A study was conducted to identify the extent to which people self-identified as victimized by obsessive relational intrusion are also victimized by sexual coercion by a given relational partner. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they had experienced any 1 of 23 clusters of obsessive relationally intrusive activities, to focus on the worst relationship in which such behaviors were experienced, and indicate the extent to which that same person had engaged in any of 36 sexually coercive activities. Results indicate that obsessive relational intrusion and sexual coercion tend to co-occur in relationships, and that both are unique and relatively equivalent predictors of psychological symptoms, accounting for extensive variance in general distress, sense of loss, and resilience symptoms. Implications are discussed for developing more predictive models of the factors sustaining intrusive relationships.

**Obsessive Relational Intrusion and Sexual Coercion Victimization**

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Sexual coercion, in all its forms, has been the subject of extensive research. Broadly speaking, sexual coercion represents the continuum of processes by which persons are induced into sexual activity against their will. At the coercive end of this continuum is rape, and at the less coercive end is what is often referred to as “psychological pressure” techniques, such as continual arguments and threats to break off the relationship. In one sense, all the forms of sexual coercion represent an intrusion on the person’s privacy and autonomy rights. Another form of intrusion that has only recently received scholarly attention is the problem of obsessive relational intrusion (ORI) and stalking. ORI is a form of ongoing and unwanted pursuit of a relationship. It involves activities ranging from constant calling or requesting a date to breaking and entering and surreptitious observation. When such obsessive relational intrusion becomes threatening, it constitutes stalking. Specifically, this study examines links between obsessive relational intrusion and sexual coercion victimization. There are several reasons to anticipate that these phenomena are linked.
Sexual Coercion

A recent summary of studies of the prevalence of various forms of sexual violence and force (Spitzberg, 1998a) indicated that approximately 13% of women have been raped, over 15% have experienced attempted rape, and almost 25% have been victims of sexual contact (i.e., nonintercourse types of sexual coercion), sexual coercion (i.e., psychological pressure to engage in sexual activity), or both. Although only approximately 4% of males reported committing or experiencing rape, between one fifth and one fourth admitted to engaging in aggressive sexual contact or coercion. Three obvious conclusions can be derived. First, sexual victimization is extensive in our society. Second, the most severe forms of sexual victimization are gendered; specifically, women are more seriously victimized than men. Third, sizable percentages of both men and women report perpetrating sexually intrusive and unwanted activities on partners.

Most studies of sexual coercion have attempted to identify psychological and sociological characteristics of rapists and sexually exploitative persons (Craig, 1990). Such research has identified some general characteristics of sexually coercive individuals, generally males, including: (a) an acceptance of social and gendered myths about sexual relations (i.e., rape myths; e.g., “In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation”), (b) an acceptance of interpersonal violence as a way of managing conflicts, (c) a view of relationships as adversarial in nature, (d) a tendency to distrust the veracity of cues of sexual disinterest and resistance, (e) a tendency to have peers who are more accepting of sexual exploitation as a norm of sexual relations, and (f) a more stereotyped image of men and women (see Craig, 1990; Malamuth & Brown, 1994; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Spitzberg, 1998a). However, despite these defining characteristics, such factors typically account for a relatively modest amount of variance in predicting perpetration and victimization. Importantly, however, these characteristics do point to a type of person who tends not to respect another person’s boundaries when self-interests are involved.

As an alternative to the individual characteristics approach, an interactional perspective attempts to locate sexual exploitation in the dynamics of the relationship, context, and interaction. One objective of such an approach is to examine the tactics through which sexual coercion is accomplished. A recent survey of studies (Spitzberg, 1998a) suggested five major categories of sexual coercion: pressure and persistence (e.g., verbal persuasion, continual arguments, etc.), deception (e.g., falsely professing love, lies, etc.), threat (e.g., threaten to terminate the relationship, threaten bodily harm, etc.),
physical restraint (e.g., holding down, intoxication, etc.), and physical force or injury (e.g., hitting or slapping, using weapon, etc.).

Interactional perspectives toward sexual coercion have identified a number of processes that facilitate the effectiveness of such tactics. For example, contextually, sexual coercion is more likely to occur (a) in private settings (e.g., home or car) rather than public settings (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987), (b) after party-type dates (e.g., dancing, keg party) rather than formal-type dates (e.g., theater, dinner) (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987), (c) after alcohol consumption by either person (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996), and (d) when peers tend to approve of sexually coercive relations (Small & Kerns, 1993).

In addition to context, an interactional perspective focuses on the various communicative difficulties encountered in relationships that may increase the risk of sexual coercion. Males in general tend to be more sexually motivated than women and tend to interpret excessive sexual intentions into women’s behavior (Spitzberg, 1998a). Excessive reliance on societal sexual scripts may lead to a lack of adaptation to partner feedback (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). The double standard that rewards men for sexual persistence and women for sexual resistance, and simultaneously penalizes women for expressing overt sexual interest, can lead to an incompatible role context of sexual compliance-gaining (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). Undue reliance on nonverbal communication in sexual pursuit can lead to a lack of communicative resources for negotiating appropriate conduct (Abbey & Melby, 1986). The physiological arousal that occurs in potentially sexual encounters can interfere with information processing (Byers, 1988; Kanin, 1984). Large numbers of people report engaging in token resistance (i.e., saying “no” when perfectly willing or intending to engage in sexual relations), which may not only create direct interpretive difficulties in a given encounter, but also perpetuate general tendencies of persistence and disregard of resistance messages in society (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). Finally, research indicates that males may, in particular, generally distrust the validity of women’s resistance messages (Malamuth & Brown, 1994).

Added to all these factors is the possibility that coercive individuals are more interpersonally incompetent than non-coercive individuals (e.g., Prentky & Knight, 1991). However, Muehlenhard and Falcon (1990) suggest that coercion may be the result of either incompetence or hypercompetence. That is, socially incompetent persons may engage in physical coercion due to lack of ability to attract others through social interaction. In contrast, hypercompetent individuals may be so socially skilled that they can invoke requisite persuasive and manipulative techniques so deftly that they can readily obtain sex from unwilling partners.
Collectively, the image of the sexually exploitative and coercive person is of someone out of touch with the actual meaning of a person’s rejection messages, and who is inclined to pursue the person regardless of the person’s preferred or expressed privacy boundaries. Such a characterization is highly suggestive. Would such persons also be more likely to stalk or obsessively pursue their intended partner regardless of the target’s expressions of disinterest? To address this question more directly, the concept of obsessive relational intrusion is elaborated.

**Obsessive Relational Intrusion and Stalking**

ORI is defined formally as the “repeated and unwanted pursuit and invasion of one’s sense of physical or symbolic privacy by another person, either stranger or acquaintance, who desires and/or presumes an intimate relationship” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, pp. 234-235). There are several important elements of such a conceptualization. First, ORI and stalking are related but not isomorphic. There are stalkers who have no intention of establishing a relationship with the target (e.g., John Hinkley stalked President Ronald Reagan to impress actress Jodie Foster). Likewise, not all obsessive relational intrusions could be legally defined as threatening or as a risk to the safety of a person’s self or property. Nevertheless, many relatively common patterns of unwanted intrusion are perceived as threatening by the targets of such pursuit (Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998). Second, ORI is ongoing and persistent. It is not a single act, or a single episode, but a continuing process of pursuit. Third, it represents a form of relational disjunction. The persons have directly incompatible preferences regarding the trajectory of the relationship. Fourth, the intrusion can take many forms, including symbolic (e.g., making constant phone calls, making verbal threats, etc.) and physical (e.g., grabbing, kidnapping, damaging property, etc.) activities.

ORI is a common experience. Studies indicate that across a continuum of ORI activities ranging from unwanted calls to physical aggression, somewhere between 5% to 40% of college students have experienced obsessive relational intrusion (Coleman, 1997; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1997; Elliott & Brantley, 1997; Fremouw, Westrup, & Pennypacker, 1997; Gallagher, Harmon, & Lingenfelter, 1994; Harmon, Rosner, & Owens, 1995; Hays, Romans, & Ritchhart, 1995; Larkin & Popaleni, 1994; Levitt, Silver, & Franco, 1996; McCreedy & Dennis, 1996; Romans, Hays, & White, 1996; Roscoe, Strouse, & Goodwin, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1996; Spitzberg, Marshall, & Cupach, 1997; Spitzberg et al., 1998). Studies also show significant levels of victimization in normal adult populations (e.g., Hall, 1998;
Walker & Meloy, 1998). Tjaden and Thoennes (1997) report the results of the only nationally representative study of stalking, indicating that 8% of women and 2% of men have been stalked. According to all this research, most ORI and stalking occurs in the context of established or past relationships, including dating and married couples, collegial relationships, friendships, or service-client relationships (e.g., counselor-client).

Thus far, little is known of stalking perpetrators (Wright et al., 1996). The thrust of most research to date has been on types of mental disorder of stalkers (for review, see Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998; Kienlen, 1998; Meloy, 1996a, 1996b, 1998; Zona, Palarea, & Lane, 1998) or on cases that come to the attention of the legal system (e.g., Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O’Regan, & Meloy, 1997; Kong, 1996). However, as the phenomenon of stalking increasingly is found in the general population (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1997), and viewed as part of a continuum of obsessive relational intrusion (Coleman, 1997; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998), it seems clear that such activity can occur in relatively normal relationships between relatively normal individuals, and appears common among the relatively young college-aged populations in which relational mobility may be highest. Yet, it is unclear what drives people to pursue obsessively and whether such actions reflect a more inclusive tendency to disregard others’ rights to privacy and autonomy. One obvious potential indication of this inclusive tendency would be sexual coercion.

Only a few studies have directly addressed the link between stalking or ORI and sexual coercion. The study by Tjaden and Thoennes (1997) found that “31% of the women who were stalked by husbands or cohabiting partners were sexually assaulted by the same partner” (p. 10). Kienlen and colleagues (1997) found that only one (4%) of their sample of 25 case files revealed sexual assault as part of the stalking activity. Kong’s (1996) report of criminal harassment cases (the equivalent of stalking) in Canada indicated that 50 of the 1,864 (2.7%) cases studied involved sexual assault as a related offense. Employing a list of 63 ORI behaviors, Spitzberg and colleagues (1997) found four factors of intrusion: pursuit (e.g., showed up before or after your work, followed you from place to place, etc.), violation (e.g., sent you offensive photographs, recorded conversations without your knowledge, etc.), violence (e.g., physically shoved, slapped, or hit you; threatened you with physical harm, etc.), and hyperintimacy (e.g., made exaggerated claims of affection for you, described acts of sex to you, etc.). Having assembled a list of coercion tactics studied in other research, their analysis indicated four coercion factors: psychological (e.g., whined or begged, used continual arguments, etc.), force (e.g., slapped, shoved, or hit you, etc.), deception (e.g., displayed mock or pretend force, falsely promised things, etc.), and restraint (e.g., pinned you down, physically restrained you, etc.). In this study of
college students, all the ORI factors were significantly and positively correlated to all the sexual coercion factors, with coefficients ranging from a low of .17 to a high of .68, and averaging .40. In particular, the simple sum of ORI behaviors a person had experienced was correlated .69 with psychological coercion, .41 with force, .51 with deception, and .41 with restraint forms of victimization.

Despite such rather striking empirical findings of correlation between stalking and ORI and sexual coercion victimization, there are limitations with these studies. In the Tjaden and Thoennes (1997) study, the conclusion is carefully restricted to husbands or cohabiting partners. According to their data, about half of female victims were stalked by a spouse (38%) or a cohabiting partner (10%). The remainder were stalked by a date (14%), relative (4%), acquaintance (19%), or stranger (23%). Thus, the linkage between stalking and sexual coercion is apparent in marriage and cohabiting situations in which long-term sexual relations can be presumed, but the link in more casual, formal, or stranger relationships is not reported. In Spitzberg and colleagues’ (1997) study of college students, despite the substantial correlations between ORI and coercion, the respondents were only asked to report on their lifetime experience of both the ORI and the sexual coercion behaviors. Thus, it is unknown whether the person who committed the unwanted pursuit is the same person who committed the sexual coercion.

The only other findings in the literature with direct relevance to the link between sexual coercion and ORI appear to be research by Mullen and Pathé. In their 1994 study of erotomanic (i.e., love obsession) individuals, six of the cases they reviewed (43% of the sample) sexually attacked the object of their obsession (Mullen & Pathé, 1994b). In their 1997 study of 83 female and 17 male victims of stalking, they found that 7 had been sexually assaulted. Because these were forensic cases from the criminal justice system, the relevance of these results is unknown, especially given that erotomanics probably only represent a relatively small proportion of all obsessive followers (Meloy, 1996a, 1996b).

In general, therefore, although there is substantial rationale and circumstantial evidence that sexual coercion commonly co-occurs with stalking and obsessive relational intrusion in a given relationship, direct evidence is still lacking. This study attempts to address these limitations. College students were asked to report about a case of obsessive relational intrusion. For those who had experienced such an episode, they were then asked to report on experiences of sexual coercion in that relationship. It was hypothesized that the experience of sexual coercion would be significantly correlated to the experience of obsessive relational intrusion.
Finally, one way of assessing the significance of the link between sexual coercion and ORI and stalking is to examine the symptoms associated with victimization. “There are virtually no data on the psychological toll that obsessional following takes on the victims” (Meloy, 1996a, p. 24). Research has displayed that criminal victimization in general (Kelly & DeKeseredy, 1994; Kilpatrick et al., 1985; Miller, Cohen, & Rossman, 1993), and sexual coercion in particular, are closely associated with a wide variety of psychological (e.g., lowered self-concept, distrust, etc.), emotional (e.g., fear, anxiety, etc.), and behavioral (e.g., sleeplessness, loss of appetite, etc.) symptoms (see Gavazzi, Julian, & McKenry, 1996; Gidycz & Koss, 1991; Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992; Koss, Figueredo, Bell, Tharau, & Tromp, 1996; McCreedy & Dennis, 1996; Resick, 1993; Roth, Wayland, & Woolsey, 1990; Wallace & Silverman, 1996). Although relatively little is known of the symptoms resulting from stalking and ORI victimization, research suggests that many victims become more distrustful of relationships in general, significantly alter their lifestyle, and experience various degrees of heightened stress, anxiety, paranoia, and fear (see review by Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998; Hall, 1998; Pathé & Mullen, 1997). Thus, it is important to ask whether ORI and sexual coercion victimization are uniquely and independently related to symptoms, or whether one of these victimization experiences subsumes the effects of the other. Thus, it is hypothesized that both ORI and sexual coercion victimization are predictive of symptoms. No prediction is offered in terms of their relative or combined significance in predicting symptoms.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 360 college students (185 females, 178 males) in the basic communication course at a large public Texas university were given a questionnaire and offered nominal extra credit for participation. Most of the respondents described their ethnicity as White (68%), followed by Black/African American (12%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (4%), and Native American (3%). Most of the respondents reported themselves currently involved in a steady (33%) or occasional dating (28%) status, with about 8% engaged, about 6% married, and almost 28% not currently dating. The respondents reported having dated an average of 4.7 persons since high school, and an average of 1.6 of these were considered “steady.”

About a third of respondents described their pursuer as an ex-partner (34%), a friend (38.4%), or an acquaintance (24.6%). The pursuer was
described as female 46% of the time, and male 54% of the time. The average case of obsessive relational pursuit was described as having occurred almost 15 months prior to the survey, and having lasted an average of 4.75 months. Respondents reported an average of 1.15 persons who had engaged in any of the relational intrusion behaviors described in the questionnaire, and claimed to know an average of 1.89 other persons who had experienced such behaviors.

**Procedure**

The study was introduced as an investigation of relational intrusion behavior. Instructions indicated,

People often pursue intimate relationships without realizing that the person being pursued does not want such a relationship. These pursuers may want friendship, or romantic intimacy, or perhaps just recognition. In addition, they often do things that do not appear in normal circumstances to be intimate, such as invading your privacy, intruding into your life, and/or making threats (e.g., “If you don’t go out with me, I’ll kill myself”) or refusing to let go. We are interested in finding out if you have ever experienced such a “relationship,” and what kinds of actions this pursuer displayed. In your lifetime, how often, if at all, has anyone ever obsessively pursued you over a period of time for the purpose of establishing an intimate relationship that you did NOT want, by [engaging in any of the following activities].

**Measures**

*Obsessive relational intrusion.* ORI was assessed by a victim-short form (ORI-VSF) measure adapted from much longer lists of intrusive behaviors employed in previous studies (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1997; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1996). This short form consists of 23 items, each of which is defined by a “core” description, followed parenthetically by several exemplars. For example, Item 8 reads: “invading your personal property (e.g., handling your possessions, breaking and entering into your home, showing up at your door or car, etc.).” These items were presented in an order from relatively low severity (e.g., 1. leaving unwanted gifts; 2. leaving unwanted messages) to relatively moderate severity (10. monitoring you and/or your behavior; 12. physically restraining you) to relatively high severity (22. physically hurting you; 23. physically endangering your life). The response scale is one of usage frequency: 0 = never, 1 = only once, 2 = 2 to 3 times, 3 = 4 to 5 times, 4 = over 5 times.
times. This measure has been found to be reliable and predictive of trauma symptoms (Spitzberg et al., 1998). Similar to previous research (Spitzberg et al., 1998), in this study the ORI-VSF produced a two-component structure with oblique rotation, reflecting a general tendency to have experienced pursuit (12 items, $\alpha = .90$), and a tendency to have experienced aggression (11 items, $\alpha = .86$).

**Sexual coercion.** Sexual coercion was assessed by items generated from a review of the coercion literature (e.g., Christopher, 1988; Craig, 1990). The resulting list of 36 coercion items was ordered in roughly the same clusters, but not labeled as such for respondents, as reported by Spitzberg (1998): pressure and persistence (e.g., got too aroused for you to feel like you could stop them, used verbal persuasion, made you feel inadequate, etc.), deception (e.g., said things they didn’t mean, falsely professed their love, lied to you, etc.), threat (e.g., threatened to end your relationship, used verbal threats or blackmail, threatened to hurt you, etc.), physical restraint (e.g., physically restrained you, got you too drunk or stoned to resist, twisted your arm to restrain you, etc.), and physical force or injury (e.g., choked you, beat you, used a weapon of some sort, etc.). The response scale ranges were never (0), occasionally (1), often (2), and very often (3).

Given the exploratory nature of this measure, items were submitted to principle components analysis. The KMO was .92, indicating excellent sample size for factor analysis. The analysis produced six components with eigenvalues over unity, and a scree leveling between the third and fourth component. When four components were extracted and obliquely rotated, a definable four-factor solution emerged accounting for 60% of the common variance. The resulting factor structure was similar to that found by Spitzberg and colleagues (1997) using the same items. The first component, labeled psychological coercion, consisted of 12 items ($\alpha = .93$) reflecting verbal persuasion, undressing without permission, verbal pressure, whining and begging, and other relatively symbolic means of influence. The second component, labeled severe force, was defined by 5 items ($\alpha = .90$) reflecting the use of a weapon, beating, injury, and choking. The third component was labeled mild force, and consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .90$), such as physically forced, pinned down, twisted arm, threatened to hurt, and so forth. The final component was named deception, and consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .87$), including lied, falsely professed love, and said things they didn’t mean. Despite the assumption that threats might form a unique form of influence, respondents apparently tend to associate threats with force.
Symptoms. Existing checklists are not very psychometrically flexible. They simply provide nominal choices to subjects, and items are summed across potentially diverse and unrelated symptoms. Consequently, existing checklists (e.g., Attansio, Andraski, Blanchard, & Arena, 1984; Derogatis, Rickels, & Rock, 1976) and research on criminal and sexual victimization symptoms (e.g., Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Gidycz & Koss, 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Ruch, Gartrell, Amedeo, & Coyne, 1991; Senn & Dzinas, 1996) were reviewed for the generation of relevant items. In addition, many of these literatures have completely ignored the possibility that people experience positive symptoms (e.g., resilience, strengthened family relationships, etc.). Thus, relevant “positive” symptoms that might result from traumatic experiences (e.g., McMillen, Zuravin, & Rideout, 1995) were included. The resulting 48 symptoms were rated on a 6-point scale, from didn’t experience at all to experienced in the extreme. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced any of the symptoms because of the relationship to which they referred when completing the ORI items.

Given the exploratory nature of this measure, items were submitted to principle components analysis. The KMO was .94, indicating excellent sample size for factor analysis. Eight components produced eigenvalues over unity, but the scree suggested a leveling between the second and fourth component. The three-component extraction with oblique rotation revealed a definable solution. The first component was clearly the dominant component, loading 30 items. This component was labeled general distress ($\alpha = .97$), and included a variety of symptoms, including helplessness, general stress, weaker self-concept, paranoia, sleeplessness, and depression. The second component loaded eight items, such as stronger romantic relationships, stronger self-concept, stronger family relationships, better coping skills, and greater safety awareness. This component was labeled resilience ($\alpha = .91$). The third component loaded seven items concerning loss of faith in the justice system, loss of faith in the police, blackouts, loss of income or property, loss of faith in the mental health system, and loss of job. This component was labeled sense of loss ($\alpha = .80$).

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 predicted that both ORI and sexual coercion would be significantly correlated. Table 1 reports the correlations among variables. As expected, the two ORI components correlated significantly and positively with all four types of sexual coercion. These correlations are generally in the moderate to strong range.
Hypothesis 2 predicted that both ORI victimization and sexual coercion victimization would relate to symptoms, but the question of relative contribution was not specified. A series of multiple regressions were designed in which the symptom component variables (i.e., general symptoms, sense of loss symptoms, resilience symptoms) served as the dependent variables. The sexual coercion components were entered first as a block, and then the ORI components were entered as a second block. Then this order was reversed. In this way, the prospect of mediation was assessed (Baron & Kenny, 1986), and the relative importance of each type of victimization was also determined (Lindeman, Merenda, & Gold, 1980).

In predicting general symptoms, sexual coercion variables account for 38% of the variance, and intrusion variables account for an additional 9% when entered second. These proportions remain virtually unchanged when the order of entry is reversed ($R^2 = .37$, $R^2 = .10$, respectively). Thus, sexual coercion victimization and obsessive relational intrusion victimization account for approximately equivalent amounts of variance in general symptoms. These proportions are sizable, and collectively, represent a large effect ($R^2 = .47$, $p < .001$).

In predicting sense of loss, sexual coercion variables account for almost 11% of the variance when entered first, with an additional 8% explained by obsessive relational intrusion variables. However, when intrusion victimization variables are entered first, they account for 15% of the variance, and sexual coercion victimization variables account for only 4% additional variance. It appears that there is a modest mediation effect of obsessive relational intrusion of the impact of sexual coercion on a person’s loss of faith in the world. Collectively, the variables account for a moderate effect in sense of loss ($R^2 = .19$, $p < .001$).

### TABLE 1: Correlations Among Obsessive Relational Intrusion, Sexual Coercion, and Symptom Variables

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<td>8 Sense of loss symptoms</td>
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**NOTE:** All correlations are significant at $p > .01$. 

Sexual coercion variables account for almost 11% of the variance in sense of loss when entered first, with an additional 8% explained by obsessive relational intrusion variables. However, when intrusion victimization variables are entered first, they account for 15% of the variance, and sexual coercion victimization variables account for only 4% additional variance. It appears that there is a modest mediation effect of obsessive relational intrusion of the impact of sexual coercion on a person’s loss of faith in the world. Collectively, the variables account for a moderate effect in sense of loss ($R^2 = .19$, $p < .001$).
Finally, in predicting resilience symptoms, sexual coercion variables account for almost 15% when entered first, and intrusion victimization variables account for an additional 5%. This proportion remains virtually identical when the order of entry is reversed. Sexual coercion and obsessive relational intrusion appear to account for equivalent relative proportions of resilience, producing a moderate effect overall ($R^2 = .20, p < .001$).

**DISCUSSION**

This study found that not only are victims of obsessive relational intrusion and stalking often also victimized by sexual coercion, but they tend to be victimized by the same person. Further, despite the fact that the average case of obsessive relational intrusion occurred more than a year ago, the intrusion generally is equally as predictive of general symptoms of distress as is the sexual coercion. Furthermore, it is apparent that experiencing both obsessive relational intrusion and sexual coercion significantly increases the experience of negative symptoms.

At this juncture, it becomes important to begin identifying the types of individual, contextual, and relational characteristics that predict such exploitative and problematic relationships (Spitzberg, 1998b). When almost half of a person’s general level of distress covaries with his or her previous experience of sexual coercion and ORI victimization, it suggests a very serious problem. To date, research indicates that coping tactics also covary strongly with the experience of ORI behaviors and are even more predictive of symptoms than the ORI behaviors. Indeed, such research suggests that one’s coping strategies mediate the impact of ORI victimization (Spitzberg et al., 1998). One interpretation is that the more one feels compelled to cope (e.g., by changing phone numbers, moving, only going out with friends, obtaining restraining orders, changing jobs, conflicting with the perpetrator, etc.), the more stressful the experience becomes.

Little is known about which types of coping are likely to be most effective in diminishing one’s distress over time, much less what types of intervention and counseling might be useful in treating such distress (Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996). The positive symptoms (e.g., improved self-concept, improved family bonds, enhanced safety awareness, etc.) examined in this study are suggestive. Although it may seem inappropriate to suggest that experiences such as child abuse (McMillen et al., 1995) and stalking may have beneficial effects, such a claim in no way implies that on balance, such experiences are either positive or insignificant. Instead, the interest is in discovering what types of people or actions are able to elicit resilience from such
ordeal. Research examining such coping processes and relationships may be extremely valuable in informing victims, friends, families, counselors, and law enforcement about more effective forms of intervention and social support in cases of stalking, obsessive relational intrusion, and sexual coercion.

In many ways, unwanted intrusion and sexual coercion may be more predictable from relational and interactional characteristics than from structural, demographic, or psychological traits (Spitzberg, 1998a, 1998b). Spitzberg (1998b) has formulated one of the only predictive models of obsessive relational intrusion. In this model, for example, jealousy, possessiveness, and insecure attachment styles can work as predictors of both perpetration and victimization, because they all indicate a tendency to cling to a partner, even if the relationship is destructive. These can be viewed as traits of the individuals, but these characteristics can also be viewed as influenced by the relational and interactional context. Thus, jealousy and possessiveness can be fueled by (would-be) partners flirting publicly with others outside the relationship, and insecure attachment may be stimulated through intermittent reinforcements such as breaking up and then calling out of the blue to get back together.

Le Poire, Hallett, and Giles (1998) have formulated an intermittent control theory of codependency. Aron, Aron, and Allen (1998) have begun to understand the paradoxical motives for staying in unreciprocated love relationships. A number of investigations are identifying the interactional paradoxes wherein victims stay in abusive relationships (e.g., Celani, 1994; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Lempert, 1994, 1996; Long & McNamara, 1989; Rosen, 1996). Efforts such as these may begin to reveal the “pathologies” of love (Mullen & Pathé, 1994a, 1994b) that occur in relatively normal relationships (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Dutton, van Ginkel, & Landolt, 1996). As with sexual coercion and rape, stalking is sometimes perpetrated by individuals who are simply mentally disturbed sociopaths. However, it unfortunately seems likely that the real risk the average person runs of experiencing these forms of victimization, in one form or another, is greater in the typical relationship than in encountering such psychologically pathological persons. In either case, it seems clear that further research is justified in understanding these phenomena.

NOTES

1. Interactional perspectives may be mistaken for shifting the responsibility (and, therefore, blame) of sexual exploitation more toward the victim than the perpetrator. However, in the context of a fledgling or potential relationship, it stands to reason that the actions of both persons...
intertwine to affect the probability of future actions of both participants. In this sense, “blame” is
an ideological notion rather than a problem of blame. See Metts & Spitzberg (1996) and
Spitzberg (1998a) for explications of the interactional perspective and its implications.
2. A coping responses measure was also included in the survey, but its results are not directly
relevant to the hypothesis being tested and, thus, are not reported here.
3. The 23-item version has since had a couple of item wordings altered slightly and an item
added concerning kidnapping and restraint. Contact the first author for the most recent version.
4. Biological sex was not a variable of concern to this study, but exploratory analyses can be
reported here. There were several statistically significant differences based on sex, but in no case
did the difference produce an \( \eta^2 \) greater than 6%. Specifically, females experienced significa-
cantly higher ORI threat \((p < .006)\), more forceful sexual coercion \((p < .001)\), psychological sexual
coercion \((p < .041)\), more general symptoms \((p < .001)\), and resilience symptoms \((p < .001)\).

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