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Unwanted Pursuit in Same-Sex Relationships: Effects of Attachment Styles, Investment Model Variables, and Sexual Minority Stressors

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This study examined the frequency and antecedents of unwanted pursuit in the intimate relationships of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals. Analyses were conducted separately for disengagers (individuals who wanted to end a relationship when the other partner did not want to let go) and rejected partners (individuals who wanted to hold on to a relationship that the other person was trying to end). One hundred percent of disengagers reported having experienced at least one unwanted pursuit behavior, and 87.7% of rejected partners reported engaging in at least one unwanted pursuit behavior. Among rejected partners, anxious attachment positively predicted pursuit behaviors; and,

among disengagers, avoidant attachment negatively predicted being the target of aggressive behaviors. Investment in the relationship predicted pursuit as reported by disengagers and rejected partners. In addition, lifetime experiences with minority stressors predicted being the target of pursuit among disengagers. The findings expand on earlier research about how personality variables and relationship beliefs affect unwanted pursuit. It also demonstrates how sexual minorities face extra challenges when one partner wants to break up and the other partner does not want the relationship to end.

KEYWORDS: unwanted pursuit; attachment styles; investment model variables; LGBT; sexual minorities; sexual minority stressors

Intimate relationships, same sex or heterosexual, rarely end smoothly. Often, one person (the rejected partner) does not want the relationship to end, whereas the other person (the disengager) wants to break up. This results in a “disjunctive relationship” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004), where partners’ views of the relationship are incompatible. Research, primarily on heterosexual relationships, shows that rejected partners frequently engage in behaviors that continue their engagement with the disengager (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004, 2008; Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Frieze, Davis, & Maiuro, 2000a; Frieze, Davis, & Maiuro, 2000b; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). These behaviors range from seemingly innocuous intrusions (such as leaving unwanted gifts or sending unwanted messages of affection on e-mail), to annoying behaviors (such as intruding on the disengaging partner’s friends, family, or coworkers), to threatening and maybe dangerous behaviors (such as sexually coercing and/or physically threatening the disengaging partner). Behaviors at the lower end of this continuum have been labeled “unwanted pursuit,” whereas behaviors that are persistent and threatening or dangerous would meet legal definitions of stalking. We use the term “unwanted pursuit” because these are the more common behaviors used by rejected partners; however, as we will see, some of the rejected partners engaged in stalking behaviors.

Although there is a substantial literature on the prevalence, antecedents, and consequences of unwanted pursuit among heterosexual couples, there is a scarcity of research about unwanted pursuit/stalking among individuals with a minority sexual identity; that is, among lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals (LGBTs; Pathé, Mullen, & Purcell, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The goal of this study is to provide preliminary data about the occurrence of unwanted pursuit in the intimate relationships of LGBT individuals. According to Huston’s (2000) social ecology model of intimate relationships, the occurrence of unwanted pursuit for individuals with a minority sexual orientation should be a product of the intimate partners’ macro environment (living in a majority heterosexual society while identifying with a minority sexual orientation), the partners’ psychological characteristics (including attachment styles and beliefs about the current relationship), and the partners’

immediate social environment (including interactions with friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances). Individual differences in attachment styles and beliefs about a current relationship are expected to have similar effects on unwanted pursuit among individuals in either sexual minority or heterosexual relationships (Kurdek, 2005). However, we expect that the stressors experienced by persons with a minority sexual identity have unique effects on how someone deals with the breakup of an intimate relationship. This research is important because there is currently no systematic research on the occurrence of unwanted pursuit among sexual minorities; and prior research indicates that victims of unwanted pursuit are at risk for adverse psychological, economic, and/or physical consequences (Baum et al., 2009; Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes). Our research documents how antecedent variables (attachment styles, dependence on a relationship, and sexual minority stressors) affect the recall of unwanted pursuit during the breakup of an intimate relationship.

First, we consider what is known or unknown about unwanted pursuit and stalking in LGBT couples; then, we provide a brief literature review and rationale for how attachment styles, dependence on an intimate relationship, and sexual minority stressors may be related to unwanted pursuit.

Given the paucity of research on unwanted pursuit among individuals with a minority sexual orientation, the study also examined the following research questions:

Research Question 1. What is the frequency of unwanted pursuit as recalled by LGBT individuals when one partner wanted to end the relationship and the other partner wanted to continue it?

There is evidence that women and men may not differ in terms of being the victim of pursuit behaviors when the intrusive behaviors do not cause fear for one's safety. However, in a national survey, women are more likely to report having experienced stalking than men (Baum et al., 2009). Women also report that their stalker is more likely to be a man than a woman, but men report that their stalker was equally likely to be a man or a woman (Baum et al.; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In a meta-analysis of unwanted pursuit, Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) found that women were more likely to be the targets of unwanted pursuit or stalking than men when the samples were clinical or forensic, but that gender differences were often not found in college student and general populations. In large surveys and most research studies, one can assume that most of the respondents identify as heterosexual, but Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) reported that men who had lived together in a relationship with another man—compared with those who had not—were at greater risk for being the victim of stalking. However, it is uncertain how much this stalking was associated with hate crimes directed at someone with a minority sexual identity or with being the victim of aggressive pursuit by a rejected, same-sex sexual partner. There is no data that addresses gender differences in unwanted pursuit/stalking among individuals in a same-sex intimate relationship. Hence, we examined the following research question:

Research Question 2. What is the frequency of unwanted pursuit as recalled by women and men with a minority sexual orientation when one partner wanted to end the intimate relationship and the other partner wanted to continue it?

The occurrence of unwanted pursuit or stalking following the breakup of an intimate relationship should be understood in the context of that relationship. Thus, although the behavior itself is obviously the responsibility of the partner who engages in unwanted pursuit, characteristics of the disengager may put her or him at risk for becoming a target of unwanted pursuit. For each of the following psychological factors, attachment style, dependence on the relationship, and sexual minority stressors, we consider how these might predict the behavior and experience of both the rejected partner and the disengager.

ATTACHMENT STYLES AND UNWANTED PURSUIT

Anxious attachment is associated with a fear of abandonment and rejection by significant others (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Research on unwanted pursuit among heterosexual couples indicates that anxiously attached persons may be excessively reliant on an intimate partner, and they may cling to a relationship when their partner wants to break up with them. Davis, Ace, and Andra (2000) found that anxious attachment was directly related to the occurrence of unwanted pursuit among rejected partners, and anxious attachment was indirectly related to unwanted pursuit via the mediating variable of anger and jealousy (e.g., “upset at being left”). Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, and Rohling (2000) reported that disengagers experienced more unwanted pursuit if they described their ex-partner as someone who was insecure and anxious in their attachment to the relationship. With participants who identified themselves as having difficulty letting go of a relationship or as having a partner who found it difficult to let go, Dutton and Winstead (2006) found that anxious attachment in pursuers was positively associated with the amount of unwanted pursuit and aggressive behaviors toward the disengaging partner. The association between anxious attachment and engaging in unwanted pursuit has been reliably established.

Although a target of unwanted pursuit cannot be the cause of the ex-partner's behavior, anxious attachment in targets has also been found to predict the amount of unwanted pursuit (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). An anxiously attached individual, as the disengaging partner, may display a high level of emotional reactivity at the end of the relationship. The expression of negative emotion, coupled with an excessive need for closeness, may paradoxically attract the rejected partner's attention, increasing the risk of being pursued among anxiously attached individuals (Locke, 2008; Wei, Vogel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005). An anxiously attached disengager may also experience ambivalence about the end of a relationship and fail to communicate clearly his or her desire to end the relationship (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

Avoidant attachment is associated with unease getting close to others and an extreme reliance on oneself (Brennan et al., 1998). There is no prior evidence that avoidant attachment is related to unwanted pursuit, as recalled by either rejected or disengaging partners (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). Wei et al. (2005) found that persons with avoidant attachment cope with interpersonal difficulties by turning away and

isolating themselves from others. Wei et al.'s (2005) findings suggest that there may be a lower risk of unwanted pursuit if the rejected and disengaging partners are higher in avoidant attachment. Individuals with avoidant attachment may pursue a strategy of distancing themselves from their partner when the couple experiences interpersonal problems associated with their breakup.

Based on this prior research about attachment, we derived the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. More anxiously attached persons, as rejected partners, will engage in more unwanted pursuit behaviors given their goal of maintaining closeness in the face of the loss of an intimate relationship. In addition, more anxiously attached persons, as disengagers, will be at higher risk for being the target of unwanted pursuit. As disengagers, individuals who are anxiously attached may display negative emotions about the loss of a relationship that are misinterpreted by the rejected partner as a rationale for unwanted pursuit.

Hypothesis 2. More avoidantly attached persons, as disengagers, will experience less victimization via unwanted pursuit; whereas more avoidantly attached persons, as rejected partners, will enact fewer unwanted pursuit behaviors. This hypothesis assumes that those with an avoidant attachment style prefer a "clean break" with the other person in a disjunctive relationship, resulting in a lower likelihood of unwanted pursuit occurring during or after the breakup.

DEPENDENCE ON A RELATIONSHIP AND UNWANTED PURSUIT

There are several studies, associated with the investment model (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), documenting that how much "an individual 'needs' a given relationship" (Rusbult et al., 1998, p. 359) is predicted by four variables: satisfaction, quality of alternative relationships, investment, and commitment. These measures of dependence on a relationship (studied mostly in heterosexual couples) have been associated with dyadic adjustment, inclusion of self in the other, trust, liking and loving, and persisting versus ending a relationship (Rusbult et al.). In addition, several studies (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Kurdek, 1995, 2000, 2004, 2005) indicate that variables related to the investment model (rewards, costs, current relationship as a match to an ideal, devaluing alternative relationships, investment efforts, barriers to leaving a current relationship) predict relationship quality and commitment in same-sex couples. Paradoxically, investment model variables that are associated with persistence in a relationship may also predict unwanted pursuit when a relationship breaks up. For both the rejected and disengaging partners, those who are highly dependent on the relationship may have more difficulty ending it. The dependency may occur because (a) one's partner has fulfilled important individual needs, (b) there is a perceived unavailability of alternative possible partners, (c) individuals may have invested considerable time and effort in initiating and/or maintaining the relationship, and/or (d) individuals feel committed to the partner and to their relationship.

There is limited research on the association between dependence on a relationship and unwanted pursuit. Dutton and Winstead (2006) found associations (based on bivariate correlations) between the unavailability of alternative possible relationships and unwanted pursuit behaviors, including aggressive behaviors, as recalled by pursuers. Higher relationship satisfaction, as reported by the target, was unexpectedly associated with less aggressive unwanted pursuit based on multiple regression analyses. It may be that people who are more satisfied near the end of a relationship may be more effective in negotiating a successful breakup. Based on prior theory and research about the effects of investment model variables on relationships, we derived the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. Higher dependence on a relationship (based on poorer quality of alternative relationships, higher investment size, and higher commitment) will be associated with a greater occurrence of unwanted pursuit as recalled by rejected and disengaging partners. It is further anticipated that relationship satisfaction will be related to unwanted pursuit, although we have no specific hypothesis concerning the direction of the relationship. Higher relationship satisfaction may make it more difficult for partners to end a relationship, increasing the risk of unwanted pursuit. On the other hand, the goodwill derived from higher relationship satisfaction may, in turn, reduce the risk of unwanted pursuit when the relationship breaks up.

SEXUAL MINORITY STRESSORS AND UNWANTED PURSUIT

Someone with a minority sexual orientation may experience unique stressors in a majority heterosexual society (Fingerhut, Peplau, & Chavami, 2005). External stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation include experiences with discrimination, prejudice, and even hate crimes. Subjective stressors include internalized homophobia, concealment of the minority sexual identity, and expectations of rejection. Meyer (1995, 2003) and others (e.g., Herek & Garnets, 2007; Mays & Cochran, 2001) have summarized considerable evidence about the association between minority stressors and poorer mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. There is also evidence that experiences with minority stressors (discrimination and internalized homophobia) increase the risk of perpetrating and/or being the victim of violence in a domestic relationship among lesbians and bisexual women (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005).

There are several mechanisms by which stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation may increase the risk of unwanted pursuit when one partner wants to break up the relationship. First, prior experiences with sexual minority stressors may encourage rejected and disengaging partners to cling to the relationship as a buffer in the face of cultural oppression (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Second, couples with a minority sexual orientation may conceal their relationship from significant others (e.g., family, coworkers, and friends) because of concerns about prejudice and discrimination. The disengager may be at greater risk for unwanted pursuit by the rejected partner if significant others (who could potentially intervene to provide assistance)

are unaware of the relationship (Mohr & Daly, 2008; Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007). Third, there is evidence that concerns about discrimination and prejudice associated with a minority sexual orientation may lead to unassertive behavior in difficult social situations. For instance, gay men who are sensitive about the possibility of rejection, based on their minority sexual orientation, are less assertive when faced with interpersonal problems (Pachankis, Goldfried, & Ramrattan, 2008). Failure to effectively and directly communicate the desire to end the relationship may inadvertently encourage the rejected partner to imagine that pursuit will succeed in reestablishing the relationship. Fourth, there is a disempowerment explanation for unwanted pursuit in sexual minority relationships (McKenry, Serovich, Mason, & Mosack, 2006). If disengagers have had extensive experience with discrimination and prejudice, they may feel powerless in coping with the rejected partner's intrusive behavior. This sense of powerlessness may, in turn, make it difficult for disengagers to push away from the rejected partner and increase their risk of being the target of unwanted pursuit. Rejected partners, on the other hand, may cope with their sense of vulnerability associated with sexual minority stressors by attempting to exercise control over the disengager. Rejected partners may use unwanted pursuit to compensate for their sense of disempowerment in a predominantly heterosexual culture by exercising control over the disengager. Based on the prior research suggesting that stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation can have a unique effect on the relationships of LGBT persons, we derived the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. Individuals—including disengaging and rejected partners—who experience more stressors (including discrimination and prejudice) associated with a minority sexual orientation are at greater risk for victimization and perpetration associated with unwanted pursuit.

METHOD

Participants

The study was directed at persons with a minority sexual orientation (particularly gay men and lesbians), who had experiences in an intimate relationship where one partner may have wanted to break up and the other partner did not. Of the 165 respondents to the questionnaire, 12 indicated that they had never had the experience of having a difficult time letting go of a same-sex romantic partner or having a same-sex romantic partner have a difficult time letting go of them. Of the remaining 153 participants, 146 (95%) self-identified as exclusively or predominantly gay or lesbian, 4 (3%) as bisexual, and 3 (2%) as transgendered. The final sample of 153 participants included 84 (55%) women, 66 (43%) men, and 3 (2%) persons who did not identify their gender. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 68 years; the average age was 38.76 ($SD = 12.04$). One hundred thirty-one (86%) participants described themselves as White, 7 (4.5%) as African American, 4 (3%) as multiracial, 2 (1%) as Asian, 1 (.5%) as American Indian or Alaska Native, 7 (4.5%) as "other," and 1 (.5%)

participant did not identify his or her ethnicity. Two (1%) participants finished high school, 52 (34%) had some college, 56 (37%) completed college, and 43 (28%) had done postgraduate work (e.g., masters or doctoral degree). Participants were asked how open they were about their sexual orientation relative to other people with a minority sexual orientation. Eighty participants (52%) indicated that they were “completely out of the closet,” 42 (27.5%) were “out of the closet most of the time,” 16 (10.5%) were “half in and half out,” and 1 (1%) participant indicated that he or she was “in the closet most of the time.” Fourteen (9%) participants did not complete this question.

The study was originally intended for gay men and lesbians. At the start of the study, we did not expect a sufficient number of bisexual and transgendered persons to respond to the announcement for the research to allow for a systematic examination of pursuit behavior among these groups. Given the relatively small number of participants who completed the electronic survey, we decided to include all the participants who completed the survey. We assume that the hypotheses and research questions are suitable for anyone with a minority sexual orientation who has had experiences with a breakup in a disjunctive, intimate relationship.

Measures

Attachment Styles. Participants were administered the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale—Short Form (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007; adapted from the original ECR constructed by Brennan et al., 1998). Scores on this questionnaire measure individual differences in adult anxiety attachment and adult avoidant attachment. Sample items tapping anxious attachment include, “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner,” and “I worry that romantic partners won’t care about me as much as I care about them.” Sample items tapping avoidant attachment include, “I try to avoid getting too close to my partner,” and “I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner” (reverse scored). Participants completed their reactions on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Individuals’ scores on the attachment style variables are based on the mean of the items on each scale. The higher the scores on the anxious and avoidant attachment scales, the higher the anxiety and avoidance attachment, respectively. Based on the ECR-S (Wei et al., 2007), higher scores on anxious attachment are positively associated with excessive reassurance seeking and emotion reactivity. Higher scores on avoidant attachment are positively associated with a fear of intimacy as well as the tendency to cut off one’s emotions in intense interpersonal situations. In the present sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the anxious attachment scale was .81, whereas the Cronbach’s alpha for the avoidant attachment scale was .84.

Investment Model Variables. Participants completed the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) to measure partners’ beliefs about their dependence on a close relationship, where one partner wanted to break up and the other partner wanted

to continue it. Participants were asked to provide their responses based on their thoughts and feelings about the relationship while it was intact. Scores were obtained for satisfaction, investment size, quality of alternatives, and commitment. Sample items measuring the four investment model variables included the following: satisfaction (e.g., “My relationship is much better than others’ relationships,” and “Our relationship makes me very happy”); investment size (e.g., “I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end,” and “Compared to other people I know, I have invested a great deal in my relationship with my partner”); quality of alternatives (e.g., “If I weren’t dating my partner, I would do fine—I would find another appealing person to date,” and “My needs for intimacy, companionship, and so forth, could easily be fulfilled in an alternative relationship”); and commitment (e.g., “I want our relationship to last for a very long time,” and “I feel very attached to our relationship—very strongly linked to my partner”). Participants provided their reactions on a series of 9-point scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*). Individuals’ scores on the investment model variables are based on the mean of the items on each scale. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction, higher investment size, and higher commitment. Scores on the quality of alternatives measure were reversed so that higher scores indicate a poorer quality of alternative relationships. Rusbult et al. have presented considerable evidence for the reliability and validity of the investment model variables. For instance, all the investment model variables are strongly related to measures of dyadic adjustment (Spanier, 1976) and inclusion of other in the self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). For the rejected partners, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the investment model variables were .95 (satisfaction), .87 (investment size), .84 (quality of alternatives), and .84 (commitment). For the disengagers, the alpha coefficients were .94 (satisfaction), .77 (investment size), .83 (quality of alternatives), and .90 (commitment).

Frequency of Stressors Associated With a Minority Sexual Orientation (Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001). Participants completed a 41-item scale focusing on the frequency of sexual minority stressors experienced over one’s lifetime. Sample items included “Fear of losing my job due to my sexual orientation,” “Lack of support from family members due to my sexual orientation,” and “Rejection when I tell about my sexual orientation.” Participants gave their reactions on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all of the time*). Individuals’ scores on the frequency of minority stressors variable are based on the sum of the items on the scale. Higher scores indicate more frequent experiences with sexual minority stressors. Unpublished research (R. J. Lewis, personal communication, January 29, 2010), based on a sample of 105 lesbians, found that a higher score on number of experiences with sexual minority stressors is associated with higher internalized homophobia, greater difficulty in talking with significant others about one’s sexual orientation, more intrusive thoughts about one’s sexual orientation, higher stress associated with a minority sexual orientation, higher depression, and higher anger. The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale measuring the frequency of minority stressors was .96.

Unwanted Pursuit Measures. Participants completed one of the two sets of questions focusing on whether and to what extent (a) they have been the target of unwanted relationship pursuit in a particular same-sex relationship or (b) they have ever engaged in unwanted pursuit behaviors in a particular same-sex relationship. Participants who self-identified or were randomly assigned (see “Procedure” in the next paragraph) as rejected partners completed the 28-item Relational Pursuit–Pursuer Short Form Questionnaire, and participants who self-identified or were randomly assigned as disengagers completed the Obsessive Pursuit–Victim Short Form Questionnaire, both adapted from Cupach and Spitzberg (2004). The items on the two questionnaires are identical except that the instructions focus on experiences about being either the target of pursuit or the pursuer. Sample items focus, for instance, on the frequency of “Leaving unwanted gifts,” “Intruding on friends, family, or coworkers,” and “Showing up at places in threatening ways.” Responses for both forms are based on a 6-point continuum ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*more than 10 times*). There is mixed evidence in the literature about the number of factors that underlie the relational pursuit questionnaire. Our limited sample made it difficult to investigate the structure of the relational pursuit questionnaire. We adapted a parsimonious, two-dimensional approach to unwanted pursuit (see Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1999; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999), focusing on pursuit (where the rejected partner’s behavior is invasive and annoying but is not necessarily threatening) and aggression (where the behavior is invasive and threatening). Individuals’ scores on pursuit and aggression are based on the mean of the items on each scale. The Cronbach’s alphas for pursuit and aggression, based on the rejected partners’ self-reports, were .79 and .65, respectively. The Cronbach’s alphas for pursuit and aggression, based on the disengagers’ self-reports, were both .91.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through various Internet (including announcements in LGBT-oriented newspapers, newsletters, LISTSERV, and on Facebook) and physical sites (Metropolitan Life Churches and LGBT-oriented bookstores). The study was directed at persons who self-identified as a lesbian or a gay man who had experienced the breakup of a same-sex romantic or intimate relationship, where one partner wanted to end the relationship and the other wanted to continue it. Everyone who completed the survey was eligible to participate in a lottery to receive \$100 as an incentive.

After participants completed measures about demographic variables and individual differences (attachment styles and minority stressors), they were asked about their experiences with a same-sex intimate relationship where one partner had difficulty letting go. We used the answers to this question to identify rejected and disengaging partners for this study. Ninety-one (55%) participants reported that they had both types of experiences (i.e., difficulty letting go of a romantic partner and a romantic partner has had difficulty letting go of them); 37 (22%) reported that they

had difficulty letting go of a romantic partner; and 25 (15%) reported that a romantic partner had difficulty letting them go. Twelve individuals (7%) reported that they had no experience with being either a rejected partner and/or disengage; they were directed to the end of the survey, and they did not complete the unwanted pursuit or investment model measures. If individuals reported having had experiences as both a rejected partner and a disengager, they were *randomly* assigned to complete the unwanted pursuit and investment model measures about a relationship where they had either initiated the breakup or wanted to continue the relationship. Participants filled out the unwanted pursuit and the investment model measures based on their most recent relationship where “you tried to hold on to the relationship that the other person was trying to end,” or “he or she refused to let go of the relationship that you were trying to end.” There are 82 rejected partners and 71 disengagers in the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive Data About Unwanted Pursuit

Of the 82 rejected partners who completed the pursuer questionnaire, 71 (87.7%) reported engaging in at least one unwanted pursuit behavior; of the 71 disengagers who completed the victim questionnaire, all (100%) reported having experienced at least one unwanted pursuit behavior. Table 1 summarizes the results for the occurrence of pursuit and aggressive behaviors, as recalled by disengagers and rejected partners. Rejected partners recalled most often that they left unwanted messages of affection, made exaggerated expressions of affection, and monitored the other person’s behavior. Disengagers recalled most often that the rejected partner left unwanted messages of affection, made exaggerated expressions of affection, monitored their behavior, and invaded their personal space. Rejected partners recalled least often physically endangering the partner who wanted to end the relationship. Disengagers recalled least often being kidnapped or physically constrained by the rejected partner.

Participants were asked if they were the targets of unwanted pursuit or if they were still engaging in unwanted pursuit. Among rejected partners, 82.9% answered “Yes”—that they had stopped pursuing the disengager—whereas 17.1% answered “No.” Among disengagers, 40.8% reported that the unwanted pursuit had stopped “definitely,” 25.4% answered “thought so,” 16.9% answered “not sure,” 8.5% answered “did not think so,” and 8.5% answered “definitely not.”

Overall, disengaging partners, compared with rejected partners, recalled more experiences with pursuit and aggressive behavior, multivariate $F(2, 149) = 27.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$. For pursuit, the means for the disengaging versus the rejected partners were 1.19 ($SD = 1.18$) and 0.78 ($SD = 0.82$), respectively, univariate $F(1, 150) = 47.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$. For aggression, the means for the disengaging versus the rejected partners were 0.60 ($SD = 0.80$) and 0.06 ($SD = .13$), respectively, univariate $F(1, 150) = 36.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$.

TABLE 1. Percent of Targets and Pursuers Recalling Pursuit and Aggressive Behaviors Along With the Mean Number of Pursuit and Aggressive Behaviors Recalled Along a Zero-to-Five Point Continuum

Pursuit Behaviors	Rejected Partners (Pursuers)		Disengagers (Targets)	
	(%)	<i>M (SD)</i>	(%)	<i>M (SD)</i>
Leaving unwanted gifts	28.8%	0.40 (0.70)	55.7%	1.30 (1.51)
Leaving unwanted messages of affection	55.6%	1.38 (1.59)	88.7%	2.99 (1.69)
Making exaggerated expressions of affection	53.8%	1.37 (1.64)	85.9%	2.51 (1.66)
Following target around	17.5%	0.35 (0.92)	45.1%	1.10 (1.55)
Watching target	31.3%	0.66 (1.16)	40.8%	1.30 (1.82)
Intruding uninvited on target's interactions	13.6%	0.32 (0.96)	50.7%	1.37 (1.65)
Invading personal space	29.6%	0.60 (1.08)	60.6%	1.68 (1.75)
Involving target in activities in unwanted ways	11.3%	0.23 (0.71)	38.6%	0.83 (1.26)
Invading target's personal property	19.8%	0.31 (0.82)	50.7%	1.08 (1.31)
Intruding on target's friends, family, and coworkers	24.1%	0.46 (0.97)	66.2%	1.72 (1.68)
Monitoring target's behavior	46.3%	1.03 (1.35)	73.2%	2.63 (2.01)
Approaching and/or surprising target in public places	20.0%	0.31 (0.72)	45.7%	1.00 (1.31)
Covertly obtaining private information	27.5%	0.65 (1.34)	47.9%	1.35 (1.69)
Invading target's property	12.5%	0.26 (0.82)	36.6%	0.79 (1.22)
Leaving unwanted threatening messages	7.6%	0.13 (0.49)	49.3%	1.39 (1.79)
Physically restraining target	8.9%	0.13 (0.44)	42.3%	0.87 (1.32)
Engaging in retaliatory harassment	3.8%	0.08 (0.38)	19.7%	0.45 (1.07)
Stealing or damaging target's valued possessions	5.1%	0.08 (0.35)	28.6%	0.67 (1.24)
Aggressive Behaviors				
Threatening to hurt himself/herself	15.2%	0.22 (0.59)	57.7%	1.23 (1.42)
Verbally threatening target personally	2.5%	0.04 (0.25)	35.2%	0.79 (1.26)
Threatening others target cares about	1.3%	0.01 (0.11)	23.9%	0.51 (1.15)
Leaving or sending target threatening objects	3.8%	0.04 (0.19)	12.7%	0.25 (0.75)
Showing up at places in threatening ways	1.3%	0.03 (0.23)	19.7%	0.37 (0.85)
Sexually coercing target	8.6%	0.19 (0.71)	35.7%	0.70 (1.13)

(continued)

TABLE 1. (continued)

Pursuit Behaviors	Rejected Partners (Pursuers)		Disengagers (Targets)	
	(%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	(%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Physically threatening target	2.5%	0.04 (0.25)	32.4%	0.59 (1.08)
Physically hurting target	6.2%	0.07 (0.31)	26.8%	0.55 (1.09)
Kidnapping or physically constraining target	1.3%	0.01 (0.11)	7.0%	0.14 (0.54)
Physically endangering target's life	0%	0.00 (0.00)	14.3%	0.20 (0.55)

Note. The mean ratings on the pursuit and aggression items are based on the following Likert-type scale: 0 = never; 1 = once; 2 = 2 to 3 times; 3 = 4 to 5 times; 4 = 6 to 10 times; and 5 = more than 10 times.

We also examined the association between gender and the occurrence of unwanted pursuit as recalled by disengaging and rejected partners. Among rejected partners, there was a significant multivariate effect of gender in the recall of engaging in pursuit and aggressive behaviors, multivariate $F(2, 75) = 3.26, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$. However, univariate analyses indicated only pursuit behavior, $F(1, 76) = 6.15, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$, displayed gender differences. Men ($M = 1.00, SD = 0.97$) reported engaging in more pursuit than women did ($M = 0.56, SD = 0.57$). There was no significant difference between men and women, as rejected partners, in recalling aggressive behavior directed at the person who wanted to end the relationship, $F(1, 76) < 1, ns$. Among disengagers, there was no differences between women and men in their average recall of being the target of pursuit and aggressive behaviors, multivariate $F(2, 68) < 1, ns$. There were also no differences between women and men, as disengagers, in their recall of being the target of pursuit and aggressive behaviors in the univariate comparisons.

Association of the Predictor Variables With Unwanted Pursuit

Bivariate Correlations. Table 2 presents the correlations of the predictor variables (i.e., attachment styles, investment model variables, frequency of sexual minority stressors) with the unwanted pursuit measures (i.e., pursuit and aggression). Focusing on the attachment measures, higher scores on anxious attachment were significantly related to higher scores on pursuit behaviors as recalled by rejected partners. Higher scores on avoidant attachment were significantly related to lower scores on being the target of aggression as recalled by disengagers.

Examining the association between investment model variables and unwanted pursuit, higher scores on investment were significantly related to higher scores on unwanted pursuit, and there was a trend for a relationship between investment and higher scores on aggression for rejected partners. Higher scores on investment were

TABLE 2. Correlation Matrix for the Predictor and Outcomes Variables for Disengagers and Rejected Partners

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD
1. Anx	—	-.07	-.15	.05	.01	-.05	.24*	.20	-.09	4.03	1.30
2. Avoid	.36**	—	.08	.09	-.08	-.19	.07	-.08	-.24*	2.61	1.09
3. Sat	-.12	-.15	—	.14	.18	.39**	.04	-.26*	-.09	3.06	2.00
4. Alt	.16	.06	.04	—	.08	.34**	-.04	-.23†	-.27*	2.28	1.69
5. Inv	.10	-.28*	.42**	.11	—	.58**	.04	.28*	.26*	4.72	1.60
6. Com	.09	-.13	-.01	.28*	.16	—	-.04	-.02	.00	4.85	1.96
7. FStr	.15	.25*	-.01	.05	.04	.09	—	.34**	.15	55.13	21.60
8. Pur	.29*	-.01	.14	.08	.37**	.03	.05	—	.61**	1.91	1.18
9. Agg	.18	.11	.11	.14	.21†	.07	.06	.31**	—	0.60	0.80
M	4.24	2.91	4.34	3.89	5.00	5.93	57.95	0.78	0.06	—	—
SD	1.27	1.30	2.37	1.85	1.95	2.00	30.45	0.82	0.13	—	—

Note. Bivariate correlations (and means and standard deviations) are above the diagonal for disengagers. Bivariate correlations (and means and standard deviations) are below the diagonal for rejected partners. Anx = anxious attachment; Avoid = avoidant attachment; Sat = satisfaction; Alt = poor quality of alternatives; Inv = investment size; Com = commitment; FStr = frequency of experiences with stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation; Pur = pursuit behaviors; and Agg = aggressive behaviors.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

also related to higher scores on being the target of pursuit and aggression as recalled by the disengagers. For disengagers only, poorer quality of alternative relationships was significantly related to reports of experiencing fewer aggressive behaviors, and there was a trend for an association between poorer alternative relationships and fewer unwanted pursuit behaviors. In addition, for disengagers, relationship satisfaction served as a buffer against experiences of unwanted pursuit.

There was a significant positive correlation between frequency of experiences with minority stressors and unwanted pursuit as recalled by the disengagers. Higher scores on frequency of minority stressors were related to being the target of more pursuit behaviors. There were no other significant bivariate correlations between frequency of minority stressors and the unwanted pursuit measures for the disengaging and rejected partners.

Multiple Regressions. Multiple regressions were conducted to test the effects of the attachment style variables (anxious adult attachment, avoidant adult attachment); the investment model variables (satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment); and frequency of experiences with minority stressors on pursuit and aggressive behaviors. These analyses were conducted separately for the disengagers (see Table 3) and the rejected partners (see Table 4). The regression analyses were conducted using a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993), which estimates an empirical sampling distribution of each effect and refrains

TABLE 3. Multiple Regressions Predicting Pursuit and Aggression as Reported by Rejected Partners

Variable	Pursuit Behavior			Aggressive Behavior		
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β
Constant	-.53	{-1.81, .56}	-.64	-.10	{-.29, .09}	-.73
Anx	.17	{.04, .32}	.27*	.01	{-.01, .03}	.11
Avoid	-.01	{-.15, .13}	-.00	.01	{-.01, .05}	.13
Sat	.01	{-.07, .07}	.02	.00	{-.01, .02}	.06
Alt	.01	{-.10, .10}	.01	.01	{-.01, .03}	.08
Inv	.15	{.05, .24}	.34**	.01	{-.00, .03}	.20†
Com	-.02	{-.11, .06}	-.06	.00	{-.01, .01}	.02
FStr	.00	{-.01, .01}	.01	.00	{-.00, .00}	-.00
<i>R</i> ²	.22			.09		

Note. CI = confidence interval; Anx = anxious attachment; Avoid = avoidant attachment; Sat = satisfaction; Alt = poor quality of alternatives; Inv = investment size; Com = commitment; FStr = frequency of experiences with stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

TABLE 4. Multiple Regressions Predicting Pursuit and Aggression as Reported by Disengagers

Variable	Pursuit Behavior			Aggressive Behavior		
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β
Constant	-.60	{-2.13, .98}	-.50	.16	{-1.02, 1.34}	.20
Anx	.07	{-.10, .26}	-.08	-.11	{-.26, .03}	-.17
Avoid	-.03	{-.24, .19}	-.03	-.18	{-.32, -.06}	-.26**
Sat	-.17	{-.31, -.04}	-.28*	-.03	{-.16, .06}	-.08
Alt	-.14	{-.30, .00}	-.19†	-.10	{-.23, .01}	-.20
Inv	.25	{.10, .44}	.34**	.18	{.08, .30}	.35**
Com	-.01	{-.22, .16}	-.02	-.06	{-.19, .08}	-.14
FStr	.02	{.01, .03}	.38**	.01	{.00, .02}	.23†
<i>R</i> ²	.37			.28		

Note. CI = confidence interval; Anx = anxious attachment; Avoid = avoidant attachment; Sat = satisfaction; Alt = poor quality of alternatives; Inv = investment size; Com = commitment; FStr = frequency of experiences with stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

from making potentially untenable distributional assumptions. Given the small sample size in this study, bootstrapping is ideal because it minimizes the influence of outliers, does not rely on stringent normality assumptions, and maintains maximum power by retaining all participants in the analyses (i.e., by not dropping “outliers”). These analyses were conducted in Mplus 5 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007) using maximum likelihood estimation, and the bias-corrected bootstrap results were based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted associations between anxious and avoidant attachments and unwanted pursuit. For Hypothesis 1, we predicted a positive association between anxious attachment and unwanted pursuit for disengaging and rejected partners. For Hypothesis 2, we predicted a negative association between avoidant attachment and unwanted pursuit for the disengaging and rejected partners. In partial support of our predictions, higher anxious attachment among rejected partners was associated with more frequent pursuit behaviors. In addition, higher avoidant attachment among disengagers was associated with less frequently being the target of aggressive behaviors.

Hypothesis 3 tested for the association between investment model variables and unwanted pursuit. We predicted that dependence on a relationship (especially poorer quality of alternative possible relationships, higher investment size, and higher commitment) would be associated with high rates of unwanted pursuit. For the rejected partners, there was a positive association between investment size and reports of engaging

in pursuit behaviors and a trend for investment size to predict reports of engaging in aggressive behaviors. For disengagers, there was a positive association between investment size and reports of being the target of pursuit and aggressive behaviors. Thus, a higher level of investment in the relationship was associated with a higher frequency of pursuit and aggressive behaviors as recalled by both disengaging and rejected partners. We also found as a trend that a poorer quality of alternatives was associated with a lower likelihood of being the target of pursuit behavior as recalled by disengagers.

Hypothesis 4 tested the association between frequency of experiences with minority stressors and unwanted pursuit. Frequency of minority stressors was unrelated to pursuit and aggressive behaviors for rejected partners. For disengagers, frequency of minority stressors and pursuit behaviors was positively related. Frequency of minority stressors and aggressive behaviors was also positively related, albeit as a trend, for disengagers.

DISCUSSION

This study is one of the first investigations to examine systematically the effects of individuals' relationship characteristics (attachment styles, beliefs about an intimate relationship associated with investment model variables) and sexual minority stressors on unwanted pursuit. The research is preliminary, but it extends and overlaps somewhat with results in earlier studies with heterosexual couples about the effects of attachment and investment model variables on unwanted pursuit. More importantly, it demonstrates how lifetime experiences of discrimination and prejudice increase the risk of unwanted pursuit and intrusive behavior among persons with a minority sexual orientation who want to end a relationship. The research also documents that unwanted pursuit happens frequently at the end of an intimate relationship among individuals with a minority sexual orientation, consistent with findings in heterosexual intimate relationships.

We collected data about the association between gender and unwanted pursuit as recalled by disengagers and rejected partners. The literature documents that men, compared with women, are more likely to be identified as stalkers. However, there is limited evidence about whether or not men are more likely to engage in unwanted pursuit when the target may not report fear associated with the intrusive behavior. We found some evidence for gender differences in pursuit behavior based on the gender of the pursuer. Men, compared with women, were more likely to recall engaging in more pursuit, but not more aggressive, behaviors when they were the rejected partner. There were no other gender differences on the unwanted pursuit measures. Although many studies of unwanted pursuit have found no gender differences, when differences have occurred, they are consistent with our finding that men are more likely than women to engage in unwanted pursuit behaviors. The fact that this occurs in same-sex relationship, when most research involves heterosexual participants, suggests that these controlling behaviors are more consistent with the male view of relationships.

The end of an intimate relationship, like its initiation and maintenance, involves the behaviors of both partners. When one partner, the disengager, concludes that the relationship should end, he or she must communicate that wish. Disengagers may be tentative in communicating their desire to end the relationship; they may be reluctant to hurt the feelings of their partners; they may even be ambivalent about the prospect of the loss of the relationship. Although the disengager is not responsible for the actions of the rejected partner, their own behaviors in the process of ending a relationship may put them at risk for being the target of unwanted pursuit. Indeed, Dutton and Winstead (2011) found that pursuers were significantly more likely than targets to suggest communication as advice for what a target could do to end unwanted pursuit.

We replicated earlier research (e.g., Davis et al., 2000; Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000), with the pursuit measure but not with the aggression measure, that someone experiencing anxious attachment is likely to engage in intrusive and invasive behaviors at the breakup of a relationship. Individuals with a high anxious attachment are expected to have a high fear of abandonment and rejection. An excessive need for interpersonal intimacy may lead participants with high anxious attachment to cling to their partner via unwanted pursuit behaviors, even though the other person wanted to end the relationship.

Individuals experiencing avoidant attachment are expected to be fearful and distrustful of intimate relationships. Hence, someone with an avoidant attachment might be expected to prefer a clean break once there are signs that an intimate relationship is ending. Consistent with this prediction, disengagers with high avoidant attachment were less likely to be the target of aggressive behaviors. Previous studies (e.g., Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Lewis, Fremouw, Del Ben, & Farr, 2001) have not found an association between avoidant attachment and unwanted pursuit. This study was conducted with a community sample of adults rather than with college students and with mostly gay men and lesbians rather than with heterosexual persons. Either of these differences may contribute to the fact that, in this sample, disengagers who were more avoidant were at less risk for being the target of aggressive behaviors.

The study expands on previous research about investment model variables and unwanted pursuit. Based on bivariate correlations, we found, contrary to the investment model prediction, that a poorer quality of alternative relationships was marginally related to fewer pursuit and significantly related to fewer aggressive behaviors as reported by disengagers. We aren't certain about why a poorer quality of alternative relationships might lower the risk of unwanted pursuit and aggressive behaviors. It could be that someone who wants to end a relationship, but who doesn't have available alternative partners, may be less likely to unleash unwanted pursuit caused by jealousy from a rejected partner. However, the results are only suggestive about the association between quality of alternatives and unwanted pursuit given that there were no unique effects of quality of alternatives in the multiple regression analyses.

The results support the notion that the size of investment in a relationship is related to unwanted pursuit. Investment (associated with tangible and/or psychological inputs and assets that would be lost if the relationship ended) positively predicted

pursuit and aggressive behaviors for rejected partners and positively predicted pursuit and marginally aggressive behaviors for disengagers. Although investment size may be a reliable predictor of relationship closeness when couples are building a relationship, it increases the risk of intrusive and invasive behaviors when one partner wants to break up. Individuals who have made substantial investments in a relationship have more to lose and may feel that pursuit, even if unwelcome by the ex-partner, is justified. Investments are also likely to be reciprocal. Thus, the investment size reported by the disengager probably reflects investments also made by his or her ex-partner, and this may explain the disengager's experience of unwanted aggressive pursuit from their former partner.

Akin to the findings by Dutton and Winstead (2006), the study found that level of satisfaction when the relationship was intact negatively predicted unwanted pursuit behavior as recalled by disengagers. Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (2000) also found that a higher level of friendship love (i.e., Storge, according to Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 1998) negatively predicted the total number of pursuit behaviors as reported by disengagers. In the investment model, satisfaction reflects positive affect about a partner and the degree to which a partner fulfills someone's emotional and physical needs. It might be predicted that a high level of satisfaction (as a component of dependence on a partner) would make it difficult to end a relationship, increasing the risk of unwanted pursuit behaviors. Instead, disengagers who perceived a higher level of satisfaction when the relationship was intact reported a lower risk of pursuit behaviors. Satisfaction in the relationship may contribute to positive communication by disengagers and/or goodwill on the part of the rejected partner. Harkless and Fowers (2005) found that lesbians and gay men were more likely to maintain connections with their former intimate partners than heterosexual women and men. Perhaps satisfaction in the intimate relationship promotes this ongoing contact and helps buffer against unwanted pursuit.

The investment model of commitment embodies a partner's desire for the relationship to persist. Commitment is a robust predictor of interpersonal closeness in ongoing relationships (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1998). However, commitment played no role in unwanted pursuit behaviors as an attempt to keep a relationship from ending in either the bivariate or the multiple regression analyses, as recalled by disengaging and rejected partners.

This study suggests that the same psychological factors (i.e., individual differences in attachment styles and the investment model variables—investment size and satisfaction) that are likely to predict pursuit and aggression for heterosexual samples also predict unwanted pursuit for a minority sexual sample. However, the study also makes a distinctive contribution by documenting that group-specific stressors (i.e., lifetime experiences with prejudice and discrimination among sexual minority individuals) uniquely predict unwanted pursuit behaviors—at least as reported by disengagers.

The study also contributes by providing broad support for an ecological model of behavior in an intimate relationship. Consistent with Huston's (2000) social ecology of marriage and other intimate relationships, the research demonstrates that unwanted pursuit behavior is a product of both distal (living in a majority heterosexual culture) and proximal factors (personality variables, beliefs about one's intimate partner, and the social context provided by interactions with members of the couple's social

environment). In particular, the research illustrates how sexual minorities (living in a majority heterosexual culture and being exposed to stressors related to their minority sexual orientation) face extra challenges when one partner wants to break up and the other partner does not want to end the relationship.

There are limitations in this study that should be noted. First, the study is based on a nonrandom sample of participants. Most of the participants were White, highly educated, and relatively affluent. Participants also had to complete an online survey in order to participate. Most of the participants self-identified as lesbians or gay men, and they indicated that they were generally open to others about their sexual orientation. The study needs to be replicated with a more representative sample of sexual minority persons, including more people of color and participants with a diversity of economic and educational backgrounds. We recruited participants who replied to either announcements for the study at Internet sites, bookstores, LISTSERV, and churches that were LGBT related. Our findings may not be generalizable to a population of persons who are not open to others about their sexual orientation. It is important in future research to develop methodologies that will be more inclusive in recruiting individuals who may be relatively closeted about their minority sexual orientation (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Meyer & Wilson, 2009).

A second limitation is that the study provides no information about possible mediators of the association between the predictor and the outcome variables. Several possible mediators might be examined in future research. For instance, there is evidence in the literature that anger/jealousy and the need for control mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and stalking among rejected partners (Davis et al., 2000; Dye & Davis, 2003). Perceptions of symbolic and/or tangible losses associated with the breakup of a relationship might also mediate the effects of investment size on unwanted pursuit. We speculated in the introduction about plausible mechanisms for an association between exposure to minority stressors and unwanted pursuit, including absence of social support, unassertiveness in coping with interpersonal problems, and attempting to exercise control. A common denominator among these potential mediators linking stressors and unwanted pursuit may be the fear of rejection. Experiences with minority stressors may increase someone's fear of rejection (e.g., from family, friends, and coworkers) that, in turn, decreases the desire to leave an unwanted relationship. The fear of rejection may increase the risk of unwanted pursuit for disengaging partners.

In summary, we believe that this study contributes to the literature on unwanted pursuit. First, the results are generally consistent with other studies (based on heterosexual samples) that attachment styles and investment model variables (especially investment size and relationship satisfaction) are related to the frequency of unwanted pursuit. More research is necessary though on how quality of alternatives as an investment model variable predicts unwanted pursuit. Second, a unique finding is that exposure to stressors associated with a minority sexual orientation (including exposure to prejudice and discrimination) heightens the risk of being the target of unwanted pursuit, as recalled by disengagers. The next step in this line of research is to document the role of possible mediators that would explain the associations between the predictor variables (attachment styles, investment model variables, and minority stressors) and unwanted pursuit.

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