

# ASSOCIATED CHARACTERISTICS OF STALKING FOLLOWING THE TERMINATION OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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This study investigated stalking by former romantic partners. It aimed to identify characteristics of relationships differentiating stalking from other post relationship experiences (harassment or no-harassment). A self-report questionnaire completed by 305 female undergraduates assessed experiences during and following termination of the relationship. Of the participants, 34.4% were classified as victims of stalking, 32.1% as having suffered post relationship harassment and 33.4% as having experienced no-harassment. Participants experiencing either stalking or harassment were most likely to have experienced *controlling behaviour* and *denigration* from their former partner during the relationship. Stalking was differentiated from harassment in that stalking victims were more likely to experience *violence* and *sexual coercion* during the relationship. These results are consistent with conceptualisations of stalking as a variant or extension of domestic violence.

Stalking is a significant social problem identified in most Western countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996; Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Whilst there is disagreement about how stalking should be defined, many authors accept that stalking consists of a constellation of behaviours in which one individual causes fear in another by inflicting on them repeated unwanted attention, intrusion, and communications, (e.g. Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The most common form of stalking is that following the termination of romantic relationships and this appears to pose the greatest risk of interpersonal violence (Farnum, James, & Cantrell, 2000; Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O'Regan,

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& Meloy, 1997; Meloy, 1998; Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2000; Mullen, Pathe, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Walker & Meloy, 1998). The aim of the present study is to identify experiences during a romantic relationship that differentiated stalking from other possible post relationship experiences (harassment or no-harassment).

In examining relationship experiences related to stalking, some research has suggested that stalking may be an important part of the cycle of domestic violence (e.g. Baldry, 2002; Coleman, 1997; Walker, 1991; Walker & Meloy, 1998). According to this theory, domestic violence is characterised by a sequence of actions that follow each other in a cycle, increasing in severity and frequency each time it is played out (Walker, 1979, 1984). The first stage is referred to as the *tension building stage*. Here tension related to unexpressed anger and unresolved conflict builds within the abuser. This stage is characterised by psychologically abusive acts such as criticism and complaints, intimidation, threats, and controlling behaviour where the abuser begins to undermine the victim's self-confidence and attempts to exercise control over her activities. As tension increases the cycle enters the *explosion stage* where the act(s) of abuse occur. This may involve verbal, physical and-or sexual attacks on the victim. The *honeymoon period* follows the explosion stage in which the abuser appears to seek forgiveness, promises never to repeat the actions, and may act as if courting the victim. As tension begins to rebuild in the abuser the cycle is repeated. It is worth noting that, although domestic violence can involve both male and female victims, this study is limited to stalking of females.

If a woman should leave an abusive relationship, the abuser is faced with the realisation that usual methods of control do not work. At this stage the woman is at risk of suffering repeated unwanted attention (stalking) from her former partner as he attempts to win her back (Walker, 1991). As hypothesised by this theory some research has identified an association between the experience

of post relationship stalking and various forms of violence within an intimate relationship (Browne, 1987; Burgess, Baker, Greening, Hartman, Burgess, Douglass, & Halloran, 1997; Coleman, 1997; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Dutton, 1998; Langhinrischen-Rohling, Palera, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000; Kienlen, et al., 1997; Kurt, 1995; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; Mullen et al., 2000; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Walker, 1991; Walker & Meloy, 1998).

There are three broad categories of abusive behaviour that can be experienced during domestic violence; physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Physical abuse refers to physical attacks that typically involve being grabbed, hit, kicked, punched, or slapped. Psychological abuse refers to controlling and coercive behaviours including criticism, insults, humiliation, social isolation, and threats that instil fear and restrict the freedom of the victim. Sexual abuse involves forced sexual acts, demands for sex, and unwanted sexual acts (Dutton, 1998; Mechanic, et al., 2000; Walker & Meloy, 1998). Studies have generally found that stalking victims are likely to have experienced all of these types of abuse by their former partner prior to the end of the relationship (Coleman, 1997; Langhinrischen-Rohling, et al., 2000; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; Spitzberger & Rhea, 1999). However, what is not clear from this literature is which of these types of abusive experiences differentiate stalking from other post relationship experiences.

There are several possible outcomes of failed romantic relationships related to the extent that one former partner attempts to maintain contact with the other. These may range from no further contact following the termination of the relationship, through contact that is acceptable to both parties (perhaps to arrange the practicalities of the split, dividing up jointly owned goods, remaining friends with each other, etc.) to contact and attention that is unwanted by one of the parties. When unwanted attention is repeatedly directed towards a former partner it is likely to vary in its impact upon the recipient and victims are likely to experience a range of emotions including fear, anger, irritation, and frustration (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, 2000; Langhinrischen-Rohling, et al.,

2000). Some behaviour might be perceived as mildly irritating or annoying, and could include unwanted telephone calls or letters asking for reconciliation; these might be regarded as harassing behaviours (e.g. Coleman, 1997; Roberts, 2002). Other behaviours might provoke fear and distress within the victim. This might be due to the number of behaviours, the duration of the unwanted attention (perhaps continuing for months or years), the presence of explicit threats, physical approaches, or violence towards the victim. When a victim's responses to unwanted attention include fear for their own well-being, the unwanted attention has generally been labelled as 'Stalking' (Meloy, 1998; Mullen, et al., 2000). Indeed, many legal definitions of stalking have the specific requirement that the victim suffer from *reasonable fear* as a result of their experience of unwanted attention (e.g. Mullen, et al., 2000). When an individual experiences unwanted attention but does not respond with fear, previous researchers have often labelled this experience as harassment in order to differentiate it from stalking (e.g. Coleman, 1997; Roberts, 2002).

The experience of fear in response to unwanted attention is likely to be related to the extent a victim believes that the stalker poses a genuine threat to their wellbeing or that of other loved ones. During an episode of unwanted attention fear would be an expected response from a victim of a direct physical attack or threats of violence, and these experiences have often been central to the determination of the reasonableness of a victim's fear within the criminal justice context (e.g. Mullen et al., 2000). To mirror legal definitions of stalking, many researchers have made the experience of fear in response to threats or physical attacks central to their definition of stalking (e.g. Meloy, 1998). The issue of reasonable fear is however problematic, especially for victims of unwanted attention who do not experience direct threats, violence, or other criminal acts. Indeed, it is possible that individuals may experience fear without explicit threats. For example, many innocuous activities such as sending unwanted gifts or making unwanted telephone calls may themselves become threatening and induce fear if repeated on a number of occasions (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, 2000; Langhinrischen-Rohling, et al., 2000). Similarly, fear may result from prior knowledge about a perpetrator of unwanted

attention, such as an abusive ex-romantic partner. For these reasons threats and violence were not made central to the definition of stalking used in this study. As a result, stalking is defined as repeated unwanted attention from a former partner that induced fear in the victim whereas harassment is defined as repeated unwanted attention that did not induce fear in the victim.

The cycle of domestic violence model provides an interesting hypothesis as to when stalking is likely to occur in the progression of romantic relationships as an attempt to further influence and control a partner when a relationship has ended. However, an interesting question, which this model does not address, is whether some types of relationship abuse are especially associated with the experience of post relationship stalking (i.e. are risk factors for stalking). Previous research has examined the characteristics of relationships that end in stalking (e.g. Coleman, 1997; Langhinrischen-Rohling, et al., 2000; Lewis, Fremouw, Del Ben, & Farr, 2001), however, little research has attempted to differentiate between the relationship correlates of stalking and other possible experiences (harassment or no-harassment) following the termination of romantic relationships. This sort of research is important because, it is at present unclear the extent to which relationship characteristics apparently associated with stalking, actually differentiate stalking from these other experiences.

Knowledge of relationship characteristics that differentiate post relationship stalking from harassment is likely to be useful in identifying risk factors for future stalking when romantic relationships breakdown. This would be of benefit to a range of professionals, such as, relationship or marriage guidance counsellors in advising clients about how to cope with a relationship breakdown, police officers in dealing with reports by victims of unwanted attention in devising risk management and protection strategies, and criminal justice professionals when attempting to ascertain the reasonableness of a victim's fear in response to unwanted attention especially in situations where no threats were made or no violence occurs.

This study addresses these issues by identifying experiences whilst a relationship was on-going that were related to and differentiated between *stalking*, *harassment* and *no-harassment* following the termination of the relationship. Following the predictions of cycle-of-violence theories it is expected that participants who were classified as having experienced stalking following the termination of a romantic relationship would be most likely to report negative relationship experiences.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants (Mean Age = 24.63; SD = 1.17 years) were 305 female undergraduate Social Sciences students at the University of Teesside. For inclusion in the study all participants had to satisfy all of the following criteria: (a) they had been involved in at least one heterosexual romantic relationship since they were aged 18 years that had ended, (b) the relationship(s) had to have ended at least two months prior to the commencement of the present study, (c) the relationship had to have been of at least three months duration.

All of the participants classified themselves as White and of British nationality. The mean duration of the relationships within the sample was 25.76 months.

### *Materials*

Participants were presented with a self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections designed to obtain information about the demographic characteristics of the participants and the participants' experiences both during the romantic relationship and following its termination.

An initial screening question asked participants to indicate (yes or no) if they had experienced unwanted attention following the break-up of a romantic relationship. All participants were asked to base their responses upon the romantic relationship that they had most recently experienced. Those who answered yes to the screening questions were to base their responses on the most recent rela-

tionship in which unwanted attention followed the termination of the relationship. This was followed by questions addressing demographic characteristics of the participants.

Section 2 of the questionnaire asked participants to give details about their experiences during the romantic relationship using a yes or no response format. Items were based upon the Domestic Violence Institute's Battered Woman's Checklist (Walker & Meloy, 1998). This checklist describes various physical, sexual, and psychologically abusive acts directed towards one partner by another. For example, '*Does your partner have to know where you are all the time?*' '*Does your partner discourage your relationships with others?*' '*Does your partner demand sex even if you do not want it?*' '*Does your partner humiliate you in front of others?*' The items were modified to the past tense so as to reflect the past nature of the relationships considered in this study. Some of the items on the Battered Woman's Checklist are concerned with acts directed towards children; mention of children was removed for this study.

Section 3 of the questionnaire was concerned with participants' experiences after a relationship had ended. Participants first had to indicate (yes or no) if they had experienced fear as a result of their former partner's behaviour following the end of the relationship. The remaining items made up a modified version of the Stalking Behaviour Checklist (SBC - Coleman, 1997). Participants had to indicate using a yes or no response format, which listed behaviours they had personally experienced and the approximate number of separate occurrences of the behaviour. The behaviours listed were those found in previous research to be commonly experienced by victims of unwanted attention. Participants reported experiences such as receiving unwanted letters, unwanted telephone calls, unwanted gifts, threats, physical attacks, and destruction of property by their former partner. The modification of the SBC to a yes or no format and the collection of data reflecting the number of occurrences was done for several reasons. The response format of the SBC did not allow adequate judgements to be made regarding the frequency of behaviours. For example, it is possible for participants with very different experiences to give the same

response to a given item. That is, a participant who had experienced a given behaviour once per day and a participant who had experienced the same behaviour many times per day could equally give the same response of *once per day or more*. The final item in this section asked participants to estimate the duration of any unwanted attention; the alpha for the scale was 0.82

#### *Classification of post relationship experiences*

In attempting to identify victims of stalking there has been some debate as to how many instances of unwanted attention constitute a persistent pattern of behaviour (e.g. Mullen, et al., 2000). Some authors and most legal definitions suggest that simply repeating the behaviour (i.e. two or more instances of unwanted attention), is sufficient to constitute a persistent pattern (Fremouw, Westrup, & Pennypacker, 1997; Mullen, et al., 2000). Although this is more likely to result in a swift legal intervention in response to a victim's suffering there is a danger that this definition may over attribute the label 'stalking' to other more innocuous behaviours. Mullen et al. (2000) suggests 10 separate acts of unwanted attention be used to indicate a repetitive pattern. This figure is somewhat arbitrary, however, and some individuals who experience fear as a result of unwanted attention may not be properly classified. As a result, this study defines a *repetitive pattern of behaviour* as *two or more* separate acts of unwanted attention. This definition is consistent with that used in a number of previous studies of stalking (e.g. Meloy, 1998; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and with the majority of legal definitions of stalking or criminal harassment (e.g. Mullen, et al., 2000).

Most legal definitions require that the perpetrator should intend to cause fear in the victim (Mullen, et al., 2000). One difficulty associated with this view is that intent is not a readily observable aspect of behaviour; instead it is inferred from other behaviour such as verbal comments and may be prone to bias. As a result, I did not make perpetrator intent central to the definition of stalking.

Three groups of participants were identified on the basis of their experiences following the termination of a romantic relationship: *Victims of Stalking*, *Victims of Harassment*, and *No-*



*Harassment.* A panel of six independent raters who were blind to the object and purpose of the study made classifications into each group. Prior to commencement of the study the six raters were presented with the classification rules and practiced classifying similar data taken from a different study. Once raters felt confident in their classifications they were independently presented with the data from this study and invited to place each participant into one of the three groups. Following the rater classifications another independent judge examined the responses of the six raters in order to produce the final classification of group membership. A participant was placed into a given group when at least four out of the six raters agreed on the classification. In practice there was little disagreement between raters, the mean inter rater reliability (Pearson correlation) was 0.98 (SD = 0.01). The classification rules used are found in Appendix A.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were contacted during undergraduate lectures at the University of Teesside. They were informed that the experimenter was researching experiences during and following the termination of romantic relationships. Those who were interested were invited to remain in the lecture theatre. Participants were informed that all responses were anonymous and that their data would be treated as confidential. Participants were to complete the questionnaire and return it to a sealed box located in the reception area of the Social Sciences building.

## RESULTS

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the frequencies of various experiences reported by participants during relationships. The most frequent relationship experience was a partners constant need to know the participants whereabouts, (i.e. *Did your former-partner need to know where you were all of the time?*). The least common experience reported was sexually abusive acts (i.e. *Did your partner ever demand sex when you did not want it? Did your partner ever demand unwanted sex acts?*). When the affirmative response frequencies were considered by group, stalking victims were more

likely than the other groups to experience more of the listed relationship experiences.

**Table 1.**  
**Distribution of Relationship Characteristics by Relationship Outcome**

<b>Relationship experiences</b>	<b>Stalked (N=105)</b>	<b>Harassed (N=98)</b>	<b>No-Harassment (N=102)</b>	<b>Overall Percentage</b>
Did your former partner ever intentionally kick, punch, slap or pull your hair?	58.2% (57)	35.7% (35)	6.1% (6)	32.1% (98)
Did your former partner often criticise you?	47.2% (51)	42.6% (46)	10.2% (11)	35.4% (108)
Did your former partner often humiliate you in front of others?	49.4% (44)	44.9% (40)	5.6% (5)	21.2% (89)
Did your former partner often insult you?	51.9% (42)	44.4% (36)	3.7% (3)	26.6% (81)
Did your former partner ever threaten you?	68.8% (53)	27.3% (21)	3.9% (3)	25.2% (77)
Did your former partner ever threaten you with a weapon?	88.9% (24)	7.4% (2)	3.7% (1)	8.9% (27)
Did your former partner intentionally damage your personal possessions?	76.3% (32)	9.5% (4)	14.3% (6)	13.8% (42)
Did your former partner intentionally damage your sentimental items?	80% (28)	2.9% (1)	17.1% (6)	11.5% (35)
Did your former partner ever demand sex when you did not want it?	57.8% (26)	35.6% (16)	6.7% (3)	14.8% (45)
Did your former partner ever demand unwanted sex acts?	50% (13)	38.5% (10)	11.5% (3)	8.5% (26)
Did your former partner need to know where you were all of the time?	48.4% (71)	42.5% (65)	11.1% (17)	50.2% (153)
Did your former partner discourage your relationships with others?	56.6% (56)	34.3% (34)	9.1% (9)	32.5% (99)
Did your former partner ask you to leave your job or college?	48.7% (37)	44.7% (34)	6.6% (5)	24.9% (76)
Did your former partner often accuse you of being unfaithful?	50% (54)	38% (41)	12% (13)	35.4% (108)

*Note:* Total sample size = 305. The numbers in brackets in columns 2-4 represent the *n* numbers for each cell. The percentages in columns 2-4 represent the number of participants within a subgroup who reported a particular relationship experience (*n*) relative to the total number of participants within the sample as a whole who exhibited that characteristic.

An exploratory principal components factor analysis with Varimax (Kaiser, 1958) rotation was performed on the relationship characteristics items. Factors with eigen values of greater than 1 and levelling of the scree plot were extracted. Factors were defined so that a minimum of three items (Velicer & Fava, 1998) had primary factor loadings of 0.5 or greater and no secondary loadings of greater than 0.3 (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000). There were four factors with eigen values of greater than 1 and the scree plot indicated levelling at the fourth factor. The four-factor solution produced a successful definition using the above criteria. Factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

Using the above criteria, the first factor loaded three items (*Did your former partner often humiliate you in front of others? Did your former partner often criticise you? Did your former partner often insult you?*) and was labelled *denigration of partner* ( $\alpha = 0.874$ ) and accounted for 27.15% of the total variance (eigen value = 5.39). The second factor loaded four items (*Did your former partner need to know where you were all of the time? Did your former partner discourage your relationships with others? Did your former partner often accuse you of being unfaithful? Did your former partner ask you to leave your job or college?*) and was labelled *control* ( $\alpha = 0.658$ ) accounting for 22.04% of the total variance (eigen value = 2.43). The third factor loaded three items (*Did your former partner intentionally damage your personal possessions? Did your former partner intentionally damage your sentimental items? Did your former partner ever intentionally kick, punch, slap, or pull your hair?*), this factor was labelled *violent conduct* ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) and accounted for 21.26% of the total variance (eigen value = 1.47). The fourth factor loaded on three items (*Did your partner ever demand sex when you did not want it? Did your partner ever demand unwanted sex acts? Did you partner ever threaten you?*), and was labelled *coercive sex* ( $\alpha = 0.63$ ) and accounted for 11.54% of the total variance (eigen value = 1.30).

**Table 2.**  
**Relationship Characteristics Factor Loadings**

<b>Relationship experiences</b>	<b>Factor 1 'denigration'</b>	<b>Factor 2 'control'</b>	<b>Factor 3 'violent conduct'</b>	<b>Factor 4 'coercive sex'</b>
Did your former partner often humiliate you in front of others?	0.949	0.202	0.093	0.108
Did your former partner often insult you?	0.879	0.296	0.114	0.140
Did your former partner often criticise you?	0.832	0.267	0.197	0.027
Did your former partner need to know where you were all of the time?	0.180	0.904	-0.097	-0.055
Did your former partner discourage your relationships with others?	0.217	0.768	0.421	0.228
Did your former partner often accuse you of being unfaithful?	0.242	0.580	0.147	0.124
Did your former partner ask you to leave your job or college?	0.393	0.553	-0.279	-0.022
Did your former partner intentionally damage your personal possessions?	0.168	0.0065	0.929	0.171
Did your former partner intentionally damage your sentimental items?	0.160	0.072	0.880	0.130
Did your former partner ever intentionally kick, punch, slap, or pull your hair?	0.413	0.415	0.595	0.351
Did your former partner ever threaten you?	-0.027	0.046	0.289	0.497
Did your former partner ever demand sex when you did not want it?	0.229	0.151	0.135	0.871
Did your former partner ever demand unwanted sex acts?	0.004	0.010	0.114	0.757
Did your former partner ever threaten you with a weapon?	0.386	0.217	0.271	0.150

**Table 3.**  
**Factor Scores for the Three Participant Groups**

	Victims of Stalking	Victims of Harassment	No-Harassment
Factor 1 'Denigration'	2.134	1.809	0.322
Factor 2 'Control'	2.084	1.842	0.411
Factor 3 'Violent Conduct'	1.256	0.469	0.198
Factor 4 'Coercive Sex'	0.984	0.618	0.145

Factor scores were computed on the four factors identified (see Table 3). There was an ordering effect in the factor scores such that the stalking group obtained the highest mean score on each of the factors. To further explore these differences the computed factor scores were subject to multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). MANOVA revealed a statistically significant multivariate effect ( $F = 21.07, p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed statistically significant effects of postrelationship experience (stalked, harassed, or no-harassment) on Factor 1: *denigration* ( $F_{2,305} = 59.24; MS = 95.54, p < .001$ ); Factor 2: *control* ( $F_{2,305} = 75.87; MS = 83.66, p < .001$ ); Factor 3: *violent conduct* ( $F_{2,305} = 44.95; MS = 31.30, p < .001$ ); and Factor 4: *coercive sex* ( $F_{2,305} = 45.88; MS = 18.29, p < .001$ ). Post hoc analysis using the Scheffe procedure was carried out for each of the factors.

*Factor 1: denigration* There was a statistically significant difference between the no-harassment and the stalked groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ) and between the no-harassment and harassed groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ). The stalked and harassed groups did not differ from each other. When considering mean factor scores the experience of denigration by a former partner was most likely for the stalked and harassed participants, although this did not differentiate between the stalked and harassed groups.

*Factor 2: control* There was a significant difference between the no-harassment and the stalked groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ) and the no-harassment and harassed groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ). The stalked and harassed groups did not differ from each other. When considering mean factor scores the experience of con-

trol by a former partner was more likely for stalked and harassed participants, although the control factor did not differentiate between the stalked and harassed groups.

*Factor 3: violent conduct* There was a statistically significant difference between the stalked and the harassed groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ) and also between the stalked and no-harassment groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ). The harassed and no-harassment groups did not differ from each other. When considering mean factor scores this result suggests that the experience of violent conduct by a former partner was more likely for stalked participants. This factor differentiated between stalked and harassed participants but did not differentiate between harassed and no-harassment participants.

*Factor 4: coercive sex* There was a statistically significant difference between all three groups: *stalked* and *harassed* groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ), *stalked* and *no-harassment* groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ) and the *no-harassment* and *harassed* groups (Scheffe post hoc  $p < .001$ ). When considering mean factor scores this result suggests that the experience of coercive sex by a former partner was more likely for the stalked group followed by harassed then no-harassment groups.

## DISCUSSION

Thirty four percent of the sample could be classified as having suffered stalking victimisation. This is consistent with prevalence rates reported by some studies of undergraduate students (Fremouw, et al., 1997) and adds to the growing evidence that the experience of stalking victimisation is common among female student samples (Bjerregaard, 2000; Fremouw, et al., 1997; Logan, et al., 2000). However, the stalking prevalence found here contrasts with lower rates in other studies of female undergraduates (e.g. Coleman, 1997; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999) and non-students (e.g. Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The higher stalking prevalence in this study may be due to a bias amongst participants who had negative experiences following the dissolution of a relationship and were more inter-

ested in participating. The greater prevalence of stalking victimisation amongst students as compared with non-students may be attributed to a routine activity model of stalking (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999). This model suggests that the likelihood of becoming a victim of stalking is related to aspects of an individual's lifestyle. For example, certain behaviours may increase the likelihood of victimisation by increasing an individual's availability to a potential stalker. Student lifestyle requires the attendance of lectures and seminars, and there are many social opportunities that may increase the likelihood of attracting the attention of a potential stalker compared with non-students.

The relationship characteristics show that participants who reported experiencing some form of unwanted attention (harassment or stalking) following the end of a romantic relationship were more likely to experience denigration and control behaviours by their former partner during a relationship. Denigration and controlling behaviours may be considered to be forms of emotional abuse and previous research has found associations between these relationship experiences and stalking (e.g. Davis & Frieze, 2000). Unwanted attention following the termination of a relationship may therefore represent a continuation of controlling and denigrating behaviour patterns that were started whilst the relationship was ongoing (Mullen et al., 2000).

This study suggests that the experience of post relationship stalking may be differentiated from post relationship harassment. Those participants classified as being victims of stalking were more likely to have experienced violent conduct and sexual coercion behaviours. This finding is perhaps not surprising and possibly illustrates the impact of prior knowledge of an individual's behaviour upon the perceptions and feelings of a victim of unwanted attention. Stalking is defined here with respect to the experience of fear in response to unwanted attention. If an individual has experienced physical or sexual violence during a relationship it is perhaps to be expected that they would respond with fear to any contact from their former partner. Hence, there is a greater likelihood of individuals with these relationship experiences reporting fear in response to any unwanted attention even if it does not include vio-

lent attacks or threats. In the context of criminal justice decisions about the reasonableness of the fear, these findings illustrate the importance of considering the nature of any pre-existing relationship between the victim and perpetrator of unwanted attention.

The results here are consistent with the body of literature that posits an association between domestic violence and stalking (Baldry, 2002; Browne, 1987; Coleman, 1997; Davis & Frieze, 2000; Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Kienlen, et al., 1997; Kurt, 1995; Langhinrischen-Rohling, et al., 2000; Logan, et al., 2000; Mechanic, et al., 2000; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999; Walker & Meloy, 1998; Zona, Palarea, & Lane, 1998). An increased risk of post relationship stalking appears to be associated with dysfunctional relationship characteristics such as the experience of denigration, control, violence, and sexual coercion. The present findings also lend support to models of stalking related to the cycle-of-domestic-violence (Baldry, 2002; Walker, 1979, 1984). Within this theory whilst a relationship is on-going, controlling behaviour and denigration in the form of criticism, insults, and humiliation are characteristic of the *tension building stage*, whereas sexual coercion and violent acts are consistent with the *explosion stage*. These findings suggest that individuals who experience behaviours characteristic of the tension building stage (denigration and control) are at risk of post relationship harassment, those who additionally experience behaviours characteristic of the explosion stages (physical violence) are at the greatest risk of post relationship stalking.

This study did not examine the stage or circumstances in a relationship when the various abusive relationship experiences occurred. It may be that certain behaviours were a constant feature of the relationship, whereas others may have occurred only in certain circumstances such as when the relationship was under threat or following an argument. Such considerations in future research would be very useful in helping to further specify the characteristics of relationships that pose the greatest risk for post relationship stalking. White and Mullen (1989) argued that jealousy and possessiveness are reactions to fear that a relationship is under threat. Perceptions of this sort may cause a partner to begin stalking be-



haviours (such as following the other partner), within an on-going relationship (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

It has been argued that the fundamental deficit in stalkers is an insecure, inadequate attachment style (Kienlen, 1998; Meloy, 1996). Consistent with this, Lewis et al. (2001) found that stalkers were more avoidant and insecurely attached than their controls. This may result in a variety of outcomes such as lack of trust, approach and avoidant behaviours, and ambivalence regarding commitment. Whilst not explicitly testing this hypothesis, lack of trust exhibited as attempts at isolation and controlling behaviour and generally dysfunctional relationship experiences were reported by the victims of stalking and harassment. Although these findings are consistent with the expectations of Meloy's (1996) hypothesis, I did not make any attempt to consider the attachment style of perpetrators. As a result, future research could examine perpetrators of stalking that explicitly examines their attachment history and attachment style.

Additionally, this study did not examine experiences during a relationship that may mitigate against stalking and harassment. Certainly not all participants who experienced dysfunctional relationships suffered stalking after the relationship ended. Future research could examine this issue. For example, it might be expected that an abusive partner who seeks treatment for their abusive behaviour or who starts a relationship with another person might be less motivated to make contact with a former partner, thus reducing the risk of post relationship stalking.

The generalisability of the findings is limited due to the narrow demographic range of participants. This may account for the lack of differentiation in the demographic characteristics between the three participant groups. These data rely upon the retrospective self-reports of participants, who may be subject to various biases. Some participants may inaccurately recall or forget aspects of their relationship or their former partner; especially if the relationship occurred some years previously. As such, different results may have been obtained using a prospective study of the break-up of relationships. However, there is a potential bias in asking par-

participants to consider failed relationships resulting in unwanted attention, as those experiencing fear may produce exaggerated or overtly negative responses concerning a former partner's behaviour which may limit the reliability of the results.

In this study stalking was defined as two or more experiences of unwanted attention that induced fear in the victim, whereas harassment was defined as one or more incident of unwanted attention that did not induce fear. It is, however, possible for an individual to experience fear following a single incident of unwanted post relationship attention. This study did not provide a means of classifying such an experience. By definition this was not considered stalking as it does not represent repeated unwanted attention. However, if such behaviour induces fear it should not be considered merely as harassment. This classification problem is likely to exist for future research and perhaps future studies should attempt to compare these experiences with those who experience stalking and harassment.

To conclude, this study suggests that unwanted attention following the end of a relationship (experienced as either stalking or harassment) is most likely if an individual experiences denigration and controlling behaviours from their partner during a relationship. This adds to previous research by providing evidence that post relationship stalking (experiencing fear as a result of repetitive unwanted attention) may be differentiated from harassment when denigration and controlling behaviour is coupled with violent conduct and sexual coercion by a former partner during a relationship. These results are consistent with stalking models that stress an association between stalking and domestic violence (e.g. Baldry, 2002; Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Walker & Meloy, 1998).

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## Appendix A

### *Victims of Stalking*

In order to be placed in the victims of stalking group participants had to have reported experiencing both of the criteria listed below.

1. Experienced two or more separate incidents of unwanted attention.
2. Experienced fear as a result of the unwanted attention.

A total of 105 (34%) participants were placed into this group. The mean age for members of this group was 24.89 years (SD = 6.68).

### *Victims of Harassment*

Participants were placed in this group if they reported experiencing one or more incidents of unwanted attention but *did not* report experiencing fear as a result of the unwanted attention. A total of 98 (32.1%) participants were placed into this group. The mean age for members of this group was 25.45 years (SD = 6.18).

### *No Harassment*

Participants who *did not* report experiencing unwanted attention following the termination of a romantic relationship were placed into this group. A total of 102 (33.4%) participants were placed into this group. The mean age for members of this group was 24.63 years (SD = 5.95).