality (Hareli & Hess, 2010) by “reverse-engineering” the emotions they express (Weiner, 2006). Additionally, facial expressions are used to obtain expectations about relevant social traits such as affiliation and trustworthiness from someone (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2009). Neurological evidence further suggests that the amygdala guides people to attend to the eye region when first viewing a face, because the amygdala is responsible for assessing emotional expressions and is key to intuitive judgements of trustworthiness (Porter, England, Juodis, Ten Brinke, & Wilson, 2008). This information is important for setting initial expectations of an interaction partner (Hareli & Hess, 2012) – for example, whether someone is or is not a creep – which is difficult to do if their face is covered. Therefore, being able to accurately read the intentions of an unfamiliar individual on their face would be highly adaptive when searching for hostility or

friendliness (Becker, Anderson, Mortensen, Neufeld, & Neel, 2011). Consequently, abnormal behaviour involving facial features should make an individual creepier – and research has found that somebody who made abnormal eye movements, such as darting or wandering, or who looked at an observer in an abnormal way, such as glaring or staring, was likely to be viewed as creepy (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017). Furthermore, as the face is the primary source of information about the intentions and motivations of conspecifics, we are denied a potential wealth of information about someone's intentions and potential threat when it is obscured (Hassin & Trope, 2000). Accordingly, those who alter the appearance of their face are often rated as creepy, as is the case for clowns, which have been rated as some of the creepiest stimuli (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016). Therefore, if an individual was encountered who generated a perceptual or social mismatch, an alarm system could be triggered that would induce the uncanny feeling (Olivera-La Rosa, 2018). In conclusion, the uncanny feeling people experience when viewing a human-like entity could have been selected for due to the need to determine either the intentions or pathogenic status of a stranger. The output of this mechanism is the uncanny feeling, which could also be described as the sensation of creepiness.

From research into the uncanny valley, the argument that creepiness evolved as a mechanism to protect against ambiguous threats can be strengthened. Moreover, it is possible that creepiness could have been selected for to guard against threats posed by conspecifics, either because they wish to commit harm or because they are vectors of disease. Some researchers even suggest that we have evolved mechanisms to detect potentially malevolent agents specifically to minimise the risk of being killed by conspecifics (Olivera-La Rosa, 2018; Złotowski, Proudfoot, & Bartneck, 2013), which results in the uncanny - or creepy - feeling. Many definitions of creepiness have revolved around the themes of socially unacceptable or norm-breaking behaviour (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017), and those who violate social norms are often rated more negatively on various dimensions of social

judgement (Szczurek, Monin, & Gross, 2012). Someone who violates social norms is more unsafe to be around than someone who does not, and could therefore constitute a threat due to their unpredictable nature. Furthermore, faces are an important tool when gathering information about a person's creepiness; the eyes and teeth have been found to be particularly useful reference points when determining if someone is creepy (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017). Research into the uncanny valley has identified a similar pattern; for example, Lewkowicz and Ghazanfar (2012) found that infants looked less at avatars designed to be uncanny when they sported unusually large eyes, which suggests that the eyes are important indicators of uncanniness as well as creepiness.

Interestingly, while disgust is frequently elicited by pathogen cues, it is also often experienced in situations where people behave immorally or in response to people who differ from social norms (Woody & Teachman, 2000), further linking this emotion to creepiness and the uncanny valley. The cues that trigger the uncanny valley effect could be interpreted as indicators of disease, as humans have evolved expertise in detecting atypical facial features which can indicate the presence of disease. MacDorman, Green, Ho, and Koch (2009) have proposed that the uncanny valley effect could be a mechanism for disease avoidance, as we are more sensitive to defects in our own species than to defects in distantly related species. Consequently, when something looks more human, the uncanny sensations we feel when we detect imperfections are stronger because the stimulus is likely to be closely related to human beings, and the probability of being able to pass on disease-causing bacteria, viruses, and other parasites increases with genetic similarity (Garamszegi, 2009). As the consequences of infection are highly costly, it would have been adaptive to develop mechanisms to protect against this threat – perhaps by heightening vigilance through the experience of eeriness – or creepiness. As natural selection has shaped a defence system prone to false alarms (Nesse, 2005), it is therefore more adaptive to err on the side of caution when encountering someone who triggers the uncanny feeling. There is some evidence to support this; for example,

individual differences in disgust propensity can predict sensitivity to the uncanny valley (MacDorman & Entezari, 2015). Additionally, when macaque monkeys were presented with unrealistic and realistic synthetic monkey faces and real monkey faces, they looked longer at unrealistic synthetic and real monkey faces (Steckenfinger & Ghazanfar, 2009). Using looking time as a measure of preference, as is the case for human infants (Lewkowicz & Ghazanfar, 2012), the researchers concluded that other primates can experience the uncanny valley effect, suggesting that it could be a specific adaptation. However, it is important to note that it is not the increased realism that elicits the uncanny valley effect, but rather that the increased realism lowers the tolerance for abnormalities (Green, MacDorman, Ho, & Vasudevan, 2008), perhaps due to the increased risk of contracting an infectious disease from conspecifics. For example, some researchers have proposed that an almost perfect replication of a human face is not enough to trigger the uncanny valley, as there must also be an abnormal feature, such as bizarre eyes (Seyama & Nagayama, 2007). In this case, the increased realism of the human face was only considered uncanny when there was also a cue to the presence of disease, supporting the theory that the uncanny feeling is an adaptation against pathogenic threats.

2.1.4 Creepiness as a proxy for negativity

Despite the findings above that creepiness can be linked to disgust both through the uncanny valley and as the ‘heebie-jeebies’, some researchers argue that creepiness is not related to disgust: Royzman, Cusimano, and Leeman (2017) conducted a word-meaning check on their study on neophobias to investigate what people feel when they are ‘creeped out’. They reported that creepiness was mostly connected to anxiety or similar sensations like nervousness or unease, but not certain danger or disgust. As fear and anxiety are closely related (Dunsmoor & Paz, 2015), the researchers concluded that disgust could be used in the context of as a proxy for general dislike or disapproval. This is something that has been previously reported by Nabi (2002), who found that the conceptual meanings of disgust and

anger are often blended by laypeople into an expression of solely disgust. Therefore, while it seems clear that fear is involved in creepiness, it will be important later in this thesis to distinguish the use of creepiness from general negativity and investigate its relevance to disgust.

2.1.5 Gender and creepiness, fear, and disgust

When it comes to provoking and feeling creepiness, men and women are not equal. McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) found that both men and women believe that a man is more likely to be a ‘creep’ than a woman is, perhaps because men carry more latent physical threat (McAndrew, 2009). They also found that there is a unique link between sexual threat and perceiving creepiness for women, which means they are more likely to find someone to be creepy. We can again use evolutionary theories of fear and disgust as comparisons when investigating this difference; given that creepiness can be elicited by both fear and disgust-relevant stimuli, it follows that its patterns of gender differences would be similar to those emotions as well.

For example, women are more likely to experience disgust than men are, which evolutionary psychologists posit is due to the periodic suppression of their immune system in anticipation of pregnancy in order to protect an embryo with foreign paternal genetic material (Fessler, 2002). Likewise, women are also more likely to experience fear than men because fear promotes risk-averse behaviour, and it would not have been worth jeopardizing one’s own survival or that of one’s offspring in threatening situations, so accurately identifying possible threats in social interactions would be more adaptive for women (Stillman, Maner, & Baumeister, 2010). Conversely, it is adaptive for men to display less disgust and fear in response to disgusting or otherwise threatening stimuli and instead express anger and a tendency to confront threats, as this gives the impression that they (and thus their genes) are

strong enough to either ward off infections or protect them from the threat (Fessler, Pillsworth, & Flamson, 2004).

Furthermore, women display stronger neural responses than men to facial expressions of disgust (Aleman & Swart, 2008), and also report higher disgust sensitivity (Olatunji, Arrindell, & Lohr, 2005). Gender-specific roles also affect the expression of emotion, as in many cultures men are supposed to suppress emotions that make them appear powerless or weak, leading them to be much less emotionally expressive than women (Fischer & LaFrance, 2015). Additionally, men who score higher on scales of masculinity are less likely to be willing to display their disgust (Skolnick, Bascom, & Wilson, 2013). Therefore, women would be more likely to experience and display feelings of creepiness than men.

2.1.6 Responding to and communicating creepiness

Once the bar of experiencing creepiness has been met, how do people react when they feel creeped out? Research has found that people prefer to avoid creepy individuals, or if they cannot avoid them, to wait until they are able to leave or take another form of action (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017), which indicates that the creepy individual is unpleasant but not necessarily a physical threat that requires confrontation. Just as confronting a person in anger can be costly to the individual (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007), confronting a creepy person could be costly and unjustified if the threat is never realised. Similarly, outright fleeing a merely creepy threat could be considered disproportionate (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016), both a waste of energy and a social faux pas. It is more adaptive to meet a creepy person with unpleasant feelings and with avoidance or vigilance rather than direct action.

Preference for avoidance supports the theory that creepiness is a diluted version of fear and disgust, as both emotions are avoidance-motivated with the goal of minimising potential harm to oneself (Fessler, Pillsworth, & Flamson, 2004). Reactions to creepiness are also likely to be gendered, following lines drawn in other emotions; men tend towards

expressing emotions like anger, which encourages confrontation as it is based on perceptions of injustice (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas, & Wells, 2017), and therefore are more likely to act more aggressively than women (Fessler, Pillsworth, & Flamson, 2004).

However, as women are more likely to experience fear and disgust, and the functional objective of both emotions is protection, experiencing them motivates avoidance (Fessler, Pillsworth, & Flamson, 2004). If creepiness truly is an attenuated version of fear or disgust, it follows that women would experience creepiness more strongly or more often, and that men and women would react differently when they experience creepiness. Specifically, men would be more likely to demonstrate a propensity towards confrontation while women would avoid or ignore the creepy stimulus.

Both disgust and fear have communicative value, where fear can serve to both warn conspecifics of danger and maintain a dominance hierarchy (Öhman, 1986), while disgust can maintain the social hierarchy through being expressed towards individuals who differ from social norms, thereby reinforcing appropriate social behaviour (Hodson & Costello, 2007). There is also evidence that expressions of disgust (facial and otherwise) can be used to warn conspecifics of the presence of pathogens (Woody & Teachman, 2000). Creepiness could thus serve a similar expressive function: labelling a person as ‘creepy’ indicates that this person presents a possible danger and should be avoided. For example, someone who exhibits fear-based creepy traits as outline above is not an obvious threat compared to a person who is actively brandishing a weapon and threatening to use it. However, it would still be adaptive to maintain awareness of this intimidating person, and one possible way to communicate this would be to label them as creepy. Alternatively, someone who exhibits disgust-based creepy traits presents a potential threat in the form of an indicator of disease (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017). Therefore, labelling these people who present such possible ambiguous threats like this as creepy is a way to indicate to others that this person should be avoided because they have the potential to be dangerous. This creepy label also indicates that they

should not be confronted, because if the threat is never realised it would be a waste of resources and may needlessly escalate the situation. Furthermore, disgust is also experienced in situations where individuals behave in a manner that others find immoral, so someone who breaks minor social rules (such as maintaining proper hygiene or invading personal space) as opposed to major ones (such as theft or unwanted sexual advances) could also be considered as creepy (Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2017). This could be because disregard for social rules is associated with unpredictability and uncertainty (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016), which are also factors closely associated with fear (Armfield, 2006). Labelling someone a ‘creep’ or their behaviour as ‘creepy’ for this reason could therefore be similar to how disgust is used to express moral condemnation (Kupfer & Giner-Sorolla, 2017).

2.1.7 Creepiness and harassment

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a word that is often used in the media to describe sexual harassers is “creepy”. Many of the creepy behaviours outlined above can be linked to sexual threat; for example, a person who stares at someone from a distance while licking their lips, or standing much closer to someone than is necessary or appropriate in a workplace setting. As creepiness serves to heighten vigilance in case the ambiguous cues of threat escalate into overt danger, the subtle sexual threat inherent in hostile work environments and the unpredictability of the outcomes of these environments (Johnson & Sacco, 1995) could lead to someone feeling “creeped out”, and therefore become wary and more vigilant around the person triggering that feeling. This ties in well with literature on both creepiness and sexual harassment, as men tend to be viewed as creepier by both women and men, and women recognise a unique link between creepy men and sexual threat (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016). The second half of this chapter will therefore summarise the literature on sexual harassment and explain how creepiness is tied into it.

2.2 Introduction to sexual harassment

One in two women will experience sexual harassment during her lifetime (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009). This can occur on the street (Kearl, 2014) or in more social contexts (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas, & Wells, 2017), but it is a particular problem in the workplace (Johnson & Sacco, 1995). Although victims and perpetrators can belong to any gender (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009), sexual harassment is most commonly performed by a man against a woman (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008).

It is generally recognised that sexual harassment takes two main forms; *quid pro quo* harassment, where sexual coercion takes place under the threat of job-related consequences such as promotions or other opportunities (Pina & Gannon, 2012), and *hostile environment* harassment, which creates an abusive working environment through subjection to gender-related or sexual comments, or other unwanted sexual attention (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). These types of sexual harassment are not mutually exclusive, although experience and reporting varies depending on the workplace (European Commission, 1998). However, defining sexual harassment has been problematic because it is difficult to identify the exact behaviours that count as sexual harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012).

2.2.1 Antecedents of sexual harassment

The climate and job-gender context of an organisation are two key factors that either facilitate or impede sexual harassment. Examples of climate are a lack of punishment for sexual harassers, or the perception that a potential victim would not be taken seriously if they complained (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). In this way, sexual harassment is especially likely to occur if leaders in an organisation tolerate or ignore the harassment (Bell, McLaughlin, & Sequeira, 2002), as the behaviour of leaders often has a trickle-down effect that can spread to the entire organisation (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). However, if the leader is intolerant of sexual harassment, this behaviour is less likely to occur.

Women who work in traditionally male-dominated environments also often become the target of sexual harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014), perhaps because their gender becomes salient in those circumstances (Pina & Gannon, 2012). For example, the military is a typically male-dominated environment (Smith & Rosenstein, 2016), and women report higher frequencies of experiencing all subtypes of sexual harassment, especially the more serious forms, in this profession (Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). However, women who work in traditionally female-dominated environments, such as nursing, are also sexually harassed (Bronner, Peretz, & Ehrenfeld, 2003), but such harassment is more likely to come from a superior than from a colleague (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Pay also plays a role; women report more harassment from colleagues and managers in male-dominated workplaces where wages are relatively high, and men self-report more harassment in female-dominated workplaces where wages are low (Folke & Rickne, 2022). This harassment has a great impact on income equality, as harassment deters both women and men from applying for jobs in workplaces where they are the gender minority. Furthermore, women who experience harassment are more likely to move to new workplaces with more female colleagues and lower pay, further contributing to the pay disparity (Folke & Rickne, 2022).

2.2.2 Relationship to power

Power has an important relationship to sexual harassment, as many authors argue that powerful people seek to exert control over those under them in the form of sexual harassment (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). O'Leary-Kelly and Bowes-Sperry (2001) argue that people who do not believe their actions will result in harm are less likely to believe that the action has ethical value, or "moral intensity", and are therefore less likely to behave in an ethical way. However, powerful people are often at a greater social distance from their victims, and are therefore less likely to recognise that their actions are inflicting harm (Magee & Smith, 2013). Power can also lead to difficulty empathising with others (van Kleef et al., 2008), and

powerful people also tend to overestimate the sexual interest that others have in them (Kunstman & Maner, 2010).

All of these factors combined means that powerful people struggle to recognise ethical problems (Kennedy & Anderson, 2017) and may therefore behave in a more unethical way, perhaps by engaging in sexual harassment. However, this is not always the case; female supervisors are more likely to report and define their experiences as sexual harassment, suggesting that harassment can serve as a way to control women in power, as opposed to being motivated by sexual desire (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012).

2.2.3 Sexual harassment training and ethical fading

An additional issue in organisational climates relates to sexual harassment training programs and policies. Formal policies concerning education about sexual harassment and relevant disciplinary actions are more effective when there are clear procedures in place (Thomas, 2004). If these procedures lack transparency or are seen as unfair then they may encourage sexual harassment because they promote a competitive environment, instead of a cooperative one (Berdahl & Raver, 2011). Additionally, many sexual harassment training programs are based on compliance and focused on avoiding legal liability for the organisation (O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). As these programs are concentrated on the legal implications of sexual harassment they can result in ethical fading, which is a process that results in an inability to consider ethics when making decisions (Dobbin & Kelly, 2007). People who have experienced ethical fading will then not consider the ethical implications of their actions (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004); for example, ethical fading often results in decreased awareness of sexually coercive behaviour as actually being coercive (Chappell & Bowes-Sperry, 2015). Furthermore, compliance-based approaches to sexual harassment training encourages people to reason at a lower level of moral development based on avoiding punishment and avoiding reward (Kohlberg, 1976). Therefore, an organisation with

such a training program may have a weak “ethical climate” and could inadvertently send the message that sexual harassment will be ignored if you can keep it under the radar (Mayer, 2014).

2.2.4 Gender differences in perception of harassment

While *quid pro quo* harassment is nearly always recognised as harassment, there is inconsistency between men and women on which behaviours constitute a hostile work environment (Pina & Gannon, 2012). One main barrier to a common definition is that men and women do not agree on which behaviours constitute sexual harassment (McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018). Generally, the more ambiguous the behaviour, the greater the gender difference; for example, men do not believe that sex-stereotyped jokes and repeated requests for dates after refusal constitute sexual harassment, whereas women do (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). This is still the case over a decade later; women, versus men, are more likely to view suggestive behaviours such as repeated sex jokes, or rubbing a person’s shoulders in the office, as harassment (Weinberg & Nielsen, 2017). Women are also less tolerant of sexual harassment (Bitton & Shaul, 2013), and are more likely to support punishment for it, especially post-#MeToo (Nodeland & Craig, 2019).

Research suggests that describing harassment as joking or flirting makes the behaviour appear more innocent (Page & Pina, 2015), and introduces uncertainty. This uncertainty can lead to ethical fading, and subsequently the perpetrator will not see that their sexually harassing behaviour is harmful (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). Furthermore, men are more likely to interpret a woman’s friendly behaviour as sexual and respond in kind, leaving them unaware that their sexual attention is actually unwanted and harmful (O’Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). It is these kinds of behaviours that make up hostile environment harassment, and it is much more difficult to prove, especially if those behaviours are commonplace in the organisation (Pryor, LaVite, & Stroller, 1993), because

there are cues that a wider range of behaviours are considered to be acceptable in a sexualised work environment (O’Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). Conversely, the gender difference is practically non-existent when it comes to judging quid pro quo harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001), as it is less ambiguous and therefore more readily identifiable than hostile environment harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012). As a result, many organisational policies against sexual harassment revolve around combating quid pro quo (Chappel & Bowes-Sperry, 2015). All of the above suggests there will also be large gender differences in feelings of creepiness (which by its very nature thrives on ambiguity) to hostile environments.

2.2.5 Ambiguity in perception of sexual harassment

Having a narrow definition of sexual harassment risks misclassifying problematic behaviour that falls outside that definition (Marshall, 2005). As there is a clear gender difference in perception of hostile environment harassment, observers may not realise that it is happening unless something draws their attention to it (Dobbin & Kelly, 2007). Additionally, observer intervention is higher when the incident is low in ambiguity, but as hostile environments are often ambiguous bystanders are less likely to step in (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005). This is especially the case when there are multiple people contributing to the hostile environment, as responsibility for the harassment is divided (O’Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). Consequently, the lack of focus and training in regard to hostile environment harassment means that it continues to persist and could even get worse, as behaviour that gradually, as opposed to abruptly, deteriorates is unconsciously accepted (Gino & Bazeman, 2009) in a process called the “slippery slope” (Tenbrunsel, Rees, & Diekmann, 2019).

2.2.6 Consequences of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is conceptualised as a workplace stressor (Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000) because it has many negative consequences for those who experience it. These consequences can generally be divided into three categories. The first is job-related consequences, which include the victim's job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and productivity (Pina & Gannon, 2012). The second is psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, and generally lower mental wellbeing (Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000), and the third is health-related outcomes, such as headaches, nausea, and exhaustion (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). However, sexual harassment is not only harmful to the individual who experiences it, but ambient sexual harassment, which often occurs in a hostile work environment, has negative consequences for other people in the same environment (Glomb et al., 1997).

2.2.7 Responses to sexual harassment

Even though sexual harassment causes significant negative consequences for those who experience it, targets often do not report incidents that have occurred (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009), and in some institutions, the reporting rate for sexual harassment is less than 10% (Cantor et al., 2015). Common responses to sexual harassment are avoidance and denial as women are often hesitant to label their experiences as harassment, leading to under-reporting (Pina & Gannon, 2012).

To mitigate this trend, studying the emotions that people feel about harassing behaviours could help to understand and develop effective responses. For example, fear and disgust are emotions rooted in personal protection motives (Frijda, 1986), so feeling them in response to harassment might encourage avoidance and hinder reporting. Conversely, emotions like anger which are based on perceptions of injustice are more likely to encourage

confrontation and promote calling harassment by its name (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas, & Wells, 2017).

Theories of legal consciousness around responses to sexual harassment argue that for a victim to report an incident they must first see the harassment for what it is, then hold the harasser responsible, before they act (Blackstone, Uggen, & McLaughlin, 2009). Therefore, sexual harassment is under-reported because women are often hesitant to label their experiences as harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012), and victims use tactics such as denial and avoidance to cope with what has happened (Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & DuBois, 1997). Furthermore, when organisations do not have policies surrounding sexual harassment, women are less likely to report their experiences (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009). Moreover, if policies do exist but they are unclear it could not only create a weaker ethical climate which may promote sexual harassment (Thomas, 2004), but could also lead to employees lacking understanding of their rights, which results in under-reporting (Blackstone, Uggen, & McLaughlin, 2009). This is compounded by the fact that victims often go through a period of questioning, as ambiguous sexual harassment can be difficult to interpret (Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990), and by the time they have concluded that what happened was sexual harassment, it may be too late to formally report it (O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). In addition, many victims experience intense emotions after experiencing sexual harassment, and these emotions could also discourage them from making a report (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002), especially if they believe that the report will not be taken seriously (Offermann & Malamut, 2002). For example, victims often fear that their harasser or other co-workers may retaliate if they make a complaint, which makes them less likely to report their experiences (Vijayasiri, 2008).

2.2.8 How response to sexual harassment is similar to creepiness

Responses to creepy people tie in with research and law covering different kinds of sexual harassment. There is the more obvious and widely recognised *quid pro quo* harassment, where sexual coercion takes place under the threat of job-related consequences such as promotions or other opportunities (Pina & Gannon, 2012). Unwanted sexual contact or exposure is another generally recognised form of harassment, especially prominent in recent #MeToo cases. *Hostile environment* harassment, however, is also legally actionable in many countries. This kind of harassment creates an abusive working environment through subjection to gender-related or sexual comments, or other unwanted sexual attention (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Behaving in a creepy manner, such as being overly familiar, continually staring at someone else, or standing too close can thus itself create a hostile work environment and may earn the perpetrator the label of a creep.

This preference for avoidance is potentially communicated by the very label of ‘creep’ itself. In a theoretical essay, Mann (2012) argued that because creepiness is such a subtle and suggestive judgement, in sexual harassment the label of a creep or “creeper” acts as a dismissal of the harassing behaviour and so obscures its harm. This may then have the knock-on effect of stifling recognition of more blatant forms of sexual harassment. In this way, Mann argues, framing harassment as “just creepy”, or a harasser as “just a creep”, may suggest that there is nothing to be done about it until it becomes more flagrant. Therefore, if you describe someone as a creep to a colleague, it communicates a specific archetype of the kind of person they are and the actions one should take in response to them, without requiring deeper explanation.

A useful analogy to describe this idea about how the “creepy” label might work in the workplace is the “Missing Stair” (“The Pervocracy”, 2012). Here, the existence of a sexual harasser in an organization is comparable to a situation where someone has a missing stair in

their house, and instead of fixing the problem, they just warn new people about the issue.

“Missing stair” thinking can be seen as aligning with the merely avoidant responses that have been found to be typical of creepiness, and may be responsible for the persistence of harassment in the workplace. This is something that often happens in the workplace, where it is rare for sexual harassment to happen just once, and often builds up over a period of time, especially in the case of hostile environment harassment (Tenbrunsel, Rees, & Diekmann, 2019). For example, in a recent paper, more than half (53%) of cases involved professors serially harassing their students (Tillyer, Gialopsos, & Wilcox, 2016). The serial element, as opposed to isolated incidents, highlights the finding that harassment builds up over time and rarely stops with just one victim. There is also a phenomenon known as “pass-the-harasser”, which is where serial sexual harassers are relocated to another position without their harassment being disclosed (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018). Therefore, all that may follow them are rumours of their creepy behaviour, and the cycle begins anew. Furthermore, due to the preference for avoidance and denial in these situations, it is possible that creepiness could even undermine identification of harassment.

2.2.9 Is creepiness a hill or a slope?

Finally, due to its status as a response to liminal cues, another unanswered question about creepiness is whether it behaves more as a “hill” – increasing with increasing threat until the point when threat becomes obvious, at which point creepiness diminishes and other emotions take over – or as a “slope” – for which endorsement of creepiness continues to increase even when the threat is obvious. This theoretical question is also relevant to the status of creepiness as a response to harassment. If the word “creepy” is avoided for more intense examples of harassment, as the word “pink” is avoided at more intense shades of red, then it is less likely to motivate action and identification. However, if it is also applied to direct and obvious examples of harassment, as the word “blue” covers both mild and intense

shades of that colour, then it could facilitate proactive responses even to all forms of harassment, including the more ambiguous threats.

In other words, while it is clear that creepiness responds to suggestions of threat, there remains a question of whether creepiness is an emotion that solely responds to a light-to-moderate level of sensed threat (“hill”), or if it continues responding to threat at higher levels but is distinctively sensitive to lower levels (“slope”).

2.3 Summary

Taking all of the above research into account, there are three overarching aims that the next few chapters will address.

- 1) To provide empirical evidence that creepiness is related to harassment.
- 2) To explore whether creepiness responds solely to sexual harassment, or whether it is also triggered by non-sexual harassment, as well as whether it is elicited solely by ambiguous threats as opposed to direct ones.
- 3) To examine how judgements of creepiness influences perceptions of harassment.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Exploratory examination of creepiness

Through reviewing what little literature exists on creepiness, it became clear that an initial exploratory study was necessary to determine whether creepiness has any relation to harassment outside of references in the media. In these first studies, participants were asked how they felt about some examples of harassment in an open-ended manner to generate more information about specific behaviours which trigger creepiness. These examples were divided into four “categories” covering the main aspects of behaviour which could be considered creepy. All four were drawn from harassment literature and concerned behaviours which are typically not readily identified as harassment, or which concern the creation of a hostile work environment, but do not constitute quid pro quo harassment.

- **Vocalisations:** sex-stereotyped jokes and other sexual comments are less likely to be identified as harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001), and so may trigger creepiness.
- **Invitations:** as above, but this ventures beyond normal comments into specific invitations to activities which are not sexual in nature yet contain a level of intimacy inappropriate to the workplace.
- **Contact:** physical contact that is not overtly sexual but is still unwanted.
- **Watching:** while identified as ambiguously threatening in earlier research on creepiness (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016), staring or lurking is not always recognised as harassment when placed against more “direct” forms like those above (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009), despite creating a hostile work environment.

The following chapter will report two experiments that served both as an initial means to gather general data on how creepiness relates to harassment, and as a “proof-of-concept” that creepiness is an emotion strongly related to harassment. The aims of these two studies

were to establish whether inappropriate behaviour in a work and educational setting would be appraised as creepy; what role these appraisals had in judgements of harassment; responses to said harassment; and what relationship creepiness had to anger, disgust, and fear.

3.2 Studies 1 & 2

The first hypothesis was based on the “hill” model of creepiness, where it would increase until the harassment becomes obvious, at which point it begins to diminish. The second and third hypotheses were based on appraisal theories of creepiness and on critiques (e.g., Mann, 2012) assuming that the concept of “creepiness” would inhibit identifying and acting on examples of hostile environment harassment. The final hypothesis is derived from research on the most common actual and perceived scenario of sexual harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012) and research on creepiness which suggests that men are more likely to be identified as creepy than women (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016).

- 1) More subtle behaviours (e.g. constant watching) would be judged as creepier than more obviously harassing behaviours (e.g. unwanted physical contact).
- 2) Feelings of creepiness would be positively associated with the avoidance-related emotions of fear and disgust, but negatively related to the approach-related emotion of anger.
- 3) Creepiness would be positively related to avoidance of the perpetrator and inhibit both confrontation and labelling the scenarios as harassment.
- 4) Creepy people will be more likely to be perceived to be men, and to target women, in line with the most common actual and perceived scenario of sexual harassment. Creepiness will be positively associated with these judgements.

3.2.1 Method

It should be noted that all quantitative studies reported in this thesis were constructed in and presented through Qualtrics.

Participants

The sample for Study 1 consisted of 74 participants recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), who were paid 1.25 USD for participating in November 2018. The sample size was determined a priori by a power analysis for a repeated measures 4 x 2 (behaviour type x participant gender) ANOVA that determined that an n of approximately 65 would be sufficient to obtain 95% power on a medium sized effect $f = .5$ (Cohen, 1988). From this number, eight people were eliminated who were judged not to have understood the questions because the free responses were either copies of the question or random letters. The final sample consisted of 66 participants (22 women), ranging in age from 19 to 60 with a mean age of 34.6, $SD = 9.4$. Most participants self-identified as heterosexual (92%) with an additional 3% identifying as homosexual, and a further 4.5% identifying as bisexual.

The sample for Study 2 consisted of 145 undergraduate psychology students from the University of Kent who were recruited through a research methods course, and were rewarded with class credits for participating in February 2019. From this number, 46 people were eliminated who did not complete the study. The final sample consisted of 99 participants (85 women), ranging in age from 17 - 56 with a mean age of 19.94, $SD = 4.3$. Most participants self-identified as heterosexual (86.9%) with an additional 3% identifying as homosexual, 7.1% identifying as bisexual, 2% identifying as asexual, and 1% identifying as other. There were not enough non-heterosexual participants in either study to conduct moderation analyses, so this factor was not explored in the experiment.

Materials and Procedure

Each participant was presented with four scenarios (described in the introduction of this chapter) of a person behaving inappropriately at work: a) someone who often makes inappropriate sexual comments and sounds; b) someone who makes repeated invitations to intimate activities like massages or hot tub parties; c) someone who repeatedly touches or hugs a specific co-worker, even though they do not seem to welcome the contact; d) someone who often stares at a specific other co-worker for a long time and hangs around their work space more often than needed. Once they had read the scenarios, the participants were asked to write freely describing “how [they] felt about this person and their behaviour,” with a minimum 50 and a maximum 500 character limit. It is important to note that no forms of the word “creepy” or “harassment” appeared in the title or explanation of the study, and these terms were only presented to participants later as scaled questionnaire items after open responses had been given to all four scenarios. Therefore, any mention of these concepts in the open-ended responses represents spontaneous labelling of the scenarios.

The participants were then presented with each scenario again in turn in a randomised order, and asked a number of questions about it before proceeding to the next random scenario. First, they indicated whether they had seen this behaviour occur in the past 12 months in a work (Study 1) or educational (Study 2) setting, and whether they had ever seen it occur. They were then asked whether a person who behaved this way would be more likely to be male or female on a bipolar scale ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = *almost certain to be male*, 2 = *more likely to be female*, 3 = *somewhat more likely to be male*, 4 = *neutral*, 5 = *somewhat more likely to be female*, 6 = *more likely to be female*, 7 = *almost certain to be female*), and whether someone targeted by this behaviour would be more likely to be male or female, on the same scale.

Following this, the participants answered several judgement questions. First, they were asked whether the behaviour was creepy, whether the person was a creep, and whether

they would call this person a creep to someone else. Secondly, they indicated whether they would avoid, confront, or ignore this person. These measures used a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *probably not*, 3 = *maybe no*, 4 = *might or might not*, 5 = *maybe yes*, 6 = *probably yes*, 7 = *definitely yes*).

The participants were then shown three sets of six faces (three male, three female) of different ethnicities displayed side by side, sourced from the Montreal Set of Facial Displays of Emotion (MSFDE; Beaupré, Cheung, & Hess, 2000), a collection of emotional facial expressions by men and women of European, Asian, and African descent. The MSFDE was created by posers trained to activate specific expressions for each emotion, which were then verified by two coders, and was designed to aid in psychological studies on emotion recognition (Beaupré & Hess, 2005). The first set of faces presented strong anger expressions, the second presented strong fear expressions, and the third strong disgust expressions. They were asked to rate how much they would feel like the displayed expressions towards the person in the scenario on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). See Appendix B for the exact expressions.

The participants were then asked whether, according to the law of the place that they lived in, whether the behaviour in the scenario constituted harassment or not, on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *probably not*, 3 = *not sure*, 4 = *probably yes*, 5 = *definitely yes*). Finally, the participants answered several basic demographic questions regarding their gender, age sexual orientation, occupation, and country of origin.

The measures of gender and creepiness perception, emotion, and harassment were all presented using Likert scales. Research suggests that Likert scales are useful and convenient means of measuring unobservable constructs, such as attitudes and emotions (Willits, Theodori, & Luloff, 2016; Jebb, Ng, & Tay, 2021). thus, it was determined that the use of such scales would be the most appropriate way to measures the constructs in the studies presented in this thesis. In line with the best practice recommended for Likert scales, all items

had between five and seven clearly labelled points, to allow for the expression of a neutral opinion (Nadler, Weston, & Voyles, 2015). It should also be noted that the Likert scales used in these studies, as well as those in future chapters, were treated as continuous variables, in line with advice on the analysis of this kind of scale data (Harpe, 2015).

The procedure was the same in both studies, however in Study 2 the scenarios were slightly altered to apply to a student population: a) a student who often makes inappropriate sexual comments and sounds to another student; b) a student who makes repeated invitations to intimate activities like massages or hot tub parties; c) a student who repeatedly touches or hugs a specific student at university, even though they don't seem to welcome the contact; d) a student who often stares at a specific student at university for long periods of time and hangs around their work space more often than needed e.g. in the library, computer room, study room etc. Appendix C contains the exact wording of all questions in these two studies.

See Appendix A for the ethical approval codes for this and all other studies in this thesis.

3.2.2 Results

3.2.2.1 *Qualitative Data*

In the open-ended responses, creepiness (i.e., “creepy” or “creep”) was spontaneously mentioned in at least one scenario by 39.4% of people in Study 1, and by 37.4% of people in Study 2. People additionally mentioned related words such as “uncomfortable”, “uneasy”, or “weird”, but these were not counted as spontaneous mentions of creepiness. At least in spontaneous mentions across these scenarios, there seemed to be a disjunction between harassment judgements and creepiness, such that the scenario most often eliciting the word “creepy” (watching) was never described as harassment, and the scenario most often eliciting the word “harassment” (contact) did not often elicit spontaneous mentions of creepiness.

Table 1

Studies 1 & 2: Frequency of spontaneous mentions of creepiness and harassment.

	Vocalisations	Invitations	Contact	Watching
Creepiness (Study 1)	1.52%	15.16%	9.10%	27.28%
	(1)	(10)	(6)	1(8)
Creepiness (Study 2)	4.04%	14.14%	7.07%	32.32%
	(4)	(14)	(7)	(32)
Harassment (Study 1)	3.03%	6.06%	13.64%	0.00%
	(2)	(4)	(9)	(0)
Harassment (Study 2)	2.02%	3.03%	3.03%	1.01%
	(2)	(3)	(3)	(1)

Using informal thematic analysis, it was found that the four scenarios elicited different judgements about the perpetrator and the severity of their actions. In the vocalisations scenario, many of the participants mentioned how immature they found the perpetrator and that they thought that “appropriate action” should be taken against them, such as being reported to the Human Resources department. The participants also used disgust to condemn the behaviour of the perpetrator, both with the literal word and more figurative language, such as referring to them as a pervert. They also indicated that they would not want to confront the perpetrator directly and would prefer to avoid them.

Creepiness was mentioned much more frequently in the invitations scenario and was also linked to judgements of disgust or perversion. These judgements were often focused on the fact that the invitations were repeated, and that the more often the invitation was offered then the worse the participants would view the perpetrator. The participants also mentioned feeling nervous and uncomfortable in this situation because of the potential for escalation, but tendency towards mentioning avoidance was much greater than in the vocalisations scenario.

The behaviour in the contact scenario was identified as harassment more than any other scenario and was associated with the expression of anger more than disgust.

Accordingly, the participants mentioned a preference for confronting the perpetrator more than avoiding them. However, some responses argued that the perpetrator simply lacked social understanding of boundaries. Finally, in the watching scenario, creepiness was mentioned much more frequently compared to all the other scenarios. Interestingly, the participants associated the creepiness with some kind of potential future threat, such as stalking. However, despite several people reporting that they would want to keep an eye on the perpetrator or inform the object of their attention about their behaviour, the potential for harassment was only mentioned once across both studies.

Table 2

Studies 1 & 2: Examples of the contexts in which creepiness and harassment were mentioned.

Scenario	Gender	Quote
Vocalisations	Female	This student makes me feel uncomfortable and harassed. Their behaviour is not acceptable, no person should have to be subjected to inappropriate sexual comments or sounds from another person.
Vocalisations	Female	I wouldn't think very highly of them if the other person did not want this kind of interaction with them. I would probably avoid them and think they were a creep.
Invitations	Male	This behaviour would be acceptable if the 'specific student' was welcoming towards them...could be that the student is sexually harassing another student. I would say this behaviour is creepy and the student needs to back off.
Invitations	Female	In my opinion this person is creepy and too persistent which is very uncomfortable.
Contact	Female	This person seems creepy to that specific student, but to others their behaviour seems harmless.
Contact	Female	This student makes me feel uncomfortable and borderline harassed. Their behaviour is not acceptable and it is clear to see when someone doesn't appreciate being touched or hugged.
Watching	Female	If they are friends or know each other it may be acceptable, but if they don't know each other it's a bit creepy.
Watching	Female	This student is creepy and their behaviour is textbook stalker. They should learn to mind their own business.

3.2.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

Data Preparation

The data for each behaviour was entered as a separate case, using the MIXED procedure in IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25) to carry out a multilevel analysis predicting each outcome variable from coded independent variables, treating the participant as a random variable. Additionally, the three measures of creepiness all correlated with each other above $r = .75, p < .001$, in both studies. Therefore, a composite variable of the average of these measures was created for use in the following analyses. All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

Judgements of Creepiness

A linear mixed model was conducted, entering the nominal variable of behaviour type as a predictor of creepiness. All behaviours inspired feelings of creepiness as they all scored significantly above the midpoint, $p < .001$. See Table 3 for means and standard deviations.

Table 3
Studies 1 & 2: Descriptive statistics of appraisals of creepiness across all four behaviours.

	Vocalisations		Invitations		Contact		Watching	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Study 1	5.77	1.51	5.75	1.38	5.63	1.47	5.44	1.27
Study 2	5.22	1.45	5.05	1.39	4.78	1.42	5.10	1.36

Note. Midpoint of 4.

Unexpectedly, the behaviour types were not significantly different in creepiness in the first study, $F(3, 195) = 1.45, p = .229$. However, in the second study, there was an effect of behaviour type, $F(3, 292.63) = 2.75, p = .043$, in that the watching behaviour was the creepiest behaviour, and the contact behaviour was significantly less creepy than the others.

A second linear mixed model was conducted, entering anger, disgust, and fear alongside behaviour type as predictors of creepiness. Judgements of creepiness were positively associated with disgust which supports the second hypothesis. Fear was also positively associated with creepiness, but to a much smaller degree. Most surprising was the revelation that higher levels of anger positively predicted creepiness in both studies, contrary to expectations. See Table 4 for the influence of those emotions on judgements of creepiness.

Table 4
Studies 1 & 2: Emotions as predictors of creepiness.

Emotion	Study	<i>t</i>	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	1	6.41***	250.34	0.28	0.19	0.37
	2	6.30***	368.54	0.26	0.18	0.33
Disgust	1	5.07***	241.83	0.23	0.14	0.32
	2	7.80***	383.29	0.33	0.25	0.41
Fear	1	2.23*	249.51	0.08	0.01	0.15
	2	2.92**	381.69	0.10	0.03	0.17

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* ≤ .001

Action Tendencies

Three linear mixed model analyses were conducted, entering anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear as simultaneous predictors of the likelihood to avoid, confront, and ignore the perpetrator in turn. As expected, disgust positively predicted avoidance in both studies, and higher levels of anger were most strongly related to higher levels of confrontation. While fear only predicted avoidance in study 1, it was a positive predictor of ignoring the perpetrator in both studies. However, although creepiness was strongly associated with avoidance, it also positively if less strongly predicted confrontation. Tables 5 – 7 present the influence of the emotions on avoidance, confrontation, and ignoring in both studies.

Table 5

Studies 1 & 2: Emotions as predictors of avoidance.

Emotion	Study	<i>t</i>	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	1	0.32	232.78	0.02	-0.09	0.13
	2	1.54	347.21	0.07	-0.09	0.15
Creepiness	1	3.92***	247.59	0.30	0.15	0.45
	2	9.50***	371.95	0.49	0.39	0.60
Disgust	1	3.73***	232.28	0.21	0.1	0.32
	2	2.95**	370.32	0.14	0.05	0.23
Fear	1	5.19***	255.72	0.24	0.15	0.33
	2	1.64	367.09	0.06	-0.01	0.13

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

Table 6

Studies 1 & 2: Emotions as predictors of confrontation.

Emotion	Study	<i>t</i>	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	1	4.67***	253.19	0.27	0.16	0.39
	2	6.62***	342.73	0.32	0.23	0.42
Creepiness	1	0.27**	0.16	0.23	0.08	0.39
	2	0.32**	0.23	0.19	0.07	0.31
Disgust	1	1.30	253.43	.195	0.08	-0.04
	2	1.88	365.65	.061	0.10	-0.01
Fear	1	1.96	237.74	0.09	-0.0003	0.18
	2	-1.28	362.23	-0.05	-0.14	0.03

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

Table 7

Studies 1 & 2: Emotions as predictors of ignoring.

Emotion	Study	<i>t</i>	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	1	-0.65	244.1	-0.04	-0.18	0.09
	2	-0.90	364.66	-0.05	-0.15	0.06
Creepiness	1	1.22	253.14	0.11	-0.07	0.29
	2	4.32***	383.46	0.26	0.14	0.39
Disgust	1	1.47	242.41	0.1	-0.03	0.24
	2	0.03	382.62	0.001	-0.11	0.11
	6	0.07	0.12	0.01	-0.23	0.24
Fear	1	4.11***	249.37	0.34	0.12	0.34
	2	3.04**	381.19	0.13	0.05	0.22

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

Identification of Harassment

One-sample *t*-tests of the means of harassment ratings against the midpoint of 3 were conducted to examine whether behaviours were consensually judged as harassment. Overall, most behaviours were significantly higher than the midpoint across studies ($p < .001$); however, the watching behaviours in Study 1 ($p = .919$) and the invitations behaviour in Study 2 were not ($p = .452$). Another linear mixed model was conducted to investigate whether the different behaviours would be differently identified as harassment. See Table 8 for means and standard deviations.

Table 8

Studies 1 & 2: Descriptive statistics of judgements of harassment by scenario.

	Vocalisations		Invitations		Contact		Watching	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Study 1	3.94	1.18	3.76	1.11	4.18	0.93	2.98	1.21
Study 2	3.80	0.94	3.08	1.07	3.46	1.04	3.38	0.99

Behaviour type did impact recognition of harassment in study 1, $F(3, 195) = 22.49$, $p < .001$, and 2, $F(3, 294.18) = 11.29$, $p < .001$, as the contact and vocalisations behaviours were significantly more likely to be viewed as harassment than the invitations and watching behaviours.

A second linear mixed model was run to determine to what extent creepiness and other emotions undermined or facilitated that identification. Behaviour type and anger, disgust, fear, and creepiness were entered as predictors of identification of harassment. Table 9 reports the relationship the four emotions had with harassment. Fear did not influence identification of harassment in either study, and disgust only positively predicted identification in Study 2. Higher levels of anger, as expected, predicted greater identification of harassment in both studies. However, higher levels of creepiness also positively predicted recognition of harassment in both studies, and if anything were slightly stronger than anger, evidence against the hypothesis that creepiness inhibits identification of harassment.

Table 9

Studies 1 & 2: Emotions as predictors of harassment.

Emotion	Study	t	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	1	3.83***	255.37	0.18	0.09	0.28
	2	3.14**	362.38	0.11	0.04	0.18
Creepiness	1	3.24***	240.57	0.21	0.08	0.33
	2	3.75***	383.54	0.16	0.08	0.25
Disgust	1	1.37	255.78	0.07	-0.03	0.16
	2	3.34***	382.23	0.13	0.05	0.21
Fear	1	0.39	209.24	0.02	-0.06	0.09
	2	0.64	380.60	0.02	-0.04	0.80

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

Judgements of Gender

Finally, two mixed model analyses were carried out to examine how emotions influenced the extent to which the perpetrator and target of the harassment were perceived as typically male or female. Anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear were entered as predictors of perceptions of the gender of the perpetrator and target. Low numbers indicated that the participants thought the gender was more likely to be male, and higher numbers as more likely to be female, with a midpoint of 4. Overall, the perpetrator was more likely to be seen as male in study 1 ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.28$) and 2 ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.22$), and the target as more likely to be female (study 1: $M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.65$; study 2: $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.20$). One-sample t -tests were conducted again to test whether these means were significantly different from the midpoint and confirmed that they were ($p < .001$).

Anger, disgust, and fear did not have a significant association with judgements of gender for either the perpetrator or the target in study 1, $p > .337$, but interestingly, the more creepiness the participant reported, the more likely they were to say that they thought the perpetrator was male, $t(245.86) = -4.29$, $\gamma = -0.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.46, -0.17]$, and that the target was female, $t(243.59) = 3.39$, $\gamma = 0.27$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[0.11, 0.42]$. Anger and fear also did not affect judgements of either the perpetrator or target's gender, $p > .087$ in Study 2, but like Study 1, participants were more likely to assume the perpetrator was male and the target female. As before, the more creepiness the participant reported, the more likely they were to assume the perpetrator was male, $t(382.87) = -6.16$, $\gamma = -0.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.42, -0.22]$, and the target female, $t(383.85) = 2.73$, $\gamma = 0.14$, $p = .007$, 95% CI $[0.04, 0.25]$. Interestingly, the same pattern was found for disgust in this study (perp: $t(384.84) = -2.90$, $\gamma = -0.14$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[-0.23, -0.04]$; target: $t(383.24) = 2.40$, $\gamma = 0.11$, $p = .017$, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.20]$). This suggests that overall, creepy people are more likely to be assumed to be male, and to target women, consistent with the hypotheses.

3.2.3 Discussion

These experiments were carried out to explore the emotion of creepiness and how it relates to sexual harassment in the workplace or educational settings. It was expected that creepiness would behave in a similar way to fear and disgust, in that it would motivate avoidance and vigilance of ambiguous threats and inhibit labelling and reporting harassment. However, the results suggest that creepiness is positively related to identification of harassment and likelihood of confrontation on the individual level. Despite this, on a scenario level the behaviours that were rated as creepier were also less likely to be identified as harassment, and creepiness was also positively associated with avoidance. Still, this may be because those behaviours were more likely to inspire avoidance than other action tendencies.

The findings of these two studies provide initial evidence for the idea that creepiness can be aroused specifically by harassment behaviours. The results also support prior research which suggests that creepiness is an emotion triggered by ambiguous cues of threat (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016), as the behaviours which were less overtly threatening (e.g. watching vs direct contact) inspired greater levels of creepiness. Said prior research was also replicated by the finding that men are seen as more likely to be perpetrators of creepy behaviour, and women are more likely to be targets. Perhaps most importantly, judgements of creepiness did not impair or undermine identification of harassment; instead, the creepier a behaviour was rated, the more likely it was to be judged as harassment, contrary to the predictions. However, it is important to note that this trend on the scenario level could have been due to the non-systematic nature of scenario selection, an issue that the following studies rectified.

The relationship of creepiness to anger, disgust, and fear was also examined, and all three emotions were positively related to creepiness. This is perhaps less surprising when the harassment results are taken into consideration; if creepiness is positively associated with

identification of harassment, then it follows that it would also be positively related to anger as it is an approach-inspiring emotion. What is interesting is that creepiness did not follow either a solely avoidance- or confrontation-based response; it responded to both actions and related emotions equally. With regards to gender, the perpetrator was more likely to be perceived as male and their targets were more likely to be judged as female, as expected.

Further examination of these experiments revealed some limitations which will be addressed by further studies in this thesis. Firstly, as mentioned above, none of the behaviours in these studies were pre-tested for their obvious or subtle nature. As such, it is unclear whether they truly represented the ambiguous threats associated with creepiness.

Therefore, in later studies elements of creepiness were pre-tested to create vignettes comparing sexual versus non-sexual threats and also more and less direct forms of threat, allowing a test of whether creepiness is reduced under blatant threat. Additionally, this made it possible to determine whether workplace creepiness exclusively responds to subtle cues of sexual harassment, or if it is triggered by subtle nonsexual threats as well.

Secondly, it is important to address the issue that there is another emotion which could have acted as a potential confound: anxiety. The participants may have used creepiness as a proxy to describe their anxiety due to the simplicity of the measures. Thus, it is possible that the variance ascribed to creepiness may be due to anxiety. Alternatively, people who feel anxious are more likely to interpret a person or situation as a possible threat (Carleton, 2012), which may then increase how “creeped out” they feel. Therefore, the creepiness measures may have also measured anxiety, leading to confusion over how much creepiness versus anxiety influenced the participants’ responses.

When designing the next study, it became clear that only limited data could be gained from informal thematic analysis of response-boxes in an online survey so it was decided that the next study, reported in Chapter 4, would be fully qualitative and consist of semi-

structured interviews. It was determined that a student population would not be adequate for this study as the typical age of a student is skewed quite young, and some students have not had any work experience before coming to university. Therefore, only people with more than ten years work experience would be selected for the interviews, with the idea that such a sample should maximise the likelihood they will have had experience with creepy people in the workplace that they could draw from. Finally, given that the results of these studies provided contradictory results both in support of and against hypotheses 2 and 3, it was decided that the next quantitative experiment should replicate and extend these findings to provide a clearer examination of how creepiness is triggered in response to harassment. The studies that address this and the limitations discussed above can be seen in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Interviewing creepiness

In the first two studies, the results suggested that while creepiness is indeed related to harassment, it did not behave in the expected manner of inhibiting its identification and confrontation. As people often overestimate how they would respond in hypothetical scenarios (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005), this study attempted to elicit anecdotal responses with the goal of determining how the participants have actually responded in creepy harassment scenarios.

Additionally, there are a number of areas that were left unexplored in the previous studies: for example, the precise nature of the relationship creepiness has with other emotions, namely fear, disgust, and anger. This chapter therefore had the goal of addressing these areas as well as investigating spontaneous perceptions of creepiness. It is hoped that this will demonstrate the general public’s perception of creepiness, allowing for a well-rounded understanding of the emotion that is not entirely shaped by academic views.

4.2 The present study

The present study aimed to explore lived experiences with creepy people in the workplace and laypeople’s perspectives of what creepiness is. While focus groups may generate more discussions owing to their more collaborative nature, individual interviews tend to elicit a broader range of discussion points (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Due to this, as well as the potentially sensitive topics that could come to light when considering harassment, it was decided that individual interviews would be more appropriate for this investigation. Non-student professionals were selected as participants for this study, with multiple kinds of jobs represented (e.g. teachers, office workers). Detailed analyses of the interviews and coded responses are presented below.

4.2.1 Method

Participants & Ethics

Ten men and ten women were interviewed for this study. The participants were recruited through word of mouth, on the condition that they were not personally familiar with the interviewer. Once each interview was completed, the participants were asked if they knew of anyone else who would be willing to be interviewed, which accounted for approximately half of the participants. All the participants had worked for at least ten years, which allowed for a greater likelihood they had experience with creepy people. A variety of professions were represented, including teachers, retail workers, office administrators, and armed forces personnel.

Given the sensitive topics discussed in this study, a number of precautions were taken to make sure ethical procedures were followed. Every participant was given an information sheet on the study a week before the interviews took place and signed a consent form. The participants' anonymity was ensured with self-selected identifier codes, which were kept separate from the participants' names and other information. After the interviews, debrief forms were provided with crisis helplines and websites. As with all studies presented in this thesis, a full account of the proposed research was presented to the ethics committee at the University of Kent, and approval was received before the interviews took place. See Appendices B – D for copies of the information, consent, and debrief forms.

Materials & Procedure

The first question posed to all the participants was “*Can you recall a situation involving a creepy person in the workplace?*” This provided a good starting point to gain an initial perspective of each participant's understanding of creepiness and their most prominent experience. The first half of each interview focused on the events described by the participants, gaining more information on what in particular made the person's behaviour

creepy, what other emotions they felt in the situation, how they responded, and if the creepy person had a reputation of being creepy. The interviews were not overly scripted, leaving the interviewer with space to improvise and follow the participant where they led. However, there were some predetermined questions and prompts if the interviewee was struggling to expand on a point, or if they began to go off-topic. For example, the interviewer could ask how the participant behaved in response to the situation they described, with prompts such as “*Did your behaviour change over time?*”, “*Can you explain why you behaved that way?*”, and “*How do you feel about how you behaved?*”.

The second half of the interviews discussed each participant’s concept of creepiness – for example, how it was similar or different to fear and disgust, or times outside of the workplace they have felt creeped out. These topics were covered in all of the interviews, but fewer prompts were involved – the participants were given freedom to explain what they thought creepiness was in as much detail as they wanted. Once they had explained their opinions as much as they could, further questions were asked and prompts used to collect as much information as possible, in a similar vein to the prompts described above.

Another subject discussed in most of the interviews was the role gender played in their perceptions of creepiness, such as whether women could be as creepy as men, and the difference between men and women’s experience and awareness of creepiness. As above, some prompts were used to elicit more information from the participants, but this topic was not spontaneously mentioned in every interview.

See Appendix G for the full list of questions and prompts used in the interviews.

4.2.1.1 Development of a coding strategy

Once the study design had been finalised, the next step was to decide what kind of qualitative analysis would be used to explore the themes of the interviews. It is important to disclose which method of qualitative analysis would be used, as studies lacking this clarity

are difficult to relate to other research in the field (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Three of the most widely used forms of content analysis were investigated: Grounded Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and Thematic Analysis.

Grounded theory was first developed in the 1960s and is now a very established methodology in qualitative research (Birks & Mills, 2011), with several different forms (Charmaz, 2002). However, this approach was not considered suitable for this investigation, as using grounded theory requires simultaneous collection and analysis of the data, which allows the analysis to influence the ongoing data collection. Furthermore, when using grounded theory, the researcher should not engage with the literature prior to data analysis, to avoid influencing the analysis with preconceptions from existing research (Charmaz, 1996), which was obviously not possible in this case. Given these constraints, it was decided that grounded theory was inappropriate for this study.

Although IPA would be more appropriate for the data than grounded theory, it was similarly discounted in favour of thematic analysis. While IPA has a dual focus on the unique characteristics of individual participants and on patterns of meaning across participants, thematic analysis focuses mainly on those thematic patterns (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This allows for greater emphasis on the themes themselves when using thematic analysis, as opposed to giving equal or greater weight to the qualities of the participants themselves. Furthermore, IPA specifies the theoretical framework that should underpin the research, the types of questions that can be asked, and exactly how the data should be collected (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, using IPA does not allow for a great deal of freedom due to its more rigid nature.

Thematic analysis is the approach most suited for the present study for a number of reasons; for example, not only is it more theoretically flexible than both grounded theory and IPA, but it is also much more accessible to a researcher new to qualitative analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). Before beginning the analysis, the researcher should make decisions about six “questions” or key features of the analysis, which will be outlined below.

The first decision is what counts as a theme, and what size a theme should be. For this research, it was decided that a theme would be any concept that contributed to an understanding of what creepiness was or was inspired by, as long as it appeared in at least two of the interviews. The second question involves whether the researcher wants to explore the overall trends in the dataset or investigate one particular aspect in detail. As there is little research on creepiness, the preference for this analysis is to explore the overarching concepts.

Next, the researcher must decide whether the themes will be extracted inductively or theoretically. An inductive approach is similar to grounded theory as the themes are strongly linked to the data themselves, and is essentially a process of coding without fitting it into a pre-existing literature-based framework. In contrast, a theoretical thematic analysis often focuses around a specific research question and provides a detailed analysis of a smaller part of the data at the expense of a less rich investigation into the overall data. This chapter will use a primarily inductive approach for two reasons. First, while there is a great deal of research into sexual harassment, there is a dearth of available literature on creepiness in social and sexual situations. Therefore, there is no specific theory available to shape a theoretical analysis. Secondly, one of the major goals of this study is to form an understanding of creepiness influenced by lay-people as well as academics. Nabi (2002) highlights how laypeople often use disgust as a combination of the conceptual meanings of disgust and anger, a marked difference from how disgust is used in academic text. This difference is likely to also be present in any examination of creepiness, thus imposing a theoretical framework at this stage using academically developed emotion concepts would not be beneficial to the above goal.

The fourth decision asked during thematic analysis revolves around whether the themes would be identified at a semantic or latent level. Semantic content regards the explicit meaning of the data, staying at surface level with the researcher investigating only what has been overtly said or written. In contrast, latent content examines the underlying ideas that shape the data, including the influences of word choice and communication style of the participants. In essence, choosing between the two approaches is based on whether the interest lies in people's stated opinions or in what their statements reveal about their assumptions and social context. Analysing the data at the latent level would likely create a similar problem to that discussed above, where the themes may be influenced by less objective notions of creepiness without taking the layperson's view into account. Therefore, the data will be evaluated at the semantic level to prevent misconceptions about creepiness becoming the centre of the analysis.

Following this, the researcher must decide whether to focus on essentialist or constructivist analysis. Essentialist (or realist) analysis explores the data in a straightforward manner, assuming a one-way relationship between the participants' experience and the language they use, in essence taking the data at face value. On the other hand, constructivist analysis assumes that the participants' experience is not inherent to the individual and is instead informed by social structure. This means that a constructivist approach is closely related to latent level analysis and focuses more on sociocultural contexts and does not explore individual psychologies. Once again, as this chapter is exploratory in nature, an essentialist approach will be applied as opposed to attempting a constructivist analysis of creepiness with very little theoretical background.

Finally, when conducting qualitative analysis, it is important to recognise the three main questions each stage of thematic analysis asks: the overall research question, the actual or narrow question, and the overarching question which guides the coding and analysis of the data. Here, the overall research question asks what causes the experience of creepiness

relevant to harassment. The actual questions presented to the participants involved the specific experiences they had with creepiness and their perceptions of it as an emotion. Lastly, the overarching questions of the thematic analysis was what the specific elicitors of creepiness were, how people responded to creepiness, and how creepiness related to other emotions. Now the major questions of thematic analysis have been answered, the next section of this chapter will cover the major steps involved.

4.2.1.2 Processes of thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that once the above decisions have been made, thematic analysis consists of six major steps, the first of which concerns the researcher's familiarisation with the content of the dataset. The main route of familiarisation here was transcribing the data and making notes on initial themes and ideas for codes. It should be noted that the transcription did not use the Jefferson method, which involves not just the transcription of spoken words, but also the use of different symbols to indicate the temporal relation between the words (e.g., length of time a pause lasts), aspects of speech delivery such as changes in pitch, volume, tempo, degrees of emphasis on words, and voice quality, as well as specific ways of representing non-speaking activities (e.g., sighing, laughing, crying) (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012).

Given that researchers have argued that the complexity of this method is not essential if conversation is not the object of study (DuBois, 1991; Ochs, 1979), and that thematic analysis does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as other forms of analysis, like conversation, discourse, or narrative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), an "orthographic" approach was taken to the transcription. This creates a rigorous and thorough verbatim account of all verbal and nonverbal utterances, without the use of a specific transcription system (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite this, as transcription is one of the most important parts of this kind of qualitative analysis (Bird, 2005), it is vital to ensure that the transcript is as "true" to its spoken form as possible, as punctuation can greatly alter the meaning of the

data (Poland, 2002). Thus, the transcripts were re-read to ensure that there were no mistakes, and that no information was lost.

The second step of thematic analysis is to generate initial codes from the dataset. While this stage can be done by hand, in this case computer software was used, namely NVivo, one of the best programs for this purpose (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). Ryan and Bernard (2003) outlined several ways to extract codes, and the “constant comparison” method was selected as the best way to proceed, where each important quote is evaluated to determine how similar or different it was to the ones before it. Importantly, the same extract can be coded multiple times to maintain as much depth from the data as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third step is to search for themes, re-focusing the analysis at the broader level. At this point, the goal is to reflect on the relationship between the codes. “Levels” of themes can also begin to develop here, i.e. main overarching themes and sub-themes within them. This process was applied to all codes extracted in the previous step. As few codes as possible should be left unaccounted for, and to this end a “miscellaneous” theme was created to temporarily contain the codes that did not fit into the main themes.

Step four involves reviewing the themes created in step three. This is composed of two phases: reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts, and then at the level of the entire dataset. First, all the extracts for each theme were examined, making sure that they formed a coherent pattern. In cases where no pattern was discerned after this review or where two themes were too similar, said themes were broken down into separate themes or merged into one. This creates what Clarke and Braun (2006) refer to as a “thematic map”. Then, in phase two, the validity of each theme was evaluated and were refined if necessary, and any additional codes that were missed in earlier code stages were included.

Step five is to define and name the themes by identifying the essence of what each one is about. This step determines what interesting aspect of the data each theme captures and what it contributes to the discussion, but also identifies what the theme does *not* cover.

The final step is the presentation of the extracted codes, both early and refined themes, and discussion of the final thematic concepts. The full report on these analyses is therefore presented below.

4.2.2 Results

4.2.2.1 Initial code extraction

The documents with the interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo and were then analysed separately to extract initial codes and common themes. Each individual line was examined for new content, which was then highlighted and linked to previous similar codes. Every interview was read multiple times to ensure that no details were missed.

Initial extraction resulted in 98 codes. These codes were then examined for potential redundancies, and any duplicate codes were removed. After this, the remainder were organised into loose categories to begin a basic analysis. At this stage, there were 75 codes across 11 categories. Each category contained between two and 13 items. The full text of these codes can be found in Table 10.

Table 10

Codes derived from interviews, organised by category.

Category	Code
Creepy actions	Cornering you Drugs Fascination with children Inflicting their views on you Manipulation Overfamiliarity Recording someone Sexual intent Stalking Threatening you / subtle hostility Unusual topics of social interaction Violating social norms Watching you
Creepy non-actions	Ambiguity Appearance Body language Having power over you Lack of control over their behaviour Neurodivergence Poor hygiene Strangers are more creepy Superiority complex Unpredictability
What creepiness feels like	Like anxiety Like disgust Like fear Skin crawling Gut feeling / instinct / “vibes” Something vaguely wrong Vulnerability
Responses to creepiness	Avoidance Confrontation Ignore Limit time with the creep “Manage” creeps, i.e., mitigate the harm they do Reporting Unsure how to respond Vigilance Warn others
Opinions on what creepiness is	A form of anxiety Fear of the unknown

	Related to disgust Perception of a singular definition of creepiness It doesn't exist
How to label creepiness	As a "creep" Different types of creepiness use the same word Different generations use the word differently
Purposefulness	Can be accidentally creepy/ unaware they are a creep Creepiness can't be changed Some people are creepy on purpose Targets of creepiness are specifically chosen
Time	Anticipation of a future event Change in what creeps you out over time Creepiness escalates over time Reactions to creepiness can change over time Realise they were creepy only afterwards
Gender	Different genders see creepiness differently Different genders are creepy differently Women are crazy, not creepy
Work	Creepy people behave differently at work It is safer at work when meeting a creep Easier to report creepiness at work
Miscellaneous	Famous examples of creeps, e.g., Jimmy Saville, Michael Jackson, some Conservative MPs Impact of #MeToo

4.2.2.2 Extracted categories

The first two categories are concerned with what triggers feelings of creepiness, separated into specific actions and then personal traits. These range from overtly harmful behaviours such as stalking and recording someone, as well as some that would not be considered harmful, like choosing unusual conversation topics. The personal traits mainly revolved around either the physicality of the individual (e.g. cues to poor hygiene or unattractiveness), or their uncontrollability – either as an unpredictable person, or as someone who holds power over the interviewee.

The next category involved what being creeped out felt like for the participants. Some used other emotions to describe the sensation, like anxiety or fear, whereas others used analogies that have been described in previous chapters, such as skin-crawling. A common theme was that being creeped out was instinctual; the participants felt like *something* was wrong that they could not place. Some participants expressed that they would feel creeped out without knowing why, which would cause the sensation of something “being off”, and then once they realised what the trigger was, they would then feel explicitly creeped out, which would manifest as a skin-crawling sensation or a chill.

Another category drawn from the data regards responses to creepiness and creepy feelings. As expected, avoidance was commonly mentioned, as were some instances of confronting, ignoring, or reporting the creep. Some other strategies were also discussed, like warning others and maintaining vigilance. Perhaps the most interesting response was the idea of “managing” the creep, where it was seen as the workplace’s responsibility to limit the time others spend with them and mitigate the harm they caused, but carefully avoiding anything resembling punishment.

The next two categories concerned what participants believed creepiness was and how it should be labelled. While some did not believe it existed at all, there was a general consensus that creepiness was related to fear of the unknown. This unknown could take several forms, such as not being able to predict someone’s behaviour, or not knowing what they were thinking and thus being unable to protect yourself. Several participants believed there was a singular definition of creepiness that they could not articulate, but that they “just knew” when something was or was not creepy.

In terms of labels, the word “creep” was used frequently, but interpretations of it differed. Where some participants took being a creep as synonymous with being a pervert, others believed it was more akin to “sucking up”, i.e. “creeping up to someone”. This was

credited to generational differences, in that someone of an older generation would be more likely to use the word in response to flattery, whereas a younger person would see it as a label for antisocial behaviour.

The next category involves the intention of the creeps. While some participants reported opinions similar to what has been found in previous studies, that creepy people do not know they are creeps and that they cannot change, others believed that some people choose to be creepy because it confers some kind of benefit to them, such as intimidation. Additionally, many responses highlighted that creeps have a specific kind of person they would target, normally younger and female, which implies intentionality – if they truly could not help their behaviour, they would behave in the same creepy way towards everyone, not target a certain demographic.

The relevance of time was also frequently mentioned. Comments were made about the potential for creepy behaviour to escalate, or that people felt creeped out by the potential for something worse to happen in the future. Conversely, some participants reported that their opinion of behaviours or people they initially considered to be creepy changed when they got to know the person, as did the way they responded to the creepiness. However, in some cases it was reported that they only realised a person was creepy days or weeks after the event. This included times where the participant described a scenario and through the course of describing it realised that the situation was creepy, or the person involved was a creep.

Gender was the next important category, with three main points raised regarding it. The first is that different genders view and experience creepiness differently; for example, women are more likely to both be targeted by creeps and also more likely to identify a person or situation as creepy. In a similar vein, a person's gender influences how creepy they are perceived to be; men are more likely to be seen as creepy than women, even if their behaviour is the same. Some participants did not believe that women could be creepy at all,

and some explained that while women were not creepy, they were instead “crazy”, implying that the same behaviour viewed through the lens of gender changed the word used to describe it.

The penultimate category was the relevance of the workplace environment. Creepy people may behave differently at work than they do outside of it, i.e. they may modify their creepy behaviour to avoid any potential repercussions. When this is not the case, then it is easier to respond to creepy people at work, as there are often specific reporting procedures that can be utilised to deal with harassment or with someone creating a hostile work environment. Furthermore, several participants disclosed that they felt safer at work when they met a creep, as they were less likely to be harmed in a public setting than if they met the same person in a park or at a pub.

Finally, there was a “miscellaneous” category, which involved examples of famous people the participants believed were creepy. These examples were often used to illustrate the actions and traits highlighted in the first two categories, but also to demonstrate cases where it was revealed that a celebrity was a predator but the participants always knew something was “off about them” (e.g. Jimmy Saville). #MeToo was also mentioned in some cases, mainly in the context of how sexual harassment has been brought to the forefront of people’s minds, and thus the participants are more likely to identify subtle behaviours as creepiness.

4.2.2.3 Initial search for themes

After the codes described above had been extracted, a post-it was written for each code to begin the initial search for themes. These were then physically arranged into clusters, where those codes that were semantically similar were next to each other, and those that were different were clearly set apart. Larger post-its were inserted to represent themes once this was completed.

Following this, a thematic map (Figure 1) was created to show those themes related to each other. At this point, the map consisted of 11 major themes and seven subthemes. The miscellaneous codes were given their own category so they could be represented without interfering with the overall thematic map.

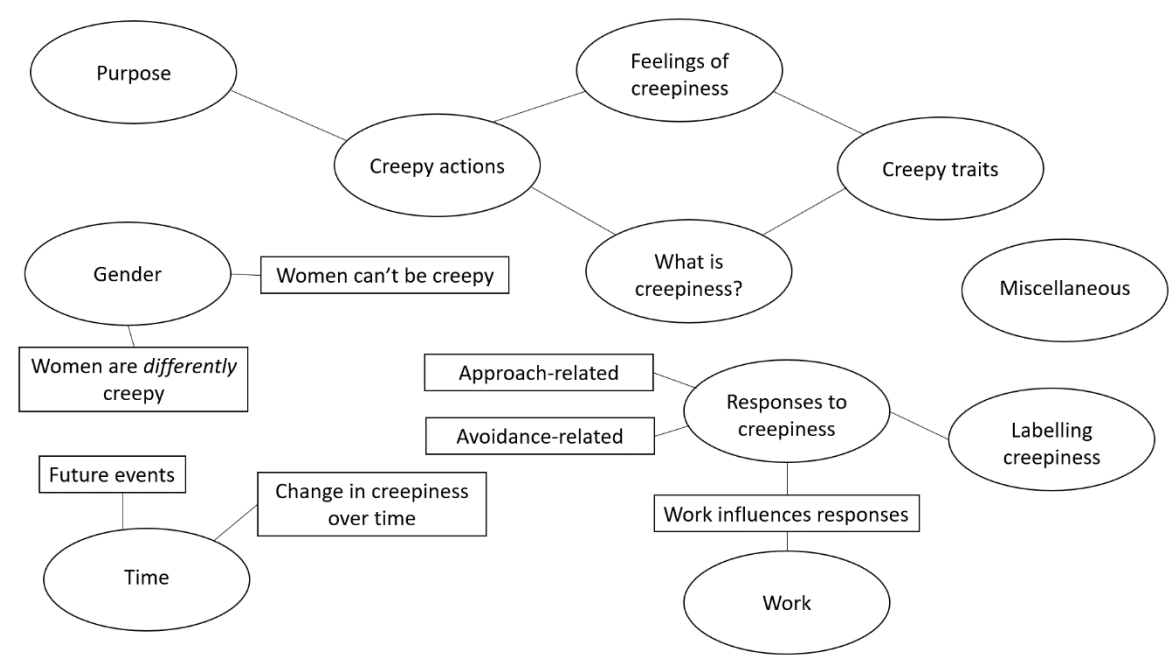


Figure 1. Initial map of themes showing 11 major themes and 7 sub-themes.

Once this was completed, the thematic map was applied to the extracted data to examine its fit and further develop it. It was determined that this map did not adequately fit the data, so the analysis was continued. This resulted in the development of the map presented below (Figure 2), composed of five major themes, with 17 sub-themes and 21 components of sub-themes. These themes are described in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

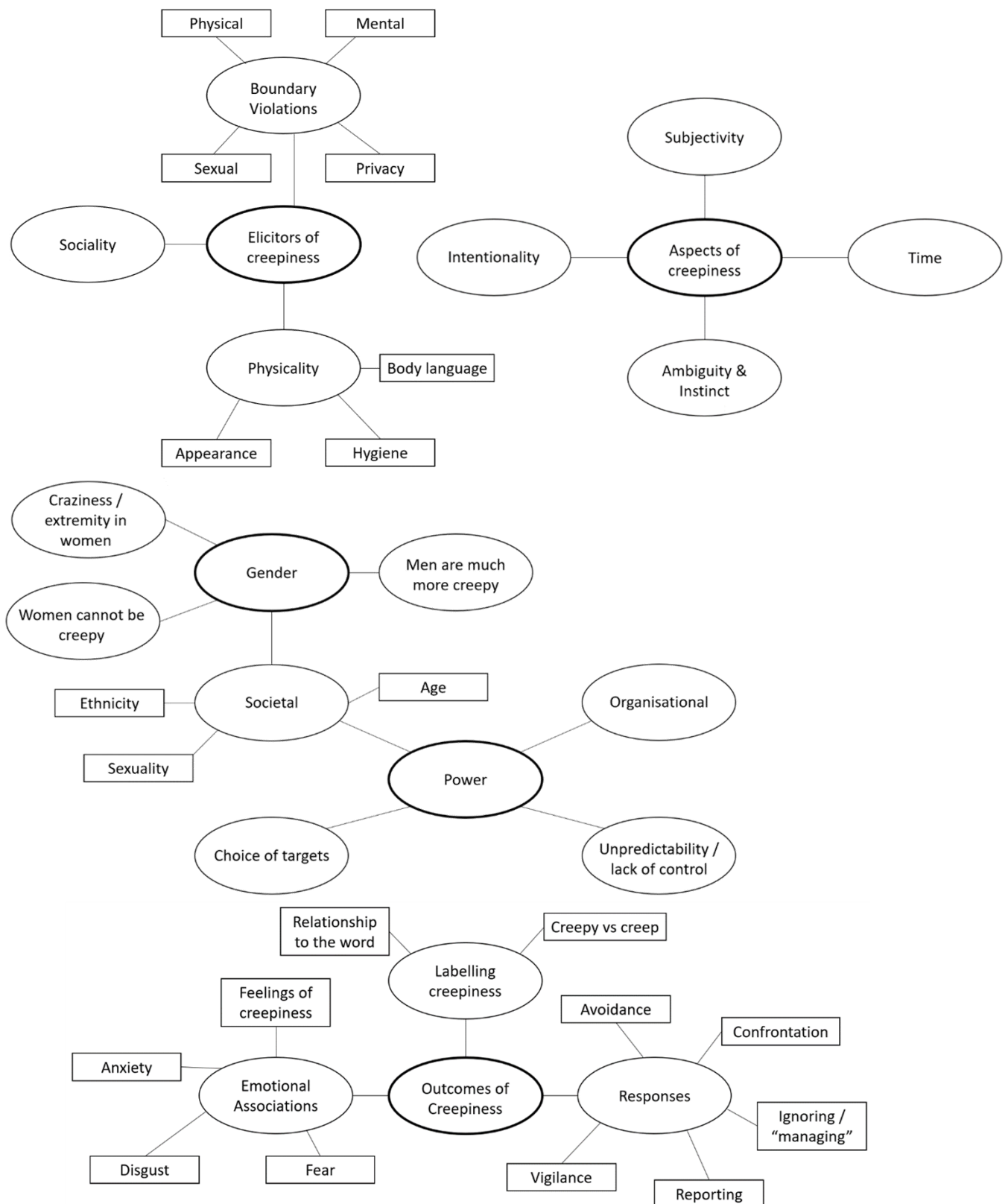


Figure 2. Final thematic map showing 5 major themes, 17 sub-themes, and 21 components of sub-themes.

4.2.2.4 Description of extracted themes

What triggers creepiness?

The first of the major themes extracted from the dataset was “Elicitors of creepiness”. When the participants were asked what creeped them out about the person in the scenario they described, this was able to be separated into three sub-themes: sociality, physicality, and boundary violations. Sociality took a variety of different forms, such as unexpected hostility, switching rapidly from antagonistic to pleasant, or not being straightforward and acting overly guarded. Another aspect that many people touched upon was difficulties with social interaction; for example, a person not taking a hint, conversing with them and feeling that something was not quite right, or a general lack of social skills. This was often linked to neurodivergence (or the perception of such) including ASD, mental disabilities, or schizophrenia. Obviously, this can be problematic and stigmatising for neurodivergent individuals, especially when considering that some participants reported knowing that someone they found creepy had a diagnosis did not change their opinion on their creepiness.

“I think as I got to know the person, and understood more about them, and their particular situation, their particular characteristics, and although unconfirmed their particular diagnosis, it made me understand why that person was the way they was. It didn’t necessarily make that person any less creepy in certain situations.”

Physicality contained several clearly distinguishable components: appearance, hygiene, and body language. Interestingly, the appearance component was not limited to a discussion of what a creepy person looks like, but also what they definitely do *not* look like. Creepy people, it was decided, look “odd” in some way – they style their hair in an unflattering way, or their features are strangely proportioned. There did not appear to be a distinction between characteristics under the control of the creep or not; hairstyles or clothing

can be changed, but not the arrangement of someone's features. Attractiveness did also play a role in the interviews, as it was almost unanimously agreed that creepy people were more likely to be unattractive, but that it was not a necessity. Lack of adherence to gender roles was also occasionally mentioned, such as long hair on men. A creepy "look" was further described as an indicator of the awareness the creep had of their creepy status:

"It's easier for people who look creepy to know that they look creepy, than people who behave creepy to know that they're behaving creepy."

Bodily hygiene was also considered to be a very important elicitor of creepiness. Greasy hair, an offensive odour, or visible dirt were strong indicators that said person was a creep, which was also occasionally linked to breaking social norms of hygiene. On the other hand, body language was a slightly more nebulous component; several participants reported that a creepy person moved "strangely" or did not physically react to someone in an expected way making it difficult to read them, but it was difficult to narrow that down to any specific creepy movement.

The final subtheme was boundary violations, which contained four components describing different kinds of boundary violations: physical, sexual, mental, and privacy. Physical violations included standing too close or touching in a non-obviously-sexual way (e.g. hands on the shoulders). Sexual violations contained both touching in an obviously sexual way, staring at a participant's breasts, or overtly sexual comments. Some participants had experience in the service industry several decades prior and had many examples of creepy customers:

"When you went past him to collect glasses or anything he'd always just put his hand on your shoulder and give it a squeeze, or put his hand behind your back to guide you along... then I found out, oh 30 years later, that he was actually a

paedophile and he's now in prison. So he was definitely creepy, I was right, there was something creepy about him."

Often, these physical and sexual violations would combine in a single example:

"I have a colleague who has tattoos in certain places, who believes it's acceptable to show them to both myself and a couple of my colleagues, but only in the lift, or in a stationary cupboard...the creepiness for me was the fact that it was done in an enclosed area where I had no means of getting out, as well as the level of discomfort that it caused me."

Mental violations were harder to define, but included examples of emotional manipulation, or cruel comments veering close to bullying. Importantly, what made these comments creepy is that they very rarely crossed the line into actionable harassment.

"He was like a wolf in sheep's clothing is the best way to describe it...he'd be throwing stuff down the desk and I'm like what the fuck, what is going on here? It got that bad that I thought he was actually trying to make me leave, and I wouldn't. So I braved it, I did, and what got me was out of that office, [he was the] nicest guy. But he also gave me the creeps."

Finally, privacy violations encompassed stalking and purchasing unsolicited gifts, but also knowing too much about the participant, indicating that they had investigated them online. This also included over-familiarity from acquaintances, illustrated by the extract below:

"So I was lying in bed ill, and I heard voices downstairs, so I knew the other two women were round, and then I heard my wife disappear into the kitchen. The next thing I knew this other woman [from work] was in our bedroom to say hello to me. Now I don't know about you, but it doesn't matter how close the friends are, I

would not think about going upstairs into someone's bedroom, knowing someone's there, without asking if it's alright if I pop up and say hello."

What are the intrinsic elements of creepiness?

The second major theme was labelled "Aspects of creepiness", which covered those characteristics the participants considered to be inherent to the elicitation or experience of creepiness that were not limited to an individual's behaviour or traits. This theme contained four sub-themes of intentionality, subjectivity, ambiguity, and time. Intentionality covered both whether the person was deliberately creepy or not, but also whether they did or could change once they became aware of their creepiness. One man gave an example of one way they try to minimise their own potential creepiness:

"...maybe they don't realise how creepy that can be. I'll give an example. I'm a big man, I'm a tall man, I know when I walk into a room that I've got...I could walk into a room and want to dominate physically the space, but if I'm doing that I'm doing that consciously. Maybe some people don't realise how imposing their physicality is."

The participants agreed that if a creepy person knew they were creepy and could not change, their creepiness lessened because it was outside of their control, but if they made no attempt to change when it was possible, their creepiness increased.

"...where you have somebody who is aware that they're doing, they're behaving in a way to make you feel uncomfortable, then it's a power struggle thing, a control. I've had situations where people are trying to manipulate it for dominance-type thing, and act, perhaps even deliberately acting creepy."

Subjectivity revolved around how every participant had their own threshold for what they considered to be creepy. Some participants had a higher tolerance level of creepy

differences, whereas others reported that they found it harder to manage their anxiety or were disgusted by small things they did not think would affect others in the same way. One participant said that he did not experience creepiness himself but could identify people that would creep out his wife. Familiarity also played a role in this component, where getting to know someone decreased how creepy the participant thought they were:

“Sometimes you see someone and you think they’re a bit creepy and then you find out more about them and that’s dispelled. Coming up with, there’s [a male MP] who recently went in for leadership of the Tory party and I think creepy could be a term when first seeing him, strange... not a nice way to judge people I suppose, but we’ve been told to be honest. And then he gets more exposure on the television and you see more of him. He still has a different appearance, but possibly the creepiness is overtaken by listening to his words and his thoughts and what’s going on in his mind, and the creepiness gives way to just looking a bit different.”

The next component is instinct and ambiguity. Many participants described creepiness as a gut instinct or a “spider-sense” that is triggered when something is not quite right. Some responses reiterated the finding from previous chapters that creepiness has to have an element of uncertainty and cannot be direct or obvious. This often takes the form of not being sure what makes a person “off”, which then prompts an instinctive feeling of creepiness. Here, creepiness is conceptualised as a gut instinct triggered by ambiguity or uncertainty.

“Creepiness is I think a gut instinct where there’s something about them that just makes me feel creepy...something doesn’t feel right, the way they react to you or the way they behave would be very different, very strange.”

“When I got creeped out walking from the train station it wasn’t because I thought I was about to get jumped and humped – sorry that’s an appalling

phrase! I wasn't concerned about that, but you can't just stop and look over your shoulder to just clearly make out what was going on. So it's the uncertainty."

Lastly, time was considered to have a key role in the elicitation of creepiness. This took two different forms. Firstly, there is anticipation; creepy behaviour is understood as an antecedent to something worse happening – it is the precursor to an overtly scary situation. Secondly, there is the escalation itself, where creepy behaviour increases until it reaches a concrete threat. Even if this intensification has not yet begun, the participants stated that they always had the knowledge of the potential for escalation: "Something that's creepy, it's building, there's the anticipation and then it presents itself."

Additionally, while not directly related to the experience of creepiness, several participants mentioned how it was much easier to deal with creepiness now than it was decades ago.

"Going back a long way there wasn't so much of this you mustn't touch people, it was just a thing that people put up with...It was sort of the 80s, 90s, and things were different whatever anyone says. Things were different, probably him pinching her bum was nothing to him."

How does creepiness relate to power?

"Power takes away your freedom to escape, that person having superiority over you or the power of cornering you in a physical location... I felt threatened by their power, because once somebody has a power level above yours they can make your life miserable if they so choose and they can usually get away with it."

The third major theme was that of power, which came from several directions. The first was, unsurprisingly, organisational power. The participants were more likely to find their bosses to be creepy, and more likely to be targeted by creeps who were in some way above

them in the organisation. In fact, some participants reported that they would never feel creeped out by a person who did not have any power over them:

“I think anyone on my same level I could handle and either disregard or sort out any issues that create creepiness. Whereas with a manager you’re less able to do that if they’re not perceptive to anyone challenging them.”

Interestingly, the organisational power was not limited to the boss-colleague-subordinate structure within any given company, but included situations where participants worked as an outside contractor to the business and were technically in a higher position but were perceived as being lower due to their outside status.

This links to the second and third subthemes, which are societal power and choice of targets. The participants agreed creeps targeted those who had less power than them, either reflected in the organisational hierarchy or people with minority ethnicities or sexualities. Age was also frequently mentioned, as creeps were more likely to be older targeting younger people, although some participants had experiences with creeps younger than them. As expected, gender also played an important role in target choice and is a theme in itself that will be discussed later on in the section. The participants all believed that women would be targeted by creeps far more than men, both as a result of lesser societal power but also due to sexism. However, in cases where men were targeted by women, the participants believed that men would not feel creepiness to the same degree.

“...men are more creepy in women’s eyes, and women can be more creepy in men’s eyes, but that men are less affected by the creepiness. Maybe because of the kind of male/female power that still exists.”

The final subtheme of power is the participants’ lack of control in response to creepy people. Some responses highlighted how a creep having power over them took away their

freedom to escape, and others reported that not knowing what a creepy person might do and thus predict them negatively impacted their own sense of control.

“I didn’t know how to behave, I didn’t know how to respond in their presence. And I think that’s where perhaps the definition in my mind of creepiness might come from, because it was a feeling that I had of I don’t know how to handle this. Here’s a particular relationship, we’re having to talk to each other, and I don’t want to be rude but on the other hand I’ve got no idea how, I don’t know what’s going to happen and I can’t control it.”

What role does gender play in creepiness?

As mentioned above, the fourth theme is gender, which presented a diverse range of perspectives. First, the participants believed there were gender differences in who could be creepy. Unsurprisingly, all participants reported that men were far creepier as a whole, although some said that this could be because creepiness is expected from men which makes it easier to identify.

“There is a dividing line between men and women. Women aren’t supposed to do things like that... men are, it’s expected. Are and expected...couldn’t get more different words if you tried. No, it’s, when it’s a woman who does it it’s more surprising.”

However, when it came to creepy women, opinions were fiercely divided. Some believed that women were creepy in a different way and had to have a sexual angle to be considered, which may then lead their behaviour to be desirable for men and creepy for women.

“She was a little bit touchy-feely, and was like I don’t really want to kiss you hug you or anything like that, and that to me was creepy. You have to bear in mind

that I work largely with male colleagues...they perhaps might have appreciated the attention and the closeness. What I thought was horrifically creepy they might have been quite flattered about."

Conversely, some believed that women could not be creepy at all - an opinion that was not limited to the men who were interviewed, demonstrated by one woman's quote below:

"I think women can unnerve you a little bit, but I don't find them creepy. I'm thinking of a girl who used to work in my team who you kind of felt had a bit of a dark side to her or could potentially be a bit dangerous if she was crossed, or I don't know...she'd done research into psychopaths, sociopaths and all these different things. I feel like she had quite a dark side to her, and actually she could be a threat if you crossed her. I didn't find her creepy, but there was an awareness that you would need to watch her and be careful around her."

Interestingly, several participants in addition to the woman above reported that whenever they had found a woman creepy, they had gone above and beyond what would normally creep them out if the woman had been a man. For example, one participant did not feel creeped out by a woman living in her house until she escalated to theft of her children's belongings and faking a burglary of the family home, and it was only when looking back on her earlier behaviour that the participant felt creeped out.

"...it crept up on me that something wasn't right. Then we challenged her on it, we were getting quite freaked by this, suddenly clicked that she was involved in all this and I was fearful for my children, I was fearful for us, and the dog. I thought if this has escalated to this point, what's she going to do next. Is she going to set fire to the house? Is she going to kill the dog, poison the dog or whatever? I'm using the term creepy because it crept up, it crept into my heart what the hell was going on."

One analogy brought up by some of the participants was that where a man is creepy, a woman is instead crazy. Therefore, it appears there are three camps when it comes to creepy women; first: they cannot be creepy at all; second: they can be just as creepy as men but in a different way; and third: to be considered creepy, they must behave more drastically than a man.

Previous research has often highlighted how women are more likely to experience creepiness than men, and these interviews also bore this out:

“I’m not sure what would creep a man out. I’m sure they do get creeped out, but I expect their tolerance has a higher limit. You hear women talking about, saying he’s given me the creeps, but I’ve never heard them say a woman’s given me the creeps, it’s always been a man. So maybe as a woman it is that gut instinct...naturally you’re not typically stronger than a man, so maybe there’s something in us that makes us go okay I need to be aware, it’s a fight or flight kind of thing and something’s not quite right here. Whereas men maybe don’t need that as much as women.”

In a similar vein to how some participants believed that a woman had to go to greater lengths to be considered creepy, some also men reported that for them to be creeped out there had to be a threat of some kind present:

“I don’t get creeped out very easily. I think I’m too long in the tooth and can see through most things... I think when I was a younger man because I was serving when the IRA was so prevalent then anything to do with terrorism was quite high up on the list of very easily freaking out from... but I was always on the lookout for people watching me. And I think everyone who was in the armed forces at the time was exactly the same because it wasn’t a great period. I think I missed two bombs, which I was quite pleased about. So yeah, we were always constantly, it’s

just that feeling of unease, you just get the feeling and then your awareness sense increase.”

It can be concluded from these extracts that gender strongly influences both who can be creepy, who can be creeped out, and who is targeted by creeps.

What happens in response to creepiness?

The fifth and final major theme was defined as “Outcomes of creepiness” with three subthemes. First was emotional associations, referring to both how the participants experienced creepiness and also what other emotions they connected with creepiness. Feeling creeped out was described as a feeling of anticipation that continues to build, an instinct that something is wrong, your skin crawling, and a sense of unease. The participants often used examples of how other emotions felt to explain how creepiness was different; as expected, the main emotions compared were fear, disgust, and anxiety. This can be illustrated in an example from one man’s interview:

“I think feeling creepy, something that makes you feel creepy is where you feel slightly uneasy, you can’t quite put your finger on it. Maybe it’s your instincts kicking in and saying there’s something not quite right there, something doesn’t add up. Whereas with fear I think that you have, you’ve generally located, you generally know what’s making you feel scared. For instance, I don’t like spiders. If there was a spider in the room, a big spider, if there was a tarantula in this room, I would not be here. But if there was something that was a bit creepy in the room, like a spiderweb...I might go oh there’s a lot of spiderwebs in here, hmm is there a spider. If there wasn’t a spider then I’d be fine, but if I located a spider then I wouldn’t be fine. So that’s the difference.”

The physical sensations for all three emotions were also reported as markedly different from creepiness. Fear makes your hair stand on end and your pulse quicken. Disgust

lends itself to nausea and anxiety makes you feel lightheaded and weak. A key theme here is that these emotions are described as far more physical than creepiness – there are very clear physical symptoms that lend themselves to the experience of the emotion, but with creepiness, the sensations are either not present or extremely muted; one participant described creepiness as a much more “cerebral” emotion than others.

This is not to say that creepiness is definitively separate from experiencing these other emotions, as many participants said that creepiness can transform into other emotions once some kind of threshold has been met. While fear was described as more substantial than creepiness and easier to define, as there is a definite thing to be afraid of, creepiness can turn into fear once the subtle threat turns into an unambiguous one, as demonstrated below:

“I think the difference with that would be something more deliberate or obvious in terms of motivation. That’s what I would use as the definition between the two. So for example, if I’m at my desk and I’m working, and someone comes up to talk to me and they put their hands on my shoulders. That’s creepy. If they put their hands on my shoulders and they told me they watched me have a shower that morning, that becomes fear because there’s a clear definite motivation there. The hands on the shoulder initially could be like great, I’m working with someone else who doesn’t understand social boundaries. The fear comes from when someone says something deliberately malicious, or there’s a clear motivation there. That to me is the distinction between the two.”

Like fear, participants reported that disgust can result from creepiness when it escalates, and several participants reported that there had to be a sexual element present.

“Disgusting is a much more tangible definition. And if he [Donald Trump] is caught when his lapel mike is still on talking to his mates about groping some women, and how he loved it and etcetera, then that’s disgusting... It’s not creepy

because it's an outright demonstration of something that has been done.

Sometimes creepiness is the unknown, what you might do, or what might happen, unknown as to how mad they're going to be."

Creepiness could also lead to anxiety when it has been present for a long time, although it is important to note that some participants believed that creepiness was in fact a form of anxiety. The overall impression was that creepiness and anxiety overlap more than creepiness does with disgust, and fear places somewhere in the middle.

"Now they are similar, but anxiety is about more, I think with anxiety you've got something to be anxious about that you can define. Creepiness I would say is the uncertainty, creepiness is an anxiety but it's an anxiety about something that you can't quite, the cause of the anxiety is that's you don't know what it is...if I had to draw a Venn diagram of it, creepiness is a subset of anxiety."

Finally, some female participants mentioned feeling guilty after they had encountered a creep. This was mainly centred around whether they thought that something *they* had done had triggered the creepy advance, and therefore whether they were truly at fault, not the creep.

"I felt guilty, did I do anything to make him behave that way, I'm really sure I didn't. What on earth made him think that [sexual advance] was a good idea, it clearly wasn't. I was creeped out completely by it."

The second subtheme is responses to creepiness. Avoidance was frequently mentioned, where participants would make sure their way to a door was clear when encountering a creep, make an effort never to be alone with a creep, and change their route if they saw a creep approaching.

“I would create a healthy distance and I probably wouldn’t put myself in a situation where I was working alone with them... if I saw him walking down this corridor for instance, and I knew I had to walk down that corridor, I’d walk the other way.”

Confrontation was also brought up, mainly by the male participants. Several participants mentioned that if their experience had happened in the present day they would choose to confront, but when the incident occurred, they avoided or ignored the creep. In cases where women chose to confront it was often done to prevent escalation of the situation.

“I had to report him. I had to. I really had to. First time in my whole working life I’d had to do anything like that, because I can’t teach my children one thing and then not do it myself...and I wouldn’t want that [the situation getting worse] to happen. I thought if I could deal with this, if I could sort it out, then hopefully it will stop.”

Reporting followed similar lines to direct confrontation, in that some participants would only report post-escalation or after a specific incident had occurred. It was acknowledged that in recent years it has become far easier to report any incidents at work, credit for which was mainly given to social justice movements such as #MeToo.

“With all the things like #MeToo I think there’s much more of a voice for people if you end up in that situation...there’s a much more raised awareness of it, and therefore if you don’t mention things, if you do mention things then companies and places don’t want to be seen as not reacting so it means that if someone does voice it up, and if they’re someone who doesn’t normally voice things up especially, then I think that would be more listened to.”

However, the reporting response appeared to be tempered by fear of making the workplace awkward, or because the creepy behaviour did not appear to be bad enough to

warrant bringing it up to a manager. Ignoring the creep was also a commonly reported strategy, where the participant would minimise their interactions as much as possible. This also occurred in some cases where a participant knew a person was a creep, but because he had not done anything to *them*, they preferred to ignore it.

“Someone here [company, office-based] actually I also find a bit creepy, in their sort of sexual way with the women... he’s very, he’ll turn anything into an innuendo, he obviously likes the ladies, he kind of flirts but in a, I look at him and go he’s creepy... he’s a nice guy, I just know, I’ve just clocked him. I just know that he’s a bit of a sex pest. He hasn’t done anything, nothing to me, I just know that he’s just more over that side than most people.”

A key difference here is that this person was creepy and was harassing women, but as it was not directly affecting the participant, they chose to ignore it. Perhaps more worryingly, several participants described situations where once they had reported a creep, the person they had reported it to ignored it. For example, male bosses were considered to not be very good at dealing with interpersonal problems compared to female bosses and would rather have a “quiet word” with the creep than address the root problem. This was especially the case for women in a male-dominated profession.

“I said to my boss about it, can you have a word with him because he’s driving me mad and I’m trying to concentrate.... I find male bosses aren’t very good at dealing with problems so he didn’t say anything...but again working in that environment with all men and you’re a woman, most of them were absolutely fine, all of the people I worked with were fine, never had any problems with them, but you do feel that you can’t complain because there’s only three of you. Typical woman, she’s moaning, you know.”

Some managers who were interviewed expressed a desire to avoid putting a known creep in a customer-facing role, or that it was important for colleagues to flag up creepy behaviour to new hires. This was mainly because they felt it was important to minimise conflict in the workplace – including conflict that would result from harsher measures in response to creepiness.

“I think some people can be misunderstood quite quickly in the workplace. I think with new people then that’s sometimes the job of other people in the workplace, if the person isn’t a major problem, then I think it’s important [for other people] to flag things up... involving the other person could make a situation more awkward. More complicated than it is in the first place.”

Unfortunately, some participants reported that this approach led to exacerbation of the problem as the other employees felt as though their problems were being disregarded, and that the onus was on them to protect themselves instead of their manager protecting them.

The next component of this subtheme contained discussions around vigilance, including being careful of what you say to a creep, and how the participants felt it was important not to let their guard down while pursuing other strategies like avoidance or reporting. Also considered was how vigilance could be maintained around a creep as a group effort through sharing a creep’s reputation with colleagues, sharing stories and events involving them, and effectively creating a whisper network of strategies to deal with them. This was reported to lower the burden of any one person when interacting with the creep but was not a solution in itself; many participants agreed that it was a short-term answer to an ongoing issue.

“So there seems to be that, you don’t realise it at the time, but once you sit down and you talk to the other people like it happened to you as well, you realise there’s quite a lot in common...thankfully I have a good enough group around me

that we can turn it into a bit of a joke, and we can laugh about it, and discuss in a slightly comedic vein how we've all been targeted by a deadly predator. But I definitely wouldn't want it to happen again."

However, not every participant had the experience where sharing their experience led to a consensus of creepiness. As discussed earlier, due to creepiness' subjective nature different people have different thresholds for considering something to be creepy. This was often revealed to the participants when they discussed their creepy experiences with their colleagues. For example:

"In this particular instance, a colleague of mine had a children's toy under their desk because it was being given to a child later on. And this email came from this older fellow out of nowhere that said I like your dollhouse dot dot dot dot dot. And this is from a guy who already has a little bit of a reputation for getting very close, commenting on what you're wearing, and yeah that creeped my colleague out...opinion was divided on the subject [of whether he was a creep]. A lot of people believed him to be a creep, a lot of people just believed him to be a friendly old man. The fact that someone whose judgement I trust very highly believes him to be a creep is enough for me to believe him to be a creep. Again, being a chap, my personal experience of him was completely different because when I talked to him we talked about football and golfing and fishing and stuff."

The last component relevant to this subtheme was the difference between encountering creepiness at work as opposed to outside of it. Some participants preferred to come across creepiness "in the wild" as they found it easier to escape the situation – if there is a creep at work then this is often not possible. However, many admitted that confronting a creep was more straightforward at work as there are processes to report and otherwise deal with harassment, and also because work is a more public environment.

“I didn’t feel threatened by him because I was in a work environment. Might have been very different if I wasn’t in a work environment...I felt safer because there was other people around and I knew I was safe.”

“I think outside of work, if someone was being creepy I would have a lot more fear. Just because you don’t know, if you don’t know that person you don’t know what they’re capable of. However if it was at work, and someone was being creepy, it’s in a controlled environment.”

Finally, the third subtheme is how creepiness is labelled. The first component was the relationship the participants had to the label of creepiness itself. Some participants viewed it as almost theatrical – related to old over-acted horror films or children’s cartoons like Scooby Doo. These people reported that while they could understand how a person could be labelled as creepy or as a creep, they themselves would use another word such as weird, strange, odd, or lechy, as creepiness was not in their general vocabulary. In some cases, this was thought of as a generational difference, where the older participants thought of it as a younger person’s word and the younger participants said it was for an older person.

“...to me the word creep is something from, you know it’s something from my earlier days when we were younger, and teenagers and you would call someone a creep and it wouldn’t have any of the connotations of that depth... it was more of a flippant throwaway remark I think.”

Others would use creepiness but in a different manner, saying that a person would “give [them] the creeps” as opposed to labelling the person themselves – marking the effect their behaviour had as opposed to the behaviour itself. Despite these differences, many of the participants did use creep or creepy to describe people in their interviews, frequently tying it to sexual behaviour.

The second component of the final subtheme was the difference between being *creepy* and being a *creep*. Some participants believed that a creep was a stand-in for any derogatory word, not necessarily somebody who creeped you out.

“I think being a creep is possibly different to being a creepy person... I think when you say oh you creep, that would be used in the moment to say you lousy person, rather than if somebody genuinely makes you feel creepy they’d be doing something. But it depends on if you say you creep than if you say oh he’s a bit of a creep. Then I suppose you’re using it in a different way.”

Others thought that while both a creep and a creepy person would creep them out, only a creep would be aware that their behaviour was creepy and have a specific target demographic. A creep was also described as someone whose behaviour has the potential to escalate, whereas a creepy person would generally maintain the same levels of creepiness.

“It’s that odd behaviour, something that you really feel like they have that potential to take it to the next level. So for some people the alarms go off and they’re a bit creepy, but some of those things you brush off – I don’t think they have an awareness of how they make other people feel... then there are some where you think they feel like that, but it’s almost like there’s a heightened awareness where you think what could they be capable of? I think it’s if you felt that he had the potential to do something about it, or to scare you, then I would say he’s a creep.”

4.2.3 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore experiences of creepy people in the workplace and gain an understanding of laypeople's perceptions of creepiness. It did so by utilising thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, allowing the participants more freedom to respond compared to the text boxes utilised in the previous chapter. Five main themes were identified during the course of the analysis: elicitors of creepiness, aspects of creepiness, outcomes of creepiness, power, and gender.

When examining the responses, it became clear that the participants' general perception of creepiness echoed the overall findings from Chapter 3, as examples of creepiness were overwhelmingly performed by men and were often forms of harassment. The participants mainly experienced creepiness in response to violations of their boundaries or when a person had a "strange" appearance. This is in line with the findings of Watt, Maitland, and Gallagher (2017), who reported that creepiness was primarily indicated by socially non-normative behaviours and odd physical appearance. It is important to reiterate a point they made here, where it is possible that the label of creepiness could stigmatise unattractive or marginalised individuals (such as those with mental illnesses or disabilities). This was borne out in this study, as several participants mentioned being creeped out by people on the autism spectrum or who they considered to be odd-looking. However, some participants mentioned situations where after spending time with a creepy person that the creepiness they felt had been reduced, which supports Langer and König's (2018) notion that increasing familiarity with an object of creepiness can reduce its creepiness, but this was not always the case.

One of the most consistent findings in the dataset was a preference for avoidance in response to creepiness, in line with earlier research (McAndrew & Koehnke, 2016), although some participants did confront or report the creep they discussed. The decisions they made with regard to their actions followed reasoning laid out in sexual harassment literature; for

example, those who utilised avoidance often did so because they either did not label their experiences as harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012), or because the people it would be reported to were not reliable – and in some cases, mainly with the older participants, the policies to protect them did not exist (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009). Interestingly, despite the fact that men are far more likely to choose to confront than women, they also frequently chose to ignore or avoid creepiness. This is not to say that this was the case in all of the situations, but even in circumstances which could very easily be labelled as harassment, some men chose to ignore it. While it is possible that this is for similar reasons as those described above, it is also likely that the men here did not feel as threatened as a woman would in the same scenario. Therefore, the effort confrontation would require was not deemed necessary, and avoidance was the least costly strategy moving forward, supporting the theory that it is more adaptive to meet a creepy person with unpleasant feelings and with avoidance or vigilance rather than direct action.

As expected, two major themes that were generated were power and gender. Cortina and Berdahl (2008) highlighted that powerful people often seek to exert control over those under them in cases of harassment. The data presented in this study does support this finding, as many participants reported that they felt creeped out by someone who held power over them in some way, either organisational or societal. This supports the idea that creepiness occurs in response to vulnerability, especially when considering that men (who have more societal power than women) did not reported feeling creeped out to the same degree as women. Additionally, regarding the debate over whether women could be creepy, it is possible that the participants did not view women as being able to create the same degree of vulnerability (i.e. powerlessness) that would inspire creepiness.

In addition to the above themes, the participants repeatedly expressed concerns over a precise definition of creepiness, and whether *their* definition was the correct one. In some cases, this was due to the participants' disbelief in creepiness as a whole, but others appeared

rooted in the ambiguity of creepiness as an emotion. In fact, some participants did not agree that creepiness was the “correct” word to use in their situation, preferring terms such as strange, odd, or weird. The “heebie-jeebies” was also mentioned, and some participants specified that they did not feel *creeped out*, but that they got *the creeps*. However, the fact that the scenarios and traits they reported followed similar threads of ambiguity, subtle threats, and vulnerability indicates that creepiness was a more accurate label than they may have believed and suggests a shared concept of creepiness.

Finally, there were several instances of a creepy person having a reputation that was primarily shared through gossip. While research has found that gossiping and sharing negative information about others helps to create bonds between the conversation partners and that this is often the main goal of the activity (Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swan, 2006), it is important to note that the purpose of sharing this reputation was not solely to gossip. In some cases, speaking about the creepy person was done to warn other people about what they had experienced. In others, the purpose was to alleviate the participant’s burden in knowing that they were not alone in being targeted. Clegg and van Iterson (2009) have described gossip in the workplace as a form of surveillance that can change the balance of power by giving those who gossip power over the subject of the gossip; in this way, sharing information about creepy people to colleagues could be considered a way of taking action against them by lessening the feelings of vulnerability that they cause.

As with the previous chapter, it is important to consider the limitations of this study. First, some participants contributed far more in their interviews than others, which may have led to an over-representation of their views, or an under-representation of others. Secondly, while an equal number of men and women were interviewed and several different kinds of employment were represented, it is difficult to both standardise people’s experiences into themes while also maintaining the differences inherent in the participants’ lived experiences. For example, a freelancer dealing with a creep will have very different methods of recourse

compared to someone in the armed forces, so while the individual's choice of action may appear to be different on the surface (e.g. avoidance versus reporting), it may be that in both scenarios these are the most efficacious routes to dealing with the creep. Despite these limitations, this exploratory study has created a foundation on which the next chapters can build, and where some of these concerns could be addressed.

The next chapter will replicate and extend the quantitative experiments presented in Chapter 3, including elements of creepiness uncovered in this chapter in order to provide a clearer examination of how creepiness is triggered in response to harassment.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Using the appraisal framework to explore creepiness

The purpose of this chapter is to empirically examine creepiness using appraisal theory, which outlines how emotions are elicited by evaluations of events and situations (Lazarus, 1991). For example, evaluating an event as dangerous would result in a feeling of fear. The emotion then gives rise to an action tendency; in this case, feeling fear often results in avoidance. Conversely, being insulted by someone may lead to an appraisal of anger, which motivates you to confront the source of that anger. Therefore, the functional purpose of emotional appraisal is to stimulate action tendencies which prepare a person to react a certain way to a stimulus.

Across the last two chapters, evidence has been found which indicates that creepiness is elicited by ambiguous threats and that it has a clear relationship to inappropriate sexualisation alongside unwanted closeness-seeking and other boundary violations. Less clear were its relevant action tendencies; creepiness appeared to inspire both avoidance and confrontation equally. Consequently, now that evidence has been found that creepiness responds to harassment, the next step of this research was to determine how creepiness responds to different kinds of harassing threats. Utilising appraisal theory provides the means to vary the proposed cues to creepiness from earlier chapters and measure them alongside fear, disgust, and anger, as well as action tendencies and identification of the behaviour as harassment. Thus, the main goals of this chapter are to build on the studies from Chapter 3 and identify the main harassment cues which lead to an appraisal of creepiness, and then to ascertain the motivational consequences of creepiness.

5.2. The present studies

None of the behaviours in Studies 1 and 2 were pre-tested for their obvious or subtle nature, which made it unclear whether they represented the kind of ambiguous threat

theoretically associated with creepiness. Therefore, in Study 3 elements of creepiness identified in previous studies were pre-tested to create vignettes to compare sexual versus non-sexual threats, and also compare more and less direct forms of threat, allowing a test of whether creepiness is reduced under blatant threat. This additionally provided a means to determine whether workplace creepiness exclusively responds to subtle cues of sexual harassment, or if it is triggered by subtle nonsexual threats as well.

It was decided that creating vignettes would be the most appropriate method to examine creepiness, as vignettes are especially useful when investigating explicit responses to hypothetical scenarios (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), and have already been used extensively in other research pertaining to harassment (e.g. Pierce, Aguinis, & Adams, 2000). A major benefit of utilising vignettes is that it allows for a greater level of control over confounding variables than other methodologies, as any factors that are not relevant to the aims of the study can be excluded, and also allows for the creation of hypothetical scenarios that address sensitive topics like harassment in an ethical way (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). While it is recommended that vignettes are analysed using a multilevel design, as is the case in Studies 4 onwards, it is also appropriate to utilise a between-participants approach (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013; Baguley, Dunham, & Steer, 2022).

The measurement of creepiness was also refined by adding differently worded measures about creepy feelings and asking questions about some potential contributors to perceptions of creepiness. Additionally, as anxiety is a more future-oriented emotion than fear (Grenier, Barrette, & Ladouceur, 2005), it is possible that participants conflated the meanings of creepiness and anxiety. People who are intolerant of uncertainty due to higher trait anxiety are more likely to interpret a person or situation as a possible threat (Carleton, 2012), which may then increase how “creeped out” they feel. Therefore, anxiety questions were also included to further discriminate creepiness from related emotions. Finally, the

option to report the perpetrator formally or informally was included in the measures of action tendencies.

5.3 Study 3

5.3.1 Study 3 Pre-test

Method

Participants

Fifty participants (38 women) were recruited from Prolific Academic (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017) who were paid 5.01 GBP/hr to complete the study.

Materials & Procedure

The participants were presented with 19 potentially negative and distressing behaviours in a random order (see appendix H for a list of the behaviours). After reading each behaviour, the participants were asked to rate how upsetting, negative, unusual, creepy, and sexual they were on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *somewhat*, 3 = *slightly*, 4 = *moderately*, 5 = *extremely*), and reported their gender.

Results

See Appendix I for descriptive statistics. Behaviours that were more directly identifiable as harassment, for example stealing ideas and taking credit for other people's work, were rated as more upsetting and negative than those that were less direct, such as asking for personal information like someone's address. However, the reverse occurred for ratings of how creepy and sexual the behaviours were; more direct behaviours received lower ratings of creepiness and sexuality than more indirect ones. This finding supports the theoretical idea that creepiness is maximised when threat perception is intermediate.

In selecting indirect behaviours, the sexual and nonsexual examples were matched as closely as possible on ratings of how upsetting, negative, unusual, and creepy they were (although even the most comparable sexual examples were worse than nonsexual by 0.5-1 scale points), while ensuring they were clearly separated on ratings of how sexual they were (2.5 scale points apart and in the upper and lower 25% of the scale range). Based on these results, three vignettes were created.

In accordance with best practice recommendations, the vignettes were short in length to minimise participant fatigue and used as much of the same language as possible between scenarios (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Each vignette began with the same sentence and included four of the pre-tested behaviours, none of which were used twice. These behaviours were selected out of those found to be most closely matched on ratings of how upsetting, negative, unusual, and creepy they were. Out of these, behaviours that were similarly rated on how sexual they were formed two of the three vignettes, and behaviours that were rated higher formed the third.

The vignettes described a scenario where the participants had started a new job, and one of their new co-workers displayed either indirectly harassing sexual behaviour (e.g., someone who frequently steers conversations towards sex), indirect non-sexual harassing behaviour (e.g. someone who asks macabre questions), or direct non-sexual harassing behaviour (e.g. someone who sabotages your work). None of the vignettes that were pre-tested could be classified as direct and sexual; this was because no behaviours that could be considered direct sexual harassment were included in the pre-test. See Appendix J for the exact wording.

5.3.2 Main Study 3¹

The pretesting yielded three scenarios: indirect sexual harassment, indirect non-sexual harassment, and obvious non-sexual harassment. It was expected that on a scenario level, the kind of indirect threats that were creepier would be less prone to direct identification and action, following the scenario-level differences in spontaneous identification found in the previous studies. It would also be interesting to see if Study 1 and 2's individual-level results would replicate; that is, showing that higher levels of felt creepiness to any one scenario positively predicted identification as harassment and proactive responses. Therefore:

- 1) On a scenario level, indirect threats should show higher identification of creepiness (in spontaneous mentions and scaled measures), because of the theoretically predicted relationship of creepiness to ambiguous situations.
- 2) On a scenario level, higher levels of anxiety, disgust, fear, confrontation and reporting, and less avoidance should occur in response to the direct threat compared to the indirect threats, because direct threat is seen as more severe.
- 3) As in Studies 1 and 2, on an individual level, creepiness, independently of other emotions, should have a positive relationship with both proactive and avoidant responses to harassment, and with identifying harassment, even including anxiety as an additional covariate.

5.3.2.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 172 participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 5.10 GBP/hr in May 2019. The sample size was determined a priori, allowing for some attrition, by a power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.4 that determined that N = 159

¹ This study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6XT39>

would obtain 80% power for a medium sized effect $f = .25$ in a 3×2 (threat type $\times$ participant gender) between participants ANOVA. Thirteen participants were eliminated who either failed the attention check or selected their gender as “other”, because some of the analyses depended on self-identification as male or female. The final sample consisted of 159 participants (102 women), ranging in age from 18 to 72 ($M = 34.35$, $SD = 12.55$).

An important note to make here regarding this study, and all later ones reported in this thesis where participants were recruited from Prolific Academic, is that efforts were made to prevent any participants who had previously taken part in earlier studies from signing up to any future studies by blocking the unique participant ID in each new study. Taking this measure allowed for some degree of certainty that the participants would not be familiar with the measures, reducing the chance that they would guess the hypotheses.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three vignettes (Appendix J) representing threat type created in the pre-test and asked to write freely describing “how that co-worker would make [them] feel”, and “how [they] would describe that co-worker to someone else”, in 50 – 300 characters. They were then asked to rate how likely the co-worker and their target would be male or female on a bipolar scale (1 = *almost certain to be male*, 2 = *more likely to be male*, 3 = *somewhat more likely to be male*, 4 = *neutral*, 5 = *somewhat more likely to be female*, 6 = *more likely to be female*, 7 = *almost certain to be female*), and whether they believed that the perpetrator of the behaviour would know they were negatively affecting their target (1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *no*, 3 = *maybe no*, 4 = *neither yes or no*, 5 = *maybe yes*, 6 = *yes*, 7 = *definitely yes*).

Following this, the action tendency measures from Studies 1-2 were given in the same format. The only changes were dividing the “report” action into informal (“e.g. telling your boss or another co-worker, but not making a recorded complaint”) and formal. The emotion

measures included an additional emotion, anxiety, to the previously examined anger, disgust, and fear endorsements. Anxiety was represented by weak (60% intensity) fear expressions from the MSFDE (defined on page 32; see Appendix B for the exact expressions used). These emotion measures were further refined by included endorsements of emotion words (angry, anxious, creeped out, disgusted, and fearful) on a seven-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 3 = *a little*, 5 = *somewhat*, 7 = *extremely*). The MSFDE has previously been used alongside endorsement of words in other research on emotions (e.g. Gutierrez, Giner-Sorolla, & Vasiljevic, 2012; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012); the aim of including it together with written emotion measures in these studies is to increase the validity of the emotion measurements (Gutierrez, Giner-Sorolla, & Vasiljevic, 2012; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012).

Participants then answered the same questions as in Studies 1 and 2 about whether the behaviour was creepy and the perpetrator was a creep. Above-midpoint answers were followed by an open text response asking for a more specific explanation. Finally, participants were asked whether they would legally define the behaviour as harassment on the same scale as the questions on creepiness, and answered the demographics questions.

Appendix O contains the exact wording of all questions in this chapter.

5.3.2.2 Results²

Spontaneous mentions of creepiness

First, the degree to which the three threat types elicited different rates of spontaneous mentions of creepiness was examined. Qualitative responses were coded as 1 (*mentioned creepiness*) or 0 (*no mention of creepiness*). As in Studies 1 and 2, words such as uncomfortable, uneasy, or weird were not counted as creepiness. This was done to gain a

² All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

rough idea of how often creepiness would be reported in response to each threat type before introducing precise questions about it to the participants.

When describing how the perpetrator made them feel, 2 participants (3.7%) in the indirect sexual condition mentioned creepiness, compared to 4 participants (7.0%) in the indirect nonsexual condition, and 0 in the direct condition, a difference in proportions which was not statistically significant, as assessed by Fisher's exact test, $p = .217$. However, when describing the perpetrator as if to someone else, 12 participants (22.2%) in the indirect sexual condition mentioned creepiness, compared to 23 participants (40.4%) in the indirect nonsexual condition, and 0 in the direct condition, a statistically significant difference in proportions, $\chi^2(2, N = 159) = 24.72, p < .001, w = 0.39$. As expected, the proportion of participants who mentioned creepiness was significantly higher in both indirect threat conditions compared to the direct condition, Bonferroni adjusted p values $< .05$. Interestingly, there was not a significant difference in the proportion of participants who mentioned creepiness between the two indirect threats, Bonferroni adjusted $p > .05$. Spontaneous mentions of creepiness did not occur for direct threat, in line with theoretical explanations of creepiness. There was no evidence that indirect sexual threats were particularly creepy compared to indirect non-sexual; the opposite trend in the data was observed.

Emotions

Before the effect the different threat types had on endorsement of emotional reactions was investigated, the correlations between the five emotions were examined (Table 11). Anger and disgust were found to be strongly correlated, as well as fear with creepiness and anxiety. This was to be expected, as these emotions are known to correlate with each other, and should not strongly impact the results of the analysis.

Table 11

Study 3: Correlations of emotions.

	Anger	Anxiety	Creepiness	Disgust
Anger				
Anxiety	.227**			
Creepiness	-.090	.258***		
Disgust	.571***	.333***	.242**	
Fear	.070	.676***	.465***	.319***

Note. $N = 159$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Following this, a 3 x 5 mixed ANOVA was conducted, entering threat type as the between-subjects factor and emotion as the within-subjects factor. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 3. In all ANOVAs reported with a within-subjects component, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied to degrees of freedom if Mauchly's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .05$).

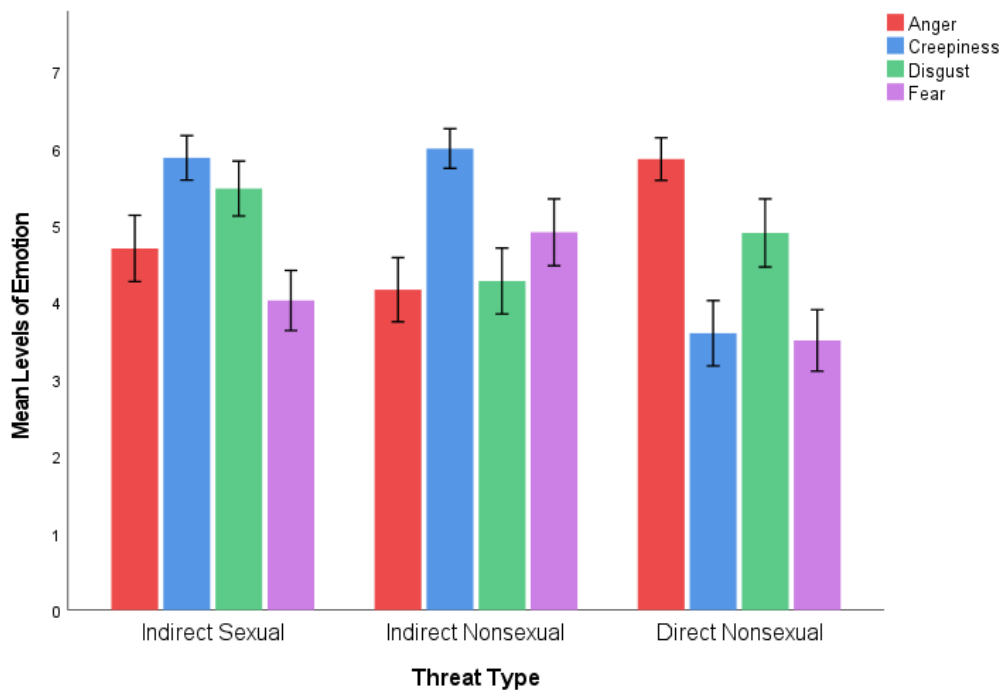


Figure 3. Study 3: Reported levels of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear.

There was a significant interaction between emotion and threat type, $F(6.46, 503.76) = 49.73, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .389$, therefore simple main effects were tested on each emotion. There were significant simple main effects of threat type on anger, $F(2, 156) = 19.23, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .198$, creepiness, $F(2, 156) = 86.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .526$, disgust, $F(2, 156) = 9.05, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .104$, and fear, $F(2, 156) = 12.01, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .133$, but not anxiety, $F(2, 156) = 0.77, p = .466$, partial $\eta^2 = .010$, which counters the objection that creepiness is just another kind of anxiety. As predicted, anger was expressed most strongly in response to direct threat, whereas creepiness was much higher in the indirect threat scenarios. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in the level of creepiness expressed between the two indirect threat scenarios, further supporting the idea that creepiness can respond equally to sexual or nonsexual threat. Reported levels of disgust were lowest in response to indirect nonsexual threat, which also motivated the highest levels of fear. The higher incidence of creepy feelings in indirect threat again provides support for the view of creepiness as a response to ambiguous situations.

It did not appear that the high correlations between some of the variables had a great impact on the results, given the significant differences between the endorsement of some of the more highly correlated variables, such as creepiness and fear. This is further support by the fact that anxiety was not highly reported in any of the threat types, including those where fear was more heavily endorsed.

Action Tendencies

A 3 x 5 mixed ANOVA was conducted, entering threat type as the between-subjects factor and type of action tendency as the within-subjects factor to investigate whether the threat type had an impact on reports of likely actions in response to harassment. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 4.

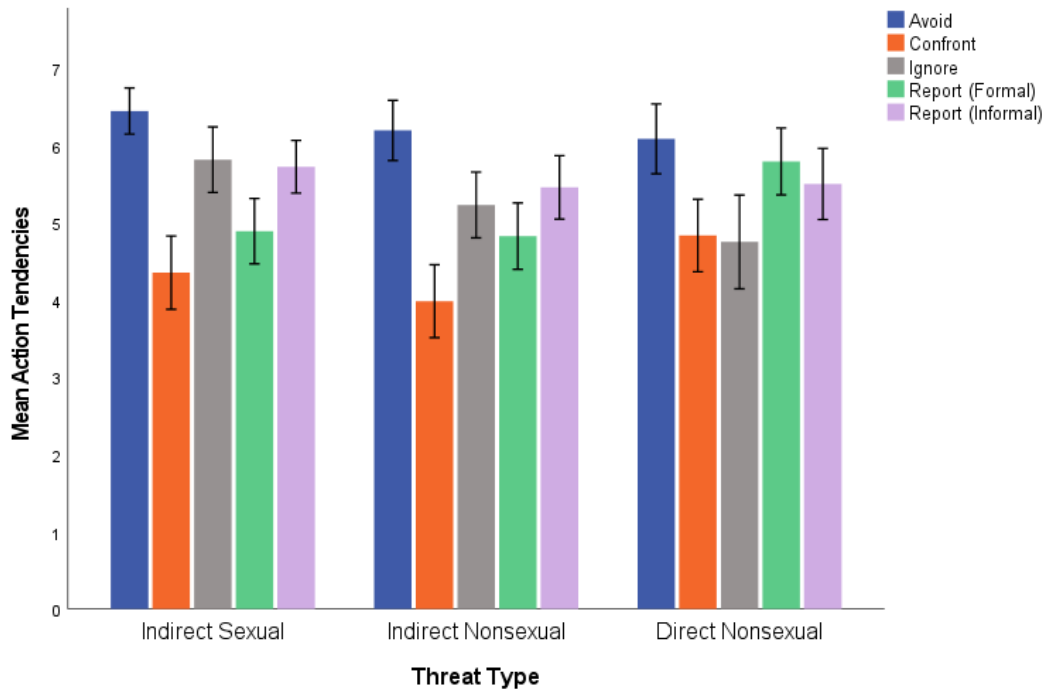


Figure 4. Study 3: Reported preferences for avoidance, confrontation, ignoring, and reporting.

There was a significant two-way interaction between action tendency and threat type ($F(6.40, 624) = 3.81, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .047$). Within this interaction were significant simple main effects of threat type on likelihood to confront ($F(2, 156) = 3.20, p = .043$, partial $\eta^2 = .039$), ignore ($F(2, 156) = 4.75, p = .010$, partial $\eta^2 = .057$), and formally report the perpetrator ($F(2, 156) = 6.09, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .072$), but not to avoid or informally report them ($p > .396$). Confronting and formally reporting the perpetrator were most likely to occur in the direct condition than either of the indirect ones, while the choice to ignore the harassment was greatest in the indirect sexual condition. Although there were no significant differences between conditions in avoidance, the means were all higher than any other tendencies, so it can be inferred that avoidance was the preferred action to take when dealing with harassment.

These simple effects tests were also run with anger, anxiety, creepiness, disgust, and fear as simultaneous covariates to investigate the influence these emotions had on action tendencies (see Tables 12 - 15). Paradoxically, creepiness was positively associated with both

avoidance and formally reporting the perpetrator. Surprisingly, fear was negatively related to avoidance, while anxiety was positively related. Disgust was positively related to formally reporting, but no emotions were uniquely related to confrontation, ignoring, or informally reporting the perpetrator.

Table 12
Study 3: Emotions as predictors of avoidance.

Emotion	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	95% Confidence Intervals	
				Lower	Upper
Anger	1.05	0.10	0.10	-0.09	0.30
Anxiety	2.38*	0.11	0.26	0.04	0.47
Creepiness	2.27*	0.10	0.24	0.03	0.44
Disgust	-0.31	0.10	-0.31	-0.23	-0.05
Fear	-2.40*	0.11	-0.26	-0.47	-0.05

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* ≤ .001

Table 13
Study 3: Emotions as predictors of confrontation.

Emotion	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	95% Confidence Intervals	
				Lower	Upper
Anger	1.26	0.12	0.15	-0.09	0.39
Anxiety	-1.69	0.13	-0.23	-0.49	0.04
Creepiness	0.42	0.13	0.05	-0.20	0.31
Disgust	1.72	0.12	0.21	-0.03	0.46
Fear	-1.21	0.13	-0.16	-0.42	0.10

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* ≤ .001

Table 14

Study 3: Emotions as predictors of ignoring.

Emotion	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	95% Confidence Intervals	
				Lower	Upper
Anger	0.01	0.13	0.15	-0.25	0.26
Anxiety	1.02	0.14	0.15	-0.14	0.43
Creepiness	0.52	0.14	0.07	-0.20	0.34
Disgust	-0.27	0.13	-0.04	-0.30	0.26
Fear	-0.51	0.14	-0.07	-0.35	0.21

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

Table 15

Study 3: Emotions as predictors of reporting.

Emotion	Study	<i>t</i>	df / Std. Error	γ / B	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Anger	Formal	0.81	0.10	0.08	-0.12	0.28
	Informal	0.84	0.11	0.09	-0.12	0.30
Anxiety	Formal	-1.26	0.11	-0.14	-0.37	0.08
	Informal	-0.38	0.12	-0.05	-0.28	0.19
Creepiness	Formal	2.78**	0.11	0.30	0.09	0.52
	Informal	1.61	0.11	0.18	-0.04	0.40
Disgust	Formal	2.35*	0.10	0.25	-0.06	0.45
	Informal	0.82	0.11	0.09	-0.13	0.30
Fear	Formal	1.41	0.11	0.16	-0.06	0.38
	Informal	-0.01	0.12	-0.001	-0.23	0.23

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

Appraising creepiness and harassment

Next, how the threat types would be differently appraised as creepy and as harassment were tested, and whether appraising a threat as creepy would relate to its appraisal as harassment. As the appraisal of the perpetrator's behaviour as creepy and appraisal of them as a creep correlated at $r = .724, p < .001$, the average of those two measures was used to represent creepiness. To this end, a 3 x 2 mixed ANOVA was conducted, entering threat type as the between-subjects factor and type of appraisal (creepy/creep vs harassment) as the within-subjects factor. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 5.

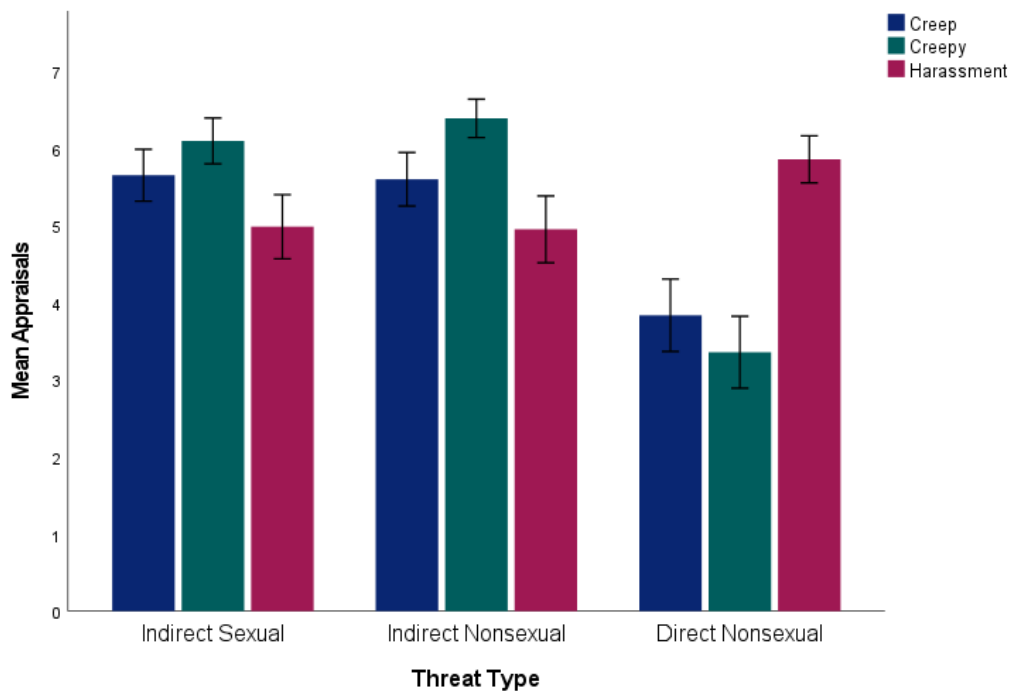


Figure 5. Study 3: Mean levels of appraisals of creepiness and harassment.

There was a significant two-way interaction between appraisal type and threat type ($F(2, 156) = 86.68, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .526$), so tests of simple main effects were also conducted. There was a simple main effect of threat type ($F(2, 156) = 67.53, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .464$), in that the perpetrator and their behaviour was more likely to be appraised as creepy for indirect threats, but more likely to be appraised as harassment in response to a direct threat ($F(2, 156) = 6.41, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .076$). Once again there was no

significant difference between the two indirect threat types. However, it is important to note that the means of all three kinds of threat were above the midpoint, showing that each of them was categorised to some degree as harassment.

How anger, anxiety, creepiness, disgust, and fear were associated with identification of harassment was also tested. To this end the above analysis was re-run with the emotions as covariates. As in Studies 1 and 2, only anger and creepiness were positively associated with harassment identification (Table 16).

Table 16
Study 3: Emotions as predictors of harassment.

Emotion	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	95% Confidence Intervals	
				Lower	Upper
Anger	3.07**	0.09	0.28	0.10	0.46
Anxiety	0.07	0.10	0.01	-0.19	0.21
Creepiness	3.79***	0.10	0.37	0.18	0.56
Disgust	0.53	0.09	0.05	-0.14	0.23
Fear	0.49	0.10	0.05	-0.15	0.25

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* ≤ .001

Judgements of perpetrator and target

Next, how the threat type influenced the extent to which the perpetrator and target of the harassment were perceived as male or female, and the degree of self-awareness the participants judged the perpetrator to have was examined. To this end, three one-way ANOVAs were carried out entering threat type as the between participant factor, and perceptions of the gender of the target, gender of the perpetrator, and the perpetrator’s self-awareness as the dependent variable in turn.

The threat type did not affect perceptions of the target's gender, $F(2, 156) = 0.99, p = .375$, partial $\eta^2 = .012$, who was judged to be slightly more likely to be female across all conditions ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.20$). However, threat type did affect perceptions of the perpetrator's gender, $F(2, 156) = 78.59, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .502$, who was more likely to be seen as male in the indirect sexual and nonsexual threat types than the direct threat. Furthermore, the degree to which participants believed that the perpetrator knew their actions negatively impacted the target was also influenced by threat type, $F(2, 156) = 26.28, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .252$, as the direct perpetrator was viewed as significantly more self-aware than the perpetrator in both of the indirect threats. Therefore, it is possible that the participants viewed creepy people as having less self-awareness, as the direct threat also did not elicit any spontaneous mentions of creepiness and perpetrators of indirect harassment were less likely to be seen as aware of the negative consequences of their actions. The findings from Studies 1 and 2 were also replicated, as the perpetrators were more likely to be seen as male and to target females.

Gender effects on emotion and action tendencies

Finally, the analyses reported above were re-run with gender included as an additional variable to test whether the interactions between threat type and emotion or action tendencies would be affected by whether the participant identified as male or female. The three-way interaction between threat type, emotion, and gender was not significant, $F(6.60, 504.78) = 0.34, p = .929$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. As before, the two-way interaction between threat type and emotion was significant, $F(6.60, 504.78) = 32.27, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .297$, but there was also a significant interaction between gender and emotion, $F(3.30, 504.78) = 3.36, p = .015$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$. All pairwise comparisons were performed for statistically significant simple main effects, and Bonferroni corrections were made with comparisons within each simple main effect considered a family of comparisons. This revealed that women reported higher levels of all emotions than men, as expected.

The three-way interaction between threat type, action tendency, and gender was also not significant, $F(6.47, 495.02) = 1.98, p = .061$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, but there was still a significant two-way interaction between threat type and action tendency, $F(6.47, 495.02) = 2.53, p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$. Furthermore, there was a significant two-way interaction between gender and action tendency, $F(3.24, 495.02) = 3.29, p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$. Again, all pairwise comparisons were performed for statistically significant simple main effects with Bonferroni corrections. There was a statistically significant simple main effect of gender on avoidance, where women ($M = 6.50, SD = 0.13$) reported a higher likelihood to avoid the perpetrator than men ($M = 5.80, SD = 0.18$), $p = .002$. Additionally, men ($M = 4.73, SD = 0.23$) were more likely to confront the perpetrator than women ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.17$) although this was only marginally significant, $p = .057$.

5.3.2.3 Discussion

Including pre-tested scenarios involving both sexual and nonsexual forms of indirect harassment as well as direct harassment allowed a further investigation into how different behaviours influence appraisals of creepiness. As expected, the indirect scenarios inspired more spontaneous mentions of creepiness and were appraised as creepier than direct harassment. However, appraising a scenario as creepy did not prevent that same scenario from being appraised as harassment. Interestingly, there was no difference in creepiness between the sexual and nonsexual indirect scenarios, which could indicate that it is not impacted by the presence of sexual undertones in harassing behaviours.

Avoidance was more likely to occur in all scenarios than any other behaviour, which suggests that avoiding the harasser is the preferred response in all kinds of workplace misconduct, not just when the harassment is appraised as creepy. As expected, confrontation and formal reporting was most likely to occur in response to direct harassment, supporting the second hypothesis. Furthermore, as predicted in the third hypothesis, creepiness did have

a positive relationship with identifying harassment and avoidance, even though anxiety was included as covariate.

Although these findings shed more light on how appraisals of creepiness differ in response to harassing conduct, one limitation is that there was no scenario involving direct sexual harassment. Therefore, a direct sexual harassment scenario was included in the next study. Additionally, to control variability in participant perceptions of the perpetrator's gender, that factor was also varied experimentally.

5.4 Study 4

To address the issues outlined above, Study 4 partially replicated Study 3, eliminating direct nonsexual threat which did not inspire creepiness, and replacing it with a new pre-tested direct sexual harassment threat. This would provide a strong test of whether, even with a sexual element, direct harassment would pre-empt judgements of creepiness.

Additionally, half of the participants were presented with scenarios with a male perpetrator, and half with a female perpetrator, to test whether, as in previous research, male targets would be appraised as creepier. The emotion measures were also improved by including multiple synonyms for each word. For creepiness, words were chosen that were frequently mentioned alongside creepiness in the qualitative parts of the earlier studies (e.g. uncomfortable, uneasy). However, anxiety was removed from the measured emotions, as it showed a difference response pattern to creepiness. Finally, the “formally report” and “informally report” measures were merged into a single action tendency of “report”, as there was no significant difference between the two in the previous study. Similar findings to Study 4 are expected, in that direct sexual threat would also not inspire creepiness as there would be no ambiguity that the behaviour constituted harassment, and that the male perpetrator will inspire more appraisals of creepiness.

- 1) The indirect threats would have higher rates of spontaneously mentioned creepiness-related words, i.e. creep, creeped out, creepy than the direct threat, and the male perpetrator will have higher rates compared to the female perpetrator.
- 2) Ratings of emotions should be different in the scenarios: creepiness will be higher in response to indirect threats than direct ones; anger will be highest in the direct threat scenario compared to the indirect threats; disgust will be higher in the sexual threats compared to the nonsexual ones.
- 3) The scenarios would encourage different action tendencies, associated with different emotions: direct threat would encourage confrontation and reporting which would be positively associated with anger and disgust, and the indirect threats would encourage avoidance which would be positively associated with fear and creepiness.
- 4) The perpetrator of the direct threat would be judged as more self-aware than the indirect perpetrators and will also be judged to be creepier when demonstrating an indirect threat compared to a direct one.
- 5) The scenarios would be differently identified as harassment: scenarios with direct threat will be judged as more likely to be harassment than those scenarios exhibiting indirect threat. Additionally, creepiness will have a significant relationship with identification of harassment.
- 6) The male compared to the female perpetrator would receive higher ratings of creepiness, being a creep, harassment, and action tendencies, lower self-awareness ratings, and show a stronger creepiness-harassment relationship.

5.4.1 Study 4 Pre-test

Method

Participants

Twenty participants (15 women) were recruited from Prolific Academic who were paid 5.15 GBP/hr to complete the study.

Materials & Procedure

The participants were presented with 7 behaviours related to sexual harassment in a random order (see Appendix K for a list of the behaviours). After reading each behaviour, the participants were asked to rate how upsetting, negative, unusual, creepy, and sexual they were on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *somewhat*, 3 = *slightly*, 4 = *moderately*, 5 = *extremely*), and reported their gender.

Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Appendix L. Unsurprisingly, all the behaviours were rated as being highly upsetting, negative, and unusual. However, making insulting gender-related comments and physically blocking the exit to a room were rated as much less sexual than the other five behaviours. The final vignette was created based on the remaining behaviours, in the same manner as in Study 3. It involved a scenario similar to those used in the previous study, where a new co-worker displayed behaviour that was directly sexually harassing (e.g., someone who sends unwanted sexual emails). While none of these behaviours constituted quid pro quo harassment, the direct behaviours were categorised as being those where there was no doubt that they were easily identifiable as harassment, whereas there was more ambiguity in the indirect threats.

5.4.2 Main Study 4³

5.4.2.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 112 participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 6.74 GBP/hr in October 2019. The sample size was determined a priori by a power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.4 that determined that an N of approximately 94 would be sufficient to obtain 95% power on a medium sized effect $f = .20$ for a 3 x 2 (threat type x perpetrator gender) mixed ANOVA. From this number, 2 participants were eliminated who did not finish the study, and a further 16 were excluded who failed the attention or manipulation checks. The final sample consisted of 94 participants (47 women), all of whom had not participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the first condition, participants only saw scenarios involving a male perpetrator, and in the second condition, they only saw scenarios involving a female perpetrator. The participants then read one of the three scenarios, presented in a random order, answered the questions pertaining to that scenario and then repeated that procedure for the remaining two. The scenarios each presented one kind of threat: 1) indirect sexual, 2) indirect nonsexual, 3) direct sexual (Appendix M). Once they had read the scenario, they were asked to “list words describing how this co-worker would make [them] feel”, and “how [they] would describe this co-worker to someone else”, with a minimum (50) and a maximum (300) character limit.

Following this, the self-awareness, action tendency, emotion, creepy/creep, and harassment measures from Study 3 were given in the same format. The only changes were

³ This study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/M5WBG>

only including one “report” option, removing anxiety from the emotion measures, and including more word endorsements for the remaining emotions (angry, annoyed, cross, and furious; creeped out, uncomfortable, uneasy, weird; disgusted, grossed out, repulsed, and sickened; fearful, frightened, scared, and terrified). After they had completed these questions, they read the next two scenarios with the same questions, and finally answered the demographic questions from the previous studies.

5.4.2.2 Results

Data Preparation

The scaled data for each threat type was entered as a separate case, using the MIXED procedure in IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25) to carry out a multilevel analysis predicting each outcome variable from coded independent variables, treating the participant as a random variable. All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

To explore the factorial structure of the reported emotions, the 19 facial expressions and words were subjected to a principal component analysis with oblique rotation (Promax). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .92. Bartlett’s test of sphericity, $\chi^2(171) = 5185.34, p < .001$, indicated that the correlation structure was adequate for this analysis. Initially, the unweighted least squares analysis with a cut-off point of .32 (indicating that the item overlaps by at least 10% with other items in that factor; Costello & Osborne, 2005) extracted a three-factor structure of creepiness, fear, and a blend of anger and disgust. Given that anger and disgust are strongly related, this was not unexpected. However, when the analysis was re-run to extract a predetermined four-factor solution for the data, anger and disgust were separated with no cross-loadings. Taking that detail into consideration, it was decided to continue the following analysis with the four-factor structure, which accounted for 76.58% of the variance. The results are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Study 4: Summary of principal component analysis results for emotion measures using unweighted least squares (N = 282).

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Fear	Anger	Disgust	Creepiness
Frightened	.97	.03	-.04	.008
Scared	.97	-.03	-.05	.05
Terrified	.95	.04	-.07	-.07
Fearful	.95	.00	-.07	.07
Angry	.02	1.02	-.10	-.02
Cross	.001	.73	.10	.05
Furious	.19	.68	.24	-.21
Anger (Face)	-.04	.63	-.01	.11
Annoyed	-.14	.62	.11	.23
Grossed Out	-.10	0.02	.95	.04
Repulsed	-.03	.06	.87	.02
Disgusted	-.03	.19	.78	-.06
Disgust (Face)	.09	.17	.63	.006
Sickened	.29	.13	.53	.03
Uneasy	-.04	.06	-.07	.95
Uncomfortable	.02	.11	-.04	.84
Weird	.07	.02	.07	.51
Creeped Out	.25	-.10	.34	.39
Fear (Face)	.26	-.16	.11	.37
Eigenvalues	9.71	2.61	1.33	0.90
% of variance	51.12	13.74	6.97	4.74

Note: Factor loadings over .32 appear in bold.

Four composite scores, one for each factor, were created based on the results of the factor analysis and were subjected to reliability analyses. All were found to be reliable scales, Cronbach's $\alpha > .830$. While the four factor-based variables were significantly intercorrelated (r values ranging from .407 to .765) this was to be expected, as anger and disgust are often

highly correlated, which is also the case for creepiness's relationship to disgust and fear (Ho, MacDorman, & Pramono, 2008).

Interestingly, the word most strongly indicative of the creepiness variable is not "creeped out", but instead "uneasy". One potential explanation is that because "creeped out" slightly cross-loaded onto disgust, endorsement of the phrase is lower in creepy scenarios when less disgust-related words are available, like uneasy or uncomfortable. However, it is important to note that in the other studies presented in this thesis, creepiness is frequently significantly spontaneously mentioned in the various harassment scenarios, which provides a justification for the label of the factor remaining as "creepiness".

Spontaneous mentions of creepiness

First, whether the threat types or the gender of the perpetrator would elicit different rates of spontaneous mentions of creepiness was tested. As in Study 3, qualitative responses were coded as 1 (*mentioned creepiness*) or 0 (*no mention of creepiness*). When describing how the perpetrator made them feel, 3 (13.6%) participants mentioned creepiness in response to the indirect sexual threat, compared to 16 (72.7%) for indirect nonsexual threat, and 3 (13.6%) for the direct sexual threat, a statistically significant difference in proportions ($\chi^2(2, N = 282) = 16.66, p < .001, w = 0.24$). The proportion of participants who mentioned creepiness was significantly higher in the nonsexual scenario compared to both types of sexual threat, Bonferroni adjusted $p < .05$. However, there was not a significant difference in proportions between the male (12; 54.5%) and female (10; 45.5%) perpetrators, ($\chi^2(1, N = 282) = 0.94, p = .332, w = 0.06$).

When describing the perpetrator to someone else, 10 (25%) participants mentioned creepiness in response to indirect sexual threat, compared to 18 (45%) for the nonsexual threat, and 12 (30%) for direct sexual threat, but this difference in proportions was not significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 282) = 3.03, p = .220, w = 0.06$). Unlike the above results, 26 (65%)

people mentioned creepiness when the perpetrator was male as opposed to 14 (35%) when the perpetrator was female, a difference in proportions that was significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 282) = 7.79, p = .005, w = 0.17$). These results support the first hypothesis, as the scenarios with a male perpetrator inspired more spontaneous mentions of creepiness, although interestingly only the indirect nonsexual threat elicited more spontaneous mentions.

Emotions

Secondly, the effect of threat type and perpetrator gender on different emotions was investigated. A linear mixed model was conducted, entering the nominal variables of threat type and perpetrator gender as predictors of the anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear in turn. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 6.

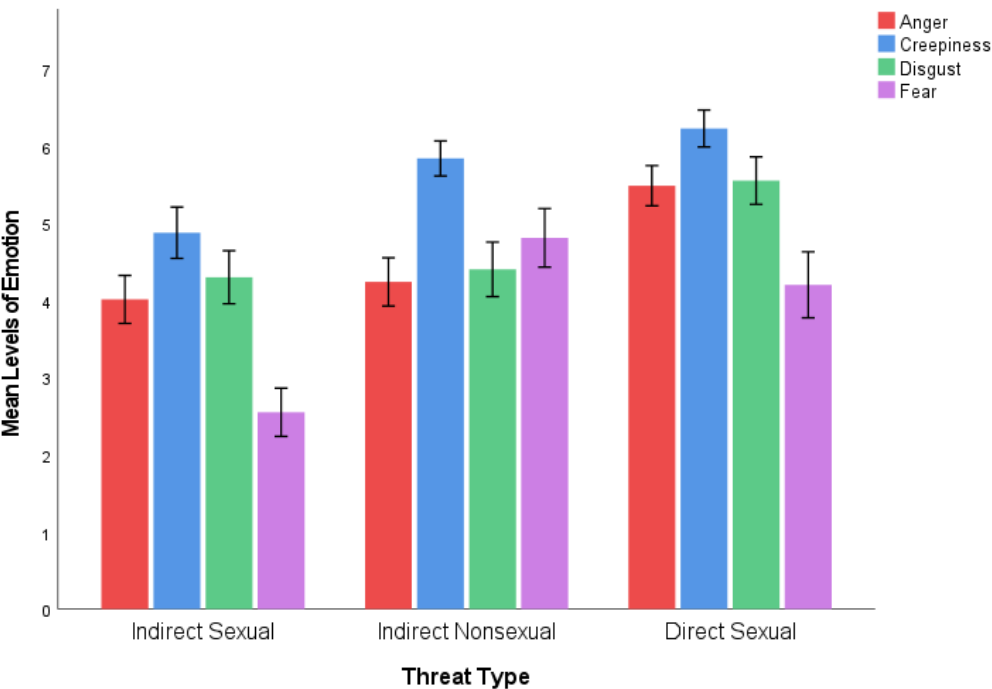


Figure 6. Study 4: Reported levels of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear.

There was no significant interaction between threat type and perpetrator gender for any of the emotions ($p > .230$). However, there were main effects of threat type on all emotions, and main effects of perpetrator gender on anger and disgust (Table 18).

Table 18

Study 4: Influence of threat type and perpetrator gender on reported emotions.

Emotion	Threat Type		Perp Gender	
	<i>F</i>	df	<i>F</i>	df
Anger	54.72***	2, 184	17.27***	1, 92
Creepiness	45.76***	2, 184	1.43	1, 92
Disgust	32.96***	2, 184	16.85***	1, 92
Fear	67.97***	2, 184	2.21	1, 92

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

As expected, anger and disgust were most strongly reported in response to direct threat compared to both indirect threats, and the male perpetrator inspired significantly more anger and disgust than his female counterpart. Surprisingly, indirect sexual threat received the lowest ratings of all emotions out of all three types, contrary to the results in Study 3, where the two indirect scenarios often encouraged similar levels of all emotions. It is possible that the inclusion of the direct sexual threat within-participants overshadowed any strong emotions participants felt, including creepiness, about indirect sexually harassing behaviour.

Furthermore, the indirect nonsexual threat scenario encouraged the highest levels of creepiness and fear, closely followed by direct threat. This does not support the second hypothesis, as the gender of the perpetrator not only had no impact on reported creepiness, but there was also no significant difference between the indirect nonsexual and the direct threat as predicted.

Action Tendencies

Four mixed model analyses were conducted, entering threat type and perpetrator gender as nominal predictors of the likelihood to avoid, confront, ignore, and report the perpetrator in turn to test whether the threat type or perpetrator gender would have an impact on actions in response to harassment. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 7.

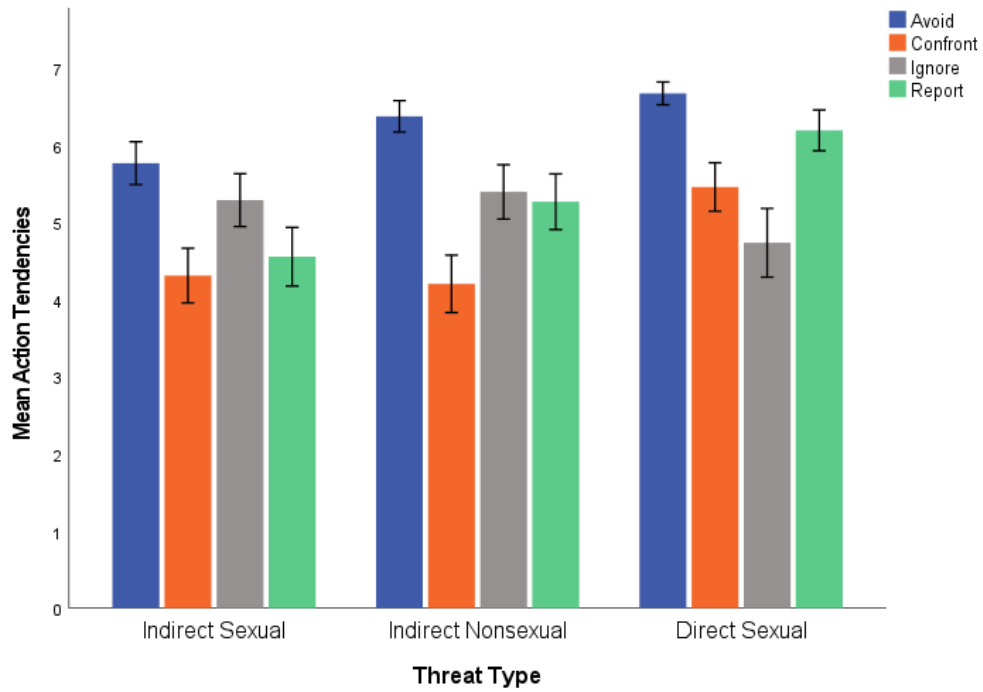


Figure 7. Study 4: Reported preferences for avoidance, confrontation, ignoring, and reporting.

There was no interaction between threat type and perpetrator gender for avoiding, confronting, or reporting the perpetrator ($p > .124$), but there were main effects of both threat type and perpetrator gender (Table 19).

Table 19

Study 4: Influence of threat type on action tendencies.

Emotion	Threat Type	
	<i>F</i>	df
Avoid	1.81	2, 230.21
Confront	7.29***	2, 220.73
Ignore	5.42**	2, 225.84
Report	3.89*	2, 222.99

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

Conversely, there was an interaction for ignoring ($F(2, 184) = 3.41, p = .035$), but no main effect of perpetrator gender. Participants were significantly more likely to avoid, confront, and report in response to direct threat compared to indirect threat, and more likely

to ignore indirect threats than the direct threat. Interestingly, in support of the sixth hypothesis, avoidance, confrontation, and reporting were significantly more likely to occur in response to a male perpetrator.

The impact the emotions had on the action tendencies was then investigated by running the same analysis as above with each emotion added as an ordinal predictor. Anger was positively associated with confrontation, reporting, and unexpectedly avoidance, and fear was positively associated with reporting and negatively associated with confrontation. Most importantly, creepiness was positively associated with avoidance, as predicted, but also positively associated with reporting. Surprisingly, disgust was not significantly associated with any action tendency, and no emotions were significantly related to ignoring the perpetrator. These results provide some support for the third hypothesis, as direct threat did encourage more confrontation and reporting, both of which were strongly associated with anger. However, both indirect threats did not elicit significantly higher rates of avoidance, although as in Study 3, ratings of avoidance were higher than all other action tendencies which supports the notion that avoidance is the preferred method to respond to harassment.

Appraisal of the perpetrator

Next, whether the threat type or perpetrator gender would influence appraisals of self-awareness and creepiness was tested. As in Study 3, the focus was on the participants' cognitive appraisals rather than their emotional responses. The average of the appraisals of the perpetrator's behaviour as creepy and appraisal of them as a creep was used to represent cognitive appraisals of threat type ($r = .830, p < .001$). Two mixed model analyses were conducted, entering threat type and perpetrator gender as nominal predictors of appraisal of self-awareness and creepiness as the dependent variable in turn. Participants generally believed that the perpetrators were more self-aware in the direct sexual condition ($M = 5.79$,

$SD = 1.31$) than the indirect sexual ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.56$) and indirect nonsexual ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.64$) conditions.

There were no interactions between threat type and perpetrator gender for either appraisal, but there was a main effect of condition and perpetrator gender for self-awareness ($F(2, 184) = 23.93$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 92) = 4.60$, $p = .035$) and creepiness ($F(2, 184) = 41.81$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 92) = 12.71$, $p = .001$). In line with the hypotheses, the male perpetrator was appraised as more self-aware and creepier than the female perpetrator, and the directly threatening perpetrator was appraised as more self-aware. Unexpectedly, indirect sexual threat was appraised as significantly less creepy and the perpetrator as less of a creep than the other types. This only provides partial support for the fourth hypothesis, as creepy appraisals were not higher overall for the indirect threats. Despite this, it is important to note that the means for both the appraisals were above the midpoint, indicating that all perpetrators were viewed as self-aware, behaving in a creepy way, and as a creep.

Influence of creepiness on harassment

Finally, in order to investigate whether threat type or perpetrator gender had an influence on identification of harassment, and how appraisals of creepiness and felt creepiness were related to that identification, three linear mixed model analyses were conducted. Threat type and perpetrator gender were entered as nominal predictors with identification of harassment as the dependent variable in the first model. In the second model anger, disgust, fear, and emotional creepiness were included, and in the third emotional creepiness was replaced by creepiness appraisals.

There were no interactions in any of the models ($p > .191$). In the first model there were main effects of threat type, $F(2, 184) = 73.69$, $p < .001$, and perpetrator gender, $F(1, 184) = 5.76$, $p = .018$, where the direct threat and male perpetrator received significantly

higher ratings of harassment. There was only a significant main effect of threat type on the second, $F(2, 228.43) = 26.16, p < .001$, and third models, $F(2, 227.58) = 21.46, p < .001$.

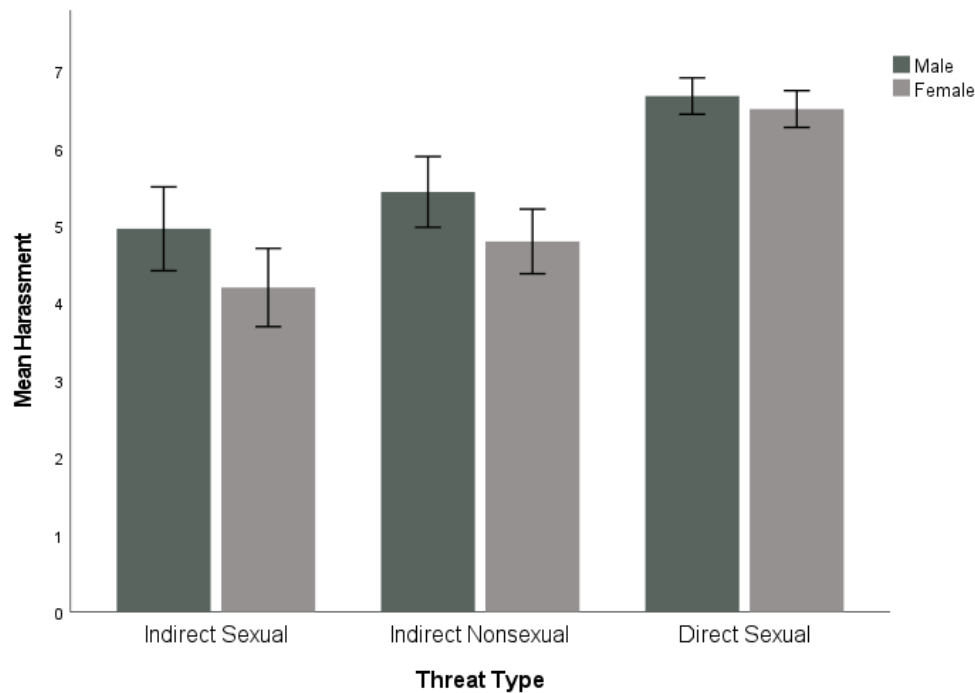


Figure 8. Study 4: Appraisals of harassment by threat type and perpetrator gender.

Anger was significantly positively associated with harassment in both models, as expected. In line with the other results, both emotional and cognitive creepiness had a significant positive relationship with harassment, though cognitive creepiness was stronger (cognitive: $t(270.29) = 7.48, p < .001, b = 0.48, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.60]$; emotional: $t(262.27) = 3.32, p = .001, b = 0.29, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.12, 0.47]$, supporting the fifth hypothesis. However, ratings of harassment for all three types of threat were above the midpoint, suggesting that all of them were identified as harassment.

5.4.2.3 Discussion

This study replicated the findings of earlier studies and further clarified how creepiness relates to different kinds of harassment, and what role the harasser's gender plays. Exchanging the direct nonsexual scenario for a direct sexual one also enabled a test of whether creepiness would only respond to indirect harassment, or whether it could also be

triggered by blatant sexual harassment. Overall, the results relating to the indirect threats were similar to those in the previous studies, but surprisingly, creepiness was strongest in the new direct sexual threat type, despite it being most readily identified as harassment. Therefore, it is possible that creepiness not only responds to ambiguous threats in a workplace situation, but also overt sexual aggression, perhaps due to the increased potential for harm. Alternatively, the “direct” sexual threats could have been a stronger candidate for creepiness than the “indirect” threats because, while overt, they still fell short of actual sexual contact or propositioning. That is, even though they were pretested to be as direct as the direct nonsexual scenarios, they were still seen as cues to even more blatant sexual misconduct.

As expected, the male perpetrator generally inspired more creepiness and his behaviour was more likely to be identified as harassment, and people were more likely to spontaneously mention creepiness in response to him. This supports the idea that one function of the word “creep” is to communicate an archetype of a person. However, he was no more likely to be acted against via confrontation or reporting than the female perpetrator. Like the previous studies, the most likely response across all the scenarios was avoidance, which is in line with the high levels of creepiness that the scenarios inspired. Importantly, creepiness does not appear to inhibit identification of harassment, but more ambiguously harassing behaviours are less likely to be noticed than direct behaviours.

Therefore, while it appears that more ambiguous behaviours are creepier and less likely to be identified as harassment, on an individual level creepiness increases identification of harassment and proactive action tendencies. This would indicate a Simpson's paradox, defined as a pattern where the direction of an association at the population level may be reversed within the subgroups comprising that population (Kievit, Frankenhuys, Waldorp, & Borsboom, 2013). The presence of this paradox suggests that an individual sense of creepiness is positively related to identifying borderline cases as harassment.

5.5 Study 5⁴

Given the results of Study 4, it was necessary to further investigate why creepiness responds to direct sexual harassment, as there is far less ambiguity in that scenario. Therefore, Study 5 tested whether asking participants to elaborate the reasons why a behaviour is creepy would make them more likely to identify it as harassment in comparison to those participants who simply make a quick appraisal. This also allowed a test of an alternative explanation of the results of Study 4: that consciously labelling a person as creepy promotes analysis of the reasons behind that judgement, which would make it more salient and thus more likely that the creepy behaviour will be recognised as harassment.

The same three scenarios as Study 4 were used, although the gender of the harasser was fixed as male to prevent any additional gender confounds. Additionally, one limitation of the previous studies was that some of the behaviours were specifically targeted at the individual reading the scenario, and some were generalised behaviours. To remedy this, the scenarios were slightly altered so none of them were targeted at a specific individual (Appendix N). This allowed an investigation of whether people understand that creating a hostile environment is harassment in itself, not just a cue to harassment.

A new measure of creepiness, the “Creepiness of Situation Scale” (CRoSS; Langer & König, 2018), was also included to test the scenarios compared to other research. Although this scale was originally developed to test the creepiness of technology, it could also be applied to assess the creepiness of interpersonal situations.

The creators of the CRoSS posit that creepiness consists of two subdimensions: emotional creepiness, defined as an unpleasant affective impression elicited by unpredictability; and creepy ambiguity, where a person lacks clarity on how to act in and judge a creepy situation. Thus, the scenarios in the current study would be examined on how

⁴ This study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/J2YXG>

much general creepiness they inspired, as well as where they elicit more emotional creepiness or creepy ambiguity. The inclusion of the CRoSS in this study should help ensure that the way creepiness was triggered and measured in the vignettes would be comparable to that of other studies, providing evidential support for their validity.

The main expectation for this study was that participants who had to elaborate on their reasons for their creepy feelings would be more likely to identify the root cause of the creepiness. Therefore, they would rate the scenarios as more likely to be harassment.

- 1) The scenario with nonsexual threat would have higher rates of spontaneously mentioned creepiness-related words, i.e. creep, creeped out, creepy than the two sexual threats.
- 2) Participants in the elaborative condition would rate the perpetrators' behaviour as more likely to be harassment for all threat types compared to the participants who were in the non-elaborative condition.
- 3) All the scenarios would rate above the midpoint of the Creepiness of Situations Scale (CRoSS).
- 4) Anger and disgust will be most strongly reported in response to direct sexual threat. Conversely, fear and creepiness will be most strongly reported in response to indirect nonsexual threat.
- 5) Tests of the hypotheses in Study 4 for measures included in this study would replicate those findings.

5.5.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 109 participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 8.18 GBP/hr in August 2020. The sample size was determined a priori by a power analysis using G*Power 2.1.9.4 that determined that an N of 94 would obtain 95% power on

a medium sized effect $f = .30$ for a 3×2 (threat type $\times$ elaboration) mixed ANOVA. From this number, 5 participants were eliminated who did not finish the study, and a further 7 were excluded who failed the attention checks. The final sample consisted of 97 participants (all women), all of whom had not participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, which determined whether they were asked to elaborate on their judgements of creepiness or not. They then read each of the three threatening scenarios from Study 4 in turn (indirect sexual, indirect nonsexual, direct sexual). Each scenario was presented in a random order, and they answered all the questions pertaining to that scenario before moving onto the next one. The participants first answered the same qualitative questions used in Studies 3 and 4.

The participants in the elaborative condition then had to report whether the behaviour in the scenario was creepy and whether the co-worker was a creep on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *no*, 3 = *maybe no*, 4 = *neither yes or no*, 5 = *maybe yes*, 6 = *yes*, 7 = *definitely yes*). They also had to write reasons for those judgements if they selected five or above. The participants in the non-elaborative condition did not see those questions, and just reported (along with those in the elaborative condition) whether they thought behaviour in the scenarios could be legally defined as harassment, and whether it created a hostile work environment, on the same scale as the creepiness questions.

Following this, the participants answered the ten questions in the CROSS on the same Likert scale, and reported how much anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear they felt using the words and facial stimuli from Study 4. After they had completed the questions for all three types of threat, they answered a manipulation check question (“Were you asked about creepiness in any of the scenarios?”), and finally reported their gender.

5.5.2 Results

Data Preparation

The scaled data for each threat type were entered as a separate case, using the MIXED procedure in IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25) to carry out a multilevel analysis predicting each outcome variable from coded independent variables, treating the participant as a random variable. All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

As in Study 4, to explore the factorial structure of the reported emotions, the 19 facial expressions and words were subjected to a principal component analysis with oblique rotation (Promax). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, $KMO = .93$. Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(171) = 5273.48$, $p < .001$, indicated that the correlation structure was adequate for the analysis. Based on the findings from Study 3 regarding the strong relationship between anger and disgust, the unweighted least squares analysis extracted a predetermined four-factor solution for the data, accounting for 76.12% of the variance. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 20.

Four composite scores were created based on the results of the principal component analysis and were then subjected to reliability tests. All were found to be reliable scales, Cronbach's $\alpha > .850$. As in Study 4, the four factor-based variables were significantly intercorrelated (r values ranging from .477 to .734).

Table 20

Study 5: Summary of principal component analysis results for emotion measures using unweighted least squares (N = 282).

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Fear	Anger	Disgust	Creepiness
Frightened	.99	-.05	-.03	.03
Scared	.94	.03	-.06	-.003
Fearful	.94	-.08	-.04	.05
Terrified	.91	.08	-.04	-.08
Fear (Face)	.33	.01	-.03	.13
Cross	.06	.93	-.06	-.03
Angry	.03	.90	.06	-.04
Furious	.17	.78	.06	-.07
Annoyed	-.20	.77	.08	.11
Anger (Face)	-.004	.65	.002	.03
Repulsed	-.02	-.03	1.00	-.06
Grossed Out	-.03	-.02	.98	-.05
Disgusted	-.07	.14	.73	.11
Sickened	.26	.15	.60	-.02
Disgust (Face)	-.12	.22	.46	.04
Uneasy	.05	-.01	-.11	.98
Uncomfortable	-.02	.02	.02	.86
Creeped Out	.16	.11	.20	.49
Weird	.24	-.07	.16	.36
Eigenvalues	9.86	2.32	1.40	0.88
% of variance	51.90	12.22	7.36	4.64

Note: Factor loadings over .32 appear in bold.

Spontaneous mentions of creepiness

Again, whether the threat types elicited different rates of spontaneous mentions of creepiness was investigated first. Qualitative responses were coded either as 1 (*mentioned creepiness*) or 0 (*no mention of creepiness*). When describing how the perpetrator made them

feel, 22 (41.5%) participants mention creepiness in response to the indirect sexual threat, compared to 20 (37.7%) for indirect nonsexual threat, and 11 (20.8%) for the direct sexual threat, but these differences were not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 291) = 4.75, p = .093, w = 0.13$.

When describing the perpetrator to someone else, 21 (29.2%) participants mentioned creepiness in response to indirect sexual threat, compared to 26 (36.1%) for the nonsexual threat, and 25 (34.7%) for direct sexual threat. The difference in proportions here was also not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 288) = 0.78, p = .678, w = 0.05$. In general, the equal mentions of creepiness were similar to Study 4’s findings using an identical set of scenarios.

Effect of elaboration on perceptions of harassment and hostile work environments

Next, two linear mixed model analyses were conducted to investigate whether threat type and elaboration of creepiness had an influence on identification of harassment or a hostile work environment. Threat type and elaboration condition were entered as nominal predictors with identification of harassment as the dependent variable in the first model, and identification of a hostile work environment as the dependent variable in the second.

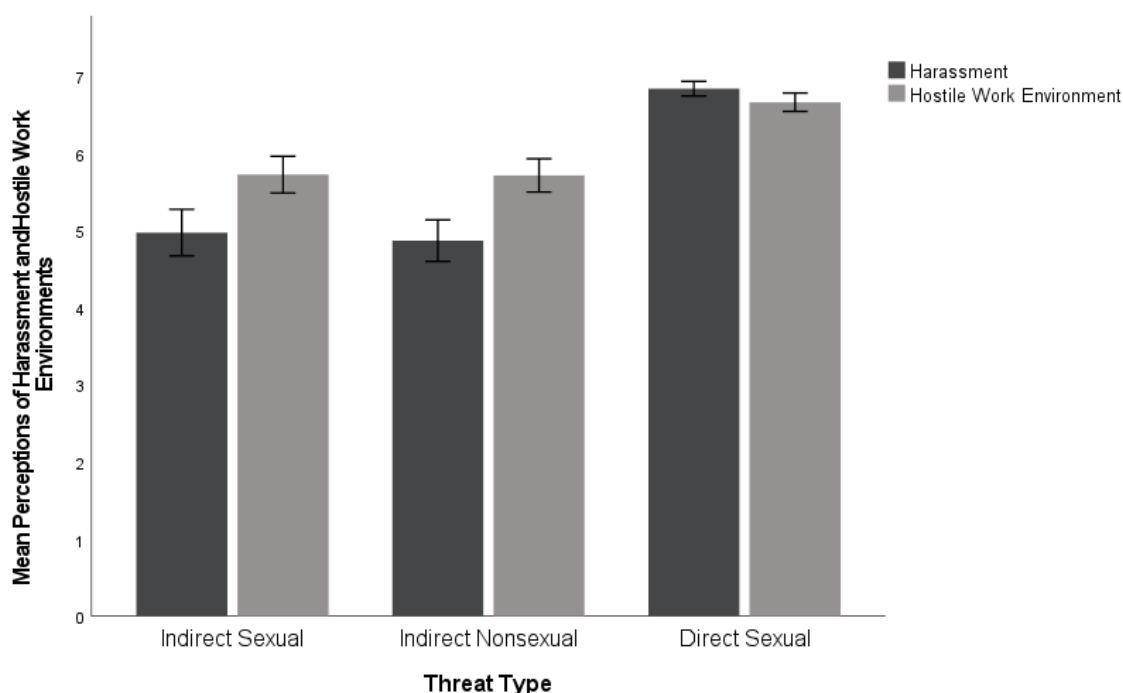


Figure 9. Study 5: Appraisals of harassment and hostile work environment across both elaboration conditions.

There were no interactions in either of the models ($p > .464$), and no effect of elaboration on identification of harassment or a hostile work environment ($p > .376$). However, as in previous studies, there was a main effect of threat type on identification of harassment, $F(2, 190) = 96.46$, $p < .001$, where the direct threat was more likely to be recognised as harassment than the indirect sexual and nonsexual threats. There was also a main effect of threat type on identification of a hostile work environment, $F(2, 190) = 34.64$, $p < .001$, as the direct threat was again more likely to be recognised as creating a hostile work environment than the indirect threat types. These results replicate the pattern of direct threat being more readily identified as harassment, but do not support the second hypothesis, thus contradicting the idea that recognising and elaborating on creepiness encourages acknowledgement and identification of harassment in the workplace.

The above analyses were then repeated with anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear added as covariates. In contrast to the previous studies, here creepiness only predicted identification of a hostile work environment, but not harassment per se, which might have been expected as the scenarios had been modified to exclude personally targeted forms of harassment. Interestingly, however, anger was a positive predictor of identification of both harassment and of a hostile work environment. Disgust only predicted identification of harassment, whereas fear had no significant associations, as expected. These last results show that harassment judgments were not completely irrelevant to emotions among these depersonalised scenarios, but that creepiness now specifically related to hostile work environment.

Table 21

Study 5: Influence of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear on identification of harassment and hostile work environments.

	Emotion	<i>t</i>	df	γ	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Harassment	Anger	4.08***	276.96	0.27	0.14	0.41
	Creepiness	-1.46	258.30	-0.15	-0.36	0.05
	Disgust	2.32*	280.44	0.19	0.03	0.35
	Fear	1.34	271.84	0.08	-0.04	0.21
HWE	Anger	3.14**	278.86	0.17	0.06	0.27
	Creepiness	2.71**	263.17	0.23	0.06	0.39
	Disgust	1.71	280.96	0.11	-0.02	0.24
	Fear	0.31	274.80	0.02	-0.08	0.11

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

Results of the Creepiness of Situations Scale

The answers on the CRoSS were subjected to a reliability analysis, which confirmed that it was a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .813$); the results were then averaged to create a score for each threat type. One-sample *t*-tests revealed that all three threat types were rated as significantly above the midpoint of the scale (indirect sexual: $t(96) = 6.85$, $p < .001$; indirect nonsexual: $t(96) = 16.98$, $p < .001$; direct sexual: $t(96) = 12.31$, $p < .001$.) This supports the third hypothesis on the validity of the scenarios, as it shows that they align with other research on creepiness. Interestingly, all three threat types scored higher on the dimension of emotional creepiness than creepy ambiguity; see Figure 10 for descriptive statistics.

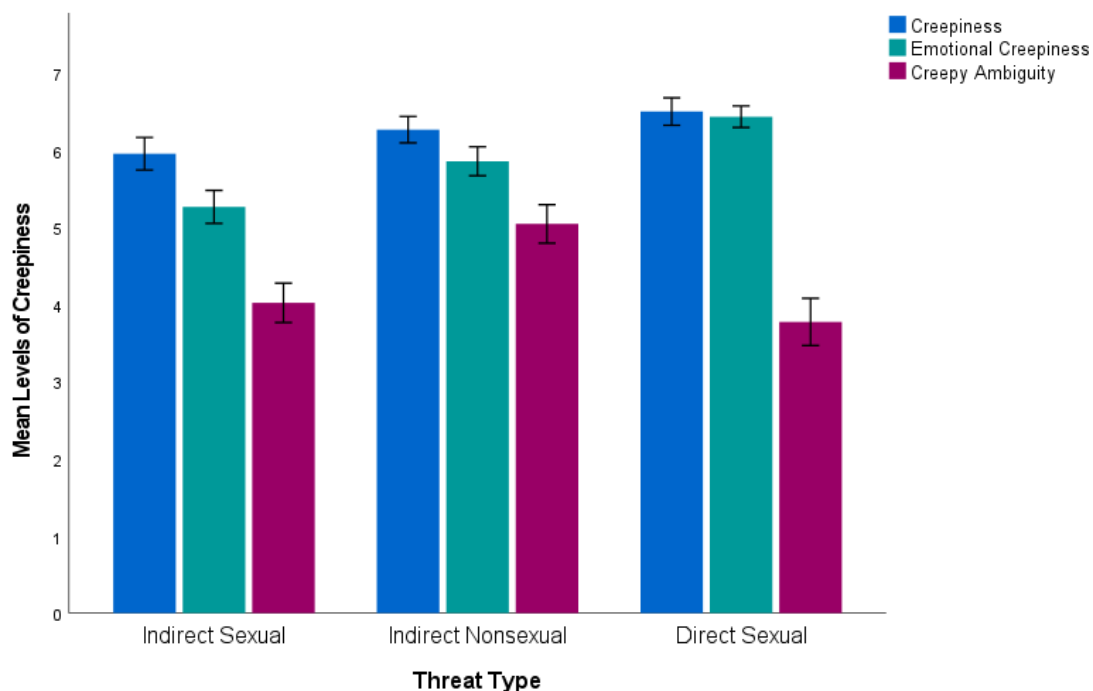


Figure 10. Study 5: Descriptive statistics of scores on the CROSS.

Emotions

Finally, the effect threat type and elaboration had on anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear was investigated. Four linear mixed models were conducted, entering the nominal variables of threat type and elaborative condition as predictors of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear in turn. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 11.

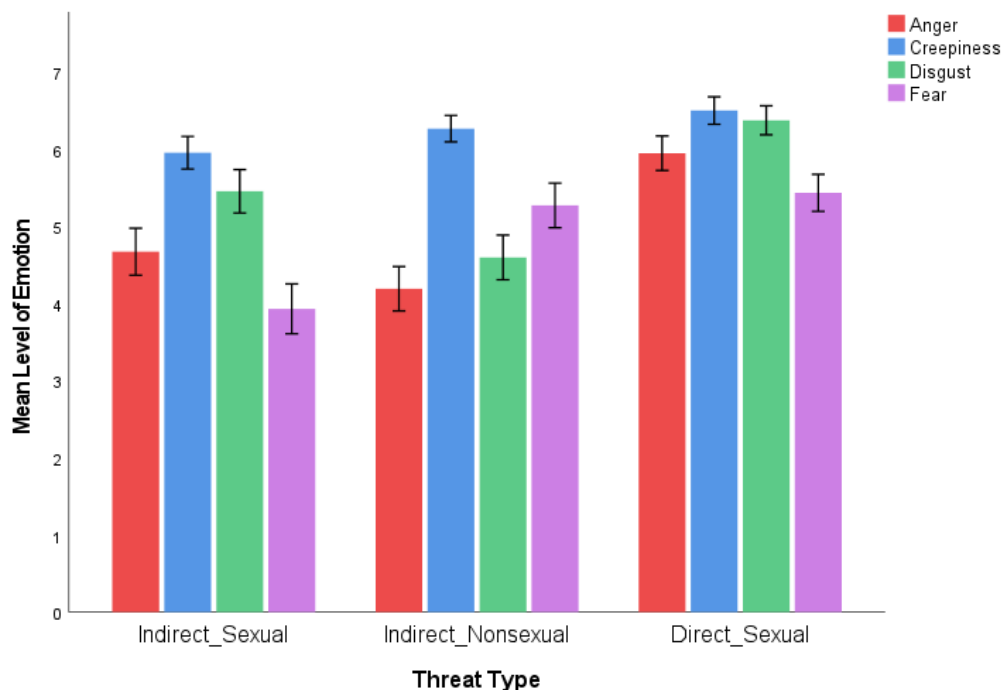


Figure 11. Study 5: Reported levels of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear.

There were no significant interactions between threat type and elaborative condition for any emotions ($p > .494$), and no main effect of elaborative condition ($p > .166$). However, as before, there was a main effect of threat type on anger, $F(2, 190) = 82.06, p < .001$, creepiness, $F(2, 190) = 15.53, p < .001$, disgust, $F(2, 190) = 84.04, p < .001$, and fear, $F(2, 190) = 61.69, p < .001$. As expected, the emotions were most strongly reported in response to direct threat.

In line with the findings from the CRoSS, creepiness received the strongest ratings for all threat types. However, contrary to the fourth hypothesis, direct sexual threat still received higher ratings of creepiness and fear than indirect nonsexual threat, as in the previous studies.

5.5.3 Discussion

This study replicated some of the findings from earlier studies and was the first in this series to distinguish between overt harassment and creating a hostile work environment. As such, it provided further insights into the minds of the participants; when they had the option to identify creepy behaviours more specifically as a hostile environment, they did so.

Additionally, the results repeated Study 4's finding that creepiness responds to overt more strongly than ambiguous sexual threats, again possibly because the "direct" threats might have been seen as cues to even higher levels of sexual aggression. However, elaborating on the reasons why a behaviour is creepy did not make it more likely to be identified as harassment, and indicates that responding to creepiness does not require active reasoning.

These results support the idea that creepiness does not inhibit identification of harassment, but more ambiguously harassing behaviours are less likely to be recognised as such. They also suggest that in the previous studies, the participants understood that the

creepiness of the behaviour in the scenarios itself created a hostile work environment, but did not have a way to express a difference between this criterion and more personal forms of harassment.

5.6 Study 6⁵

The final study attempted to address the main finding from Study 5: that participants identify creepy behaviour as creating a hostile work environment more than overt harassment. To this end, all four scenarios from the earlier studies were included which would provide a strong test of both this newfound difference, and to conduct a final fully crossed test of the interactive effects of direct/indirect behaviours and sexual content. Furthermore, it also allowed a contrast of direct sexual with the direct nonsexual behaviour for the first time. The findings are expected to replicate those from the prior five quantitative studies, in that direct nonsexual threat will inspire creepiness to a significantly lower level than the other three scenarios, and that creepiness will be more strongly associated with a hostile work environment than blatant harassment, as seen in the following hypotheses based on the previous findings:

- 1) Creepiness would be most strongly reported in response to the direct sexual condition, followed by the indirect conditions. The direct nonsexual condition will elicit the least creepiness. Additionally, anger, disgust, and fear would be most strongly reported in response to the direct threats.
- 2) The scenarios would encourage different action tendencies: direct scenarios will encourage confrontation and reporting, and the indirect threats will encourage avoidance.

⁵ This study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/CQTMV>

- 3) Action tendencies would be positively predicted by different emotions: confrontation by anger and disgust, and avoidance by fear. Creepiness would positively predict both avoidance and reporting as in Studies 3 and 4, and possibly confrontation as in Studies 1 and 2 where reporting was not an option.
- 4) Creepiness would be positively related to identification of a hostile work environment, and negatively related to identification of blatant harassment.
- 5) The scenarios would be differently associated with harassment: scenarios with direct threat will be more likely to be identified as harassment, and those with indirect threat will be judged as creating a hostile work environment.

5.6.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 303 participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 9.44 GBP/hr in January 2022. The sample size was determined a priori by a power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.7 that determined that an N of 277 would obtain 80% power on a medium sized effect $f = .20$ for a 2×2 (sexual/nonsexual x indirect/direct) between-participants ANOVA. From this number, three participants were eliminated who did not finish the study, a further 13 were excluded who failed the manipulation checks, and six were excluded for overly similar responses. The final sample consisted of 281 participants (all women), none of whom had participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four scenarios: the indirect sexual, indirect nonsexual, and direct sexual scenarios from Study 5, as well as the direct nonsexual scenario from Study 3. Following this, the action tendency, emotion, creepy/creep, and harassment measures from the previous studies were given in the same format. After they had

completed all those questions, they answered two manipulation checks (“Was the scenario you read sexual or nonsexual?” and “Would you describe the scenario you read as being more ambiguous or more blatant?”) and reported their gender.

5.6.2 Results⁶

Emotions

First, a 2 x 2 x 4 mixed ANOVA was conducted to investigate how anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear would be affected by the directness (indirect/direct) and content (sexual/nonsexual). Directness and content were entered as between-subjects factors and emotion (anger, creepiness, disgust, fear) as the within-subjects factor. Descriptive statistics can be found in Figure 12.

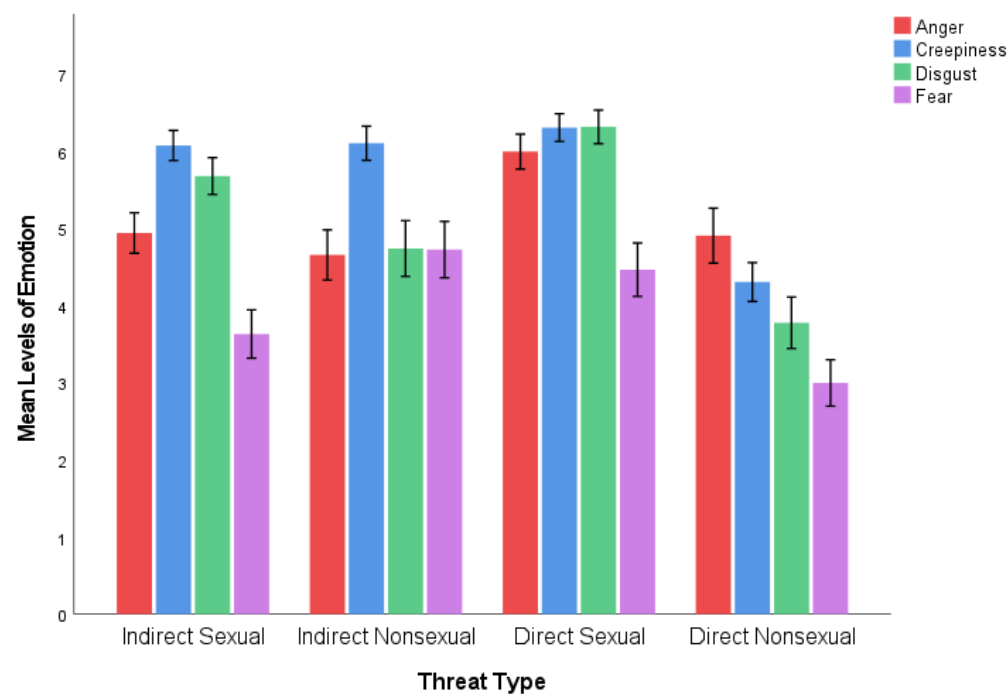


Figure 12. Study 6: Reported levels of anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear.

The three-way interaction between directness, content, and emotion was significant, $F(2.413, 668.51) = 12.42, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$. There were also statistically significant

⁶ All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

simple two-way interactions of directness and content on anger, $F(1, 277) = 7.24, p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, creepiness, $F(1, 277) = 88.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .242$, disgust, $F(1, 277) = 28.96, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .095$, and fear, $F(1, 277) = 59.21, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .176$.

There were simple main effects of directness and content on anger and creepiness, of content on disgust, and of directness on fear, and pairwise comparisons were performed for all significant main effects. The direct threats inspired more anger, whereas the indirect scenarios inspired more creepiness and fear. The sexual threats also inspired more anger, creepiness, and disgust than the nonsexual conditions. This supports the first hypothesis, and replicates the results from earlier studies, as the direct sexual threat type elicited the most creepiness, closely followed by the indirect scenarios. Additionally, as in Study 3, the direct nonsexual threat type inspired significantly less creepiness than the others. Anger, disgust, and fear also responded as predicted.

Action tendencies

Next, a $2 \times 2 \times 4$ mixed ANOVA was conducted to investigate how action tendencies would be affected by directness and content. Directness and content were entered as between-subjects factors and action tendency (avoid, confront, ignore, report) was entered as the within-subjects factor. Descriptive statistics can be found in Figure 13.

The three-way interaction between scenario, condition, and action tendency was not significant ($F(2.25, 624.34) = 2.61, p = .068$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$). There was a statistically significant simple two-way interaction of directness and content on reporting ($F(1, 277) = 8.76, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .031$), but not avoidance ($F(1, 277) = 2.97, p = .086$, partial $\eta^2 = .011$), confrontation ($F(1, 277) = 0.37, p = .543$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$), or ignoring ($F(1, 277) = 0.01, p = .942$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$).

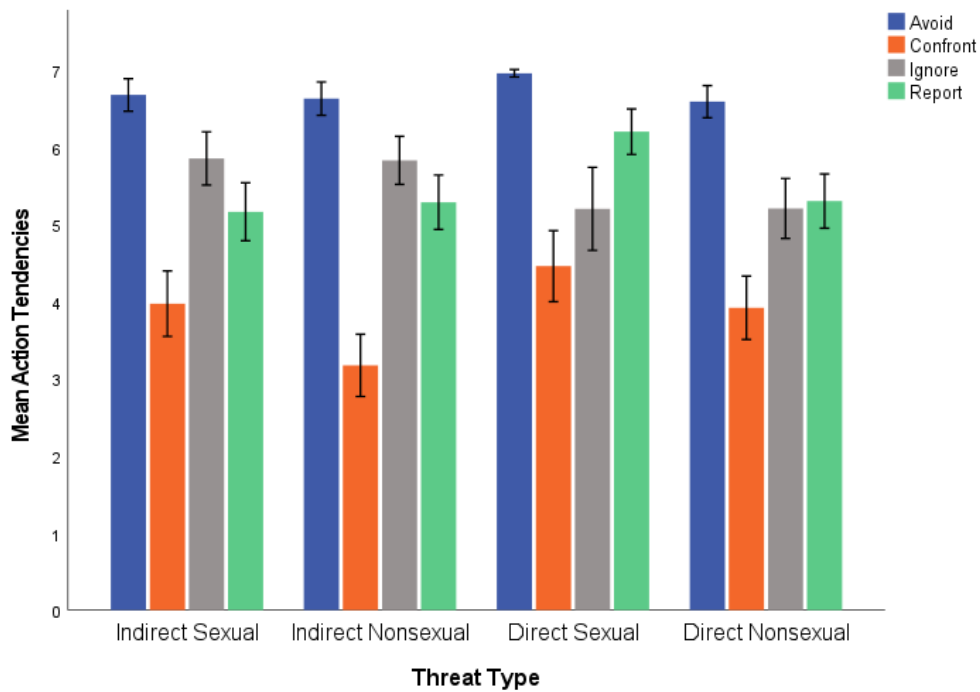


Figure 13. Study 6: Reported preferences for avoidance, confrontation, ignoring, and reporting.

There were simple main effects of directness and content on confrontation and reporting, of content on avoidance, and of directness on ignoring. Pairwise comparisons were performed for all significant main effects. Participants were more likely to avoid, confront, or report the perpetrators in the sexual than nonsexual conditions, and more likely to confront and report in the direct scenarios, in line with the second hypothesis. Furthermore, ignoring the perpetrator was rated much higher in the indirect scenarios.

The impact the emotions had on the action tendencies was then investigated by running the same analyses as above with each emotion added as a covariate. As expected, anger was a positive predictor of confrontation and reporting, and fear negatively predicted confronting the perpetrator. However, contrary to the third hypothesis, creepiness did not significantly predict any of the action tendencies.

Identification of harassment

Next, how directness and content affected identification of harassment and a hostile work environment was tested. To this end, a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed ANOVA was conducted, entering directness and content as between-subjects factors and identification as the within-subjects factor. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 14.

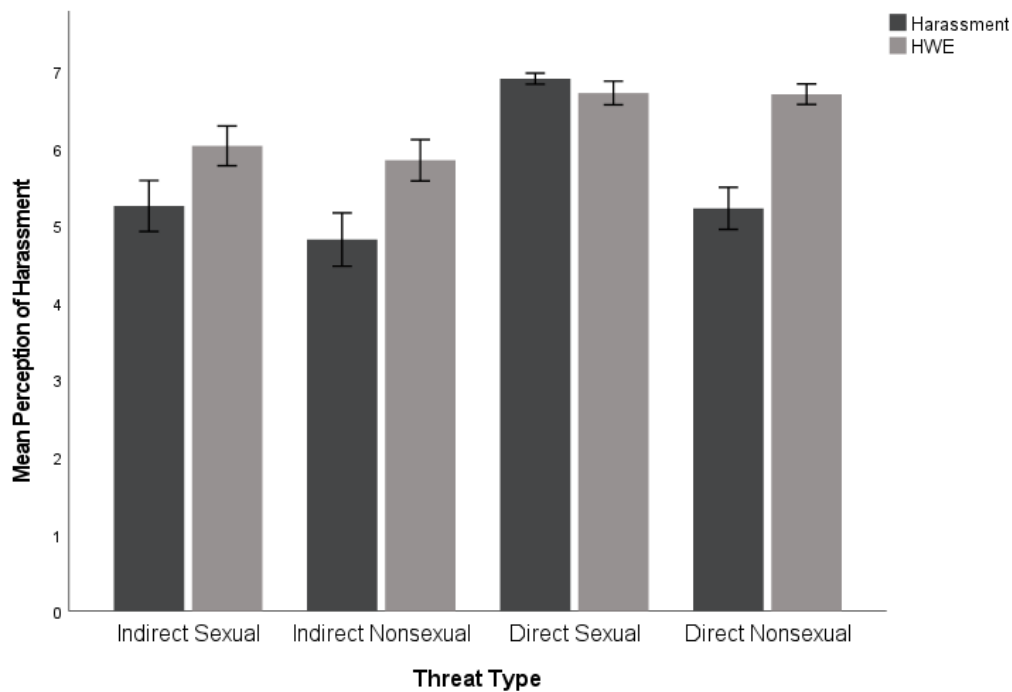


Figure 14. Study 6: Appraisals of harassment and hostile work environment.

The three-way interaction between directness, content, and harassment type was significant, $F(1, 277) = 30.81, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .100$. There was a statistically significant simple two-way interaction of directness and content on identification of harassment, $F(1, 277) = 20.15, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .068$, but not of a hostile work environment, $F(1, 277) = 0.66, p = .417$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$.

There were simple main effects of directness, $F(1, 277) = 54.87, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .165$, and content, $F(1, 277) = 58.21, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .174$, on identification of harassment, and of directness on identification of a hostile work environment, $F(1, 277) = 53.71, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .162$. Pairwise comparisons were performed for all significant

main effects. As predicted, harassment was more readily identified in response to direct sexual threats, but surprisingly, identifying a hostile work environment was also more likely in response to direct threats. However, as in the previous studies, all four of the threat types were rated above the midpoint, indicating that they were all categorised to some degree as being harassment or creating a hostile work environment.

Finally, the above analyses were reconducted with anger, creepiness, disgust, and fear included as covariates. Creepiness was the only emotion to positively predict identification of harassment, whereas anger and disgust positively predicted identification of a hostile work environment alongside creepiness.

5.6.3 Discussion

This study replicated the findings of the three previous studies and was the first to contain a comparison between direct sexual and direct nonsexual behaviours. These results confirm that creepiness responds to overt sexual aggression as well as ambiguous threats, but not overt nonsexual aggression. Interestingly, while Study 5 found that creepiness was only associated with identifying a hostile work environment, here creepiness positively predicted identification of overt harassment as well.

5.7 General Discussion

These four experiments were carried out to test how creepiness responded to sexual/nonsexual and direct/indirect harassment using an appraisal framework. It was expected that the results would replicate those reported in earlier chapters, in that creepiness would respond to indirect threats and motivate identification and confrontation of harassment.

In Chapter 3, it was found that creepiness was a spontaneous and common response to workplace sexual harassment, but it was not clear how much these findings supported the theoretical account of creepiness as a response to ambiguously threatening situations. With pre-tested scenarios in this chapter, Study 3 found that creepiness was inspired solely by indirect forms of harassment. However, in Study 4 the highest levels of creepiness were reported in conditions involving more direct sexual harassment, a result which was repeated in Study 5. This could be because sexual harassment, even when direct, was seen as a cue to more severe misconduct. Study 6 bore this out in a full design that replicated jointly the findings of Studies 3 through 5: creepiness was elicited more by any level of sexual harassment and indirect nonsexual threats, than by direct nonsexual ones. It is especially important to recognise that creepiness was still endorsed in all four studies even when in competition with the other “stronger” emotions. This provides further evidence that creepiness is triggered by indirect threats or threats of a sexual nature, which supports McAndrew and Koehnke’s (2016) findings that creepiness responds to ambiguous situations and that it has a special relationship with sexual behaviour.

Throughout the studies, creepiness judgments usually predicted avoidant action (but not ignoring the harassment) and reporting. This could explain why creepiness predicted confrontation in Chapter 3, because reporting the perpetrator was not offered as an option. Alternatively, Molho, Tybur, Güler, Balliet, and Hofmann (2017) found that disgust predicted avoidance but also less costly indirect aggression such as gossip or reporting; creepiness

could therefore behave in the same way. As expected, anger was more consistently related to direct confrontation. The findings also demonstrate that creepiness does not inhibit identification of harassment and instead can aid in recognition and action. In Studies 3 and 4 (and those in Chapter 3), when hostile environment was not explicitly assessed, creepiness was linked to judgements of harassment, even controlling for other more commonly studied emotions like anger, disgust, and fear. When environment judgments were included and the scenarios were standardised to exclude personal targeting, the relationship of creepiness to environment judgments became clearer, which could indicate that people understood that creepy behaviour itself creates a hostile workplace environment.

While this is related to higher reports of confrontation of the harasser, people do tend to overestimate how likely they would be to take confrontational action in harassment situations (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005), and may in fact behave differently in response to real-life creepy scenarios. Additionally, determining what is and is not acceptable behaviour may be easier in the workplace because of legally mandated guidelines as to what constitutes harassment (Thomas, 2004), although this depends on the policies of the organisation in question. Consequently, as there is less ambiguity about how to respond, the participants’ experience of creepiness may act as further motivation for confrontation. It would therefore be interesting to investigate whether creepy behaviour outside of the workplace is as readily identified and challenged.

The most important results from this chapter are that creepiness is triggered by ambiguous cues of threat and provides evidence that it can stand as an individual emotional response separate from anger, disgust, and fear. There is also more support for the idea that men are seen as more likely to be perpetrators of creepy behaviour, and women are more likely to be targets. Furthermore, this research is the first to investigate creepiness in the specific environment of the workplace and to establish that creepiness can also be triggered

by overt sexual aggression. Most importantly, judgements of creepiness do not impair or undermine identification of harassment and can be recognised by both men and women.

The next chapter will test whether incidental cues to creepiness intensify the response to the threats presented in this chapter. A focus on cues that are irrelevant to harassment will then allow the investigation of whether harassment is minimised if the harasser does not conform to the stereotypes of a creep. The studies will investigate whether stereotypically creepy people are more likely to be identified as harassers, even if the behaviour is identical to a non-stereotypical creep. In addition to this, a new measure of “punishment” based on Madera, Podratz, King, and Hebl (2007) was also introduced to provide a measure of how severe the participants believed the behaviour deserved a reaction beyond personal avoidance or confrontation.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 Using the association framework to explore creepiness

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that creepiness is not only elicited by ambiguous cues of threat, but also by direct sexual aggression. It also revealed that judgements of creepiness did not obscure recognition of said behaviour as harassment. However, creepiness does not take place in a vacuum. Two people committing identical acts are not judged identically; for example, the same behaviour is viewed as creepier when committed by a man compared to a woman, as reported in Chapter 5. Additionally, research into overt sexual harassment has revealed that not only is it perceived as worse when conducted by men towards women than vice versa (Wayne, Riordan, & Thomas, 2001), but also that the high attractiveness of the perpetrator can decrease the likelihood that the harassment is taken seriously and lead to more negative views of the victim (Petrauskaitė & Čunichina, 2019). Therefore, an important factor that the earlier chapters did not take into consideration was the characteristics of the creeps themselves.

An appraisal framework would not be suitable for this investigation, as these characteristics would inspire unconscious biases towards or against the individual, and appraisals depend on activation of a goal. Instead, this chapter will focus on the associative function of emotion. Where appraisals rely on an objective and are more slow-moving due to their cognitive nature, associations are often faster (but not always) (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006), but importantly, associations are not goal-focused (Giner-Sorolla, 2012). For example, when spotting a snake in the grass, you do not stop and think about what a snake is, whether it is dangerous, and how this information will shape your emotional reaction – instead you feel an instinctive fear and quickly avoid it. As Chapters 3 – 5 have identified additional non-harassing behaviours, traits, and characteristics associated with

creepiness, it is now important to investigate whether they will impact perception of a person's threatening behaviour, and subsequent consequences of it.

The goal of this chapter is therefore to investigate whether non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness will influence whether the threat types from Chapter 5 will be identified as harassment. This will be done by varying incidental cues to creepiness (e.g. awkwardness, strange hobbies) and cues that inhibit judgements of creepiness (e.g. personable, self-assured). The chapter will then discuss whether the harassment and its consequences would be minimised if the harasser does not conform to the stereotypes of a creep.

6.2 The present studies

Before conducting these studies, two pre-tests were conducted to find out what traits were associated with different kinds of harassment, and to investigate the emotional associations of several pre-selected traits mentioned in the previous three chapters. The goal was to create character vignettes to elicit associations of creepiness outside of harassing behaviour.

6.3 Study 7

6.3.1 Pre-test 1

Method

Participants

Thirty-nine participants (29 women) were recruited from Prolific Academic who were paid 12.11 GBP/hr to complete the study.

Materials & Procedure

The participants were presented with two open-ended questions asking them to describe the behaviour, hobbies, physical characteristics, and other traits of a man who could

be a 1) “sexual threat” and 2) “non-sexual violent threat” to a woman in the workplace. On the next page, the participants were shown a list of 16 traits (Appendix P) mentioned in previous studies matched with a “non-creepy” version (e.g. introverted and extroverted, collecting dolls and collecting football cards), and rated on a Likert scale of 1 (*extremely less likely*) to 7 (*extremely more likely*) how likely a man displaying these would be to sexually harass someone compared to the average man. Those traits were then repeated, but the participants were asked about a man who non-sexually harasses someone.

Results

Behaviours listed for the sexually threatening man mostly involved hyper-masculinity, such as watching porn, being a “gym rabbit”, and having a sense of entitlement towards women. The man was characterised as being typically older and physically strong, with no female friends. In the case of the non-sexually threatening man, answers were themed more obviously around control, such as not taking no for an answer, being controlling and condescending, and being highly ambitious. Several of the participants mentioned straightforward cues to violence like losing his temper easily and enjoying violent sports.

One-sample t-tests against the midpoint were conducted to investigate what pre-listed traits were associated with a) men who are sexual harassers, and b) men who are harassers without a sexual element involved, and c) which traits were *not* associated with harassment. See Appendix Q for descriptive statistics. The tests revealed that men who were outgoing, unpredictable, and interrupted meetings with irrelevant jokes about colleagues or irrelevant grievances were considered to be significantly more likely to sexually harass. Interestingly, men who rock-climbed, were introverted, predictable, played football, and were physically weak were less likely to be assumed to be a sexual harasser. Similarly, men who were extraverted, unpredictable, physically strong, and interrupted meetings as described above

were more likely to be assumed to be a non-sexual harasser, whereas men who were introverted, predictable, and weak were less likely to be assumed to be a non-sexual harasser.

6.3.2 Pre-test 2

As many of the listed traits in pre-test 1 were rated similarly for both sexual and non-sexual harassers, it was decided that the focus would be on the characteristics generated by the participants. Based on these results, a second pre-test was constructed to further examine the highlighted traits and match the sexual and nonsexual traits on how negative, creepy, and threatening they were perceived.

The primary goal of this pre-test was to separate the traits from pre-test 1 into high, medium, and low categories to create three new blocks of traits. The results would then be used to create profiles of three fictional men who would inspire different levels of creepiness, negativity, and threat to use in later studies in order to investigate the effect of creepiness independently of negativity.

Method

Participants

Thirty-nine participants (all women) were recruited from Prolific Academic who were paid 12.11 GBP/hr to complete the study.

Materials & Procedure

The participants were presented with three blocks of a hypothetical man's behaviours (e.g., states that he is an alpha male), physical characteristics (e.g., dirty and rumpled clothes), and hobbies (e.g. collecting insects) (Appendix R). They were then asked to rate how negative, creepy, and threatening each one was on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Results

See Appendix S for descriptive statistics. Unsurprisingly, the sexually charged behaviours across all three blocks received the highest levels of negativity, threat, and creepiness. This was closely followed by being condescending and entitled, which were equally negative but less threatening. There were then some traits which were rated as being negative but not that creepy or threatening, such as obsessive behaviour and giving people at work pet names.

The physical characteristics were all rated at similar levels of negativity, creepiness, and threat, aside from having bad teeth and abnormal eye movements, which were rated as significantly worse (e.g. rapid blinking, darting from side to side). It was therefore decided that physical characteristics would not be mentioned in the following studies, as a great deal more pre-testing would have been necessary to create three different levels of negativity, creepiness, and threat.

Therefore, it was decided that only the behaviours and hobbies would be used to create the three fictional men. One man would be highly negative and creepy, the second would be highly negative but at a medium creepy level, and the last would have low levels of negativity and creepiness. This allowed for a comparison of whether high negativity and high creepiness influence creepy associations, or whether high negativity alone is necessary.

The first man, “J”, was constructed from the greatest negative and creepy traits, such as making sexist comments and collecting dolls. The comments were specified to be stereotypical sexist comments (e.g. women are bad drivers and should be responsible for all the cleaning in the house), not comments with sexual overtones. The second man, “C”, was equally high on negative traits but rated lower in creepiness, such as being condescending and stating he is an “alpha male”. Finally, “B” was made up from equally balanced low-level

negative, creepy, and threatening traits, all of which were rated lower than J or C, such as giving people pet names and becoming obsessed with new projects.

Each man was also given a previous creepy or non-creepy job, sourced from McAndrew and Koehnke (2016). Being a taxi driver was one of the creepiest professions, aside from being a mortician or a clown, which were deemed as more unusual than the other jobs which may have acted as a confound. The non-creepy jobs that were chosen were a construction worker and a financial advisor. Therefore, “J” became an ex-taxi driver, “C” used to be a construction worker, and “B” had previously worked as a financial advisor.

While it is possible that introducing different jobs may introduce a confound of the perceived social status of each job, the risk of this was deemed acceptable for several reasons. For example, the jobs each man was described to have were all *previous* positions, and their *current* jobs were the same as each other. Additionally, the perceived social status of jobs can differ from person to person and is influenced by multiple factors, such as experience and age. For example, one study found that although the general view of translator jobs was that they were of middling status, translators themselves viewed their jobs as high status given their familiarity with the profession (Ruokonen & Makisalo, 2018). Generational differences also impact the consideration of jobs as high- and low-status (Cennamo & Gardener, 2008), and governmental policies can also affect how a job is perceived (Hayes, 2001).

Moreover, perceived job status does not necessarily relate to the perceived job *value*; for instance, teaching is not generally regarded as a high-status job, but it is often reported to be more intellectually fulfilling and great means of making a social contribution than jobs with a higher status (Watt & Richardson, 2008).

Finally, the more impactful job-status-relevant relationship in other harassment research is the supervisor/peer/subordinate relationship (Dougherty, Turban, Olson, Dwyer, & Lapreze, 1996; Lopez, Hodson, & Roscigno, 2009). Given the likely difference between

participants in their perceptions of high- and low-status jobs, and that all three men are presented as colleagues of the participant, this is the relationship that is more likely to take precedence when determining status than a previous job.

6.3.3 Main Study 7

The aim of this first main study was to investigate whether incidental cues of creepiness influence perception of a character as responsible for harassment. It was expected that the men who possess the creepy traits will be more likely to be identified as culprits than the man who has only negative traits, providing support for the theory that creepiness is associated with harassment separate from its negativity. Therefore, there are three main hypotheses:

- 1) The high-creepy/high-negative man (J) will be rated as most likely to be the culprit of harassment compared to the medium-creepy/high-negative (C) and the low-creepy/low negative man (B).
- 2) Incidental creepiness will positively predict ratings of each man as the culprit of harassment.
- 3) Identification ratings of J and C will be higher in the sexual condition than the nonsexual condition due to the relationship creepiness has with sexual harassment.

6.3.3.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 134 participants from the UK, recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 7.94 GBP/hr in July 2021. Five participants were then eliminated who failed the attention check. The final sample consisted of 129 participants (all women), ranging in age from 18 – 62 ($M = 25.83$, $SD = 9.73$), none of whom had participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read either the indirect nonsexual (nonsexual condition) or direct sexual (sexual condition) threat types from Chapter 5, Study 6, which were selected as the two scenarios that consistently received the highest ratings of creepiness. They then read a description of J (high negativity, high creepiness), C (high negativity, medium creepiness), and B (low negativity, low creepiness), and were asked to indicate which one they associated most with that behaviour, and which one the least. After that, they were asked how likely it was that each man was the culprit, on a Likert scale from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*). See Appendix T for descriptions of each man.

Following this, the participants were asked to rate whether they thought each man was creepy, a creep, weird, and unusual on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely yes*), which would later be used to create creepiness scores for each man. Next, they reported whether they believed the behaviour they read at the beginning constituted harassment on the same scale. Finally, they answered the attention check (“*was the behaviour you read about sexual or nonsexual?*”) and the demographic questions.

Appendix U contains the exact wording of all questions in this chapter.

6.3.3.2 Results

Data Preparation

The participants’ choice of J (high negativity, high creepiness), C (high negativity, medium creepiness), and B (low negativity, low creepiness) was reported as both a categorical choice of which of the three men was the culprit, and a scale where each participants rated the likelihood that each man was the perpetrator. This allowed for an ultimate choice of culprit, and also provided scaled identification scores for each man even if they were not chosen as the perpetrator. See Figure 15 for descriptive statistics of the scaled variables.

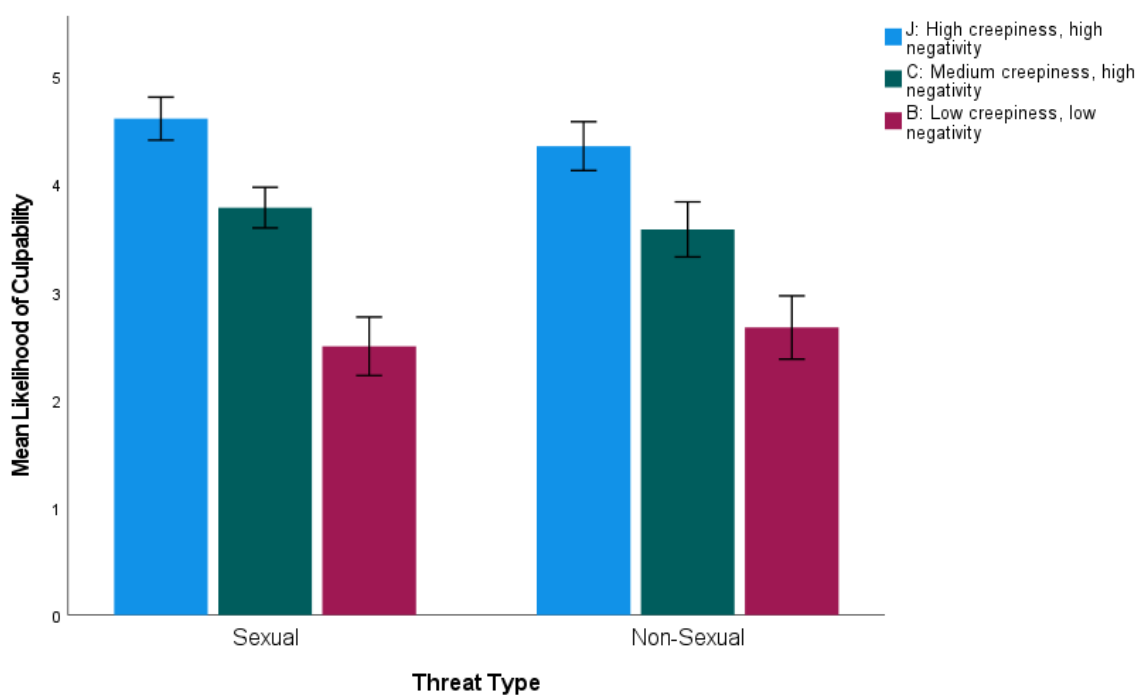


Figure 15. Study 7: Likelihood of each man as the culprit of harassment.

The creepy, creep, weird, and unusual ratings were subjected to reliability analyses, which revealed that removing the unusual ratings for all three scales would increase the reliability of the resultant score. Therefore, only the creepy, creep, and weird ratings were used to create overall incidental creepiness scores for each man (Cronbach’s $\alpha > .743$).

Unsurprisingly, J was rated the highest ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.46$), followed by C ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.88$) and then B ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.93$).

All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

Identification of the culprit

First, the frequencies were assessed for the perceived culprit. J was picked as most likely to be the culprit 87.3% of the time in the sexual condition, compared to 6.3% apiece for C and B. In the nonsexual condition, once again J held the clear majority of 78.8%, while C had 9.1% and B at 12.1%. A Chi-Square test of association revealed that there was not a significant difference in proportions between the two conditions, $\chi^2(2, N = 129) = 1.75$, $p = .417$.

Examining the scaled data, the same results are evident: J was rated as significantly more likely to be the culprit than both C, $t(128) = 7.28$, $p < .001$, and B, $t(128) = 12.84$, $p < .001$. C was also rated significantly higher than B, $t(128) = 8.04$, $p < .001$. This supports the first hypothesis that creepiness, not just negativity, is necessary to automatically identify harassers.

Next, the effect that condition (sexual/nonsexual threat type) had on choosing each man as the culprit was investigated. Three one-way ANCOVAs were then conducted, entering condition as the between-subject factor and the scaled identification scores for J, C, and B as the dependent variables in turn, with the creepiness scores as covariates. The condition did not influence the likelihood that J, C, or B were identified as harassers ($p > .090$). However, in each case the creepiness scores significantly positively predicted identification of each man as the culprit, supporting the hypothesis that incidental cues to creepiness do influence perception of a character as responsible for harassment.

Table 22

Study 7: Creepiness scores of each man as predictors of choosing each man as the perpetrator.

Creepiness Scores	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	partial η^2	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
J	3.42***	0.16	0.55	.085	0.23	0.86
C	6.21***	0.08	0.50	.234	0.34	0.66
B	7.16***	0.09	0.66	.289	0.47	0.84

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p \leq .001$; $df = 1$

Relationship with harassment

Finally, identification of the behaviours as harassment was included in the model. Identification of harassment did not have a significant relationship with choosing B as the culprit ($p = .476$), but it did have a *negative* relationship with choosing J, $t(1) = -2.45$, $p = .016$, $B = -0.39$, partial $\eta^2 = .046$, 95% CI [-0.70, -0.07], and C, $t(1) = -2.33$, $p = .022$, $B = -0.37$, partial $\eta^2 = .042$, 95% CI [-0.68, -0.06]. A potential explanation is that the more identifiable that behaviour is as harassment, the less likely creepy people are to be thought of as the culprit as creepiness tends to linger on the edge of identification.

6.3.3.3 Discussion

This experiment was carried out to provide an initial examination of how incidental creepiness is associated with harassment. The results support the theory that less harassment-relevant cues to creepiness can increase interpretations of a character as a harasser and provide evidence that creepiness functions separately from general negativity, because the high creepy/high negative man (J) was blamed significantly more frequently than C, who was less creepy, but just as negative as J. Interestingly, there was no support for the third hypothesis that identification of each man as a harasser would be higher in cases of sexual

harassment. However, ratings of creepiness were positively associated with each man being chosen as the culprit, further evidence that creepiness is linked to harassment.

While this does substantiate the argument that incidentally creepy traits are more likely to be associated with harassment than other negative non-creepy traits, it does not investigate the impact these associations may have. This opens up several questions: if someone is viewed as creepy, would they be judged more harshly than their well-liked peers? Does being creepy intensify perceptions of harassment, even when the creepy traits are not harassment in and of themselves? Alternatively, given the unexpected finding that there was a negative relationship between choosing the two creepy men (J and C) as the culprit and belief that the behaviour was harassment, is it the case that as harassment intensifies creepy people are less likely to be blamed?

It has been proposed that individuals have schemas about sexual harassment interactions which influence perceptions of the severity of the harassment as well as the punishment it receives (Madera, Podratz, King, & Hebl, 2007). For example, a common finding in sexual harassment literature is that said harassment is perceived as more serious and harmful when conducted by men towards women than vice versa (Wayne, Riordan, & Thomas, 2001). This is also the case for attractiveness, as more attractive victims are more likely to be believed especially when the perpetrator is unattractive (Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001). Given the presence of this sexual harassment schema, it is not a stretch to say that it could also apply to creepiness. Therefore, the following two studies explore whether perceptions of harassment are minimised if the harasser does not conform to the stereotype of a creep.

6.4 Study 8

Study 8 was designed to be a partial replication of Study 7, with two major changes: first, after the participants had chosen who they believed was the victim, they would be told either J (high creepiness and negativity) or B (low creepiness and negativity) was responsible for the harassment. This created a 2 x 2 between-participants design: threat type (sexual vs nonsexual threat) x condition (creepy culprit vs non-creepy culprit). Secondly, measures regarding likeability, believability, and punishment were included, sourced from Madera et al. (2007), to allow for a more thorough test of how creepiness is associated with sexual harassment schemas. This led to the following hypotheses:

- 1) As in Study 7, J would be rated as most likely to be the culprit of harassment compared to C and B.
- 2) Incidental creepiness will positively predict ratings of each man as the culprit of harassment.
- 3) When revealed as the culprit, J would receive harsher punishments than C or B for both the sexual and nonsexual threat types, due to his higher incidentally creepy traits.

6.4.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 183 UK participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 9.00 GBP/hr in November 2021. The sample size was determined a priori via a power analysis that determined that $N = 128$ would obtain 80% power for a medium sized effect $f = .30$ in a 2 x 2 (threat type x choice of perpetrator) between participants ANOVA. Three participants were then eliminated who failed to complete the study. The final sample consisted of 180 participants (all women), ranging in age from 18 – 67 ($M = 34.84$, $SD = 11.23$), none of whom had participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read either the sexual or nonsexual threat scenarios, as in the previous study, and then read the same descriptions of J, C, and B from Study 7. They then rated the likelihood of each man being the perpetrator, and completed the same creepy, creep, weird, and unusual scales.

Afterwards, the participants were told that either J or B was the real culprit, and that he denied it. In the previous study, the majority of the participants chose J as the perpetrator, so those who had this confirmed were in the “creepy culprit” condition, and those who were told B is the culprit were in the “not-creepy culprit” condition. They then answered questions about the believability and likeability of either J or B and were asked to write a reasonable solution to J or B’s behaviour, sourced from Madera et al. (2007). Finally, they reported whether they would legally define the behaviour they read as harassment, and whether the co-worker in the scenario was creating a hostile work environment on a Likert scale from 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely yes*) and answered the demographics questions.

6.4.2 Results

Data Preparation

As in Study 7, the participants’ choice of J (high negativity, high creepiness), C (high negativity, medium creepiness), and B (low negativity, low creepiness) was reported as both a categorical choice of which of the three men was the culprit, and a scale where each participant rated the likelihood that each man was the perpetrator. See Figure 16 for descriptive statistics of the scaled variables.

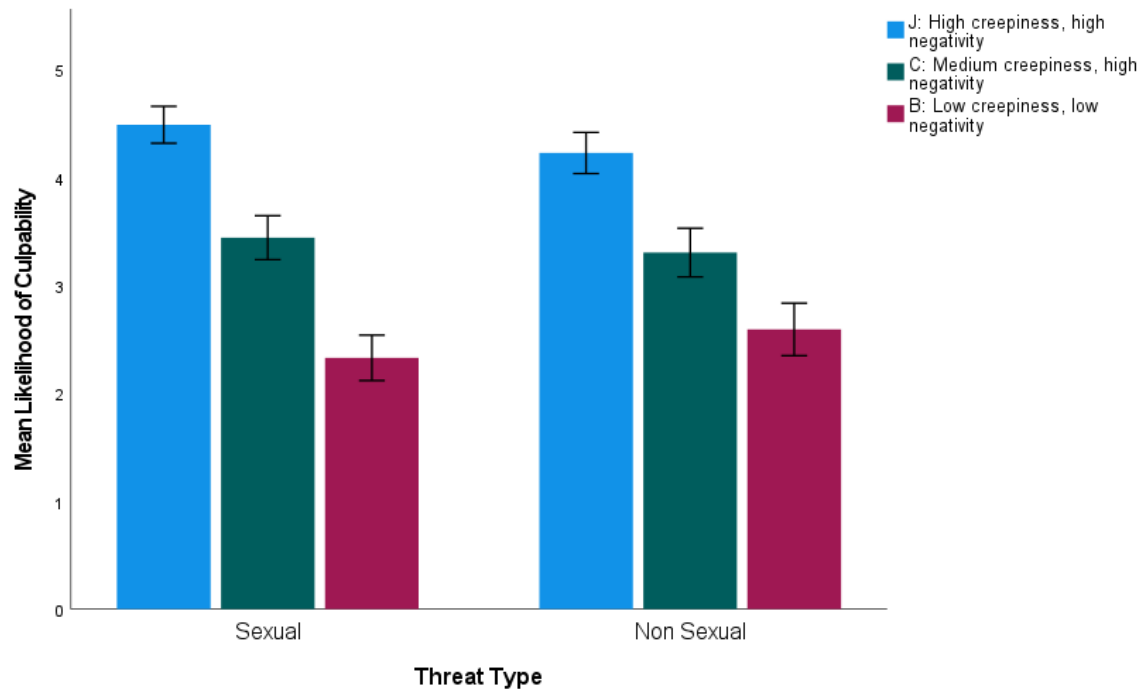


Figure 16. Study 8: Likelihood of each man as the culprit of harassment.

The creepy, creep, weird, and unusual ratings were subjected to reliability analyses, which revealed, as in Study 7, that removing the unusual ratings would increase the reliability of the creepiness scores (Cronbach's $\alpha > .754$). Therefore, only the creepy, creep, and weird ratings were averaged to create a composite creepiness score. As before, J was rated the highest ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.55$), followed by C ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.77$) and then B ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.91$).

Given that the item asking participants to recommend a reasonable solution to the situation as a measure of punishment was open-ended, the recommended actions were rated by four independent raters on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (no action) to 5 (termination), which were then averaged, Cronbach's $\alpha = .926$.

All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

Identification of the culprit

The frequencies were then assessed for the perceived culprit. J was picked as most likely to be the culprit 87.8% of the time in the sexual condition, compared to 10 for C and 1.1% for B. This was still the case in the nonsexual condition, where J was chosen 75% of the time, and C had 8.9% compared to B at 15.6%. This was a significant difference between the two groups, as J was chosen significantly more often in the sexual condition versus nonsexual, $t(177) = 3.14, p < .001$. The scaled data revealed the same pattern: J was rated as significantly more likely to be the culprit than C, $t(178) = 10.87, p < .001$, and B, $t(178) = 15.68, p < .001$. C was also rated significantly more likely than B, $t(178) = 7.62, p < .001$.

Three one-way ANCOVAs were conducted in the same manner as Study 7, with sexual/nonsexual threat type as the independent variable and scaled identification of the perpetrator as the dependent variable, including creepiness scores as covariates. The type of threat did not impact identification of the perpetrator for medium-creepy C or neutral B ($p > .170$), but it did for creepy J, $F(1, 176) = 4.46, p = .036$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, as ratings of him as the perpetrator were higher in the sexual than nonsexual condition. Creepiness scores significantly positively predicted identification of each man as the culprit, replicating the findings from Study 7 and supporting the first two hypotheses.

Table 23

Study 8: Creepiness scores of each man as predictors of choosing each man as the perpetrator.

Composites	<i>t</i>	Std. Error	B	partial η^2	95% Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
J	6.70***	0.11	0.71	.203	0.50	0.92
C	2.74**	0.10	0.27	.041	0.08	0.46
B	9.68***	0.07	0.70	.346	0.56	0.84

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p \leq .001$; $df = 1$

However, unlike in Study 7, neither identification of harassment nor a hostile work environment had any significant relationship with choosing any of the three men as the culprit when they were added to the model.

Punishment of harassment

To investigate whether creepy perpetrators would receive harsher punishments than non-creepy perpetrators, a 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVA was conducted, entering threat type (sexual/nonsexual) and condition (creepy culprit/not-creepy culprit) as the independent variables, and punishment rating as the dependent variable. Likeability and believability of the perpetrator were included as covariates. Descriptive statistics can be found in Figure 17.

There was not a significant interaction between condition and threat type ($p = .181$), but there were main effects of both. As expected, the sexual threat received a harsher punishment than the nonsexual threat, $F(1, 179) = 13.84, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .074$. Interestingly, the non-creepy man received more severe punishments than the creepy man, $F(1, 179) = 6.64, p = .011$, partial $\eta^2 = .037$.

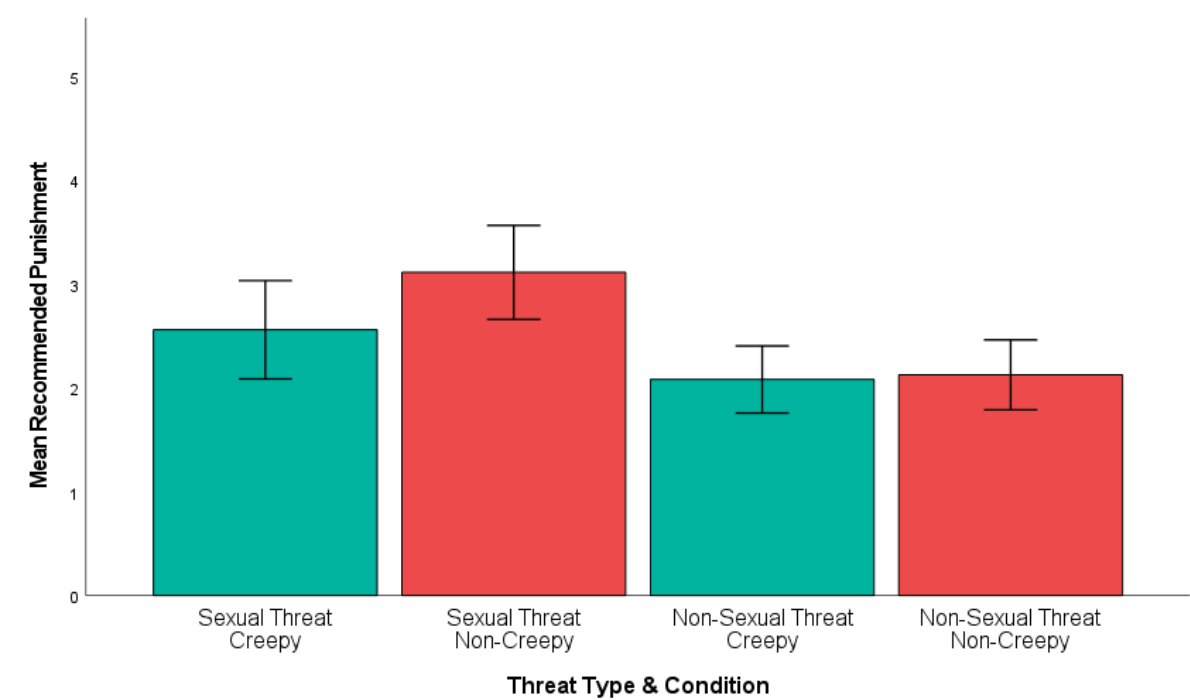


Figure 17. Study 8: Severity of punishment by threat type and condition.

Believability did not have a significant relationship with punishment ($p = .837$), but likeability was significantly negatively associated with punishment, $t(179) = -2.79$, $p = .006$, $B = -0.42$, 95% CI $[-1.52, -0.27]$. While this supports previous findings that sexual harassment is viewed more negatively and receives harsher punishment, and that likeability helps to mitigate punishment, it undermines the hypothesis that creepy traits inspire harsher punishment than non-creepy traits.

6.4.3 Discussion

This experiment was conducted to expand on the information gained about how creepiness is associated with perceptions of harassment from Study 7. The expectation was that people with creepy traits would inspire harsher punishment of harassment than those with other negative, non-creepy traits, replicating the results of the previous study. As expected, the initial findings were very similar: in both samples, incidental creepiness increased interpretation of a character as a harasser, showing that even non-harassment relevant creepy cues are associated with greater likelihood to harass. The major difference from Study 7 was that perceptions of harassment itself did not have any significant relationship with the participants' choice of culprit.

The most important finding here was that incidentally creepy traits did *not* inspire harsher punishment of harassment, contrary to predictions. A possible explanation for this could be violation of the participants' expectations. Although conformity to a sexual harassment schema tends to lead to greater perceptions of the severity of harassment, violation of this schema could have an even greater effect. Indeed, deviations from expected patterns of sexual harassment can result in more negative evaluations of the violating target (Goh, Bandt-Law, Cheek, Sinclair, & Kaiser, 2022). For example, male sexual harassment targets violate typical sexual harassment schemas, and are thus unfairly evaluated more negatively than their female peers (Madera et al., 2007). Therefore, it is possible that because

the participants chose J as a harasser and were then told that it was in fact B, they viewed B more negatively and thus recommended harsher punishments.

To control for this, the final study did not ask participants to choose which man they believed was the perpetrator; instead, they read a description of either J or B alongside the harassing behaviour. The goal was to test whether excluding the confound of choice would allow a clearer examination of the role of creepiness in sexual harassment schemas and potential expectancy-violation.

6.5 Study 9

To address the issue outlined above, Study 9 retained the overall 2 x 2 design of Study 8 but removed the confound of participant choice. The expectation was that harassers who conform to stereotypes of creepiness will be more harshly punished than those who do not fit those stereotypes. However, there was still the possibility that the results from Study 8 could replicate and the less creepy harasser could receive more severe judgements.

Additionally, one aspect of creepiness that has not been explored thus far is communication. As discussed in Chapter 2, emotions signal our mental states and intentions to others, and can be used to transmit information about the person they are directed towards. Therefore, the final part of this study asked some basic questions about whether the participants would tell other co-workers about J or B, and whether they would label these warnings with creepiness-related language.

The findings were expected to be the reverse of what was reported in Study 8, in that J would be viewed more negatively and receive harsher punishments than B now that the confound of choice has been removed.

- 1) J, the creepy character, would receive higher ratings of creepiness than for both the sexual and nonsexual threat types.
- 2) J would receive harsher punishments than B, the non-creepy character, for both the sexual and nonsexual threat types.
- 3) J's behaviour would be more likely to be identified as harassment and creating a hostile work environment than B, for both the sexual and nonsexual threat types.
- 4) Participants would be more likely to choose to warn other co-workers about J than B.

6.5.1 Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 140 participants recruited through Prolific Academic, who were paid 8.79 GBP/hr in November 2021. The sample size was determined a priori via a power analysis that determined that $N = 128$ would obtain 80% power for a medium sized effect $f = .30$ in a 2×2 (threat type $\times$ creepiness of perpetrator) between participants ANOVA. All participants were women ranging in age from 18 – 74 ($M = 37.32$, $SD = 14.12$), none of whom had participated in any of the previous studies.

Materials & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read either a description of J or B, and then completed the creepy, creep, weird, and unusual scales from the previous studies. They then read either the sexual or nonsexual scenario and were asked to write a reasonable solution to the behaviour, and then reported their belief of whether it was harassment and created a hostile work environment.

Afterwards, the participants indicated (yes/no) whether they would warn someone new about the person they read about. Next, they answered four open-ended questions about

this warning: why they would warn, how the warning would be phrased, anything they would leave out or not want to say, and listed five words to describe the person they read about. The participants were then told that J/B denied the accusations of their behaviour, and had to rate their believability and likeability as in Study 8. Finally, they answered the demographic questions.

6.5.2 Results

Data Preparation

As in Studies 7 and 8, the creepy, creep, and weird ratings were averaged to create a creepiness score for each man (Cronbach's $\alpha > .883$). J was once again ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.56$) rated significantly creepier than B ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.86$), $t(138) = 15.29$, $p < .001$. As before, the punishment item was rated by the same four independent raters from Study 8 on the same Likert scale and then averaged, Cronbach's $\alpha = .943$.

All assumptions required to run the following analyses were met.

Punishment of harassment

To investigate whether creepy perpetrators would receive harsher punishments than non-creepy perpetrators, a 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVA was conducted, entering threat type (sexual/nonsexual) and condition (creepy/not-creepy) as the independent variables, and punishment rating as the dependent variable. Likeability and believability of the perpetrator were included as covariates. Descriptive statistics can be found in Figure 18.

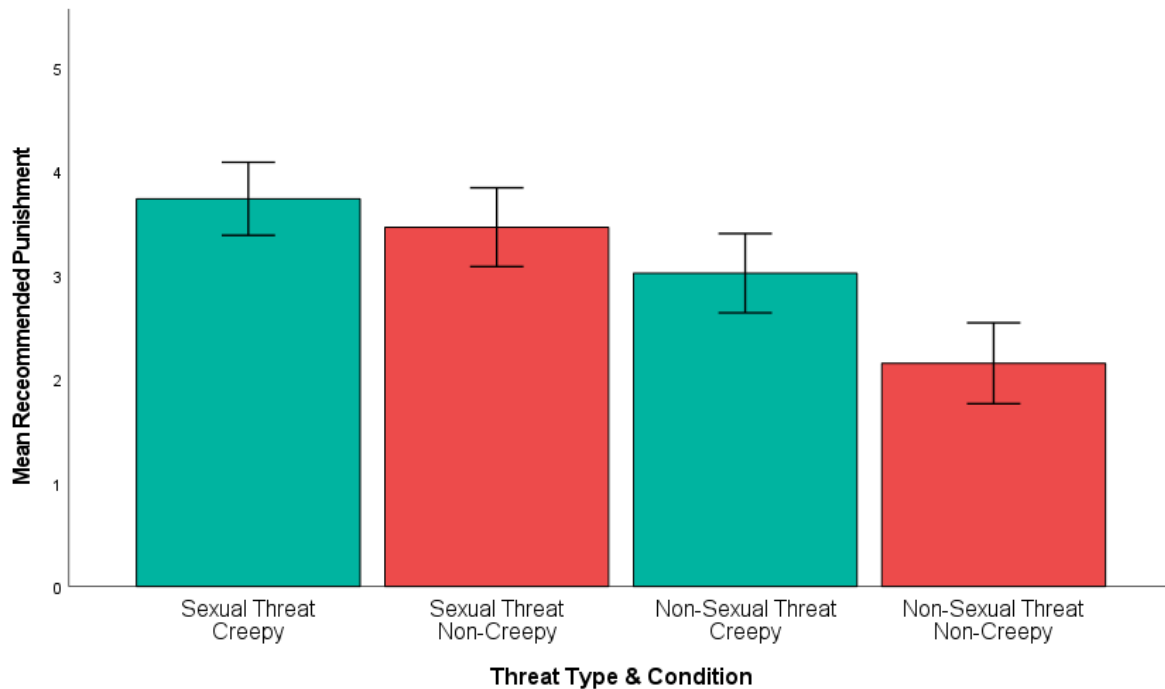


Figure 18. Study 9: Severity of punishment by threat type and condition.

As before, there was no significant interaction between condition and threat type ($p = .211$), but there were main effects of both. Again, the sexual threat received harsher punishment than the nonsexual threat, $F(1, 134) = 19.49, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .127$. However, this time the creepy man received more severe punishments than the non-creepy man, $F(1, 134) = 8.69, p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .061$. Believability ($p = .087$) and likeability ($p = .372$) did not have a significant relationship with punishment in this study, perhaps because the element of choice had been removed. This supports hypothesis 2, and indicates that without violation of sexual harassment schemas, based on the participants' own choice in the non-creepy condition, creepy people do receive harsher punishments than their more “normal” peers.

Identification of harassment

Next, how the condition and threat type affected identification of harassment and a hostile work environment was tested. To this end, two 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted, entering threat type (sexual/nonsexual) and condition (creepy/not-creepy) as the

independent variables, and identification of harassment and of a hostile work environment as the dependent variable in turn. Descriptive statistics can be found in Figure 19.

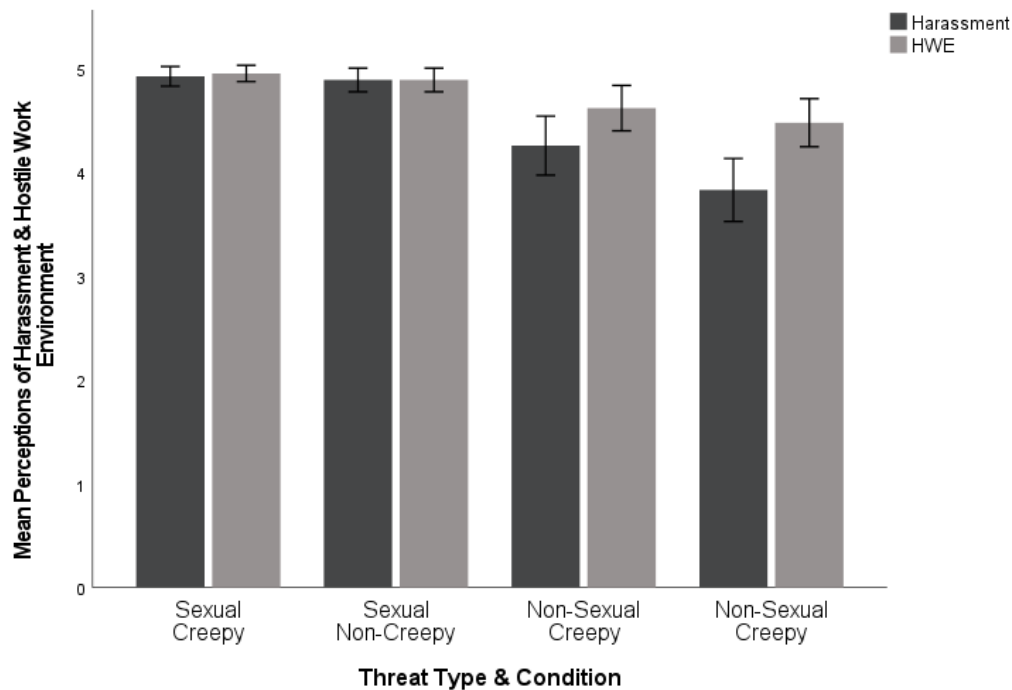


Figure 18. Study 9: Perceptions of harassment and hostile work environment.

There was no significant interaction between threat type and condition for overt harassment, $F(1, 136) = 3.27, p = .073$, partial $\eta^2 = .023$, or identification of a hostile work environment, $F(1, 136) = 0.21, p = .646$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. However, there was a main effect of threat type, where the sexual threat was more readily identified as being harassment, $F(1, 136) = 63.25, p > .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .317$, and creating a hostile work environment, $F(1, 136) = 19.17, p > .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .124$, than nonsexual threat.

Interestingly, while there was no main effect of condition for identifying a hostile work environment ($p = .236$), the behaviour of the creepy perpetrator was more likely to be recognised as harassment than the non-creepy perpetrator, $F(1, 136) = 4.51, p = .035$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$. This supports hypothesis 3, as J's behaviour was more likely to be identified as harassment than B. As hostile work environments are often not recognised as easily as overt harassment, it is not surprising that there was no difference between the two men in this case.

First, whether the threat types or condition would inspire different rates of warning was investigated. When the threat was sexual, 67 (95.7%) participants said they would warn other co-workers, compared to 3 (4.3%) who did not. When the threat was nonsexual, 62 (88.6%) chose to warn their co-workers and 8 (11.4%) did not, a difference between conditions that was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 140) = 2.47, p = .116$. The same pattern was apparent for the condition: 69 (95.8%) participants would warn their co-workers about J, the creepy man, compared to 3 (4.2%) who would not, and 60 (88.2%) would warn about B, the non-creepy man, compared to 8 (11.8%) who would not, a difference that again was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 140) = 2.79, p = .095$. Although these results are not in line with the expectations of hypothesis 4, this could be because the behaviour was generally viewed as being harassment, and thus the creepiness of the individual man would not have an impact.

As in Chapter 3, informal thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative responses from this section of the study. In general, the responses did not differ overmuch between conditions and threat types, so the overall trend of the responses will be summarised here. When asked why they would warn – or not warn – their fellow co-workers, the majority of the participants believed it was important to be prepared about a potential harasser, with one phrasing it as “*forewarned is forearmed*”. Interestingly, several participants stated they believed it was their “duty” to warn others about the behaviour. Some participants also mentioned that they would be more likely to warn a woman than a man because women need to keep themselves safe, whereas a man would instead be able to help call it out as it was presumed they would not be a target. For the minority of participants who preferred not to issue a warning, their reasoning was that they believed this fell under the realm of gossip, and felt that everyone should make up their own mind about J or B without outside interference.

When asked how they would phrase their warning, there appeared to be a clear divide in responses. Some of the participants left their warnings very vague, mentioning only that there was a co-worker who could make you feel uncomfortable, whereas others would directly label it as harassment. Most of the participants made it clear that they would want to give examples of the behaviour to make it clear that they were not “just gossiping”, both so the warning would be taken more seriously and to avoid giving themselves a negative reputation. Most importantly, several participants used creepiness in their warnings, e.g. “*that man is a creep, try and steer clear from him and don't engage in his creepy conversations*” or “*be careful around him because in the past he has behaved creepily*”. Furthermore, those who used this label did not give further information about the behaviour, which supports the idea that labelling someone as a creep transmits an archetype of a person and the ideal response towards them.

When asked if there was anything the participants would prefer not to mention in their warnings, once again there was a division in preferences. Approximately half of the participants, in response to both the sexual and nonsexual threats, and towards J and B, stated that they would not leave anything out of their warnings. However, those who would omit something either said that they would leave out specific examples and would prefer to phrase their warnings more generally, while the others reported that the only things they *would* say were the specific examples they knew about.

Finally, the participants were asked to list five words they would use to describe the perpetrator. Across all four combinations of threat type and condition, 148 individual words were reported. Any words which were only used once in response to one scenario were removed, and once all synonyms were combined, 15 different words remained.

Table 24

Study 9: Frequency of descriptive words relating to the perpetrator.

	Sexual Creepy	Sexual Non-Creepy	Non-Sexual Creepy	Non-Sexual Non-Creepy
Creep	7		2	1
Creepy	18	21	23	13
Disgusting	18	12	2	
Disrespectful	9	8	2	3
Harassing	3	4	1	2
Inappropriate	6	16	7	13
Invasive	2	5	16	28
Lonely		1	1	6
Odd	5	2	17	9
Persistent		6	3	14
Scary	17	17	20	8
Sexist	38	17	25	5
Strange	5	4	12	12
Uncomfortable	2	6	6	8
Weird	9	11	13	6

Unsurprisingly, creepiness was frequently mentioned, as were words linked to ambiguity, like odd, strange, and weird. Interestingly, overtly condemning words were seldom mentioned – only ten participants would label the man as a harasser across all conditions. However, words related to disgust were often used (e.g. dirty, gross, repulsive, slimy), which were overwhelmingly used in response to sexual violations. The usage of these words is similar to that used in response to morally wrong acts; for example, cheating on a partner or stealing (Herz & Hinds, 2013). As disgust is used to communicate moral condemnation and indicate impersonal moral motivations (Kupfer & Giner-Sorolla, 2017), it is possible that creepiness may perform a similar function, where labelling someone as a creep (or their behaviour as creepy) suggests that their actions are morally wrong.

Finally, while most participants viewed both J and B as having a negative impact, and would often describe them in harsh ways, they were strangely reluctant to offer as strict a punishment as their choice of descriptor would suggest. Tying into the previous point, it could be said that the “creep” label conveys an archetype for how the subject should be dealt with, i.e. generally avoided but not harshly punished until they cross a nebulous line.

6.5.3 Discussion

The goal of this study was to test the schema-violation theory put forward in Study 8 and investigate whether obviously creepy harassers would now be more harshly punished than those who do not appear to be creepy. As expected, when the confound of participant choice was removed, the results revealed the opposite pattern to Study 8, as the man with creepy traits was punished significantly more harshly than the man with non-creepy traits. In other words, perceptions of harassment are minimised if the harasser does not conform to stereotypes of creepiness and there is no confirmation that they are the harasser.

Interestingly, when it came to communication, it did not appear that creepiness had an impact on the participants’ choice to warn others about the harassment. However, it is important to note that while the participants indicated that they would warn their co-workers about a harasser in their midst, people often overestimate how likely they would be to act in such a situation (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005).

6.6 General Discussion

The three studies presented in this chapter provided an investigation into perceptions of creepiness and harassment using an association framework. The main expectation for these studies was that incidental cues to creepiness (i.e. creepy traits of an individual that are not harassment in themselves) would heighten sensitivity to both sexual and nonsexual forms of harassment.

Study 7 found that non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness increased interpretations of a character as a harasser and of said character's behaviour as harassment. It also demonstrated that creepiness could be evaluated separately from general negativity, as the creepy descriptions had this effect whereas the more negative but non-creepy descriptions did not. Study 8 replicated this, but found that these cues did not inspire more severe punishment of harassment; in fact, a *lack* of creepy traits resulted in harsher recommendations. This could have been due to violation of the participants' expectations that the creepy man was responsible for harassment, and when expectations were not violated, the non-creepy man was evaluated more negatively. Study 9 substantiated this, where the procedure did not intentionally contradict or support expectations by revealing who the harasser was, and so now the participants directed that the creepy man should be punished more harshly. Importantly, when a non-creepy person is a perpetrator of harassment this appears to diminish the perception of its severity, resulting in lesser punishment – but *only* when no previous conceptions have been formed about the individual. These results expand on previous work on sexual harassment schemas, where the violation of which (e.g. a male as opposed to a female victim) results in more negative evaluations of the violator. Therefore, when there is a possible scapegoat (i.e. a typically creepy person), the revelation of a non-expected party as a perpetrator of harassment leads to harsher evaluations of this person than if they were known as a harasser from the beginning.

Just as in Chapter 5 it was found that creepiness was present even alongside “stronger” emotions like anger, disgust, and fear, this chapter found that the effect of creepiness was separate from general negativity. This implies that non-harassing creepy behaviour can serve as a clue to the presence of harassment in a way that unspecific “bad” behaviour does not. However, it is vital to reiterate that not all creepy behaviour is harassment. Watt et al. (2017) noted that the label of creepiness could stigmatise unattractive or marginalised individuals. For example, they found that teeth cleanliness was an important aspect of creepy considerations, but not everyone has access to dental care. In the same vein, non-normative social behaviours were also cues to creepiness, but many mentally ill people exhibit such behaviours and may be unable to change them. This often leads to them being labelled as creepy, but it does not mean that these people are harassers. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of biases against marginalised groups when investigating potential creeps in the workplace.

The main limitation of these studies is that images of the potential perpetrators were not included. This was because characteristics such as attractiveness have been shown to influence perceptions of harassment, and furthermore everyone perceives attractiveness differently (e.g. Tovée, Swami, Furnham, & Mangalparsad, 2006; Geldart, 2008). Additionally, while some research has investigated physical characteristics that are considered creepy, as mentioned above, (Watt et al., 2017), it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough and valid image-based measure of creepy and non-creepy individuals. Thus, it was decided that attractiveness and physical creepiness would act as a confound which would hinder far more than help the studies in this chapter.

It is possible that if images were provided, in addition to or instead of the vignettes, the results would be different. The features of each man could either weaken or compound the rulings made based on their behaviour. Perhaps a creepy-looking man would be more likely to be viewed as a harasser, or maybe his unfortunate looks would garner sympathy and

more lenient conclusions? An attractive man may be the recipient of kinder verdicts, or he could be judged as more likely to get away with harassing behaviour, and thus chosen more often as the perpetrator. Any differences may be even more apparent if audio-visual stimuli were provided, perhaps in the medium of a short film. However, as stated above, providing valid and reliable images, videos, or other stimuli was beyond the realistic means of this thesis. Therefore, it was decided that the most practical and controllable method of presenting creepy individuals was through vignettes, given that participant responses to vignettes have been found to relate to real-world responses (Ganong & Coleman, 2006), and the use of vignettes allowed for more control over the stimuli, as the information each participant received was identical aside from the specific parts that were manipulated..

The most important finding in this chapter is that creepy harassers will receive harsher punishments, and vice versa, those who do not appear on the surface to be creepy may escape blame. The weight of labels is also relevant; when the creepy behaviour of someone who has skated under the radar of the creepy label is revealed, the recommended punishments are much harsher than if they had been suspected all along. This expands upon the results of the previous chapters, as while it has been established that creepiness does not inhibit identification of harassment, it does influence punishment of said harassment. These studies have therefore provided a first step in the process of empirically testing the impact that incidental creepiness has on identification and punishment of harassment.

The final chapter will discuss the overall conclusions of this thesis, the limitations of the reported studies, and the future directions of this research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 Summary of findings

This research aimed to provide an empirical examination of interpersonal creepiness and its relation to harassment. It is important to mention here the most significant finding of this thesis: creepiness can also be harassment in and of itself, as well as being an emotion elicited in response to other forms of harassment. With this in mind, the studies conducted in this thesis set out to shed light onto the elicitors of creepiness in the workplace, the behavioural consequences of creepy behaviour, and other emotions that are related to creepiness. This chapter will provide a summary of the key findings of each study, along with the main theoretical and practical implications of this research.

In the first two quantitative studies, the participants were given examples of harassment and asked to freely describe how these instances made them feel, and later to indicate whether the instances were creepy and how they would behave in that situation. In both studies, creepiness was strongly linked to all four harassment examples. The more “indirectly” harassing behaviours (such as watching from across the room) were judged as creepier than the “directly” harassing ones (e.g. physical contact). These findings supported the hypothesis that creepiness is an emotion triggered primarily by ambiguity; but surprisingly, the participants’ preferred action tendencies did *not* tend in the expected direction. Although previous research had indicated that avoidance was the favoured strategy in response to a creep (McAndrew & Koehnke; Watt, Maitland, & Gallagher, 2018), both studies found that the participants were equally likely to choose to avoid or *confront* the perpetrator. Additionally, while creepiness was positively associated with fear and disgust, as expected, it was also strongly positively associated with anger – and judgements of creepiness did not undermine identification of harassment, as had been anticipated. Given that these findings were consistent across both studies, one investigating an adult working

population and the other focusing on students, this indicated that there was more to interpersonal creepiness than initially hypothesised.

The qualitative interview study was therefore designed to address the unexpected findings by investigating laypeople's opinions on and involvement with creepiness. When participants were asked about their experiences, the results supported previous findings; they felt creeped out in response to violations of their boundaries, and when the intentions of the creeps they encountered were unclear. Interestingly, although the participants in the earlier studies reported that they would feel angry in response to creepiness, when discussing real-life experiences the main emotions the participants felt were disgust and fear. Likewise, while confrontation was frequently mentioned in studies one and two, in response to their own encounters with creepiness the participants mainly avoided or ignored the creeps, very rarely choosing to confront. This is in line with findings from the literature, which suggests that people often overestimate their likelihood to confront perpetrators in response to harassment (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005).

There was evidence that gender played a large role in the understanding of creepiness. The women who were interviewed had fairly similar experiences, in that the creeps they encountered were mainly male, although some were creeped out by women; the same pattern was true for men who had personal experience with creepiness. However, some men did not report feeling creeped out at all and described creepiness as second-hand knowledge gained through talking with their female partners or friends. The most important gendered distinction was whether the participants believed women *could* be creepy; some participants claimed that they could never feel creeped out by a woman, or that for a woman to be considered creepy their behaviour would need to go above and beyond that of a man. This is consistent with research into gendered perceptions of harassment, where ratings of sexual harassment are often harsher when the perpetrator is male (Rothgerber, Kaufling, Incorvati, Andrew, &

Farmer, 2021), and women are more likely to perceive behaviour as sexual harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001; Bitton & Shaul, 2013).

Studies three to six were designed to explore the themes uncovered in the interviews by replicating the design of the first two studies while also including pre-tested scenarios. The results supported the earlier findings that creepiness is triggered by ambiguous or indirect harassment, but surprisingly, it was also inspired by *direct* sexual harassment. This suggests that creepiness is elicited in response to either ambiguity in harassment - which often takes the form of the creation of a hostile work environment – or by unwanted sexual attention. Furthermore, when participants were presented with either a male or a female perpetrator, the male’s behaviour inspired more creepiness and his behaviour was more likely to be identified as harassment, supporting existing research.

Importantly, these four studies clarified the findings from studies one and two with regards to avoidance and confrontation of creeps. The results supported the pattern of a general preference for avoidance, but in contrast to the earlier results, confrontation was not as popular. Instead, the participants were far more likely to choose to *report* the creep, suggesting that confrontation was selected as a proxy for reporting in the first two studies.

Finally, studies seven, eight, and nine investigated how non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness would influence the likelihood that threatening behaviour would be identified as harassment. Whereas the first six studies utilised appraisal theory in their examination of creepiness, these three studies took an associative approach, exploring whether harassment and its consequences would be minimised if the harasser did not conform to the stereotypes of a creep. Study seven supported this theory, finding that non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness increased interpretations of a character as a harasser and of said character’s behaviour as harassment.

Uniquely in studies eight and nine, a measure of punishment was included to determine the participants' perceptions of the severity of the harassment. These studies revealed the importance of harassment schemas when judging creepiness; when the participants' schema was violated (i.e. when a person who did not display creepy traits was revealed to be a harasser), then the non-creepy individual was evaluated much more harshly than the creepy individual. However, when the participants did not assess who they thought was more likely to commit the harassment, a person who displayed non-harassment-relevant cues to creepiness was judged much more harshly than a person who displayed no creepy traits. In other words, when the participants had already formed a judgement that a stereotypically creepy person was the more likely perpetrator of harassment, they retaliated by giving more severe punishments when this judgement was wrong, but when no prior assessment was made, then a stereotypically creepy person would generally receive harsher punishments than a person who did not conform to the expected portrayal of a creep.

The findings of this thesis support the theory that creepiness plays a role in workplace harassment. Experiencing creepiness in the workplace can inspire vigilance of a creep in case their behaviour escalates; but importantly, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, creepiness can also *be* harassment, whether this is through the creation of a hostile work environment or more direct and obvious means. Furthermore, there is also evidence that creepy harassers who do not display conventionally creepy traits may escape punishment.

7.2 Situating the thesis within the broader psychological literature

These findings not only contribute to ongoing research into harassment in the workplace, but also to several other areas of research. Firstly, while this thesis expands the understanding of interpersonal creepiness, it can also shed light on other aspects of creepiness this thesis does not discuss. Earlier chapters have discussed the uncanny valley, but there is

another form of creepiness that has inspired an increasing level of attention: how technology itself can be creepy.

Social media applications provide users' locations to others and use data mining to collect personalised analytics for tailored advertising (Shklovski, Mainwaring, Skúladóttir, & Borgthorsson, 2014). Many retailers now tailor their online ads to "follow" people through different websites they use, a process known as retargeting (Helft & Vega, 2010), and in February 2012 an article was released detailing how the company Target was able to predict pregnancy from shopping habits, and tailor adverts for people who had not ever disclosed their condition (Duhigg, 2012). In extreme examples, this information can be used to search for private information about an individual online and publish it as a form of harassment, known as "doxxing" (Eckert & Metzger-Riftkin, 2020), which blurs the lines between interpersonal and technological creepiness. All of the above cases are considered creepy (Tene & Polonetsky, 2013; Torkamaan, Barbu, & Ziegler, 2019; Woźniak et al., 2021), and the mechanism through which it is triggered is akin to elicitors of interpersonal creepiness: violations of boundaries, and specifically privacy violations. Also similar in this case is that the legal infrastructure for creepy technology has not yet caught up to provide a clear definition of what is and is not appropriate for companies to do (Tene & Polonetsky, 2013), similar to how laws relating to hostile work environment harassment have been criticised as vague and unclear (Druhan, 2013; Williams et al., 2019). Therefore, both the threat and the norms and laws surrounding managing the threat are often as ambiguous as creepiness itself. The findings of this thesis highlight how research into interpersonal creepiness can lead to insights into technological creepiness, and vice versa. For example, investigating how the legislature and research into dealing with creepy harassment progresses could lead to a greater understanding of how technological creepiness could be addressed. Alternatively, examination of the advancement of "creepy" technology could be useful when applying its theories to non-technological settings. This was highlighted by Langer and König's (2018)

paper which demonstrated that evaluations of situations focussed on creepy technologies could also be applied to interpersonal settings in a consistent manner.

Another contribution this thesis makes is to the field of disgust. Chapter 2 explores how creepiness (or the “heebie-jeebies”) could stimulate avoidance of vectors of disease other than micro-organisms, and in Chapter 4 many of the participants described how encountering a creepy person made their skin crawl. Kupfer and Fessler (2018) discuss how ectoparasite defence should be considered separate from the disgust response typically used to defend against pathogens and other harmful microorganisms, as the mechanisms through which they infect humans are different and thus distinct adaptations are required to guard against them. Where exposure to pathogens results in prototypical disgust responses, such as nausea and the urge to vomit, ectoparasite cues lead to surface-guarding responses such as itching, scratching, and grooming, consistent with defence against organisms that attach to the surface of the body.

While it would be rather farfetched to suggest that harassers seeking to gain access to a person’s body are simply an extremely large ectoparasite in themselves, it is possible that creepiness has exapted the ectoparasite defence as a way of maintaining bodily autonomy. Neurological and behavioural adaptations are often re-used when a related threat arises, resulting in similar ways of responding to two stimuli that may appear to be distinct (Holbrook, 2016). Both protection from ectoparasites and harassers could stem from the same surface-guarding instinct; in this vein, creepiness could have arisen as a way to encourage vigilance of potential threats to physical boundaries in order to maintain bodily autonomy.

Perhaps most importantly, this thesis contributes new insights to organisational psychology. A lot of research has been conducted on the impact of the traits of perpetrators and victims of harassment, primarily focusing on gender (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009), but also including the increased levels of discrimination that transgender people face

(McFadden, 2020), sexuality (Giuffre, Dellinger, & Williams, 2008), and ethnicity (Webster, 2002). The results generally find that those in marginalised groups are targeted more, especially if they are members of more than one marginalised group (Raver & Nishii, 2010), and that members of groups with more societal power are more likely to be perpetrators of harassment (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012). The likeability of a harasser has also been investigated, revealing the disheartening finding that a popular boss's harassment is often rated as less serious than that of a disliked boss (Corr & Jackson, 2001). The results of this thesis fall in line with these findings, but also expand upon them, revealing that harassment is perceived as more serious when conducted by a person who is "expected" to harass someone by virtue of their creepy traits. However, when the participants' schema was violated (i.e. when a person who did not display creepy traits was revealed to be a harasser), then the non-creepy individual was evaluated much more harshly than the creepy individual. Therefore, this thesis highlights a new dimension that influences perceptions of harassment: how much does the harasser conform to *creepy* stereotypes, and to what degree does their conformity, or lack thereof, impact a person's expectations of their behaviour?

Finally, studies of power and its relationship to workplace harassment can also be informed by the research in this thesis. The themes uncovered in Chapter 4 indicated that a creep tends to have power on their side, and the target has a vulnerability to that power; thus creepiness is felt when someone holds power over an individual. When interviewed, several men reported that the only times they had ever felt creeped out was when the subject of creepiness held power over them, in contrast to the majority of female participants. Some even stated that they did not believe that they were *capable* of being creeped out by someone who was not in a position of power. The power can be organisational, such as the creep holding a higher position in the organisation or even being part of the main company while the target is an outside contractor, or societal, like the creep being a man targeting a woman or a white person targeting someone of an ethnic minority. Such a power imbalance leads to

vulnerability, where a creep having power over their target takes away their freedom to escape and negatively impacts their own sense of control.

This is especially the case when the creep holds a position of leadership in the workplace, as the usual avenues of reporting a harasser may involve reporting the creepy behaviour to the perpetrator of said harassment. Usually, immediate supervisory leadership moderates the strength of the relationship between sexual harassment and outcomes – except in cases where the supervisor is the perpetrator (Murry, Sivasubramaniam, & Jacques, 2001). In these situations, the behaviour of more senior leaders is vital (Offermann & Malamut, 2002). This is further supported by previous research that has reported that leadership in the workplace environment is crucial in limiting the existence of harassment (Mayer et al., 2009). Furthermore, when working under a passive leader both men and women are more likely to experience sexual harassment (Sischka, Schmidt, & Steffgen, 2020), and the relationship between passive leadership and harassment is stronger when there is a societal power imbalance in place, such as when women work in male-dominated environments (Lee, 2018).

Additionally, it is important to recognise that the participants across the studies in this thesis that measured action tendencies professed a desire to report creepy harassment. In the interview study, some participants even described the process they went through to report a creep, only to be thwarted by the policies their workplace had in place, or by unsympathetic management and human resources departments. Although this may appear to run counter to studies which report that avoidance is the most common response to harassment, this is not the case. While avoidance was certainly a common action to take, the desire to confront and report creepiness was far greater than anticipated. This supports earlier findings that when an organisation's policies are weak, harassment is harder to report and address (Thomas, 2004; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). This is compounded by the actions leaders take in response to said policies; when leaders are perceived to make honest efforts to stop harassment, people are more likely to report harassment and are generally more satisfied with the complaint

process, compared to those who view leaders as more tolerant of harassment (Offerman & Malamut, 2002). Consequently, this thesis contributes two pieces of information. First, that power and vulnerability play a key role in the experience of creepiness in the workplace. Secondly, that passivity or a leader's unwillingness to act lends tacit endorsement to the actions of a creep, allowing creepy behaviour to continue and eventually escalate.

Through situating this thesis in the context of the earlier literature, it is clear that further examination of creepiness in the workplace allows for the possibility of engaging the problem of workplace harassment from a new perspective. Similarly, these findings can be employed to investigate the real-life challenge organisations face when combating creepiness and other forms of harassment in the workplace.

7.3 Relevance of the findings to the reality of creepiness in the workplace

With the results of this thesis in mind and having discussed how it relates to other areas of psychological research, it is important to lay out the implications of identifying creepiness and how people respond to it. Given the importance of strong leadership and workplace policies in reducing harassment, it follows that similar approaches would be applicable to identifying and dealing with creepiness. However, it is not so simple as creating robust policies against harassment. Ahmed (2007) writes that documents often become nothing more than tools of institutional performance, where creating documents becomes a substitute for action, as writing the document becomes proof that action has been taken.

Furthermore, *who* writes the documents is crucial to the impact the document has. Therefore, creation of harassment policies which make sure to include its more ambiguous forms requires that construction of new policies should not be left to one or two people. This is especially relevant for creepiness, as so much of its identification comes down to the people most vulnerable to it. It is also crucial to take into account the performative nature of many harassment policies, as noted in Chapter 2, because many sexual harassment training

programmes are based on compliance and focused on avoiding legal liability for the organisation (O’Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). This is also highlighted by Ahmed (2007), who discusses the difference between mere compliance and fulfilment of harassment laws, where compliance is the very least an organisation can do, whereas fulfilment is more about good practice. Although every step towards equality in the workplace has the potential to become nothing more than a “tick-box” exercise, described as the “bureaucratisation of diversity” (Mirza, 2005), it is still vital that policies regarding harassment are kept up to date as new information comes to light. Some authors recommend that harassment policies should be constantly revisited and revised so it is more responsive to the culture of the organisation and the changing needs of those people inside it (Dougherty & Goldstein Hode, 2016). This is also relevant to policies surrounding creepiness – some participants in this thesis noted that creepy behaviour they experienced several decades ago was no longer legal, yet other behaviour they experienced in the same timeframe was still permissible (e.g. physical touch vs repeated asking for dates).

As women move into more workplaces in greater numbers, these policy issues continue to be a problem because when the gender balance of an organisation shifts, the needs of the individuals shift in tandem. For example, one of the interviewees in this thesis was part of the UK Armed Forces, and described how he witnessed women facing harassment which he believed was in part due to the greater proportion of men in the organisation. This experience is reflected by research that indicates that 23% of women in the Uniformed and Armed Services had reported harassment in the previous three years, some of the highest rates in the UK (Godier & Fossey, 2018), which is in part due to the hypermasculine culture of the military profession (Sadler, Lindsay, Hunter, & Day, 2018) as well as the male-dominated chain of command (Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). Thus, any documents and policies relevant to creepiness and other forms of harassment in the workplace *must* be consistently revised by multiple people from different areas and levels of

the organisation and should reflect the needs and environment of the specific workplace for which they are created.

Furthermore, when tackling creepiness in the workplace, it is not enough to simply create policies – or documents – addressing its existence. Organisations often employ the use of harassment training programmes, with the goal of preparing bystanders to identify harassment and then intervene, removing a large proportion of the responsibility from the target of the behaviour. Unfortunately, this does not appear to significantly reduce harassment in the workplace, although it frequently does increase trainees' knowledge of and sensitivity to what constitutes harassment (Roehling & Huang, 2018). Some of this may be due to the fact that harassment is not conducted purely between the harasser and the target, but that all members of an organisation are involved in some way (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2000). Zelin and Magley (2022) outline several other reasons why this may be the case in addition to the legal compliance angle already discussed: people expect immediate results after a single training session, employees can hold negative attitudes prior to the training, bystander training does not transfer well to the workplace, and there are frequently no effective measurements to determine whether the training works. The authors recommend a complete change of the organisational culture which benefits harassers and enables harassment. This can be achieved by supporting victims and holding perpetrators accountable, but also through diffusing the hierarchies that assist harassment and increasing levels of managerial support. For example, organisations seeking to prevent sexual harassment should monitor and screen out managers who display passive leadership behaviour (Lee, 2018), and work to change the norms of the workplace – even those that already boast equal representation (Raj, Johns, & Jose, 2020), as ending harassment is more about changing existing power structures than providing training (Bergman, 2019). The research in this thesis has borne out this point; many participants mentioned how they knew individuals in their workplace who had reputations for creepy behaviour, but it was ignored

or brushed off as harmless until their behaviour escalated. The participants who did report their creepy colleagues for their harassment often only did so with the support of their colleagues and managers – those without either suffered in silence or left the organisation. Therefore, changing the norms of the workplace is particularly relevant to addressing creepy harassment, as its pervasiveness in the workplace reflects the permissive culture of the organisations in which it takes root.

Accordingly, it is important when instigating institutional change not to let the act of writing policy become the only meaningful action taken, but to also implement robust, *continuous* training procedures that focus on changing the organisational climate and have measurable outcomes. Most importantly, victims of harassment need to be believed and supported at all levels when they come forward, as creepy harassment will often escalate, so it is vital to have policies, training, and support networks in place that allow this behaviour to be reported and taken seriously before it gets to that point.

The findings of this thesis also highlight the importance of addressing the stigma that surrounds neurodivergent people in the workplace. Several participants reported feeling creeped out in response to behaviour typically associated with neurodivergence, such as lack of eye contact, difficulty adhering to social norms, and missing social cues. Previous research into creepiness has also reported this; Watt et al. (2017) found that people who avoid eye contact or ambiguously stare may be more apt to be considered creepy and then be ostracized or avoided as a result. In fact, one participant who was interviewed in Chapter 4 directly stated that he believed the reason a person he encountered was creepy was because they were on the autism spectrum. Given that neurodiversity is still highly stigmatised, ranging from implicit biases and assumptions to outright discrimination (Krzeminska, Austin, Bruyère, & Hedley, 2019), it is important to emphasise that any conclusions drawn from this thesis to identify creepy people should not disproportionately impact people belonging to these groups. Neurodivergent people often have difficulty gaining opportunities to move to higher

positions within the workplace (Austin & Pisano, 2017), as adherence to neurotypical organisational norms and progressing through rigid hiring processes can be extremely uncomfortable, contributing to exclusion from many workplaces (Faragher, 2018). Thus, when investigating reports of creepiness in the workplace, care must be taken to avoid doing more to stigmatise and ostracise an already vulnerable group of people.

Finally, this thesis has revealed that creepiness is another area which is not seen equally by men and women. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, participants across most of the studies reported that men were far creepier than women, but when it came to *identifying* creepy behaviour, women were far more likely to do so than men. Additionally, women were often not seen as capable of being creepy, and men not capable of being creeped out. This is in line with perceptions of other forms of harassment; a recent study found that women tended to judge both male and female harassers severely but relatively equally, whereas men tended to judge only the male harasser severely (Harush, Elikishvili, & Kaspi-Baruch, 2023). The authors posited that men could be affected by gender schemas and stereotypes to a greater extent than women, and that perceptions of harassment still reflect an unequal gendered distribution of power.

Creepiness does not exist in a vacuum; like other forms of harassment, it occurs within a broader context (Lim & Cortina, 2005). This context may be the power structures in place in the organisation and the relationships of those who work within it, but also each individual's perceptions of who they are in society, and how their societal norms impact their way of seeing the world. It has been argued that due to societal power structures where men are associated with strength and women with weakness, men fail to see themselves as potential victims of harassment and only women recognise the disempowering effect of being associated with victimhood (Tinkler, 2012). This is certainly supported by the results of this thesis, particularly in cases where some men reported that they did not think they could be creeped out as they did not see themselves as vulnerable. This has consequences for

occasions where creepy women are present in the workplace; not only would their behaviour inspire punishments less harsh than their male peers, these women may not even be identified at all. In this way, feeling creeped out may in fact be counterproductive to eliminating harassment in the workplace. Therefore, while it is important to ensure that women are taken seriously when they report creepiness at work, it is equally necessary to recognise that women's behaviour can be just as creepy as men's. In actual cases of creepy harassment, it is vital that everyone should be held to the same standard, no matter their perceived gender.

7.4 Limitations of the current research

As has been previously mentioned over the course of this thesis, several potential limitations have been identified. In some cases, multiple research designs have been utilised to address these, such as the creation of pre-tested scenarios between Chapters 3 and 5. Likewise, the inclusion of qualitative research methods has allowed for the more in-depth analysis characteristic of qualitative analysis as well as the more objective and data-driven quantitative approach. However, there remain a small number of concerns to address about the overall work.

For most of the studies presented in this thesis, the participants were drawn from an online sample consisting of UK members of Prolific Academic. While this certainly ensures some consistency in responses, a sample of this kind is almost guaranteed to have prior experience of taking part in experimental studies, which may have a negative impact in the form of hypothesis-guessing or even practice effects. However, every effort was made to ensure that participants who took part in one study were excluded from taking part in the next. Furthermore, the majority of the measures used in these studies were created specifically for this research, minimising the chance that the participants would have encountered similar measures before and reducing the chance they would guess the

hypotheses. Despite these preventative actions, it is likely that there are variances in the experience of creepiness that could not be captured with such a sample.

The fact that all but one of the studies took place online could also present an issue. For example, all participants were required to have internet access, and samples on both Prolific Academic and MTurk are generally more technologically active and well-educated (Turner, Engelsma, Taylor, Sharma, & Demiris, 2020). However, the bulk of the research in this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, so laboratory research that had been planned was unable to be carried out.

Another issue is the utilisation of primarily self-report measures. Use of these techniques can result in participants having more time to consider their responses and elaborate upon their feelings in a way that they may not usually do. Therefore, it is possible that their written responses may differ from their immediate thoughts. While this is less relevant to the earlier studies focusing on appraisal theory, as the process of appraisal is cognitively more involved, this could be more of an issue in the association studies. Though there may be a difference between the instinctual and more-considered responses as the separate processes of appraisal and association may not be clearly delineated, the results still present a reasonable insight into perceptions of creepiness and the traits with which it is associated.

Finally, the chief tool used to inspire creepiness was vignettes. Although psychological research has long used vignettes to elicit participant attitudes, there have been concerns over their validity, in that they could be unable to fully capture all elements of the reality the researcher is attempting to convey (Erfanian et al., 2020). Despite this, participant responses to vignettes have been found to relate to real-world responses (Ganong & Coleman, 2006), and it would also have been extremely unethical to subject participants to actual creepy harassment. Additionally, the vignettes used in this thesis were pre-tested and strongly

correlated with independent measures of creepiness, suggesting that their use was not unsound.

The concerns outlined above do not take away from the value of these largely exploratory studies that have laid the foundation for this expanding field of research. Instead, they present opportunities to expand upon in future research, which will be outlined in the next section.

7.5 Future research directions

As mentioned above, research that addresses the limitations raised in the previous section would allow for greater understanding of creepiness and how it is experienced in the workplace. For example, comparing the vignettes used in these studies to other measures, such as short films, would provide a useful measure to reflect the complexity of real-world creepiness. Using such a technique would still allow for the random assignment of participants to different conditions in a manner that the real world does not allow, and could improve the quality of the data collected beyond what a vignette would allow.

Additionally, given that all of the studies relied on self-report measures, utilising technology such as electromyography (EMG) to measure the facial expressions of the participants in order to determine their emotions could also be beneficial to the study of creepiness. However, this approach would not be possible to use in a “natural” setting, considering the restrictions (e.g., use of electrodes) necessary for its use, despite the empirical data it would provide (Wolf, 2022). It should also be noted that even the six “basic” emotions do not reliably co-occur with their predicted facial signal (Durán & Fernández-Dols, 2021), and that there is evidence for substantial variation in facial expressions across cultures, situations, and even the same people in a single situation (Barrett, Adolphs, Marsella, Martinez, & Pollak, 2019). Therefore, use of this method should be used concurrently with other measures to maintain the validity and reliability of the experiment.

Furthermore, research into how creepiness is communicated would be an interesting new line of investigation. The last study of this thesis touched upon how likely people were to warn others about harassment, but this could be explored in far more detail. For example, future research could examine whether women or men are more likely to pass on information about creeps, and whether these warnings are labelled in harassment terms. A framework for this may already exist in the form of “whisper networks”, private forms of communication where people (primarily women) warn each other about abuse and harassment (Peters, 2020). This is different from gossiping, which can be used either as a bonding experience (Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swan, 2006) or as surveillance of powerful people and a means to transfer said power to the gossipers (Clegg & van Iterson, 2009), as the purpose of whisper networks is specifically to warn others about harassment and other forms of mistreatment.

It would also be interesting to investigate whether there truly is a semantic difference between being a creep and being creepy. Some participants who were interviewed expressed an opinion that being creepy was less intentional than being a creep, and that being a creep was associated more with sexual perversion than being creepy. Gaining a clearer picture of these differences (if they exist) and exploring how creeps and creepy people are spoken about may lend further insight into creepy harassment.

Third, the majority of the research presented in this thesis focused on heterosexual dyads, so including same-gender pairs as well as investigating the impact of sexuality on perceptions of creepiness would likely provide some interesting insights. For example, a recent paper reported that only *heterosexual* men’s perceptions of sociosexual behaviours varied depending on the target of the behaviour, in that they only viewed it as harassment when the target was female. Additionally, only women and gay men viewed said behaviour as harassment (Clarke, 2022). Therefore, including different variations in harassment pairings and investigating the role that sexuality plays in identifying creepiness would be a useful addition to the current understanding of this emotion.

Finally, as the studies in this thesis were limited to a UK and English-speaking population, it is possible that other languages do not have an equivalence for the specific way creepiness is understood in the UK. This is a common issue encountered by researchers looking to translate measures into other languages (Tsai, Luck, Jefferies, & Wilkes, 2022), but it would be interesting to explore whether other languages have equivalencies for creepiness as it is understood in English. Alternatively, it could be that creepiness has developed this novel meaning similar to how emotion concepts from other languages have become assimilated into English (Barrett, 2017); the typical example here is the German concept of *Schadenfreude* becoming a recognisable emotion in non-German speakers (Cikara & Fiske, 2012). This “construction” approach to emotion research explores how words can ground the highly variable occurrences of an emotion category (Lindquist & Gendron, 2013), and how people can use prior experiences to construct new emotional concepts anchored in language (Gendron & Barrett, 2018). Therefore, could words in other languages also take on the meaning creepiness now has in English? If this is the case, then research into creepy harassment could also be applied to non-English-speaking countries – it may just be called by a different name.

7.6 Conclusion

Across the course of ten studies, creepiness has repeatedly been found to be elicited by harassment in the workplace. This harassment has taken both sexual and nonsexual forms and includes overt sexual harassment. No other studies to date have empirically tested the relationship interpersonal creepiness has with harassment and the creation of a hostile work environment. These results therefore demonstrate the future potential of investigating creepiness in relation to harassment in the workplace and contribute to the ongoing and vital discussion of its consequences.

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Appendix A

Ethical Approval Codes for Each Study

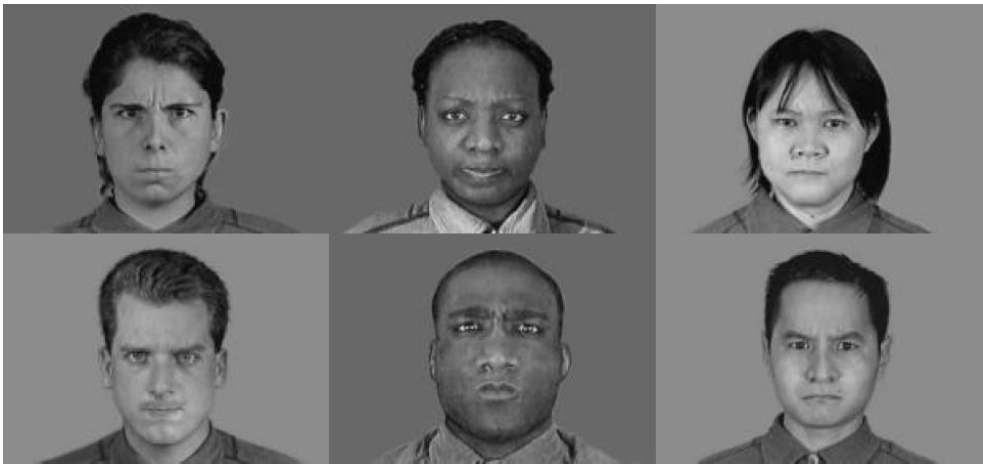
Study	Ethics Approval ID
Study 1*	201815287958915022
Study 2*	201815287958915022
Interview	201915565474215710
Appraisal pre-test 1	201915525783225698
Study 3	201915583687825781
Appraisal pre-test 2	201915657127615853
Study 4	201915698408885905
Study 5	202015923909076523
Study 6	202116391578527507
Association pre-test 1	202016073703726869
Association pre-test 2	202116157097797112
Study 7	202116270348357252
Study 8	202116353280237329
Study 9	202116375751197434

*Note. * Studies 1 and 2 were covered by the same ethical approval.*

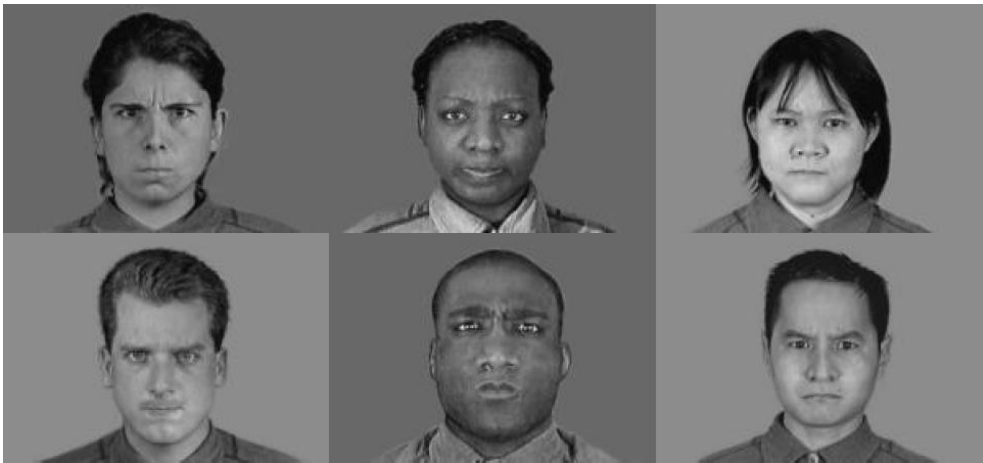
Appendix B

Extracted images from the Montreal Set of Facial Displays of Emotion (MSFDE)

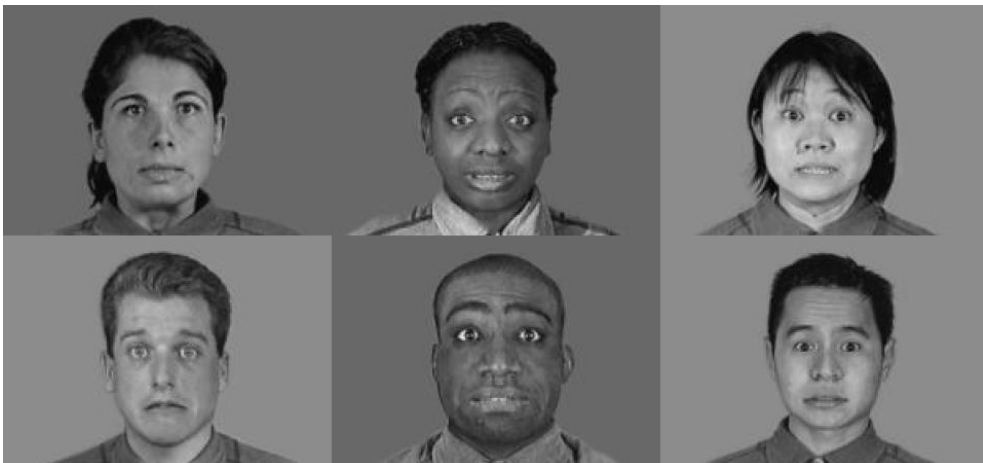
Anger



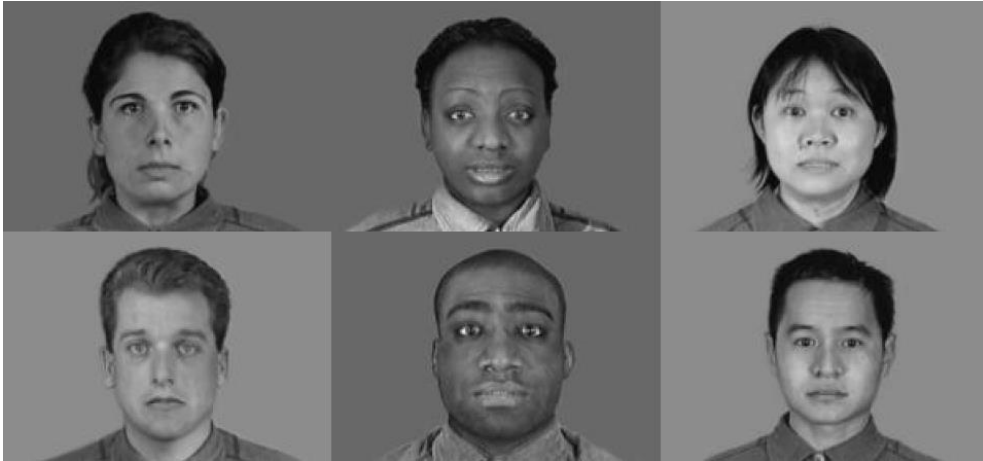
Disgust



Fear



Anxiety (Study 3 only)



Appendix C

Studies 1 & 2: Questionnaires

Gender

“Would someone acting like be more likely to be male or female?”

“Would someone targeted by this behaviour be more likely to be male or female?”

	Almost certain to be male	More likely to be male	Somewhat more likely to be male	Neutral	Somewhat more likely to be female	More likely to be female	Almost certain to be female
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Creepiness appraisals

“For this behaviour in a work or education setting...”

	Definitely not	Probably not	Maybe no	Might or might not	Maybe yes	Probably yes	Definitely yes
Was it creepy?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Was the person a creep?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you call this person a creep to someone else?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Action tendencies

“If you saw someone behave this way towards someone else in a work or education setting...”

	Definitely no	No	Maybe no	Neither yes or no	Maybe yes	Yes	Definitely yes
Would you avoid them?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you confront them?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you ignore them?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Responding to the MSFDE

“How much would you feel like this towards someone who behaved this way towards
someone you work with?”

Not at all							Extremely
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Harassment

“According to the law of the place where you live, does this behaviour constitute
harassment?”

Definitely not	Probably not	Not sure	Probably yes	Definitely yes
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix D

Interview Study: Information Sheet



School of Psychology
Keynes College
University of Kent
Canterbury, CT2 7NP

Study Information Sheet

Title of Project:	Investigation Into Creepiness	Ethics Approval Number:	201915565474215710
Investigator(s):	Felicity Gallagher Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla (Supervisor)	Researcher Email:	fsg3@kent.ac.uk rgs@kent.ac.uk

Aims of the Study:

This study is part of a PhD research project investigating the emotion of creepiness. The results from this initial study will provide useful insights into creepiness that can be used to structure future studies on this topic.

Eligibility Requirements:

You have been chosen for this research because you have had at least ten years of experience in a work environment.

What you will need to do and time commitment:

This interview will last for approximately 30 minutes, and you will be asked several questions about creepiness, and creepy people you have encountered. Audio recording only (no video) will be taken of this interview.

Risks/Discomforts involved in participating:

You will be asked about experiences you have had with creepy people in the past, which could cause you discomfort beyond what would be expected in your daily life. To minimise the risk of this happening, please only go into as much detail as you feel comfortable with, and if you wish to stop talking about your experiences you can.

Confidentiality of your data

Any responses you provide will be treated confidentially. Any publication resulting from this work will report only aggregated findings or fully anonymised examples that will not identify you.

To enable this study, we need to collect some personally identifiable information from you. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally identifiable information possible, and act according to the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as outlined in the University Privacy Notice (<https://research.kent.ac.uk/researchservices/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/12/GDPR-Privacy-Notice-Research-updated.pdf>). Only members of the research team will have access to any personal information that may identify you, which will be stored separately from your other responses and securely. Any such identifying information will be removed and destroyed as soon as possible after necessary data processing has been completed – for example, records from separate files merged, or audio recordings transcribed. Once fully anonymised, the responses you provide may be used by the research team, shared with other researchers, or made available in an online data repository. You will also be asked to generate a participant code which will be kept with your responses in case of withdrawal of data.

Remember that participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Even after you agree to participate and begin the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and for any reason. Please note that once your data have been included in published analysis or data repositories, **it cannot be withdrawn**.

If you would like a copy of this information sheet to keep, please ask the researcher. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing, to the Chair of the Psychology Research Ethics Committee by email at: psychethics@kent.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can contact us by post at: Ethics Committee Chair, School of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury, CT27NP.

Appendix E

Interview Study: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM



Title of project: Investigation into Creepiness

Names of investigators: Felicity Gallagher

Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla (Supervisor)

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. (*Contact details for lead researcher: fsg3@kent.ac.uk. Contact details for supervisor: rsg@kent.ac.uk*).
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I give my permission for my anonymised quotes from this interview to be published.
5. I agree to take part in the above research project.
6. I agree to have my interview recorded.

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Felicity Gallagher		
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature
Felicity Gallagher		
Lead researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix F

Interview Study: Debrief Form

DEBRIEF FORM



Title of project: Investigation into Creepiness

Names of investigators: Felicity Gallagher

Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla (Supervisor)

Participant Identification Number for this project:

This study was an investigation into the characteristics of the emotion of creepiness. Creepiness has not been studied in much depth so far in psychology, although existing research suggests that it is an emotion triggered by ambiguous threats and that people would prefer to ignore or avoid creepy individuals. Women have also been found to recognise a unique link between 'creepy' men and sexual threat. In this manner, "creeping out" co-workers can create a hostile work environment, and persistent sexual harassers are often referred to as creepy in the media. This interview study was designed to identify what traits elicited the creepy label, and what kind of actions it led to.

We anticipate that the main cues to creepiness will be inappropriate sexualisation and unwanted contact, and that experiencing creepiness will also be associated with similar emotions such as disgust and fear. If creepiness is associated with inappropriate sexualisation, then "creeping out" your co-workers could be considered hostile workplace harassment, and future research could support further investigation into this topic.

If any of the subjects discussed in this interview have caused you distress, or you would like to report an incident of harassment, here are some contact numbers and links that may be able to help you:

National Bullying Helpline: 0845 22 55 787

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) Helpline: 0300 123 1100

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/taking-action-about-discrimination/taking-action-about-harassment/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/what-are-the-different-types-of-discrimination/sexual-harassment/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/checking-if-its-discrimination/if-youre-being-harassed-or-bullied-at-work/>

Please contact Felicity Gallagher or Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla at the following e-mail addresses (fsg3@kent.ac.uk; rsg@kent.ac.uk) if you have any questions regarding this study. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Appendix G

Interview Study: Questions and Prompts

1) Can you recall a situation involving a creepy person in the workplace? You can go into as much detail as you feel comfortable talking about.

- ❖ [If necessary] What happened/what else happened in that situation?

- ❖ [If necessary] What was your relationship to this person/these people?

2) What was it about their behaviour in particular that made them creepy, or made you feel creeped out?

3) Aside from creepiness, did you feel any other emotions in this situation?

- ❖ Did you feel threatened in this situation?

- o [If yes] How threatened did you feel, and why did you feel threatened?

4) How did you behave in response to this situation?

- ❖ Did your behaviour change over time?

- ❖ Can you explain why you behaved that way?

- ❖ How do you feel about how you behaved?

5) Did this person have a reputation of a creep?

- ❖ [If yes] How did you find out about this reputation?

- ❖ [If yes] Did you tell other people about this person's reputation, for example someone new to that workplace?

6) How would you explain the difference between creepiness and fear?

- ❖ How about creepiness and anxiety?

- ❖ And creepiness and disgust?

7) [If time allows] Can you think of another situation involving a creepy person, but this time outside of the workplace?

- ❖ If yes, repeat above questions.

8) Is there anything you would like to add or discuss that we haven't covered, or anything you would like to go back to?

Appendix H

Study 3: List of pre-test behaviours

Belittler: A co-worker who often belittles you with mocking comments and demeaning remarks about you and your work.

Contact 1: A co-worker who puts their hand on yours or your shoulder, or brushes the hair out of your face when they talk to you.

Contact 2: A co-worker who likes to hug you.

Finger-pointer 1: A co-worker who blames you whenever something goes wrong.

Finger-pointer 2: A co-worker who withholds information which leads you to make mistakes, or tampers with your work so it looks like you screwed up.

Impersonal sexual: A co-worker who watches explicit content on their work computer.

Invitations: A co-worker who makes repeated invitations to intimate activities, such as massages or hot tub parties.

Questions 1: A co-worker who asks you macabre questions, such as if you could kill someone in any way that you wanted how you would do it.

Questions 2: A co-worker who asks you for personal information, such as your address.

Rumour-monger 1: A co-worker who makes up rumours about you and spreads gossip to your other co-workers.

Rumour-monger 2: A co-worker who tells your supervisor lies about you to get you in trouble.

Slacker: A co-worker who spends most of their time slacking off, leaving you to take on their duties and responsibilities as well as your own work.

Space: A co-worker who stands very close to you when you speak to them.

Thief 1: A co-worker who steals your ideas and takes credit for your work.

Thief 2: A co-worker who has a tendency to take things from your desk, such as staplers and pens, and not return them.

Vocalisations 1: A co-worker who frequently steers conversations towards sex and makes a lot of sexual jokes, and brags about their sex and party lifestyle.

Vocalisations 2: A co-worker who constantly compliments your appearance.

Watching 1: A co-worker who hovers around your work space, waits around to “bump” into you and start a conversation, or follows you around the workplace to carry on a conversation, even outside the bathroom or in the kitchen.

Watching 2: A co-worker who you often catch staring at you.

Appendix I

Study 3: Descriptive statistics for pre-test behaviours

Behaviour	Upsetting	Negative	Unusual	Creepy	Sexual
Belittler	4.6 (0.81)	4.72 (0.70)	3.52 (1.28)	2.30 (1.33)	1.20 (0.57)
Contact 1	3.14 (1.34)	2.78 (1.39)	3.94 (1.19)	3.90 (1.23)	3.28 (1.11)
Contact 2	1.96 (1.14)	1.76 (0.94)	3.00 (1.31)	2.64 (1.26)	2.10 (1.09)
Finger-pointer 1	4.44 (0.91)	4.68 (0.59)	3.44 (1.18)	1.94 (1.19)	1.08 (0.34)
Finger-pointer 2	4.72 (0.67)	4.74 (0.66)	3.82 (1.19)	2.72 (1.51)	1.04 (0.20)
Impersonal Sexual	3.88 (1.38)	4.14 (1.13)	4.48 (0.95)	4.48 (0.97)	4.52 (0.79)
Invitations	3.42 (1.23)	3.44 (1.39)	4.20 (1.07)	4.30 (0.97)	4.20 (0.97)
Questions 1	3.30 (1.39)	3.74 (1.29)	4.12 (1.04)	3.98 (1.15)	1.20 (0.45)
Questions 2	2.20 (1.26)	2.26 (1.34)	3.22 (1.22)	3.26 (1.34)	1.68 (0.89)
Rumour-monger 1	4.80 (0.54)	4.78 (0.62)	3.64 (1.24)	3.10 (1.43)	1.30 (0.71)
Rumour-monger 2	4.78 (0.62)	4.80 (0.57)	3.78 (1.22)	2.90 (1.47)	1.10 (0.30)
Slacker	4.02 (1.06)	4.22 (1.02)	2.74 (1.19)	1.46 (0.95)	1.02 (0.14)
Space	2.44 (1.25)	2.30 (1.17)	3.02 (1.10)	3.12 (1.29)	2.14 (1.11)
Thief 1	4.60 (0.70)	4.60 (0.67)	3.32 (1.33)	2.24 (1.44)	1.06 (0.24)
Thief 2	2.82 (1.14)	2.84 (1.10)	2.28 (1.25)	1.58 (0.97)	1.02 (0.14)
Vocalisations 1	3.02 (1.41)	3.28 (1.33)	3.60 (1.34)	3.80 (1.03)	4.34 (1.00)
Vocalisations 2	1.50 (0.79)	1.48 (0.81)	2.88 (1.02)	2.70 (1.07)	2.40 (1.01)
Watching 1	3.04 (1.31)	2.82 (1.22)	3.74 (1.19)	3.88 (1.17)	2.38 (1.24)
Watching 2	2.64 (1.24)	2.54 (1.28)	3.60 (1.05)	3.80 (1.11)	2.64 (1.01)

Appendix J

Study 3: Vignette Materials

Indirect Sexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently steers conversations towards sex and makes a lot of sexual jokes. They often brag about their “sex and party” lifestyle, and there are rumours that they watch explicit content on their work computer. Recently, they have begun to invite you to join them for activities like massages and hot tub parties, and keep asking even after you have declined several times.

Indirect Nonsexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently hovers near your work space or waits around to “bump” into you to start a conversation. These conversations often veer into intrusive territories, as your co-worker asks you macabre questions, such as if you could kill someone in any way you wanted then how would you do it, and they ask for personal information like your address. They tend to stand very close to you when they ask you these questions, and once a conversation has begun, they will follow you around the workplace to carry it on, even to outside the bathroom or the kitchen.

Direct Nonsexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them likes to spread gossip to your other co-workers. This co-worker often belittles you with mocking comments and demeaning remarks about you and your work. You later find out that they made up rumours involving you as part of this gossip, and have been telling your supervisor lies about you to get you in trouble. Recently, they have begun withholding information from you which leads you to make mistakes, and tampering with the work you have done so it looks like you messed up.

Appendix K

Study 4: List of pre-test behaviours

Block: A co-worker who repeatedly physically blocks your way into or out of rooms.

Brush: A co-worker who constantly “accidentally on purpose” brushes up against you.

Email: A co-worker who constantly sends you unwanted sexual emails.

Insult: A co-worker who makes insulting comments about your gender.

Lips: A co-worker who looks you up and down while licking their lips whenever they see you.

Sex: A co-worker who asks you to have sex with them, even after you have declined.

Touch: A co-worker who repeatedly touches you, despite telling them to stop.

Appendix L

Study 4: Descriptive statistics for pre-test behaviours

Behaviour	Upsetting	Negative	Unusual	Creepy	Sexual
Block	4.15 (0.88)	4.45 (0.95)	4.10 (0.91)	4.00 (1.29)	2.50 (1.54)
Brush	4.00 (1.08)	4.00 (1.12)	3.90 (0.97)	4.45 (0.83)	4.10 (0.85)
Email	4.60 (0.68)	4.40 (0.88)	4.50 (0.69)	4.75 (0.64)	4.85 (0.37)
Insult	4.15 (0.99)	4.60 (0.68)	3.20 (1.11)	3.15 (1.42)	2.50 (1.28)
Lips	4.10 (1.25)	3.95 (1.19)	4.25 (0.97)	4.75 (0.55)	4.30 (0.87)
Sex	4.60 (0.99)	4.65 (0.81)	4.40 (0.94)	4.70 (0.73)	4.90 (0.45)
Touch	4.65 (0.81)	4.45 (0.89)	4.35 (0.93)	4.65 (0.76)	4.35 (0.81)

Appendix M

Study 4: Vignette Materials

Indirect Sexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently steers conversations towards sex and makes a lot of sexual jokes. He/she often brags about his/her “sex and party” lifestyle, and there are rumours that he/she watches explicit content on his/her work computer. Recently, he/she has begun to invite you to join him/her for activities like massages and hot tub parties, and keeps asking even after you have declined several times.

Indirect Nonsexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently hovers near your work space or waits around to “bump” into you to start a conversation. These conversations often veer into intrusive territories, as he/she asks you macabre questions, such as if you could kill someone in any way you wanted then how would you do it, and he/she asks for personal information like your address. He/she tends to stand very close to you when he/she asks you these questions, and once a conversation has begun, he/she will follow you around the workplace to carry it on, even to outside the bathroom or the kitchen.

Direct Sexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them constantly “accidentally on purpose” brushes up against you, and looks you up and down while licking his/her lips whenever he/she sees you. He/she also repeatedly sends you unwanted sexual emails asking you to have sex with him/her even after you have declined, and repeatedly touches you despite you telling him/her to stop.

Appendix N

Study 5: Vignette Materials

Indirect Sexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently steers conversations towards sex and makes a lot of sexual jokes. He often brags about his “sex and party” lifestyle, and there are rumours that he watches explicit content on his work computer. Recently, he has begun to invite the women in the workplace to join him for activities like massages and hot tub parties, and keeps asking even after they have declined several times.

Indirect Nonsexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them frequently hovers near the women’s work spaces or waits around to “bump” into them to start a conversation. These conversations often veer into intrusive territories, as he asks macabre questions, such as if you could kill someone in any way you wanted then how would you do it, and he also asks for personal information like your address. He tends to stand very close to people when he asks these questions, and once a conversation has begun, he will follow them around the workplace to carry it on, even to outside the bathroom or the kitchen.

Direct Sexual

You have just started a new job, and as you are getting to know your co-workers you notice that one of them constantly “accidentally on purpose” brushes up against the women, and looks them up and down while licking his lips whenever he sees them. He also repeatedly sends people unwanted sexual emails asking to have sex with him even after he has been declined, and repeatedly touches women despite having been told to stop.

Appendix O

Appraisal Studies: Questionnaires

Gender appraisals (Study 3 only)

“Would this co-worker be more likely to be male or female?”

“Would someone targeted by this co-worker be more likely to be male or female?”

Almost certain to be male

More likely to be male

Somewhat more likely to be male

Neutral

Somewhat more likely to be female

More likely to be female

Almost certain to be female

Self-awareness appraisals (Studies 3 & 4)

“Do you think the co-worker behaving this way would know that their behaviour is negatively affecting you?” (Study 3)

“Do you think the co-worker behaving this way would know that his/her behaviour is negatively affecting you?” (Study 4, gender dependent on condition)

Definitely not

No

Maybe no

Neither yes or no

Maybe yes

Yes

Definitely yes

Action Tendencies

“How likely would you be to avoid / confront / ignore / this co-worker?” (Studies 3, 4, & 6)

“How likely would you be to formally report this co-worker?” (Study 3 only)

“How likely would you be to informally report this co-worker? (e.g., telling your boss or another co-worker but not making a recorded complaint)” (Study 3 only)

“How likely would you be to report this co-worker? (Studies 4 & 6)

Extremely unlikely

Moderately unlikely

Slightly unlikely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Slightly likely

Moderately likely

Extremely likely

Responding to the MSFDE

“The facial expressions about portray an emotion. How much of this emotion would you feel in this situation?” (Study 3)

“The facial expressions above portray an emotion. How much of this emotion would this co-worker make you feel?” (Studies 4, 5, & 6)

None

A little

A moderate amount

An extreme amount

Emotion word endorsements (Study 3)

“For each of the below emotions, please select how much this scenario would make you feel that emotion.”

	Not at all		A little		Somewhat		Extremely
Angry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anxious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creeped out	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disgusted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fearful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Emotion word endorsements (Studies 4, 5, & 6)

“For each of the below emotions, please select how much of that emotion this co-worker would make you feel.”

	None		A little		A moderate amount		An extreme amount
Angry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Annoyed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creeped out	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cross	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disgusted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fearful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Frightened	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Furious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grossed out	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Repulsed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Scared	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sickened	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Terrified	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uncomfortable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uneasy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Creepiness appraisals (only displayed in Study 5 in the elaboration condition)

“Is the behaviour displayed by this person creepy?” (Study 3)

“Is the person behaving this person a creep?” (Study 3)

“Is the behaviour displayed by this co-worker creepy?” (Studies 4, 5, & 6)

“Is this co-worker a creep?” (Studies 4, 5, & 6)

Definitely not	No	Maybe no	Neither yes or no	Maybe yes	Yes	Definitely yes
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Creepiness of Situations Scale (CRoSS) (Study 5 only)

“During this situation, I had a queasy feeling.”

“I had a feeling that there was something shady about this situation.”

“I felt uneasy during this situation.”

“I had an undefinable fear during this situation.”

“This situation somehow felt threatening.”

“I did not know how to judge this situation.”

“During this situation, I did not know exactly what was happening to me.”

“During this situation, things were going on that I did not understand.”

“I did not know exactly how to behave in this situation.”

“I did not know exactly what to expect of this situation.”

Definitely not

☐

No

☐

Maybe no

☐

Neither yes or no

☐

Maybe yes

☐

Yes

☐

Definitely yes

☐

Harassment appraisals

“Would you legally define this behaviour as harassment?” (Study 3)

“Would you legally define his/her behaviour as harassment?” (Study 4, gender dependent on condition)

“Would you legally define his behaviour as harassment?” (Studies 5 & 6)

Definitely not

☐

No

☐

Maybe no

☐

Neither yes or no

☐

Maybe yes

☐

Yes

☐

Definitely yes

☐

Hostile work environment appraisals (Studies 5 & 6)

“Is the co-worker in the scenario creating a hostile work environment?”

Definitely not

☐

No

☐

Maybe no

☐

Neither yes or no

☐

Maybe yes

☐

Yes

☐

Definitely yes

☐

Appendix P

Study 7: List of pre-test 1 behaviours

Formal: Someone who dresses too formally for the workplace

Informal: Someone who dresses too informally for the workplace.

Taxidermy: Someone who practises taxidermy in his spare time.

Rock-Climbing: Someone who does rock-climbing in his spare time.

Outgoing: Someone who is very outgoing.

Introverted: Someone who is very introverted.

Predictable: Someone who behaves in a predictable manner.

Unpredictable: Someone who behaves in an unpredictable manner.

Dolls: Someone who collects dolls.

Football: Someone who collects football cards.

Strong: Someone who is confident with a strong handshake.

Weak: Someone who is awkward with a weak handshake.

Jokes: Someone who interrupts meetings with irrelevant jokes about colleagues.

Grievances: Someone who interrupts meetings with irrelevant grievances about colleagues.

Action: Someone who is always first in line to see a new action film.

Horror: Someone who is always first in line to see a new horror film.

Appendix Q

Study 7: Descriptive statistics for pre-test 1 behaviours

	Sexual Threat		Non-Sexual Violent Threat	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Formal	3.88	0.77	4.12	0.33
Informal	3.92	0.63	4.04	0.53
Taxidermy	4.19	0.85	3.88	0.86
Rock-Climbing	3.62	0.80	3.77	0.59
Outgoing	4.35	0.69	4.19	0.80
Introvert	3.81	0.57	3.58	0.81
Predictable	3.77	0.99	3.50	0.71
Unpredictable	5.00	0.85	4.88	1.11
Dolls	4.46	1.14	4.00	0.94
Football	3.69	1.12	3.92	0.84
Strong	4.23	0.59	4.19	0.69
Weak	3.88	0.82	3.73	0.87
Joke	5.04	0.92	4.31	1.01
Grievance	4.54	0.86	4.46	0.90
Action	4.00	0.89	4.08	0.39
Horror	4.00	0.40	4.04	0.20

Note. Higher numbers indicate more likely to harass.

Appendix R

Study 7: List of pre-test 2 behaviours

Traits

Sexist: Makes sexist comments

Control: Has to be in control of projects and meetings

Condescending: Is condescending towards colleagues

Entitled: Expresses that he is entitled to whatever he wants in life

Better: Says that he is better than everyone else around him

Pet: Gives people pet names

Obsessive: Gets obsessive about projects or hobbies very quickly

Friends: Has no female friends

Jokes: Makes inappropriate jokes

Comments: Makes comments on people's appearance

Over-Friendly: Is over-friendly with people

Alpha: States that he is an alpha male

Hero: Tries to be a hero at work

Cocky: Behaves in a cocky manner

Imperative: Thinks that as a male it is his biological imperative to have as much sex as possible

Hobbies

Sports: Competitive sports

Games: Computer games

Gym: Goes to the gym every day

Watches: Watches a lot of live sports

Drinking: Goes out drinking

Dolls: Collecting dolls

Insects: Collecting insects

Birdwatching: Birdwatching

Taxidermy: Taxidermy

Pictures: Taking pictures of strangers

Physical Characteristics

Taller: Taller than average

Shorter: Shorter than average

More Attractive: More attractive than average

Less Attractive: Less attractive than average

Straight: Clean and straight teeth

Crooked: Dirty and crooked teeth

Neat: Neat and well-groomed appearance

Dirty: Dirty and rumpled clothes

Normal Eyes: Maintains normal eye contact

Darting Eyes: Blinks much less than the average person, darting his eyes around

Appendix S

Study 7: Descriptive statistics for pre-test 2 behaviours

Traits	Negative		Creepy		Threatening	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sexist	4.54	0.76	4.08	1.16	4.05	0.97
Control	3.41	1.25	1.92	1.22	2.74	1.33
Condescending	4.36	0.96	2.44	1.12	2.95	1.26
Entitled	3.97	1.20	3.31	1.42	3.74	1.37
Better	4.00	1.15	2.77	1.29	3.13	1.15
Pet	2.62	1.27	2.87	1.26	2.08	1.04
Obsessive	2.23	1.22	1.90	1.25	1.90	1.25
Friends	2.51	1.25	2.08	1.16	1.89	1.16
Jokes	3.95	1.26	3.49	1.25	2.89	1.13
Comments	3.69	1.22	3.31	1.17	2.82	1.06
Over-Friendly	2.82	1.10	3.05	1.12	2.64	1.09
Alpha	3.95	1.28	2.87	1.47	3.51	1.27
Hero	2.05	0.97	1.77	0.96	1.59	0.82
Cocky	3.59	1.09	2.33	1.11	2.82	1.25
Imperative	4.44	0.99	4.18	1.10	3.82	1.34

Hobbies	Negative		Creepy		Threatening	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sports	1.19	0.40	1.11	0.39	1.34	0.71
Games	1.67	0.93	1.23	0.58	1.36	0.67
Gym	1.44	0.75	1.18	0.51	1.51	0.79
Watches	1.38	0.71	1.08	0.27	1.31	0.77
Drinking	1.92	1.06	1.31	0.66	1.74	1.02
Dolls	3.08	1.24	3.71	1.27	2.42	1.29
Insects	2.15	1.18	2.28	1.15	1.49	0.85
Birdwatching	1.28	0.79	1.36	0.81	1.13	0.41
Taxidermy	3.05	1.39	3.64	1.31	2.54	1.35
Pictures	4.05	1.21	4.26	1.16	3.92	1.22

Physical Characteristics	Negative		Creepy		Threatening	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Taller	1.03	0.16	1.03	0.16	1.33	0.74
Shorter	1.26	0.79	1.03	0.16	1.05	0.23
More Attractive	1.21	0.57	1.18	0.51	1.28	0.60
Less Attractive	1.23	0.48	1.13	0.41	1.10	0.38
Straight	1.15	0.71	1.08	0.35	1.05	0.32
Crooked	2.69	1.24	1.82	0.97	1.51	0.97
Neat	1.15	0.71	1.05	0.32	1.08	0.48
Dirty	3.00	1.21	1.90	0.97	1.56	0.79
Normal Eyes	1.15	0.67	1.23	0.58	1.21	0.47
Darting Eyes	2.21	0.92	2.56	1.07	1.92	0.93

Appendix T

Study 7: Character Vignettes

“J” – high creepiness, high negativity

J used to work as a taxi driver, and frequently makes comments with sexist overtones, such as stating that women are bad drivers and that they should be responsible for all the cleaning. He has previously said that he believes that as a man his greatest responsibility is to have sex with as many women as possible. In his workspace he has several small dolls displayed, and he has a collection of dozens more at home.

“C” – medium creepiness, high negativity

C used to be a construction worker, and loudly states that he is the most dominant 'alpha male' of the team. He is very condescending and looks down on other people, frequently correcting them and giving unsolicited advice. He likes to go out drinking almost every night, and decorates his work area with slogans of different alcohols.

“B” – low creepiness, low negativity

B used to work as a financial adviser. He has a tendency to get obsessed with new projects very easily and put them before anything else, and he likes to give everyone around the office pet names. His favourite thing to do is watch live sports, and has pictures of all his favourite teams around his work area.

Appendix U

Association Studies: Questionnaires

Harasser choice (Studies 7 & 8)

“Based on the above descriptions, which man do you think is **MOST** likely to be the one you have been warned about?”

“Based on the above descriptions, which man do you think is **LEAST** likely to be the one you have been warned about?”

- ☐ B
- ☐ C
- ☐ J

“How likely is it that J is the culprit?”

“How likely is it that C is the culprit?”

“How likely is it that B is the culprit?”

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Extremely unlikely | Somewhat unlikely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Somewhat likely | Extremely likely |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Creepiness

“Do you think J / C / B is creepy?” (Studies 7 & 8)

“Would you describe J / C / B as a creep?” (Studies 7 & 8)

“Do you think J / C / B is weird?” (Studies 7 & 8)

“Do you think J / C / B is unusual?” (Studies 7 & 8)

“Do you think this man is creepy?” (Study 9)

“Would you describe this man as a creep?” (Study 9)

“Do you think this man is weird?” (Study 9)

“Do you think this man is unusual?” (Study 9)

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Definitely not | Probably not | Might or might not | Probably yes | Definitely yes |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Harassment

“Would you legally define this behaviour as harassment?”

Definitely not

☐

Probably not

☐

Might or might not

☐

Probably yes

☐

Definitely yes

☐

Hostile work environment (Studies 8 & 9)

“Is this behaviour creating a hostile work environment?”

Definitely not

☐

Probably not

☐

Might or might not

☐

Probably yes

☐

Definitely yes

☐

Believability

“How likely is it that J / B is telling the truth?” (Study 8)

“How likely would a jury believe that J / B is telling the truth?” (Study 8)

“How likely is it that he is telling the truth?” (Study 9)

“How likely would a jury believe that he is telling the truth?” (Study 9)

Extremely unlikely

☐

Somewhat unlikely

☐

Neither likely nor unlikely

☐

Somewhat likely

☐

Extremely likely

☐

Likeability

“To what extent can you sympathise with J / B?” (Study 8)

“To what extent would a reasonable person sympathise with J / B?” (Study 8)

“To what extent can you sympathise with him?” (Study 9)

“To what extent would a reasonable person sympathise with him?” (Study 9)

Not at all sympathetic

☐

Slightly sympathetic

☐

Somewhat sympathetic

☐

Very sympathetic

☐

Extremely sympathetic

☐