Attachment and Targets’ Experience of Obsessive Relational Intrusion Following an Intimate Relationship

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Pacific University
Attachment and Targets’ Experience of Obsessive Relational Intrusion Following an Intimate Relationship

Abstract
Current literature on stalking indicates that young adults, particularly women, are at risk for being targets of stalking. They are also most likely to be stalked by someone known to them or by a previous romantic partner. Although the literature on stalking has expanded, most notably over the last 20 years, significant gaps in knowledge still remain, particularly with regard to understanding the role that target characteristics and relational dynamics may play in the expression of pursuit behaviors. The current study was an investigation of the impact of target attachment style on the degree and nature of stalking behaviors experienced by targets following the termination of an intimate relationship. Approximately 100 college and graduate students responded to the survey regarding attachment styles and experiences of post-intimate relationship stalking. The results indicated that target attachment style did not have a significant impact on target experiences of post-intimate stalking. However, based on the small sample size and certain characteristics of the sample, the true impact of target attachment style on experiences remains unclear.

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ATTACHMENT AND TARGETS’ EXPERIENCE OF OBSESSIVE RELATIONAL INTRUSION FOLLOWING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

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Catherine Miller, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

Current literature on stalking indicates that young adults, particularly women, are at risk for being targets of stalking. They are also most likely to be stalked by someone known to them or by a previous romantic partner. Although the literature on stalking has expanded, most notably over the last 20 years, significant gaps in knowledge still remain, particularly with regard to understanding the role that target characteristics and relational dynamics may play in the expression of pursuit behaviors. The current study was an investigation of the impact of target attachment style on the degree and nature of stalking behaviors experienced by targets following the termination of an intimate relationship. Approximately 100 college and graduate students responded to the survey regarding attachment styles and experiences of post-intimate relationship stalking. The results indicated that target attachment style did not have a significant impact on target experiences of post-intimate stalking. However, based on the small sample size and certain characteristics of the sample, the true impact of target attachment style on experiences remains unclear.
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Attachment and Targets’ Experience of Obsessive Relational Intrusion

Following an Intimate Relationship

Being the target or pursuer of unrequited love is not an uncommon experience. In a study of young adults’ experiences of unrequited love, Baumeister, Wotman, and Stillwell found that almost every subject surveyed reported at least one experience of unrequited love and “over 90% reported a strong or moderate experience” (1993, p. 389). Instead of giving up and moving on, a portion of individuals may choose to pursue the target of their affection. Pursuers may engage in various strategies to win back a partner that range from those seen as romantic and culturally appropriate (e.g., sending flowers, discussing reconciliation) to those that are viewed as obsessive, threatening, and meet legal criteria for a type of pursuit commonly known as stalking.

Although some researchers have reported that the term stalking was first used to describe human pursuit behaviors in the 1970’s (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004), other researchers have pointed out that the term was not formally recognized as a descriptor of a problematic, repetitive, and intrusive, relational pursuit pattern until the 1990’s, following certain well-known celebrity stalking cases (Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003). As stalking has only formally been recognized as a harmful and potentially dangerous phenomenon in the last few decades, the need for more research to augment our understanding of the phenomena and thus allow individuals to create effective protocols for prevention, treatment interventions for targets and pursuers, and public policy is essential (Meloy, 2007). The purpose of this paper is to review and expand the current literature on stalking phenomena.
Definition

To date there is still significant debate in the judicial and clinical fields regarding the definition of stalking (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Meloy, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2003). Legally speaking, the criteria for and definitions of criminal stalking vary not only between countries that recognize the phenomena as a crime, but also between states within the US (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Meloy, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2003). In a typical legal context, stalking is often described as “a course of conduct directed at specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination there of, that would cause a reasonable person fear” (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, p. 2).

In clinical research the definition of stalking phenomenon has varied between studies. Researchers have documented a spectrum of stalking behaviors that has include behaviors such as repeatedly sending unwanted letters or gifts; making unwanted phone calls; monitoring targets; intruding into interactions; involving targets in unwanted activities; vandalizing property; breaking and entering; making threats against the target or their loved ones; pursuers threatening to harm themselves; sexual assault; physical assault; and kidnapping (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Sheridan et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Although some pursuit behaviors may fall into clearly discernable categories of appropriate versus inappropriate behaviors, as Spitzberg and Cupach (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998, 2003; Spitzberg, 2002) noted, pursuit behaviors occur along a continuum between the two categories. One unreciprocated expression of affection may be interpreted quite differently than those that are repeated, exaggerated, with increasing intensity despite a lack of reciprocity.
However, romantic persistence is a quality that has been prized within our culture and celebrated in film and music (Ravensberg, 2001). Thus, it is possible that beginning stages of stalking behaviors may appear to be part of a culturally acceptable courtship behavioral pattern and initially be seen as flattering or non-threatening to a target. Although the contrast between pursuit behaviors in the examples above make discerning appropriate versus threatening behaviors clear, it is important to note that the dimensional and culturally contextual continuum of pursuit behaviors may make defining the difference between a love struck yet harmless pursuer and an obsessive and inappropriate pursuer a potentially complex task for targets (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998), as well as for pursuers who may intend or interpret their motivations as positive and pursuit behaviors as flattering, desirable, and as causing limited harm.

Spitzberg and Cupach created the term obsessive relational intrusion (ORI) to describe a range of pursuit or stalking behaviors which the authors defined as, “repeated and unwanted pursuit and invasion of one’s sense of physical or symbolic privacy, by either stranger or acquaintance, who desires and/or presumes an intimate relationship” (1998, pp. 234-235). Spitzberg and Cupach’s continuum of pursuit behaviors includes behaviors that range from leaving unwanted gifts or messages on the target’s voicemail to threatening the target and physically endangering the target’s life, thus including behavior that would be identified as meeting legal criteria for stalking.

Clearly, significant variance in definition of stalking phenomenon exists. This variance in definitions has significant implications for understanding the phenomenon, for treatment of victims and perpetrators, and for understanding the impact on communities.
Prevalence and Course

The definition of the stalking has also impacted estimates of prevalence rates of stalking phenomena. Tjaden and Thoennes’ 1998 study for the National Association for Violence Against Women Survey indicated that approximately 8% of women and 2% of men had been victims of stalking when defined in largely legalistic terms. These estimates rose to 12% and 4%, respectively, when the authors used a less stringent definition of stalking.

More recent data from the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the US Department of Justice in 2009 indicated that approximately 5.9 million individuals experienced stalking during the year prior to the survey (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). A number of other studies have indicated even higher rates. A review of 25 studies indicated that stalking, defined as ORI, is not an uncommon phenomenon, and that the average prevalence for ORI victimization was approximately 21% (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003). A meta-analysis including 103 studies on stalking phenomena indicated prevalence rates of approximately 23.5% for females and 10.5% for males (Spitzberg, 2002). Such evidence indicates that stalking poses a greater problem than may have previously been recognized.

In addition, the course of a single episode of stalking can be chronic. Estimates of the typical duration of a stalking episode have varied among individual reports, with averages ranging from months to over a decade (Sheridan et al., 2003). A number of studies have indicated that the mean duration hovers between 1.5 to 3 years (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & de Vries, 2004; Spitzberg, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).
Pursuer Characteristics

The data from the National Association for Violence Against Women Survey (NAVAWS) indicated that the vast majority of stalkers, approximately 87%, are male (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The high ratio of male stalkers is supported by a number of other studies on the topic (Baum et al., 2009; Kamphuis et al., 2004; Mullen, Pathe, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999; Sheridan et al., 2003; Tonin, 2004). The study data from the NAVAWS also indicated that few victims reported that mental illness or psychosis was a significant cause of the stalking behavior. Instead most targets, 77% of female targets and 64% of male targets, reported being stalked by individuals they knew or had relationships with in the past. Data from other sources also points to a high prevalence of acquaintance or post-intimate relationship stalking (Baum et al., 2009; Sheridan et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 2002).

Although most stalkers may not be psychotic, findings on the personality traits of stalkers have indicated that stalkers may have a higher prevalence of pathological personality traits than community norms. In a Dutch study, Kamphuis and colleagues (2004), measured post-intimate stalker personality traits using the Five Factor Personality Inventory (Hendriks, Hofstee, & Raad, 1999). This inventory can be used to construct a dimensional model of an individual’s personality based on scores on five major personality factors. Each factor included in the model can be described by the following: Extraversion, the “disposition to engage in social behavior” (Leary & Hoyle, 2009, p. 30); Agreeableness, the tendency to maintain positive interpersonal relations; Conscientiousness, the tendency to engage in behavioral control and to follow norms; Emotional Stability, the tendency to experience euthymic stable affect; and Autonomy, a disposition associated with a desire for independence (Leary & Hoyle, 2009). The sample of post-intimate stalkers “was rated extremely low on Agreeableness. The authors of the study
noted that “persons with similar scores can be described as extremely bossy, domineering, imperious, egocentric, authoritarian and exploitive” (Kamphuis et al., 2004, p. 173). These post-intimate stalkers were also rated as significantly less Conscientious and Emotionally Stable when compared to the reference sample.

Further research on stalker personality characteristics using the multi-axial classification system described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) has indicated that stalkers exhibit a greater rate of Axis II, cluster B personality traits than community samples (Mullen et al., 1999). Within this classification system, Axis II is used to denote the presence of pathological personality disorders or salient pathological personality traits. Cluster B personality traits are those associated with individuals who “often appear dramatic, emotional, or erratic” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 685). Thus stalkers may present with characteristics including: mood lability, impulsivity, lack of empathy, unstable or ego-centric self concept, and a tendency toward interpersonal exploitation, as these characteristics are commonly associated with Cluster B personality disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Although individuals who engage in stalking may exhibit higher rates of pathological personality traits, lower rates of psychopathy have been found among stalkers when compared to other forensic populations (Reavis, Allen, & Meloy, 2008). Psychopathy is a complex personality construct which recent research has indicated may be described by a four factor model which includes affective, lifestyle, antisocial, and interpersonal dimensions. The affective dimension can be described as a tendency toward expressing callous emotional traits such as a lack of empathy or remorse over wrongful actions (Hill, Neumann, & Rogers, 2004). The second factor of the model, antisocial behavior, can be described as a persistent pattern of engaging in
criminal and deviant behaviors during adolescence and adulthood. The third factor, life style, is characterized by a behavioral orientation associated with engaging in impulsive and irresponsible choices. The last factor, interpersonal style, is associated with a manipulative, egocentric, and superficial interpersonal presentation (Hill et al., 2004).

A study completed by Reavis et al. (2008) indicated that 15% of a sample of stalkers actually met criteria for psychopathy. However, it should be noted that on closer inspection, differences in rates of psychopathy existed among subpopulations of the sample. Very few of the pursuers who stalked targets who were known to them or stalked targets with whom they had a previous relationship met full criteria for psychopathy. Yet almost 50% of the individuals who stalked strangers met criteria for psychopathy (Reavis et al., 2008). These findings indicate that although certain characteristics are common among stalkers it is likely that heterogeneity of characteristics in the population exists. Accordingly, multiple taxonomical systems for stalkers have been proposed by researchers with the intent of defining subpopulations among stalkers, increasing understanding of them, and more accurately assessing risk. These systems often include variables such as motivation, personality characteristics, behaviors expressed, attachment style, and relationship with the target (Mullen, 2003; Spitzberg, 2002).

**Stalking and Attachment**

Reavis et al. (2008) noted that some pursuers have reported a strong desire to continue or augment an attachment with a target, and suggested that dysfunctional attachment systems may be a partial culprit behind the expression of stalking behaviors. A number of other researchers have also noted that data indicate that a dysfunctional attachment system is likely an important factor in expression of stalking behaviors.
An attachment system, as theorized by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) is an innate adaptive mechanism intended to increase survival fitness by maintaining an individual’s proximity to an attachment figure, usually a primary caregiver (Wallin, 2007). The attachment system works by motivating an individual “to maintain a sense of safety or security”, and is “particularly activated by events that threaten the sense of security, such as encounters with actual or symbolic threats or noticing that an attachment figure is not sufficiently near, interested, or responsive” (Leary & Hoyle, 2009, p. 63). Thus the attachment system works by stimulating anxious arousal in an individual when they become aware of threats, unfulfilled needs, or lack of proximity with attachment figures. Anxious arousal then cues individuals to engage in behavioral patterns intended to resolve the distress, typically by seeking proximity with attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Leary & Hoyle, 2009; Wallin, 2007).

However, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) noted that behavioral strategies for reducing anxious arousal may vary across individuals and were frequently correlated with early patterns of responding by attachment figures. Ainsworth and colleagues hypothesized that, based on patterns of attachment figure responding, individuals develop internal working models, or schemas, of themselves and others. These internal models create expectations about future interactions and thus guide behavioral strategies that an individual will employ to reduce anxious arousal when stimulated by the attachment system (Ainsworth et. al., 1978; Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Wallin, 2007).

Following the observation of behavioral interactions between infant, mother, and stranger triads, Ainsworth et. al. (1978) developed a three category model of attachment styles. Each attachment style was defined relative to the pattern of behavioral strategies employed by infants when faced with the separation and reunification with their mother while in the presence of a
stranger. It should be noted that infant strategies tended to correspond with different patterns of sensitivity and consistency of responding to infant needs on the part of the mothers. The model includes secure, avoidant, and anxious ambivalent categories.

Infants whose mothers exhibited sensitive care giving tended to develop corresponding patterns of behavioral strategies which Ainsworth and colleagues categorized as secure attachment styles. Individuals who exhibit a secure attachment style tend to be comfortable being independent as well as relying on others for support without significant anxiety or avoidance (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Wallin, 2007). A secure attachment style is also associated with the use of effective interpersonal, problem solving, and emotional regulation strategies (Leary & Hoyle, 2009).

Infants whose mothers exhibited inconsistent or insensitive responding tended to develop forms of insecure attachment, what Ainsworth and colleagues defined as avoidant or anxious-ambivalent styles (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Individuals who present with an avoidant attachment style typically experience difficulty trusting others and anxiety/discomfort associated with close interpersonal bonds. Research has indicated that these individuals tend to employ less effective strategies for emotional regulation, such as dissociation and repression, tend to have shorter, less intimate interactions with others, and experience higher levels of physiological arousal associated with stress (Leary & Hoyle, 2009). Individuals who present with anxious ambivalent attachment patterns typically want to be close with others, but often exhibit ambivalent and sometimes needy behavior as a result of their anxiety about abandonment (Leary & Hoyle, 2009).

More recently, attention has come to Bartholomew’s adult attachment model (1997), which includes four adult attachment patterns in terms of two dimensions, internal model of self
and internal model of others. Individuals exhibiting a secure attachment style have positive models of both self and others and tend to have an “internalized sense of self worth and a trust that others will be generally be available and supportive” (Bartholomew, 1997, p. 252).

Individuals with a fearful attachment style have negative models of self and others and tend to “avoid intimacy due to fear of rejection” (Bartholomew, 1997, p. 251). Individuals who exhibit a dismissing attachment style have a positive model of self and negative model of others and thus tend to take a distancing approach with regard to intimate relationships. Those individuals who exhibit a preoccupied attachment style have a negative model of self and a positive model of others; thus, they tend to be overly dependent on others for approval and tend to exhibit a strong need for proximity seeking (Bartholomew, 1997).

As a preoccupied attachment style is associated with a strong need for proximity seeking with an attachment figure (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) it is not surprising that stalkers frequently exhibit a preoccupied attachment style or otherwise insecure attachment (Kamphuis et al., 2004; Tonin, 2004). Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) noted that a preoccupied attachment style is commonly associated with “feelings of jealousy and anger toward a romantic partner. Such emotional reactions, in turn, associate with surveillance of partner and the commission of other stalking-like behaviors” (p. 95). This pattern is in keeping with the conceptualization of attachment pathology as a pursuer characteristic implicated in the manifestation of the phenomenon (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Meloy, 2007; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998) and may be an explanatory factor particularly when considering that risk for target victimization has been found to be highest amongst individuals who were divorced or separated (Baum et al., 2009).
**Target Characteristics**

Research on target characteristics has indicated that young adults, typically females, are at an increased risk for being the target of ORI (Sheridan et al., 2003). Tjaden and Thoennes’ (1998) study indicated that over half of the female targets of stalkers sampled were between the ages of 18 and 29. Fremouw, Westrup, and Pennypacker (1997) found that 30% of undergraduate women and 17% of undergraduate men had reported being targets of stalking.

Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey have indicated that Caucasians are more likely to be stalked than individuals of Hispanic or Asian heritage. African Americans were also less likely to be stalked but were more at risk than Hispanic or Asian populations. The data also indicated that risk for stalking decreased as income level rose. The researchers noted that an inverse relationship between income and crime victimization is a common pattern across a variety of other types of crime (Baum et al., 2009). Unfortunately, lower income level leaves those individuals most likely to be victimized with potentially fewer economic resources to cope.

Investigators have also repeatedly documented the harmful impact that stalking phenomenon has on these targets. Stalking is associated with a wide range of poor outcomes for targets which include increased psychological distress, restriction of activities, property damage, economic difficulties, physical injury, and sexual assault (Baum et al., 2009; Davis, Frieze, & Maiuro, 2002; Sheridan et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 2002).

**Target Characteristics and Experience of Stalking Phenomenon**

Although pursuer characteristics likely account for the significant proportion of behavioral variance for ORI and other stalking behaviors, it is possible that target characteristics may also impact the expression of pursuit behaviors, specifically when strong relational dynamics are present between pursuer and target. Such factors may be important in risk
assessment for targets who were previously in a relationship with their pursuer, particularly as multiple researchers have identified the presence of a previous relationship between target and pursuer as a risk factor associated with increased rates of violence against targets (Davis et al., 2002; Mullen, 2003; Sheridan et al., 2003).

Furthermore, in a review of literature addressing how relationship between pursuers and target has impacted the target’s perception of the pursuit behavior, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) pointed out that “the most troubling result of these studies is that the type of relationship victims have with their pursuers often moderates their inclination to label the experience stalking, even though this has no legal relevance” (p. 66). This analysis indicates that targets who may be at the greatest risk for suffering violence may be the least likely to define their experience as stalking, thus failing to acknowledge the significance and risk of such pursuit behavior.

In a 2006 study, Dutton and Winstead examined both pursuer and target characteristics as potential predictors of ORI following the dissolution of an intimate relationship. Using Brennan, Clark, and Shaver’s (1998) Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire the investigators grouped targets into one of four attachment styles based on an adult attachment model (Bartholomew, 1997; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The researchers also measured severity and nature of ORI using Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1997) Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire (VSF), which allows investigators to calculate a total score for target experience of ORI, with higher scores indicating greater severity. The researchers also calculated scores for the two dimensions of ORI target experience, pursuit focused ORI which tends to focus on following, monitoring, and intruding upon the target, and aggressive ORI which focus more on threatening the target or causing injury to the target or target’s property.
Dutton and Winstead found that, although targets’ attachment style was not significantly correlated with higher scores on the pursuit factor, those targets that reported a preoccupied attachment style were significantly more likely to have higher scores on the aggression factor, indicating that targets with a preoccupied attachment style may experience more aggressive forms of ORI.

The authors suggested that the deviation in level of aggressive ORI between groups may have been associated with ambivalent breakup behaviors from an insecurely attached target. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style have a strong need for proximity seeking with intimate partners. Research has indicated that a preoccupied attachment style is associated with problematic separation resolution (Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997) and that preoccupied individuals tend to engage in a pattern of breaking up and getting back together with partners multiple times (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994).

The authors noted that that ambivalent separation resolution behavior associated with target preoccupied attachment style may act to intermittently reinforce ORI on the part of a similarly attached pursuer. Data indicates that pursuers often misinterpret rejection from a target in a more positive light than the target intended (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005). Ambivalent separation behaviors may be more likely to be misinterpreted than direct negative social cues. Thus, patterns of unintentional reinforcement of ORI and misinterpretations of target behaviors may amplify the expression of pursuer ORI and lead to more aggressive tactics. Further research on these potential patterns would have important implications for understanding underlying relational dynamics and behavioral cycles in post-intimate and domestic violence related stalking phenomenon.
Unfortunately, the study conducted by Dutton and Winstead has not been replicated. Replication of scientific studies allows researchers to increase confidence in findings by showing that results are consistent across studies samples and unrelated to factors that may have skewed the results of a single study. Furthermore a review of the literature indicates that few studies that examine the impact of target characteristics exist in proportion to the number of studies examining pursuer characteristics.

**Hypotheses**

The purpose of the current study was to replicate a portion of the Dutton and Winstead’s study. We surveyed young adults regarding their attachment styles and experiences of ORI victimization following an intimate relationship. We then analyzed the data to determine if relationships exist between target attachment style and the nature of ORI experienced following the dissolution of a relationship.

We hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between attachment groups on mean scores of the aggression factor of the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire. Specifically we expected that individuals in the preoccupied attachment group would, on average, score significantly higher on the aggression factor of the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire than the secure, fearful, and dismissing attachment style groups. We also expected to find that the preoccupied group would, on average, have significantly higher scores on the total score on the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire as a result of the higher score on the aggression factor. We did not expect to find any significant differences between all attachment style groups on mean score of the pursuit factor of the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire.
Methods

Participants

Target participants were psychology graduate and undergraduate students of Pacific University who were aged 18 or older. This target population was chosen due to the previously reported high incidence of stalking and stalking related phenomena victimization among young college aged adults and because of the convenience of sample acquisition. The researchers sent survey invitations to all individuals who met the above criteria, approximately 300 individuals. Of those individuals, 108 responded which represented approximately 30% of those sampled. This sample size allowed the researchers to detect large effect sizes when examining differences between group means. A total of 100 of these individuals had completed all aspects of the survey. Those participants who were not survey completers were deleted list wise from the analysis as these individuals did not provide enough information on variables to complete statistical analysis of the results.

Data pre-screening analysis revealed that one outlier existed which that fell far outside three standard deviations from the norm. Based on degrees of freedom (3) and an alpha of .001, the Mahalanobis distance critical value for determining cutoff for outliers was 16.27. The individual’s Mahalanobis distance score was 19.66, far outside the normal range. Based on these values, it was determined that this case was not representative of the typical population, thus this case was dropped from the analysis. Dropping the case left a total of 99 participants in the analysis, out of the approximately 200 students who were sent invitation emails.

Complete demographic data on participants can be seen in Table 1. The sample was largely comprised of Caucasian female subjects, with minorities and males representing
approximately 20% of the sample respectively. The majority of the sample, approximately 85%, reported being between 18 and 29 years old.

Based on characteristics endorsed by participants on the ECR-Q, roughly half of the participants were categorized as having a secure attachment style. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style comprised roughly a quarter of the sample, those that were identified as fearfully attached and those categorized as having a dismissive attachment style comprised the rest of the sample. These ratios of attachment style group membership differ from those reported by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) in their study of adult attachment. The authors reported a higher percentage of individuals categorized as dismissing and a lower percentage of individuals categorized as preoccupied than the percentages found in the current sample. However, given that the females tend score higher on the preoccupied category and males tend to score higher on the dismissing category (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), it is likely that the higher proportion of individuals categorized as preoccupied and lower proportion of individuals categorized as dismissing in the current sample reflect the largely female make up of the sample.
Table 1

Sample demographic information (N=99)

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<td>Fearful</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

Participants were asked to indicate their age, ethnicity, and gender so that the sample demographics could be reported. Participants were then asked to complete Brennan et al.’s (1998) 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR). Based on dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance, this measure can be used to examine attachment style dimensionally or be used classify individuals into one of four attachment categories. This measure has been reported to have a high degree of reliability with coefficient alpha, a measure of internal consistency, found to be greater than .9 for both factors (Brennan et al., 1998; Dutton & Winstead, 2006), is reported to have high test-retest reliability, and “high construct, predictive, and discriminant validity” (Leary & Hoyle, 2009, p. 68).
The participants were also asked to complete Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1997) 24-item Obsessive Pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire (VSF). This measure may be used to determine the degree and nature of pursuit behaviors experienced by a target/victim of such behavior. The VSF has three possible scores that can be computed, a total score, a pursuit dimension score, and an aggression dimension score. The overall degree of ORI experienced is calculated by summing an individual’s scores on all items to create a total score for each individual. The pursuit dimension score is calculated by summing an individual’s scores on items that emphasize the target’s experiences that involved intrusive contact and monitoring behaviors by the pursuer. The aggression dimension score is calculated by summing an individual’s scores for all items that are indicative of target experiences which include more aggressive pursuit behavior such as threats, property damage, and physical harm to the target by the pursuer.

The VSF has been reported to have a high degree of reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal consistency, found to be at .86 or greater for the pursuit dimension and for the aggression dimension (McCutcheon, Aruguete, Scott, Parker, & Calicchia, 2006; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999). The measure is also consistently cited and used in ORI and stalking related research and literature (Dutton & Winstead, 2006; McCutcheon et al., 2006; Ravensberg, 2001; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999).

**Procedure**

All undergraduate and graduate psychology students at Pacific University were forwarded an email which included a study description, invitation to participate, and link to the survey via a secure online survey response collection program (Survey Monkey). The emails were forwarded to students via student list serve. When students chose to access the link to the survey materials, the students were presented with detailed study information and informed
consent documentation. Participants were asked to read through the informed consent documentation and to anonymously indicate if they had read and understood the document, had all questions regarding the study answered, are 18 years of age or older, and agreed to participate in the study. Participants were also asked to keep a copy of the informed consent information for their records (Appendix A). Participants were given the option to print a research participation receipt and/or to include an email address in the survey materials to participate in a drawing for gift cards for participation.

All survey materials were collected and stored via a confidential online survey response collection program. The participant survey data was then entered into a password protected statistical analysis program data base (SPSS).

**Statistical Analysis**

Based on individual participant responses to the ECR and Brennan et al.’s (1998) formula, each participant was placed into one of four attachment styles groups (secure, fearful, preoccupied, or dismissing) in accordance with Bartholomew and Horowitz’s adult attachment model (1991). The data acquired from participants’ responses on the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire were used to calculate an ORI aggression dimension score, and a pursuit dimension score for each participant. Mean group scores for the pursuit and aggression factors of the VSF measure were also computed for each attachment style group.

The independent variable in the study was attachment group, and was comprised of four levels: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing. The three dependant variables were mean group total score on the ORI-VSF, mean groups score on the aggression factor of the ORI-VSF, and mean group scores on the pursuit factor of the ORI-VSF. Based on these variables we conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine the relationship
between target attachment style and nature of ORI experienced following an intimate relationship.

Prior to interpreting the MANOVA we pre-screened data and to ascertain that certain necessary statistical assumptions were met. We specifically addressed outliers, the assumptions of Independence, Normality, and Homoscedasticity.

Descriptive statistics, sample characteristics, and frequencies were computed and reported. An omnibus one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine if statistically significant differences existed between attachments groups ORI-VSF aggression dimension scores, pursuit dimension scores, and total scores.
Results

As noted above, prior to conducting the MANOVA the data were analyzed to insure that certain statistical assumptions were met. Due to study design each observation within each sample is independent of each other, thus the sample met MANOVA assumption of independence. Examination of correlation coefficients between the dependant variables revealed linear relationships, indicating that the data met the MANOVA assumption of linearity.

The data were analyzed to determine if it met the assumption of normality. Upon examination of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics, skewness, and kurtosis coefficients, most dependant variables groups were found to be statistically significantly positively skewed and leptokurtic. The data were transformed using a square root transformation. Such transformations of data are considered ethical and a standard part of data analysis. An analysis using a square root transformation was completed, which used all 99 remaining members of the sample.

Analysis of data revealed that although the square root transformation adjusted most dependant variable groups' data to fit criteria for normality, data for the aggression variable remained skewed and kurtotic. Although MANOVA is robust to such violations of normality a second analysis using a log transformation was also completed. The log transformation caused all dependant variable groups’ data to fall within acceptable ranges for consideration of normality. It should be noted that the log transformation removed several individuals from the analysis, thus decreasing the sample size to 56 cases for the analysis using the log transformation, and thus decreasing the power of the following tests. The results of both analyses are reported below.

A one way MANOVA using the square root transformation which contained all 99 individuals in the sample was conducted to determine the effect that attachment style had on the combined dependant variable of the VSF total score, pursuit factor score, and aggression factor score.
Levene's test was conducted and the results indicated that equal variances can also be assumed across all dependant variables: total score, $F(3, 95) = .566, p > .05$; pursuit score, $F(3, 95) = .248, p > .05$; aggression score, $F(3, 95) = 2.288, p > .05$). Boxes test was conducted and found to be significant, $F(18, 3327.850) = 3.091, p < .025)$. As these results indicate that data did not meet the assumption of homoscedasticity we interpreted Pillai’s Trace upon examination of multivariate tests.

The results of the MANOVA indicated that attachment style group did not have significant impact the combined dependant variable of VSF total score, pursuit factor score, and aggression factor score, Pillai’s Trace $= .164, F(9, 285) = 1.827, p > .05, n^2 = .055$. The effect size indicates that approximately 5.5% of the variance in the combined dependant variable can be explained by attachment type. Thus attachment style accounted for approximately 5.5% of the variance in target experience of obsessive relational intrusion. This should be considered a small effect size. Due to the insignificance of the multivariate test, univariate and post hoc tests were not examined. Thus attachment style was not found to have a significant impact on targets’ reported total experience of obsessive relational intrusion, their experience or pursuit behaviors, or their experience of aggressive behaviors.

A one-way MANOVA on the log transformed data was conducted to determine the effect that attachment style had on the dependant variables of VSF total score, pursuit factor score, and aggression factor score. Levene's test was conducted and the results indicated that equal variances can also be assumed across all dependant variables: total score, $F(3, 52) = .306, p > .05$; pursuit score, $F(3, 52) = .105, p > .05$; aggression score, $F(3, 52) = .680, p > .05$). Boxes test was conducted and found to be significant, $F(18, 2685.489) = 2.926, p < .025)$. These results indicate that we cannot assume homoscedasticity; thus, we interpreted Pillai’s Trace upon examination of multivariate tests.
The results of the MANOVA indicated that attachment style group did not have significant impact on the combined dependant variable of VSF total score, pursuit factor score, and aggression factor score, Pillai’s Trace = .210, $F(9,156) = 1.302$, $p > .05$, $n^2 = .070$. The effect size indicates that approximately 7% of the variance in the combined dependant variable can be explained by attachment type. Thus attachment style accounted for approximately 7% of the variance in target experience of obsessive relational intrusion. This effect size should be considered small. Due to the insignificance of the multivariate test, univariate and post hoc tests were not examined.

Upon visual inspections of group means, it might appear that individuals in the dismissing category experienced higher levels of all forms of ORI than other groups (Table 2). However, as stated above, the analysis did not indicate that these differences were significant. The insignificance of this result may be related to the small sample size of dismissing individuals in the total sample. Given the small sample size of dismissing individuals, it is possible that a few individuals may have significantly skewed the group’s mean scores.

Table 2
Means for Pursuit, Aggression, and Total score factors by sample and attachment category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pursuit M</th>
<th>Aggression M</th>
<th>Total score M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>8.849</td>
<td>3.313</td>
<td>12.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>9.400</td>
<td>3.156</td>
<td>12.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>7.053</td>
<td>2.526</td>
<td>9.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>7.333</td>
<td>2.333</td>
<td>9.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>15.125</td>
<td>9.375</td>
<td>24.500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the frequency and level of endorsement of ORI-VSF scale items was conducted. The frequency of endorsement of VSF-ORI items was analyzed to determine if notable patterns existed in the endorsement of ORI experiences by targets (Table 3).
Analysis of the frequency data indicated several notable patterns regarding the endorsement of ORI items. Scale item two, which described experiencing obsessive pursuit by an individual indicated by leaving repeated unwanted messages, was the item most highly endorsed by participants. Approximately 71% of the sample reported that they had experienced such pursuit behaviors at least one or more times following the termination of a relationship. Over half of the sample reported being obsessively pursued by an individual leaving unwanted gifts or by making exaggerated expressions of affection. Between 24% and 48% of the sample endorsed experiencing the remaining items on the pursuit factor scale, with the exception of the item describing pursuers engaging targets in activities against their will/without permission, which was endorsed by less than 10% of the sample.
Among items on the aggression factor, three items were more frequently endorsed as having occurred one or more times following a relationship. These three items included being physically restrained, which was endorsed by approximately 31% of the sample; having a pursuer threaten to harm him or herself, which was endorsed by approximately 37% of the sample; and being sexually coerced, which was endorsed by 28% of the sample. All other aggression factor items were endorsed as having occurred one or more times by 20% or less of the sample. Engaging in regulatory harassment, leaving threatening objects, kidnapping, and endangering a target’s life were the least frequently endorsed items, with endorsement of those experiences being reported by only 4% to 9% percent of the sample.
Discussion

Recent research has illustrated the pervasive nature of stalking, particularly amongst young adults. The results of the current study further support this conclusion. The majority of the sample endorsed having experienced some form of ORI, and many reported experiencing multiple forms or aggressive forms of ORI. Patterns of ORI experience endorsement did emerge, specifically the markedly high endorsement of certain experiences among participants. Experiences involving a pursuer repeatedly leaving unwanted messages/gifts and/or repeatedly making undesired exaggerated expression of affection were endorsed by the majority of the sample.

Between 24% and 48% of the sample also endorsed experiencing other items listed on the pursuit factor, with the exception of low endorsement of experiences of regulatory harassment (>10% endorsement). Speculatively, it is possible that stalkers may be reluctant to engage in regulatory harassment as engaging officials in ORI behaviors may seem to put them at higher risk for detection by third parties. A low rate of regulatory harassment reported by targets mirrors the result of Spitzberg’s 2002 meta-analysis, which also found lower rates of reported regulatory harassment (approximately 14.8%). However, causal factors regarding this pattern remain unclear.

The results also indicated that approximately one third of all respondents had experienced being physically restrained, having a pursuer threaten to harm him or herself, or being sexually coerced. While this trend of targets commonly experiencing aggression during the course of stalking is frequently reported by other researchers, it is nonetheless disturbing. The commonality of aggressive and violent forms of ORI experienced by targets indicates the
potential and likelihood for serious harm as a result of these experiences. These finding indicate that stalking remains an unresolved and destructive social problem.

To adequately address a problem we must first understand it. Thus, further research on the topic is needed. Although researchers have examined a number of pursuer characteristics such as gender, personality traits, presence of mental illness, attachment style, and patterns of pursuit, notably less research has focused on target characteristics. Considering that the majority of stalking cases developed out of pre-existing relationships and that of those cases many developed out of a current or previous intimate relationship, it seems evident that understanding the characteristics of targets and understanding relational dynamics involved would be essential in understanding the phenomenon as a whole.

Although the results of the current study did not indicate that a significant relationship exists between target attachment style and experiences of obsessive relational intrusion following a relationship, more research on the impact of target attachment style and other target characteristics is necessary. It may be possible that significant results were not found due to the small sample size. As pursuer characteristics account for a significant portion of variance in the manifestation of pursuit behaviors, it is likely that larger samples sizes would be necessary to detect what would be expected to be smaller, but nonetheless important, effects. It is notable that in their study which indicated that a significant relationship between target attachment and experience of ORI exists, Dutton and Winstead (2006) had a larger sample (>300) and thus more power to detect differences than the current study.

It is also notable that the percentages of individuals grouped into each or the four attachment style categories in the current sample did not match ratios found in typical community samples. Although it is likely that the higher proportion of individuals categorized as
preoccupied and lower proportion of individuals categorized as dismissing in the current sample is consistent with the largely female make up of the sample it is possible that the skewed attachment groupings may have obscured a significant relationship between target attachment style and ORI experiences.

Based on these factors, the impact of target attachment style on experiences of ORI remains unclear. The impact of other target characteristics and relationship dynamics between target and pursuer also remain unclear as less research has focused on those domains. Clearly, further research on these and other associated topics are necessary to develop strategies for reducing stalking, treating pursuers, and assisting victims in coping.
References


Appendix A

Attachment and targets experience of obsessive relational intrusion following an intimate relationship.
Katie Diershaw, dier7828@pacificu.edu
Pacific University, School of Professional Psychology, Forest Grove, OR 97116

You are invited to participate in a study on obsessive relational intrusion (a continuum of stalking behaviors) intended to examine the relationship between attachment and target’s experience of obsessive relational intrusion following the termination of an intimate relationship. Data obtained from this survey will be analyzed and results may be published. If the results of the study are published no personal identifying information of participants will be available. The results of this study should expand current knowledge regarding obsessive relational intrusion, which may serve to benefit victims of such phenomena in the future. Should you choose to participate, we thank you for your time and effort in advance.

To assess if relationships between these variables exists you will be asked to report demographic information and complete the following measures: Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire and the Obsessive pursuit – Victim Short Form Questionnaire. Completing the consent form and following measures should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

There are no direct benefits of participation and you will not be paid. However, participants may choose to have their emails placed into a drawing for one of two $25.00 iTunes gift cards. Winners will be emailed regarding the gift cards following the completion of data collection.

It should be noted that some of the questions in the following survey may be of a sensitive nature regarding unpleasant experiences. It is possible that some participants may
experience emotional discomfort as a result of responding to such questions. However, such problems have not been reported in similar studies. If you feel that completing the following survey will be significantly detrimental to you the researchers ask that you do not complete the survey. Should you experience any discomfort as the result of this survey please contact the primary researcher who will provide you with numbers for mental health resources. Although unlikely, there is risk of having your computer identified during electronic communication including, but not limited to, the use of electronic mail (e-mail) and use of the Internet. This could associate the computer user with this study. The Survey Monkey account used to collect data is a private account belonging only to the primary researcher and is password protected, thus no other individuals will be able to access participant data via the account. The primary researcher will securely store then destroy any such information they have obtained following the completion of data collection and the drawing for participant gift cards.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

During your participation in this project it is important to understand that you are not a Pacific University clinic patient or client, nor will you be receiving complete mental health care as a result of your participation in this study. If you are injured during your participation in this study and it is not due to negligence by Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the research, you should not expect to receive compensation or medical care from Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the study.

Should a participant have an adverse response to study questions the primary researcher will provide the participant with contact information for mental health care resources.
a minor adverse reaction reasonably attributable to participation in the study (e.g. Participant reports mild emotional upset. The upset does not interfer with participant functioning or cause significant emotional distress per participant report), the investigators will notify the IRB by the next normal working day. In the case of more serious adverse events that occur during or for a reasonable period following the study (e.g. participant experiences and reports significant emotional upset), the investigators will notify the IRB within 24 hours.

The researcher will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. Complete contact information for the researchers is noted on the first page of this form. If the study in question is a student project, please contact the faculty advisor. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352 – 1478 to discuss your questions or concerns further. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.

Please feel free print a copy of the above pages for your records.

I have read and understand the above. I am 18 years of age or over and agree to participate in the study. I have been offered a copy of this form to keep for my records.

☐ Yes
☐ No

What is your age?
☐ 18-23
☐ 23-28
☐ 28-33
☐ 34-40
☐ 40-65
What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Other

What is your ethnicity?
- African American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Indian
- Hispanic Origin
- Middle Eastern
- Multiracial
- Native American/Alaska Native
- Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian
- Other (please specify)