CYBER-INTRUSIONS: STRATEGIES OF COPING WITH ONLINE OBSESSIVE RELATIONAL INTRUSION

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Speech.

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ABSTRACT

The current study explored how victims of Internet-related stalking crimes cope with relational intrusions. Using a communication privacy management framework, research questions examined strategies that victims used in response to the relational pursuit, the effectiveness of these strategies, and the relationship between the coping strategies and the online obsessive relational intrusion behaviors. Participants were either college students who were victims of online pursuits or victims who were directed to an online survey from a support website for cyberstalking victims. The results indicated that victims used eight coping strategies, of which *ignore/avoidance*, *technological disassociation/disengagement*, and *help-seeking*, were the most common. A *technological privacy maintenance* strategy was perceived as the most effective of all the strategies. The association between the eight coping strategies and 19 online relationally intrusive behaviors, and implications for the broader domain of privacy management and mediated communication are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Maintaining privacy of one's sensitive information has been a major concern for people long before the arrival of electronic modes of communication. In order to protect or keep information from entering the public domain, individuals had to maintain privacy boundaries. If the maintenance of these boundaries was ineffective or unsuccessful, and intrusion was to occur, then the loss of privacy left the individual feeling vulnerable (Burgoon et al., 1989). Hence, people used strategies in order to protect their privacy.

Technology, with particular respect to the Internet and other online modes of communication, has brought both positive and negative consequences. Some of these positive aspects include sharing of educational and practical information, social networking, and convenient eCommerce. However, because large organizations, or even a single entity, can easily compile extensive information on anyone by using the Internet, online privacy concerns have been heightened. Activities such as web-based identity theft (Berghel, 2000) and fraud are examples of abuses that occur when privacy boundaries are breached and private information is made public. However, information theft is not the only way in which harm can be inflicted on a net user. Privacy can be lost in situations where overt relational intrusions take place. A substantial number of such cases have been reported, and with thousands of new users flocking to the Internet each day, it can only be assumed that instances of obsessive online pursuits will continue to grow as well.

One such example of an online incursion is that of obsessive relational intrusion. The Internet and other forms of electronic media have become a source for these activities, which range in severity from merely annoying events to serious crimes. Through anonymity, these technologies have made it easier for pursuers to commit these intrusive acts without the fear of repercussions. Furthermore, it has even made proximity limitations that are experienced in offline relational pursuit negligible, because the Internet has been extended to practically all corners of the world. With this in mind, practically every user of the Internet, both males and females, are at some risk of relational intrusion by using communication technology.

The results of such a pursuit have great impacts on its victim. Specifically, physical and psychological effects can result from the obsessive relational intrusion. Objects of pursuit often have symptoms consistent with post traumatic stress disorder (Yehuda, 2002), which is manifested as severe psychosocial effects (Hall, 1998; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2001; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Westrup, Fremouw, Thompson, & Lewis, 1999). Haider and Haider (2001) suggest that the pervasiveness of the privacy intrusion can deteriorate mental and physical health. Victims can become weary of society and develop a general distrust for people. Because of their chaotic and turbulent present state, victims often look to different approaches to manage their boundaries and end their psychological suffering. There has, for instance, been anecdotal evidence to suggest that some victims are not helpless during an obsessive relational pursuit (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). They have devised ways to protect their privacy by adapting their behaviors using these electronic modes. Although scholarship on online privacy intrusion is still relatively new, descriptions of these victims and the effects of the pursuit have slowly become elucidated. The paucity of extant literature has been specific details of how these people manage their privacy boundaries during an unwanted relational pursuit. Specifically, what strategies are used by these victims in order to control their privacy after a relational intrusion has occurred?

Thus, the objectives of the current study are three-fold. The first objective is to investigate specific coping strategies, which are used by those who are pursued, to manage their privacy online. The second objective is to investigate which of these strategies have been the most effective and successful in ending the pursuit. The final objective is to explore the relationship between the online obsessive relationally intrusive behaviors and the coping strategies that were used in response to these encounters.

Communication Privacy Management

The communication privacy management theory (CPM; Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002) helps explain how people cope with the need to maintain their privacy. Originally developed to explore privacy regulation in marital relationships (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002), CPM has been applied to contexts such as parent-child communication (Caughlin et al., 2000; Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Afifi, 2003; Finkenauer, Frijns, Engels, & Kerkhof, 2005), health communication (Yep, 2000; Mattson & Brann, 2002; Brann, 2006), and information technology (Stanton, 2003; Stanton & Stam, 2003; Zarkaria, Stanton, & Sarkar-Barney, 2003). The adaptability of this theory to various communication contexts exemplifies its heuristic value.

The theory is premised upon the notion that people set up boundary structures as a way to control the risks associated with the disclosure of private information. CPM is based on the assumptions that (a) people set up informational boundaries to control the degree of autonomy they experience when disclosing and receiving private information, (b) boundaries are more tightly regulated with private information than with other information, and (c) boundary rules are used to determine when, with whom, and how much private information is disclosed as well as how to respond. Petronio (2000) argues that people's need to maintain their privacy leads them to create boundaries which guide their communicative behavior. Although these boundaries may be adjusted with changing circumstances, their continual management allows for people to balance their need for privacy or autonomy with their need for connection or intimacy.

Intensity of the Disclosure

The second axiom of the CPM theory suggests that the intensity of the message or disclosure will determine the amount of boundary management. The axiom demonstrates that a disclosure's intensity is a significant element to boundary management. Because a receiver's boundaries have the ability to be extremely malleable, they can be tightly or loosely controlled, depending on the intensity of the private disclosure received. When information is more significant, individuals generally exert greater control over their boundaries, tightening them as a protective or preventative measure. Since the risk of losing autonomy is extremely high when receiving intense private disclosures, it is possible to create nearly impenetrable boundaries. However, when disclosures are relatively unimportant and insignificant, looser management is generally maintained because the risk of losing autonomy is low.

Privacy Management Online

Recently, a number of studies have surfaced in the information technology discipline with regard to the application of the communication privacy management theory (Stanton, 2003; Stanton & Stam, 2003). The application of the theory in this context provides a necessary foundation for the appropriateness of using a privacy management perspective online. Although previous research focused on organizational issues of online privacy implications (Stanton, 2003; Stanton & Stam, 2003), a similar structure may be applied to an online model of privacy intrusions.

The previous Internet studies focused heavily on issues of privacy concerns within organizations, government, and industry (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Stanton (2003), for instance, recognized that many people have become concerned with the privacy and security of sensitive information online. In particular, the study examined the ubiquity of organizations which collect employee data (e.g., in the form of e-mail and chat log surveillance, etc.) of their work and non-work activities. The study examined the constraints experienced by employees in the workplace with sharing private information, because of the constant threat of privacy intrusions. Stanton (2003) suggested that regular surveillance of the mediated communication channels make sensitive information over these networks limited, as the employees tightened their boundaries when they perceived intrusion to be likely.

The theory is also useful when looking at private information sharing between relational partners. Applying the three assumptions of CPM can help to explain how dyads manage their communication when personal information is exchanged. It can, however, also be helpful in explaining what occurs following a relational intrusion. It would be wrong to assume that receiving private information is unconditionally accepted by the receiver. There are instances where one partner does not want to hear the disclosure, thereby increasing his or her autonomy. Likewise, one cannot also presuppose that the outcome of private information exchange is always manageable. It is even possible for cases to exist where one partner's motive is to disclose information, while the other's intention is to thwart all communication. In these specific situations, understanding the underlying assumptions of CPM can be valuable in explaining the phenomenon of relational intrusions. The next section will look into what procedurally happens if this private information sharing becomes repetitive, intrusive, and unwanted.

Obsessive Relational Intrusion

Obsessive relational intrusion (ORI; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998) is defined 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, p. 234). The fulfillment of three primary assumptions is necessary in order for an event to be considered an ORI behavior. First, the obsession results from a non-mutual view of the relationship, where the pursuer desires a close relationship while the object of pursuit wants autonomy. A second assumption of ORI is that the event has to be repeated over several occasions to qualify as intrusive. Merely asking someone out on a date to the movies would not infer obsession unless the behavior, once thwarted, is continuously repeated. What is considered obsessive may also depend on one's tolerance for intrusion. One person may feel threatened after three incidents of ORI behaviors, whereas another may feel threatened only after ten different encounters. When a receiver of annoying private messages reaches his or her threshold by becoming fearful of the other, he or she is considered an object of pursuit. Third, the intrusion does not necessarily have to be physical; it can include psychological and symbolic threats as well. Behaviors such as waiting outside a home or sending unwanted letters may be intrusive even though they are not necessarily physical.

Typology of ORI Behaviors

Cupach and Spitzberg (1998) developed a continuum of intrusive behaviors, organized by their relative level of intensity. ORI behaviors can range from something as harmless as repeated letter writing, to something as ominous as making death threats. The anchors of the ORI continuum are *annoying* and *threatening.* Annoying behaviors are categorized as any actions which a person persistently engages in to be bothersome to the other (Pruitt, Parker, & Mikolic, 1997). These behaviors are generally regarding as harmless to the target, as they do not typically elicit fear in them. Threatening behaviors, in contrast, are manifested in physical and symbolic forms, which cause considerable psychological suffering as well as changes to the victim's lifestyle. As such, threatening behaviors are considered significantly more dangerous than annoying behaviors. The next section will discuss the gradation of the taxonomic structure of ORI behaviors. Based on the continuum, pestering, harassing, and menacing behaviors are organized in a manner from the least threatening to the most threatening.

Pestering. The first type of intrusion includes irritation and annoyance in the form of pestering. Pestering involves mild intrusive behaviors which cause aggravation to the victim (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998). One example of pestering in the physical form is when an object of pursuit is covertly followed wherever he or she goes. In the context of telephone use, pestering behaviors would include calling and arguing, calling and hanging up, or leaving unwanted messages on an answering machine. In the context of letter use, leaving unwanted notes at one's residence, writing to get another chance, or sending unwanted cards are all possible ways that could cause an annoyance. Again, these behaviors represent the least amount of threat, but can be the building blocks to more serious violations.

Harassing. A median form of ORI behavior with regard to the level of threat is manifested as obsessional harassment (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998). Harassment is defined as the "voluntary and repetitive following of or initiating contact with another person that causes fear or a significant disruption in his or her life" (Rosenfeld, 2000, p. 529). This definition explains that obsessional harassment is multifaceted. In order for an event to be considered harassment, it must (a) cause a disruption in one's life, and (b) include a perception of fear. Like pestering, harassment takes many forms which are conditional to the communication channel used. For instance, spying or watching and staring from afar can be construed as physical harassment. Being approached by the pursuer about other relationships that he or she is involved in is another form of harassment. The telephone can also be used as a mechanism for engaging in harassing behaviors. One particular avenue of pursuit is to call the person at all hours to "check up" on them, thereby establishing control over the victim's social life. Finally, writing and sending letters which makes vague references to bad things that will happen is considered letter writing harassment. The collection of these behaviors is more pervasive and poses a greater threat than pestering.

Menacing. The most severe case of ORI is affixed at menacing behaviors. These are the most intense manifestations of intrusion and represent the greatest threat. The most prevalent type of menacing behavior is stalking. Stalking has many different forms, depending on the type of communication channel being used. Examples include breaking into a home or apartment, making obscene or threatening calls, and writing threatening letters. Researchers have examined the characteristics (Zona, Sharma, & Lane, 1993; Lewis, Fremouw, Del Ben, & Farr, 2001) and behaviors (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998) of stalkers.

Within the three behaviors, different examples are offered based on the previously most common modes of communicating the pursuit: telephone, letter writing, and face-to-face. The Internet, however, has offered a new and convenient way for pursuers to connect with their victims. Because of the ubiquity of these online intrusions, a further exploration of this context is necessary

Obsessive Relational Intrusion Online

In the past three decades, society's dependence on the Internet and aggregate computer technology has been increasingly apparent. Things as trivial as checking latest sports scores to eCommerce (Metzger, 2007) can be done via electronic communication. The relative simplicity and convenience of computer technology and the Internet has prompted people to learn how to use these devices, in turn creating a culture of computer literate and Internet savvy individuals. As the Internet diffuses further into society and its reach extends farther into different areas, certain activities that were once conducted exclusively offline have moved online because of its unique characteristics.

Although the Internet has offered its share of successes, it has also become a hotbed for abuses to people's personal privacy. Specifically, the Internet has become an infrastructure for stalking and other like typologies of crimes to commonly take place. An analysis of cyberstalking-reported cases conducted through the two largest Internet safety organizations, Women Halting Online Abuse (WHOA) and CyberAngels, have yielded conservative estimates that approximately 76,000 cases of online stalking are reported each year (Bocij, 2004). If the statistics included all forms of ORI, the number would likely rise considerably.

Previously, there were only a few available means of communication available to pursuers in order to connect with the objects of pursuit. However, Internet channels such as e-mail (Ross, 1995), chat rooms (Hughes, 2001), and instant messaging (Hughes, 2002) have offered new ways to gather information on and communicate with objects of pursuit (Ashcroft, 2001). Internet technology has made it possible for pursuit to continue without ever having to leave one's home.

Offline vs. Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion

Although there are some researchers who regard online ORI as simply an extension of its offline counterpart, the majority of researchers conceptualize them as two unique entities which share only a few similar characteristics (Bocij, 2004). Two examples of the similarity between the contexts are the types of pursuers (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stewart, 1999) and their desire to control their victims (Ashcroft, 2001). However, beyond these similarities, there are significant differences between offline and online ORI. These divergences reflect the reason why more emphasis must be placed on investigating online-specific phenomena, rather than simply adapting offline ORI behaviors to the online context.

Geographical Location. One of the most prominent differences between offline and online channels with regard to ORI is geographic location (Ashcroft, 2001). One important characteristic of online ORI is that geographical limitations are negligible. Offline pursuit assumes that the pursuer and object of pursuit are in somewhat close proximity to each other, in order for the target to feel inherent fear and consider the behaviors a serious threat. However, the Internet has made it possible for pursuers to maintain a menacing level of threat without being in the same proximity as the objects of pursuit (Ashcroft, 2001). The Internet makes it possible for pursuers to invade the privacy of people who are at the opposite end of the world. Although the strategies that the pursuer uses to threaten their victims may differ in relation to their offline counterparts (cf. sending a virus that attacks the victim's hard drive to ransacking the victim's house), the psychological symptoms of uneasiness and vulnerability are similarly experienced (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, Stewart, 1999).

Third Party Proxy. A second characteristic which is unique to online ORI is that the Internet makes it easier for pursuers to encourage third party members to act as a *proxy*, or assist them in harassing or threatening the object of pursuit (Ashcroft, 2001). Identity theft is the most common occurrence in stalking by proxy. The pursuer will generally assume the object of pursuit's identity online and post inflammatory or provocative messages in chat rooms or on bulletin boards. Once third party dwellers of these chat rooms receive the messages, some are either enraged or aroused to a high degree which causes them to join the pursuit. Once engaged, third party proxy pursuers send threatening or sexually explicit messages to the objects of pursuit. Unlike online pursuers, offline pursuers are rarely able to enlist the help of third party members in efforts to pursue others. One reason cited is the high risks that are associated with being caught in a face-to-face context.

Lowering Barriers to Threat. A third characteristic that is unique to online ORI is that electronic modes of communication lower obstacles to harassment and threats that offline stalkers would normally encounter (e.g., being seen by the victim, caught in their house, etc.). Ashcroft (2001) suggests that offline pursuers have an increased chance of getting caught by the object of pursuit or law enforcement than online pursuers. Anonymity and pursuit by proxy were mentioned as principal reasons why the Internet has lowered obstacles to threats. Another characteristic of online pursuit is that pursuers do not necessarily need to confront their victims physically. With the relative ease of online pursuit, more cases of online ORI are appearing globally on the net (Bocij, 2004).

Acknowledging the differences that exist between the two communication contexts, Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) developed a typology of online ORI behaviors from an analysis of various online pursuit behaviors that have been observed. This typology is described as unique from its offline counterpart, particularly because of the differences discussed above. Similar to the offline ORI construct, these behaviors are organized by their relative threat to the object of pursuit. The construct includes the following general behaviors: hyperintimacy, sabotage, threat, and invasion.

Typologies of Online ORI Behaviors

Hyperintimacy. Hyperintimacy is defined as a form of unwanted pursuit which can be carried out through the use of electronic means, to which most behaviors are generally harmless, but harassing (Spitzberg, & Hoobler, 2002). Hyperintimacy online can be expressed in four ways. The first expression of hyperintimacy is through *affection expression*, where verbal messages of desire are repeatedly sent to the victim using one of the online communication channels (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2001). Some of the specific behaviors which fall under this category include excessive and redundant messages of affection and disclosure. The second expression of hyperintimacy is *ingratiation*, where unsolicited offers of assistance, compliments, and positive regard are given to the victim.

The third expression of hyperintimacy behavior occurs when specific proposals are communicated to the preferred relational state, known as *relational repair*. Finally, *hypersexuality* can arise from online encounters where the pursuer sends verbal messages or images which include graphic, yet nonviolent, sexual depictions. Such examples include sending attachments of pornographic images to the object of pursuit or describing explicit hypothetical scenarios of sexual meetings.

Sabotage. Sabotage usually occurs when the victim's reputation or image is tarnished by either real or falsified information. Often, the pursuer will sabotage the image of their target in their private life, at their workplace, or at school. Social sabotage includes behaviors such as spreading rumors to friends, families, or partners about the object of pursuit's romantic relationships. Workplace or school sabotage involves the diffusion of similar rumors but through organizational networks using electronic communication modalities.

Threat. Threat or coercion exists in many forms in an online ORI context. Typically, these threats are defined by messages which include warnings of harm that will occur to the object of pursuit. These threats can range from vague statements implying that "something bad" is going to happen to them, or specific threats against an object of pursuit's property, economic livelihood, family, or friends. Pursuers can also threaten their targets by claiming that he or she will commit suicide if the relationship does not progress. In the most extreme cases, threats of physical harm or even death threats can be made.

Invasion. Invasion behaviors are considered the most threatening to the victim because it involves actions which impact their livelihood. Invasion extends as far as property damage and identity theft (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). The concept is further separated into two parts. The first form which involves computers or other electronic devices is information theft. This occurs when pursuers succeed in gathering private information (e.g., unlisted contact information, medical, or employee records, etc.) about the object of pursuit. The most common way this information is collected is by hacking into the object of pursuit's computer of computer of a close family member. The second type of online invasion is exotic surveillance, where pursuers succeed in bugging a computer to garner information about the target's whereabouts. This is most commonly performed through the use of key log viruses, which record everything the object of pursuit types and inconspicuously sends it back to the pursuer.

To date, a growing number of online ORI related cases have appeared on the Internet. Online ORI provides a unique context to study privacy intrusions because offline and online components diverge so greatly. Specifically, because the conditions that each context is premised upon are dissimilar, then it would be problematic to adapt offline phenomena to an online context with regard to relational intrusions. In addition, since it is argued that the modes of offline and online pursuit differ, then it follows that how the objects of pursuit respond to the intrusion, in order to manage their privacy boundaries, is similarly disparate.

Coping with Obsessive Relational Intrusion

Objects of pursuit are rarely passive about being pursued. They often enact a variety of coping strategies in attempts to end the pursuit. Coping strategies refer to ways that objects of pursuit manage, deal with, ignore, or respond to intrusive behaviors (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Victims' needs are only satisfied when they are able to thwart the pursuit through the use of these strategies. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) developed three general strategies that victims commonly used to respond to offline pursuit, which coping tactics would fall under: moving with, moving against, or moving away.

Strategies of Coping with ORI Behaviors

Moving With. The first coping strategy involves direct confrontation with the pursuer about the intrusive behavior, known as "moving with" (Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998). The moving with strategy results from the notion that conflict and argumentation is a viable means to end festering annoyances (Wilmot & Hocker, 1995). Using the conflict perspective in this instance, a victim's direct interaction with the pursuer is perceived as the best way to manage the repeated privacy intrusions. This strategy involves engaging the pursuer in direct confrontation to which the object of pursuit can either yell or have a serious, discursive talk. Some examples of these behaviors include arguing, yelling, criticizing, reconciling, or rationally negotiating the boundaries or type of the relationship with the pursuer.

Moving Against. The second type of coping strategy, known as "moving against," emerged when victims proactively sought legal help (e.g., requested a restraining order, called the police, etc.) or employed retaliatory responses to end the pursuit (Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998). Victims felt that deferring to a higher authority was the best way to stop the problem. However, inadequacies within the legal system may often lead them to other response strategies (Abrams & Robinson, 1998). Inaction or disbelief by law enforcement, which is rampant in stalking cases, may direct victims to threaten or inflict harm on the pursuer. Pathé and Mullen (1997) found that 65 percent of stalking victims sampled admitted to experiencing feelings of aggressive cognitions and a desire to retaliate against their pursuer. In their earlier work, Mullen and Pathé (1994) found cases where pursuers were eventually murdered in response to causing the victim intense psychological pain.

Moving Away. Moving away or evading the pursuit occurred when targets avoided the ORI events all together. This strategy is in direct opposition to the aforementioned move with strategy, which encourages direct interaction and argumentation. Victims who enact moving away strategies refrain from approaching the pursuer about their discontent, and will sometimes even go as far as to avoid common activities that they would typically participate in (e.g., going out to dinner, watching a movie, etc.). When the level of threat is high and victims feel tremendous vulnerability, cases of extreme evasion occur. Active measures such as changing jobs, schools, or even moving are some examples of "moving away" coping tactics.

Spitzberg, Nicastro, and Cousins (1998) alluded to a final way that objects of pursuit can cope with privacy intrusions. They suggested that the use of technology can be an avenue to thwart ORI behaviors. The victim could, for instance, obtain certain tools which allow them to monitor the pursuer. Inexpensive and easily accessible technologies such as caller ID and call-back capabilities on the telephone are two methods that can be employed (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1996). Although this category was phased out in later investigations of the coping strategic taxonomy, revisiting technology as a way to cope with ORI behaviors seems necessary with the ubiquity of online ORI. Specifically, with technology constantly changing and better equipment being introduced to the public, the methods to which objects of pursuit cope are also evolving.

Although it is possible to visualize the adaptability of Spitzberg, Nicastro, and Cousins' (1998) coping strategies from an offline context to online ORI behaviors, there is one note of caution that must be iterated. A large concern emerges from the previously established differences between the offline and online contexts. Specifically, it is impossible to claim that these "moving strategies" are manifested online, due to the dearth of research regarding specific online coping tactics and strategies.

Managing Boundaries to Online ORI

The initial assumption of the CPM theory suggests that there is a tension between intimacy and autonomy between the interactants (Petronio, 1991). In its original application to spousal couples, the tension between intimacy and autonomy can often be convoluted, since both partners typically strive for similar goals, namely greater intimacy. In the case of online ORI, the delineation between autonomy and intimacy are much clearer; the pursuer will naturally strive for greater intimacy while the object of pursuit actively attempts to maintain his or her autonomy. The goal of any pursuer is to develop and sustain an intimate relationship with their target. This relational goal is achieved only when the object of pursuit loosens his or her boundaries to allow for message permeation. However, because targets do not desire the same relational interdependence that pursuers seek, they take careful precautions to manage and maintain their privacy and autonomy. To do so, objects of pursuit engage in specific strategies in response to intrusive behaviors. In essence, once objects of pursuit reach their threshold for living with the ORI behaviors, and a sense of physical, psychological, or symbolic threat is appraised, they often will engage in behaviors that will thwart or end the pursuit.

Within the realm of electronic communication media, it is possible to conceive of a number of proactive measures to manage tight privacy boundaries. For instance, disregarding harassing e-mails or instant messages, or enacting private settings on social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Friendster, etc.) are a few foreseeable ways that one can cope with online ORI behaviors. By engaging in these strategies, objects of pursuit make their privacy boundaries nearly impenetrable to the pending intrusion. But, the list of technological coping tactics and strategies is underdeveloped because it has been relatively unexplored. Therefore, because of the scarcity of literature which exists with regard to coping strategies following an online ORI episode, it makes the study of these mechanics integral. Moreover, because the number of online ORI cases dramatically increases each year, as reported by Working to Halt Online Abuses (WHOA) and CyberAngels, the two most popular support websites for victims of cyberstalking (Bocij, 2004), the need to identify common responses to these intrusions is essential. The results will yield a clearer illustration of strategies that individuals, who are entangled in a similar ORI event, can turn to in order to end or prevent future intrusions. After producing a comprehensive list of the different tactics which are used by objects of pursuit, it may be possible to classify them using Spitzberg, Nicastro, and Cousins' (1998) framework for coping strategies (i.e., move with, move against, or move away). Based upon the preceding arguments, the following research question is proposed:

RQ_1: What strategies are used to cope with online obsessive relational intrusion?

Furthermore, an effort to delineate which coping strategies were effective from those that were not is equally important. If the strategy is consistently deemed ineffective in managing privacy boundaries for objects of pursuit, then future victims are able to determine that engaging in these strategies will do nothing to end the intrusion. To the same degree, highlighting effective strategies will assist with the general understanding of how those who are pursued can successfully manage their privacy boundaries against intrusion. Knowing which responses will be the most effective in preventing any further psychosocial harm will ultimately be beneficial to future victims. Thus, the second research question offered is:

RQ$_2$: Which strategies are perceived as effective in ending the online obsessive relational intrusion?

The second assumption of the CPM proposes that the intensity of the message impacts privacy boundary maintenance. In the context of ORI, the private messages which are employed by the sender are akin to the intrusive behaviors which are enacted by the pursuer. The privacy management perspective of online ORI illustrates that the greater the intensity of the messages or behaviors, the tighter the victims will manage their privacy boundary.

On the continuum of online ORI behaviors, the most severe and fear-inducing behaviors are those anchored at threat or invasion. Hyperintimacy and sabotage, while often annoying and onerous to objects of pursuit, rarely ever create a real harm. However, because threat and invasion cause harm to the object of pursuit's possessions or even life, it is easily regarded as the highest degree of privacy loss. Thus, by analyzing the relationship between coping strategies and intrusive behaviors, it is possible to deduce coping strategies that are most appropriate for the degree of the intrusive behaviors. By having this knowledge, it may be possible to thwart pursuit in earlier stages, thereby diminishing the chance that it will progress to later, more menacing stages

Any coping strategy that is associated with the high degrees of privacy intrusion (i.e., threat or invasion) will assume a tightly managed response. In essence, when a coping strategy is associated with the most threatening behaviors of online ORI, then according to the second assumption of the CPM theory, the response would be considered a method of tightly managing privacy boundaries. Therefore, an examination of this relationship will yield an organization of the taxonomic structure of coping strategies, by suggesting which strategies constitute looser boundary management and which involve tighter boundary management. Thus, the third research question which is presented is:

RQ_3: What is the relationship between online obsessive relational intrusive behaviors and coping strategies?

CHAPTER 2
METHOD

Design and Procedure

Potential participants were asked to join the current study if they had experienced an event online where another person, either a stranger or someone whom they knew, repeatedly pursued a relationship with them and they did not want the relationship. Two means were utilized to recruit participants for the current study. Recruitment was conducted through speech classes at a large Pacific university, and links to an online form of the survey were placed on two popular support websites for victims of cyberstalking. Students who met the requirements and were interested in participation were given a paper copy of the survey. Students who did not meet the participation requirement criteria were asked to hand-deliver the survey to an acquaintance, friend, or family member who had experienced online obsessive relational intrusion. All participants were asked to complete the survey and return it within one week. Students who returned completed surveys received either extra credit or research participation credit in exchange for their participation.

Online participants who were interested in participation simply clicked on the link from either the CyberAngels or WHOA websites. Participants who clicked on the link were taken directly to the consent letter (see Attachment A) of the survey, which was embedded in HTML format. After reading the letter, participants were asked if they would like to continue by clicking on the link to the survey.

Both the paper survey and the online survey were identical. The multi-section survey consisted of: (a) a section where participants were asked to write a narrative of their most pervasive experience with online ORI, (b) questions regarding the background of this experience, (c) questions addressing the frequency of specific online ORI behaviors, (d) open-ended questions asking what participants did in order to thwart the behaviors, (e) its effectiveness, and (f) demographic and Internet skills-related questions (see Appendices B through H).

Participants

A total of 51 individuals were recruited for the present study. The sample included 43 students and eight Internet participants. In an attempt to recruit a greater number of participants, the researcher solicited participation from suitable Yahoo! and Google groups. For instance, a mass e-mail was sent out to all subscribers of groups which were dedicated to victims of online stalking. The second attempt was unfruitful as it yielded no further participation.

Analyses indicated that of the sample, 27.5% (n = 14) were males and 72.5% (n = 37) were females. The average age of the sample was 23.35 years (SD = 6.73, range = 18 to 48 years). The ethnicities of the sample were reported as follows: 45.1% (n = 23) Asian, 31.4% (n = 16) Caucasian, 15.7% (n = 8) mixed, 3.9% (n = 2) Hawaiian/Part-Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.0% (n = 1) Native American, and 2.0% (n = 1) African American/African.

In an attempt to frame the participants' experience with online ORI and to ensure that they experienced a genuine case, participants were asked to describe their most persistent experience where another person repeatedly pursued an unwanted relationship with them. After a short narrative, participants were asked a series of questions relating to their most pervasive experience. The results indicated that 70.6% (n = 36) of the participants were pursued by males and 29.4% (n = 15) were pursued by females. The average length of time of the overall pursuit was 178 days (*SD* = 345.91, range = 1 day to 5 years). The pursuer contacted the participant an average of 15.27 times a month (*SD* = 19.11, range 1 to 120). The type of relationship that the participant had with the pursuer prior to the obsessive behavior was reported as follows: 41.7% (*n* = 24) stranger, 19.6% (*n* = 10) acquaintance relationship, 13.7% (*n* = 7) friendship, 7.8% (*n* = 4) serious dating relationship, 5.9% (*n* = 3) other, 2.0% (*n* = 1) colleague or service relationship, 2.0% (*n* = 1) casual dating relationship, and 2.0% (*n* = 1) spouse or ex-spouse. The relationship lasted, on average, approximately 74.35 days (*SD* = 125.58, range = 0 days to 545 days) before becoming unwanted. Lastly, participants reported experiences which occurred approximately 1.63 years (*SD* = 1.92, range = currently ongoing to 9 nine years) ago.

Instruments

Cyber-Obsessional Pursuit (COP)

A 19-item scale, which was originally developed by Spitzberg and Cupach (1999) and later revised by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002), was used to assess the frequency of participants' encounters with specific online ORI behaviors. The modified COP is an online ORI behavior inventory which was created with input from legal, psychological, and popular media literature. It includes four subscales with items that contain examples of hyperintimacy behaviors (e.g., sending exaggerated messages of affection), threat behaviors (e.g., directing others to you in threatening ways), sabotage behaviors (e.g., sabotaged your private reputation), and invasion behaviors (e.g., obtaining private information without permission)

The modified COP reflected a frequency response format (i.e., asking the participants how many times they had encountered the behaviors). The anchors of the scale for frequency were set at 0 (*no experience*) to 4 (*over 5 times*). The COP displayed an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

Communication Channel Use

To measure the means in which pursuer communicated with their victims, participants were asked to indicate, using a legend, what Internet channel(s) was/were used by the pursuer to enact each specific intrusive behavior. The choices that were provided to the participants were e-mail, chat rooms, newsgroup/message board, blogs, instant messaging, social networking site, personal homepage, and other (see Appendix D). The channels were adopted from Spitzberg and Cupach's (2004) short-form measures of obsessive relational intrusion and coping.

The participants reported that 46.8% ($n = 110$) of the time, a number of mixed modes (i.e., any combination of the aforementioned channels) were used to pursue them. Of the Internet-mediated channels where only a primary mode was selected, the percentages that participants reported were as follows: 22.6% ($n = 53$) social networking sites, 11.9% ($n = 28$) e-mail, 7.7% ($n = 18$) instant messaging, 7.2% ($n = 17$) chat room, 2.1% ($n = 5$) newsgroup/message board, and 1.7% ($n = 4$) blog.

Coping with Online ORI (COORI)

Following each of the items for the COP scale, an open-ended question asked respondents to describe the action(s) that they took in order to: (a) end the intrusive behaviors, and/or (b) prevent future pursuit. In an attempt to obtain a comprehensive taxonomy of the strategies victims used to thwart the online relationally intrusive behaviors, a list of 31 responses (see Table 1) were established through content analysis procedures outlined by Krippendorff (1980). Two individuals coded the responses into specific actions which participants reported. Any disagreements that developed between the coders were discussed until an amicable agreement was reached. The inter-coder reliability of the entire procedure was acceptable, with an average of 93.3% agreement. In order to create a more parsimonious taxonomic structure, however, a subsequent content analysis led to eight supraordinate strategies. The inter-coder reliability of the second item-reduction content analysis was .96.

Perceived Strategy Effectiveness

After each coping tactic was listed as an open-ended response, a one-item question asked participants to rate their perceived effectiveness of the response in stopping or preventing the intrusive behavior. The perceived strategy effectiveness scale reflected a 7-point Likert format, with anchors at 1 (not at all successful) and 7 (extremely successful).

Experience, Exposure, and Internet Self-Efficacy

Items which assessed participants' experience on and exposure to the Internet were asked through two questions. To assess Internet experience, participants responded to a question of "how long have you been using the Internet" on a 5-point scale with anchors at 1 (less than 2 months) and 5 (more than 2 years). All 51 participants reported using the Internet for more than two years. Internet exposure was assessed by asking "on average, how many hours a day do you spend using the Internet?" The mean length of time that participants were exposed to the Internet was 3.77 hours per day (*SD* = 3.08, range = 30 minutes to 12 hours).

Items, which were suggested by Compeau and Higgins (1995), the GVU 10th survey (GVU, 1999), and Nahl (1996), and later compiled by Eastin and LaRose (2000), assessed Internet self-efficacy, or the belief in one's abilities to execute procedures to garner something from the Internet. The analyses indicated that the sample had relatively high Internet self-efficacy with a mean of 4.94 ($SD = 1.31$), suggesting that participants were confident in their abilities to navigate the Internet.

CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

Analysis Plan

As indicated earlier, several attempts were made to gather as many participants as possible in order to use both descriptive and inferential analyses to answer the research questions. As this project was exploratory in nature, participants were asked to respond to several open-ended questions which were later coded into a parsimonious taxonomy. To see if there were any significant differences between the mean scores of each strategy's perceived effectiveness ratings, an ANOVA was planned. However, because of the way the data was arrayed and embedded, analyses of inferential statistics were impossible. Also, to test the association between the coping strategies and the online ORI behaviors, cross-tabulation tables were created and chi-square analyses for the cells were planned. However, the lack of participant responses did not allow for the requisite five responses for each cell necessary to run a chi-square analysis. Therefore, the current study strictly used descriptive statistics in order to answer the three research questions.

Research Question 1

To test Research Question 1, a content analysis was undertaken to code responses from several open-ended questions. The research question explored the strategies that are used when objects of pursuit encounter an event of online obsessive relational intrusion. Because the instructions for the open-ended questions were not rigid, participants had a wide array of responses. Specifically, participants reported either interpersonal behavioral responses that they enacted in order to thwart the event, or intrapersonal responses that helped them to cope internally with the traumatic event. For the purpose of this study, however, the intrapersonal coping responses were dropped from the analyses.

The first content analysis conducted on the 19 items yielded a list of 31 unique tactics (see Table 1). Similar or overlapping items were later condensed through a subsequent content analysis which resulted in a smaller set of distinct coping strategies. Based upon a sample of 51 respondents, the clustered items revealed eight different coping styles. The frequencies with which the sample used each strategy type for first and secondary responses are reported in Table 2. The results indicated that the most frequently used strategy is *ignore/avoidance* (e.g., avoided sites or programs pursuer used to communicate with them, used language that showed a lack of interest, etc.), which was reported more than one-third (n = 126, 34.62%) of the time when encountering online ORI.

The second coping strategy which was discovered used technological means in an attempt to thwart the obsessive behaviors. The factor, labeled *technological active disassociation/disengagement*, was used 20.33% (n = 74) of the time. Some examples of the strategy included deleting online accounts and making new accounts, making all online information private to verifiable "friends" only, and blocking the pursuer from a buddy list.

Acquiring help from an outside source was cited as a popular way to stop the relational intrusion or prevent future intrusion from occurring. Most respondents who instituted this strategy, called *help-seeking*, reported contacting local law authorities, filing charges, contacting web owners or Internet Service Providers (ISPs), or searching through information posted on online support websites. A few respondents reported taking more unilateral, proactive measures such as keeping a hardcopy of all evidence, using a third party member to bully the pursuer, or even hiring a team of private investigators. The help-seeking coping strategy was used 18.96% (n = 69) of the time.

A *negotiation/threatening* strategy was used 14.01% (n = 51) of the time. This strategy is illustrated by discursive and direct confrontation with the pursuer. Some of the specific tactics within the strategy included threatening the pursuer with either legal action or bodily harm, arguing with the pursuer, or directly telling the pursuer to stop or that there was no interested in starting a relationship.

A fifth strategy, labeled *compliance/excuses*, was discovered through consistencies in reported patterns of behavior. The results demonstrate that compliance and excuses were used infrequently; as it was reported only 5.77% (n = 21) of the time. Compliance with the pursuer involved targets playing along with the pursuit, even going so far as to falsely disclose information about themselves. Respondents similarly reported telling fibs about why they were unable to enter into a relationship (e.g., currently in a relationship) or why they did not want a relationship (e.g., just got out of a bad relationship).

Along with the active disassociation/disengagement component, another technological means for coping with online ORI was reported. *Technological privacy management* occurred when objects of pursuit tried to regain control of their online persona when their privacy was somehow breached. The tactics that were reported were as innocuous as changing a profile picture on a social networking site or instant messenger, to something more proactive such as changing e-mail addresses, usernames and/or passwords, or even downloading antivirus software to protect their computers from intrusion. The privacy maintenance strategy was reported 3.57% (n = 13) of the time when victims encountered an online relational pursuit.

Although the negotiation/threaten component introduced the notion of interacting directly with the pursuer, another unique strategy was teased apart from it. The strategy, labeled *interaction/derogate*, was used 2.47% (n = 9) of the time. It involves direct confrontation for mostly two reasons. The first is to directly insult the pursuer in an attempt to stop the intrusion. The second reason is more situational. Respondents confronted their pursuers as a fraud when they pretended to be someone that they were not online.

The final technological coping mechanism is a strategy which was unique from the aforementioned. Although coders attempted to subsume the strategy into one of the previous clusters, no agreement could be reached as to which cluster it could be incorporated into. Therefore, although it was reported only .27% (n = 1) of the time, a *technological role reversal* strategy was established. The strategy involves the object of pursuit electronically monitoring the pursuer through the pursuer's IP address. Victims who engaged in the role reversal strategy were able to take control of the pursuit by watching their pursuer's every online action.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked which of the coping strategies were perceived as effective in ending the online obsessive relational intrusion. The research question was assessed using a single item exploring whether their response listed was effective in stopping the intrusive behavior. Descriptive statistics were computed on the first and secondary responses to the online ORI behaviors and assumptions of effectiveness were made using the mean scores of each strategy. The criterion which was used to determine effectiveness was a crude split of the 7-point Likert scale used. Any effectiveness means which were above 4 were considered to be effective, whereas scores that were below 4 were considered to be ineffective in stopping the intrusion. Any mean that were clustered around 4 were considered moderately effective strategies.

First Response Strategies (RQ_2)

The results indicated that objects of pursuit perceived technological privacy maintenance, technological active disassociation, and ignore/avoidance as the most successful strategies as a first response to online ORI. The results demonstrated that technological privacy maintenance, or the action of making information private and available to selected users only, was the most effective strategy in stopping the online intrusion, with a mean of 5.57 (*SD* = 2.30). Technological active disassociation/disengagement was the second most successful approach, with a mean of 4.68 (*SD* = 1.73). Finally, ignore/avoidance was the third most successful strategy in stopping the online intrusion, with an average effectiveness score of 4.16 (*SD* = 2.04).

As a first response to the online ORI, the results indicated that technological role reversal, with an average effectiveness score of 4.00 and help-seeking, with a mean of 3.96 (*SD* = 2.39), were considered moderately effective.

Negotiation/threaten, with a mean score of 3.68 (*SD* = 2.25), compliance/excuses, with a mean score of 2.82 (*SD* = 1.47), and interaction/derogate, with a mean of 2.43 (*SD* = 1.81) was clearly ineffective in ending the online intrusion. It is important to note, however, that many of these mean scores must be interpreted with caution, as the small sample sizes of the actual reported effectiveness score may cause the means to be unstable. Means and standard deviations for all first response strategies are presented in Table 3.

Secondary Response Strategies (RQ_2)

A secondary response strategy suggests that the coping strategy was used either alongside or after the first response. The overall results of the descriptive statistics computations of the effectiveness scores, reported in Table 4, demonstrate only a few divergences from first response scores. Technological privacy maintenance remained overwhelmingly more successful than any of the other strategies, with an average effectiveness score of 6.20 (SD = 1.79). Technological active disassociation/ disengagement, with a mean score of 4.88 (SD = 2.02), maintained its place as the second most successful strategy. Help-seeking, which was considered ineffective as a first response strategy was deemed effective as a second response strategy, with a mean of 4.13 (SD = 2.10). The opposite was true for ignore/avoidance. Whereas ignore/avoidance was regarded as successful as a first response strategy, it only approached being considered effective as a secondary response strategy, with a mean of 3.93 (SD = 2.05).

Consistent with the results of the mean effectiveness scores for first response strategies, negotiation/threat (M = 3.36, SD = 2.13), compliance/excuses (M = 2.33, SD = 2.05), and interaction/derogate (M = 1.00, SD = .00) were clearly not effective in ending the online intrusion.

Research Question 3

The final research question investigated the relationship between online ORI behaviors and the established coping strategies. Specifically, the research question explored whether certain strategies were more prevalent, given an ORI behavior. Cross-tabulation tables were created for first and secondary responses, in order to look for patterns of association across the eight coping strategies and the 19 online ORI behaviors. To reiterate, chi-square tests between the observed and expected frequencies in each cell were originally planned. However, because each cell did not have the requisite five cases, chi-square tests could not be conducted. In place of the inferential tests, patterns of association were observed using the cross-tabulation tables.

In order to further examine the online ORI behaviors, sums were computed on the reported number of times objects of pursuit encountered each specific intrusive behavior. The results indicated that objects of pursuit more frequently experienced lesser menacing forms of online ORI, as illustrated in Table 5. As the behaviors became more menacing, fewer people reported having encountered these events. For instance, hyperintimacy behaviors (i.e., the least threatening form of online ORI) accounted for 458 (57.25%) of the total 800 reported cases of online ORI behaviors, whereas invasion behaviors (i.e., the most threatening form of online ORI) accounted for only 89 (11.13%) of the 800 cases. Sabotage (158, 19.75%) and threat (95, 11.88%), both considered median forms of ORI behaviors, reported fewer frequencies than hyperintimacy behaviors but more than invasion behaviors.

The cross-tabulation tables for the current study are useful in two ways. First, the frequencies, which are reported in Tables 6 and 8, illustrate which strategies are the most prevalent across all of the online ORI behaviors. Second, percentages of frequencies, as reported in Tables 7 and 9, illustrate which strategies are the most prevalent for each specific online ORI behavior. Therefore, it is possible to identify the relationship between strategies and behaviors macroscopically (i.e., holistically) or microscopically. For the purpose of the present study, both were examined for initial and secondary responses.

First Response Strategies (RQ_3)

As previously mentioned, ignore/avoidance was the most frequently reported coping strategy. Of the 96 reported cases, 71 (74.0%) were in response to hyperintimacy behaviors, 12 (12.5%) were used against threat behaviors, 9 (9.4%) were used to end sabotage behaviors, and 4 (4.2%) were against invasion behaviors.

The second most frequently reported strategy as a first response to online ORI behaviors was help-seeking. 54 cases were reported by respondents and the following frequencies and percentages were reported for each of the online ORI behaviors: 17 cases (31.2%) were in response to hyperintimacy behaviors, 9 (16.7%) were for sabotage behaviors, 17 (31.2%) were in response to threat behaviors, and 11 (20.4%) were for invasion behaviors.

Technological active disassociation/disengagement was the third most common strategy reported. Of the 49 cases which respondents reported, 34 (69.4%) were instituted as a result of hyperintimacy behaviors, 3 (6.1%) were used against threat behaviors, 5 (10.2%) were in response to sabotage behaviors, and 7 (14.3%) were used to thwart invasion behaviors.

Negotiation/threaten strategies were reported on 37 separate occasions across the 51 participants. Of these cases, 25 (67.6%) were used in response to hyperintimacy behaviors, 3 (8.1%) were used to end threat behaviors, 7 (18.9%) were used for sabotage behaviors, and 2 cases (5.4%) were reported as a strategy used in response to invasion behaviors.

With 17 reported cases of occurrence, compliance/excuse was the fifth most frequently used strategy. 14 (82.4%) of these cases were reported as a result of hyperintimacy behaviors and the other 3 (17.6%) cases were reported as a response to sabotage behaviors. The compliance/excuses strategy was not reported as being appropriate for threat or invasion behaviors.

The technological privacy maintenance strategy was used in response to online ORI behaviors a total of eight times. Of these eight reported occurrences, all (i.e., 100%) were used in response to invasion behaviors. Interaction/derogate was reported seven different times. Of these responses, 1 (14.3%) was used for hyperintimacy behaviors, 1 (14.3%) was used for threat behaviors, and 5 (71.4%) were reported as a means to end sabotage behaviors.

Finally, the technological role-reversal strategy, which as previously mentioned was attempted to be combined with other similar strategies, was only reported once. The strategy was used in response to a hyperintimacy behavior (specifically, sending excessively disclosive messages). The cross-tabulation table for frequencies of first response strategies is presented in Table 6.

Furthermore, when looking at the cross-tabulation table row-wise as opposed to column-wise, it is possible to get a more microscopic view of the relationship between the online ORI behaviors and coping strategies.

With regard to specific hyperintimacy behaviors, when pursuers sent tokens of affection to their objects of pursuit, the most frequently reported strategies used were ignore/avoidance (n = 18, 37.5%) and technological active disassociation (n = 16, 33.3%). When pursuers sent exaggerated messages of affection, ignore/avoidance (n =

20, 55.5%) was overwhelming used in comparison to other strategies. In response to being sent excessively disclosive messages, ignore/avoidance continued to be the most popular response (*n* = 11, 35.5%), followed by technological active disassociation/ disengagement (*n* = 6, 33.3%). In response to sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages, the ignore/avoidance strategy (*n* = 16, 50.0%) was again the most commonly used, followed by negotiation/threat (*n* = 11, 34.4%). Finally, when objects of pursuit were sent pornographic or obscene images or messages, they reported ignoring or avoiding the problem (*n* = 6, 37.5%) the most, followed by technological active disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 4, 25.0%) and help-seeking (*n* = 4, 25.0%).

When reviewing the threat component more microscopically, similar trends to that of hyperintimacy behaviors were identified. For instance, when objects of pursuit were sent threatening written messages, help-seeking (*n* = 5, 41.7%) was most commonly used as a means to thwart the online ORI behavior, which was followed by ignore/avoidance (*n* = 4, 33.3%). When objects of pursuit encountered sexually harassing messages, most respondents cited ignore/avoidance as their most frequently used coping strategy (*n* = 7, 53.8%). In response to threatening pictures or images, ignore/avoidance (*n* = 1, 33.3%), technological disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 1, 33.3%), and help-seeking (*n* = 1, 33.3%) were reported in the same vein.

For the four items dedicated to sabotage behaviors, the most common response to the pursuer exposing private information to others was help-seeking (*n* = 6, 50.0%), followed by negotiation/threat (*n* = 3, 25.0%). In response to the pursuer pretending to be someone he or she wasn't, the following largest percentages of frequencies were reported: ignore/avoidance (*n* = 5, 29.4%) and help-seeking (*n* = 4, 23.5%). When objects of pursuit had their private or social reputation sabotaged, they most frequently turned to help-seeking (n = 4, 36.4%) and ignore/avoidance (n = 3, 27.3%) to resolve their problem. In contrast, when their work or school (i.e., professional) reputation was sabotaged, half of the objects of pursuit reported using help-seeking (n = 3, 50.0%) and another one-third used negotiation/threat (n = 2, 33.3%).

Finally, when analyzing the invasion component, when objects of pursuit were faced with someone attempting to disable their computer, they would most often use technological privacy maintenance behaviors (n = 5, 45.5%) and technological active disassociation/disengagement (n = 3, 29.4%). When the pursuer obtained private information without their permission, technological active disassociation/disengagement (n = 2, 28.6%) and help-seeking (n = 2, 28.6%) were sought the most. In cases where the object of pursuit's computer was hacked to obtain information on others, they responded most commonly with help-seeking (n = 3, 75.0%). In response to the pursuer altering their electronic identity or persona, respondents said that they most frequently used technological active disassociation/disengagement (n = 2, 50.0%) and technological privacy maintenance (n = 2, 50.0%). In contrast, when their online identity was taken over, they turned to help-seeking (n = 3, 75.0%) and negotiation/threat (n = 1, 25.0%) most commonly. Lastly, when third party proxy members were used to threaten the objects of pursuit, they either ignored/avoided them (n = 1, 50.0%) or engaged in help-seeking (n = 1, 50.0%) The cross-tabulation table for frequency percentages is presented in Table 7.

Second Response Strategies (RQ_3)

The column-wise, macroscopic analysis of the cross-tabulation table for the observed frequencies of online ORI behaviors and secondary response coping strategies revealed similarities to the first response strategies. The observed frequencies are reported in Table 8. Of the 30 instances where ignore/avoidance strategies were used, 22 (73.3%) were in responses to hyperintimacy behaviors, 2 (6.7%) were used to thwart cases of threat behaviors, 4 (13.3%) were used against sabotage behaviors, and 2 (6.7%) were used to end invasion behaviors.

With regard to the technological disassociation/disengagement strategy, a total of 25 cases were reported as second response behaviors. Of these cases, 20 (80.0%) were used in response to hyperintimacy behaviors, 1 (4.0%) respondent used it to thwart threat behaviors, 2 (8.0%) used it to relieve sabotage behaviors, and finally 1 (4.0%) case was reportedly used against an invasion behavior.

Help-seeking behaviors were used by 15 respondents as a secondary means to end the online ORI behaviors. The hyperintimacy behavior accounted for the largest segment of the total (n = 9, 60.0%), followed by threat (n = 3, 20.0%), sabotage (n = 2, 13.3%), and invasion (n = 1, 6.7%).

Similar frequencies were also reported with negotiation/threat strategies, as a total of 14 cases were identified as secondary responses. The results indicated that 9 (64.3%) responses were used against hyperintimacy behaviors, 4 (28.6%) were used to end threat behaviors, and 1 (7.1%) respondent used the strategy against sabotage behaviors.

Although technological privacy maintenance, compliance/excuses, and interaction derogate were used infrequently (i.e., 5, 4, and 2 respectively), it is interesting to note all of them reported the most frequent use in the hyperintimacy category vis-à-vis threat, sabotage, and invasion.

A row-wise analysis of the secondary responses was conducted and results were consistent with the patterns observed in the initial response analyses. Within the hyperintimacy cluster, when objects of pursuit received tokens of affection, ignore/avoidance tactics (*n* = 10, 45.5%) were predominantly used followed by technological disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 6, 27.3%). Similarly, when receiving exaggerated messages of affection, both ignore/avoidance (*n* = 4, 30.7%) and technological active disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 3, 23.1%) were most frequently cited. In order to end pursuer's excessively disclosive messages, ignore/avoidance (*n* = 5, 38.5%) and help-seeking (*n* = 4, 30.7%) were more commonly used. Among the 15 instances where needy or demanding messages were reported, the most prevalent strategy used was technological active disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 6, 46.2%). In the same vein, the most popular method to cope with receiving pornographic or obscene images or messages was to use technological active disassociation/disengagement (*n* = 3, 60.0%).

Because the frequencies of occurrences for threat, sabotage, and invasion behaviors did not reach higher than two in any particular cell, further analysis of percentages would be spurious. Therefore, only the hyperintimacy cluster, which accounted for 69 (72.6%) of the total cases, was reported.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

The goal of the present study was to investigate instances of online relational pursuit and how receivers of such obsessive communicative behaviors respond, through a communication privacy management (CPM) framework. In order to explore the growing phenomenon of online relational pursuit, an inductive approach was employed. The three broad objectives which the present was founded upon were to investigate: (a) what responses people used to cope with the unwanted online relational pursuit, (b) the effectiveness of the responses that were used, and (c) the relationship between the coping responses and online obsessive intrusive behaviors.

The results indicated that the majority of the sample consisted of female respondents who were pursued by males. The results further showed that the pursuit typically lasted for several months and was most frequently perpetrated by someone who the victim did not know (i.e., a stranger). All of the participants were considered highly experienced Internet users, who generally felt confident about their ability to navigate the web. Because Internet users who have the most experience also have the knowledge to troubleshoot a variety of situations on the net when compared to novice Internet users, it is argued that the responses that these respondents provided are generally more useful to discuss than those of novice Internet users.

Furthermore, when looking at the findings macroscopically, the results of the current investigation generally support the utility of the privacy management theory in uncovering the hurdles that some unfortunate Internet users must overcome. Using CPM's three tenets, assumptions can be made not only to the manner in which privacy boundaries are protected, but to the relative degrees (i.e., tightness or looseness) of management that each method of bounrary management (i.e., the coping strategies) offers.

Management Following an Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion

The Internet has changed scope of privacy for its users. In general, people's privacy needs have changed, which is evident by their online behaviors (Zwarun & Yao, 2007). People who use the Internet, particularly for socialization purposes, have become less fearful of making their innermost thoughts and private information available for public consumption. It is somewhat naïve to assume that the private information, which is publicly broadcasted to every part of the world, will never be used for harm. In fact, the present study clearly shows that a rather sizeable number of college students have had encounters with annoying, threatening, or menacing obsessive events online.

Management through Coping Strategies

Intuitively, the longer one continues to use the Internet, the greater chance he or she will have to encounter a case of online ORI. In fact, as the number of Internet users continues to dramatically increase, the problem will only be exacerbated. Thus, when it does occur, web users must have the knowledge and capability to thwart the intrusion. The current study provides descriptions of how others have responded in a similar encounter of online ORI behaviors.

Petronio (2002) explained that all people set up some type of privacy boundary in order to control their level of intimacy and autonomy. In the case of coping with online ORI, people have a basic subset of skills that they can instinctively use to prevent further intrusion. Ignoring or avoiding the incident, for instance, is overwhelmingly the most commonly used coping strategy. One explanation for the high frequency of its use is that people have an innate fight or flight response to threatening situations. However, because it is easier to ignore and avoid the intrusion than actively pursue an end, objects of pursuit often select the flight method. As explained earlier, some of the tactics people used in the ignore/avoidance strategy included avoiding websites or Internet programs which the pursuer was known to be on, using language which showed a lack of interest, or simply not responding in any way whatsoever.

Another common strategy that objects of pursuit used when they experienced an instance of online ORI was technological means to evade the threat. For instance, victims often tried to disengage from the obsessive intrusion by deleting their previous accounts and forming new ones, deleting messages before reading them, and most importantly, making all of their previous publicly displayed information private. The process of making information private is interesting to note insofar as the previous privacy needs that the Internet infrastructure has shaped could be starkly changed following a series of intrusive online events. Other technologies have also made it possible for a person to simply block others that they do not wish to interact with rather than avoid the communication channel completely.

At times, the most threatening cases of relational intrusion call for more active measures than simply changing e-mail addresses and blocking users. In those events that require outside parties to assist with stopping the intrusion, respondents enacted a help-seeking strategy, where they either pursued legal means, contacted web owners or Internet Service Providers (ISPs), or even hired a team of private investigators. Help-seeking, however, did not always involve using legal means to handle the problem. In fact, respondents reported requesting the help of a third party "proxy" person, whether a family member, friend, or significant other, to bully the pursuer into stopping the behavior. Therefore, they turned the table on the pursuers and directed others toward them. Moreover, in cases involving a pursuer whom the object of pursuit had a previous relationship with (i.e., not a stranger), exposure of their obsessive behavior to other friends, family members, and partners were reported.

Some respondents took it upon themselves to directly contact the pursuer. In these cases, objects of pursuit threatened, argued with, or discursively talked to the pursuer. When threatening language was used, it was often to either suggest physical harm to the pursuer or to let the pursuer know that legal means would be used if the obsessive behavior did not cease. Arguing with the pursuer involved swearing, yelling, and disagreeing with any of the excuses that the perpetrator offered. The results also indicated that some respondents sought out pursuers and asked for the behaviors to stop or simply told them that they were not interested.

A unique strategy which was used by those pursued is compliance and excuse-making. Although it makes sense that objects of pursuit offer excuses of why they cannot enter into a relationship, it was interesting to note that numerous respondents also reported that they played along with the obsessive behaviors, even at times disclosing false information about themselves. Intuitively, it seemed that making excuses about not wanting to enter into a relationship would be effective; however, some respondents did not seem to consider that playing along could have the potential to exacerbate an already delicate situation.

A less common form of using technology to cope with online ORI was the privacy maintenance strategy. When people encountered intrusive behaviors, the objects of pursuit responded by changing profile pictures or disassociating themselves with their owned e-mail addresses. In specific instances where victims thought their computer had been hacked, in order to get information about others or obtain other private information without consent, reported responses included changing usernames and/or passwords of various accounts as well as downloading an antivirus software with firewall capabilities.

Closely related to threatening the pursuer, which was mentioned as a strategy above, some individuals directly contacted the pursuer simply to insult them. In one particularly memorable incident, a respondent reported creating a public blog rebuking the stranger who had been repeatedly contacting her. In addition, when a pursuer claimed to be someone whom he or she wasn't, objects of pursuit did not hesitate to confront them as a fraud.

The final strategy which was only used by one person was technological role reversal. Although its frequency of occurrence was scarce, it was nevertheless notable. The victim who used role reversal was technologically savvy enough to log the pursuer's Internet Protocol (IP) address, an identification number which is unique to each Internet user, and monitor the pursuer's online movements. Much like instituting a proxy member to bully the pursuer, which was mentioned earlier, role reversal is another instance where the pursuer becomes the pursued.

It is worth nothing here that the list of coping strategies that are provided is in no way intended to be construed as exhaustive, given the small sample size. The list, however, is argued to reflect the most common strategies that are used by objects of pursuit, given that the sample is comprised of both college-aged Internet users as well as anonymous Internet victims of ORI.

Effectiveness of the Management

Simply identifying these coping strategies is not useful if future victims are unable know whether they have been successful in ending the online pursuit. It is clear that when objects of pursuit take action against their pursuer, either as a first or second response, technological privacy maintenance is the most effective strategy of the eight mentioned. The finding, however, must be taken with caution. The results do not imply that in any instance of online relation intrusion, using technological privacy maintenance strategies will categorically work the best. The findings propose that technological privacy maintenance strategies will work best given the specific online ORI behavior. The outcome is not difficult to believe, considering that many of the respondents were pursued by strangers who selected them most plausibly by either their profile pictures or profile information (e.g., age, gender, hobbies, etc.). Therefore, by removing their actual picture and taking off much of their identifiable information, pursuers may have moved on to next victim, considering there was no reference for them. Additionally, it is apparent that objects of pursuit were successful when responding to invasions of privacy by changing their e-mail addresses or their usernames and passwords. They also added an extra element of security, as many respondents reported downloading the latest antivirus software. The installation of the antivirus software was primarily done for two reasons. The first was that software was necessary for instances where pursuers attempted to disable victims' computers by sending them a virus. The second reason is that current antivirus software can also detect weaknesses in one's computer system which can be susceptible to hacking or security breaches.

Using technological features to keep pursuers away appeared to be consistently effective in discontinuing the intrusion. The second most effective strategy across both initial and secondary responses is technological active disassociation/disengagement. The effectiveness of disassociation and disengagement lies in the actions of deleting all accounts and actively distancing oneself from the tumultuous situation. When the strategy was enacted, objects of pursuit were able to rid themselves of the threat. Furthermore, when making private information available to only verified friends, it shuts out the pursuer from the life of their victim, thereby making the pursuit much more difficult to continue. Hierarchically, the disassociation/disengagement strategy is considered more multifaceted than ignoring and avoiding, simply because the object of pursuit is choosing flight rather than fight, but actively making strategic moves in order to move away from the problem.

Ignoring or avoiding the pursuit, however, is not necessarily a poor method in ending the pursuit. As a first response to the online ORI behaviors, it appears that ignoring or avoiding the ORI behaviors may be effective in solving the dilemma. However, as the problem persists and other strategies are used as a precursor to avoiding or ignoring, it may have detrimental effects. An explanation of the turn of events is that the initial contact with the pursuer through one of the other coping methods could have aroused the pursuer, making him or her angry or stimulated. In this scenario, it may have been too late for victims to turn their backs on the pursuit, since the pursuit had escalated to a new, more threatening level. An alternative explanation is that any obsessive behavior that requires more than one strategy to end it may require greater active measures than ignoring or avoiding the issue.

An intriguing strategy which was uncovered in participants' responses was technological role reversal. The strategy was considered moderately effective in dealing with intrusive online behaviors. As iterated earlier, the role reversal strategy was mentioned only once, suggesting that the results of its reported effectiveness must be taken with extreme caution. The one respondent who cited using role reversal may have figured that it was effective insofar as he or she could track the movement of the pursuer online; however, the tracking did not accomplish much. Knowing which websites the pursuer had visited was important for the victim to feel secure that he or she could keep tabs on the pursuer, but this knowledge could only go so far to putting an end to the intrusion.

When enmeshed in a situation such as online ORI, it is not unreasonable for the victim to turn to some outside source for help. However, the recommendation for turning to such an agency has mixed results. As a first response, help-seeking seemed to be ineffective in ending the pursuit. It was, at first, confusing to understand how pursuing legal means against the pursuer could be unsuccessful as a first or secondary response. Pathé (2002) explained, however, that a strategy which is commonly used by stalkers is to take their victims to court. These stalkers do not necessarily have any grounds for the hearing, except that it offers them an opportunity to interact with their victims. The interaction often leads to further pursuit, as the stalker becomes enticed by the meeting. Also, as has been noted by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998), when victims of stalking pursue legal means, it is often met with either incredulousness or inaction. Thus, help-seeking behaviors may be perceived as less effective.

In addition, when objects of pursuit asked other parties to assist in the bullying of the pursuer, it may have given the pursuer ample reason to become enraged, only fueling the pursuit. As a second response, though, help-seeking seemed to be effective. The finding suggests that when other strategies fail for whatever reason, help-seeking may be a viable response. One thing that the secondary response implies is that it is used in times when: (a) more than one response is necessary, or (b) the first response was unsuccessful in ending the pursuit. Therefore, in cases which involve threatening conditions that are difficult to resolve, turning to others for help may be a practical alternative.

When victims instituted strategies which involve direct interaction with their pursuers, the strategies often failed to discontinue the obsessive behavior. Threatening pursuers with physical harm or legal action, or arguing with them only propagated the intrusion further by giving the attention to the pursuer that is sought. Gender must also be taken to consideration when discussing threatening responses. Two different studies found that males chose to confront their stalkers directly with threatening harm more often than women (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Fremouw, Westrup, & Pennypacker, 1997). Males perceived confrontation to be effective whereas their female counterparts thought that ignoring the problem was the most successful means to thwarting the intrusion.

Some victims used the notion of playing along with the pursuer to end the pursuit. Playing along with the pursuer's repeated requests was clearly ineffective and probably did more harm than good. In fact, playing along may have actually influenced the pursuer to think that the formation of a relationship was a real possibility. Whatever previous notions the pursuer may have had to the implausibility of the relationship were likely nullified as a result of the feigned interest or false disclosure.

Alongside compliance/excuses and negotiation/threatening, the final strategy, which involves directly confronting the pursuer and insulting them either privately or publicly, was found to be the least successful of all the strategies. As mentioned earlier, similar to threatening and arguing, the insults and provocation that compliance or excuse-making entails only further strengthens the resolve of the pursuer. By giving pursuers the welcomed attention, objects of pursuit are only arousing the pursuer's interest, thereby making the problem worse.

Countering Online ORI Behaviors

Microanalysis. The most commonly reported online ORI behaviors were those that are the least threatening. In fact, more than sixty percent of the intrusions that respondents reported encountering were hyperintimacy behaviors. One consistency in the results was in cases where hyperintimacy behaviors were reported, victims most commonly ignored the problem or avoided the situation as both first- and second-level responses. Ignore or avoiding strategies, however, were only moderately successful in thwarting the intrusion. In cases where tokens of affection and exaggerated messages of affection were received, technological active disassociation responses were also largely prevalent. Active disassociation may have been an appropriate reaction, as the strategy was perceived as able to effectively manage the intrusion. People sought help as a secondary response to excessively disclosive messages, which may have been only moderately successful. But, as a first line of defense against needy or demanding messages, the victims, unbeknownst to its outcome, used negotiation or threatening tactics, which likely enraged the pursuer. Both technological active disassociation and help-seeking strategies were used in specific instances where victims received pornographic or obscene messages or images. As explained earlier, although technological active disassociation was perceived as effective more often than not, help-seeking strategies could have just as likely resulted in either success or failure.

Similar to occasions where objects of pursuit encountered hyperintimacy behaviors, the majority of the sample commonly ignored or avoided the threat as a means to end the problem. These coping responses, though, may not have produced a desirable result, as it was only found to be moderately successful when used. A similar success rate is true for the high percentage of individuals who referred to help-seeking strategies in response to receiving threatening written messages, sexually harassing messages, or threatening pictures or images.

When victims described instances of sabotage behaviors, the most common response was seeking help. Each specific behavior within the sabotage cluster showed a high prevalence of the moderately effective help-seeking strategy. Negotiation and threatening the pursuer were also commonly used in response to having private information exposed about them and having their work or school reputation sabotaged, but this strategy was perceived as often ineffective in ending the behaviors. Objects of pursuit may have impulsively argued with or told the pursuer directly to stop these disruptive actions because of the sensitive nature of involving close others with the pursuit. The response did not work because the mere interaction with the victim is precisely what the pursuer wanted. Cases of ignoring and avoiding strategies still existed in response to sabotage behaviors; however, not as in large proportions when compared to less threatening behaviors. In particular, the ignore and avoidance strategy was used heavily in response to situations where the pursuer was pretending to be someone whom he or she was not, or when the pursuer attempted to tarnished the private or social reputation of the pursuer. The ignoring and the avoiding may have been successful in thwarting less threatening behaviors, but was unsuccessful when the pursuer sabotaged their objects' social reputation. It is easy to simply ignore a person posing as another, but one cannot easily ignore the questions that friends and acquaintances begin to ask in reaction to whatever sabotage the pursuer has committed (e.g., spread rumors about them, their relationship or activities to friends, family, partner, etc.).

For the most severe cases of ORI, people most often turned to help-seeking strategies in order to alleviate some of the burden associated with the menacing invasion behaviors. The response was sensible since pursuing legal avenues may be the last resort to resolving the most threatening scenarios. Some people responded to the disabling of their computers and altering of their electronic persona by using technological means; both actively disengaging and disassociating or by using privacy maintenance strategies. These coping responses were shown to be most effective in thwarting the online intrusive behaviors. To explain this, when objects of pursuit found that their computer or online identity was breached, they simply changed their old accounts, e-mail addresses, profile pictures, and started a new, safer identity. Actively disengaging or using privacy maintenance behaviors appeared to thwart any future intrusions by the pursuer who, through some means, was able to obtain private security information about the victim. Similar patterns were true in times where targets caught their pursuers obtaining private information without permission. Again, they simply found it helpful to actively disengage from the situation by deleting those accounts and removing the pursuer from a "friend's" list. Along with help-seeking, negotiation and threatening tactics were used when the pursuer took over the electronic identity or persona of the object of pursuit. The threatening retaliation did not effectively work in overcoming the identity theft. When proxy members were directed to the target by the pursuer, they also tried to ignore the problem. Ignoring tactics may or may not have been successful, depending on the level of threat the proxy member was to the victim. If the level of threat was high, then simply ignoring or avoiding the problem may have led to serious consequences. However, the strategy may have been successful if the proxy member was non-threatening.

Macroscopic Analysis. The COP measure was arranged in an organization which reflected a gradual increase in threatening behaviors to the victim. Therefore, it is possible to determine how a particular coping strategy was used as behaviors become more menacing. To demonstrate this point, which is illustrated in Figure 1, objects of pursuit often used ignore and avoidance, compliance and excuses, and technological role reversal strategies as a means to end the most peripheral forms of online intrusion, as the majority of cases reported were used against hyperintimacy behaviors. However, as the behaviors became gradually more intrusive, these strategies became less prevalent. When behaviors were the most invasive (e.g., disabling personal computer, altering online identities, etc.), these strategies simply did not appear to be a sufficient option for the victims to turn to.

Similarly, technological active disassociation and disengagement, and negotiation and threat were heavily used as a response to hyperintimacy behaviors. Conspicuously, though, both were infrequently reported against threat behaviors but had a slight increase in frequency through sabotage and invasion behaviors. This finding may be explained by the notion that actively disassociating oneself from these real life threats or threatening the pursuer may be insufficient in expelling the harm. However, it does not explain why there is a small, yet noticeable increase in the frequency of reported strategies. This inverted curvilinear pattern suggests evidence of a threshold that objects of pursuit, who use these two strategies, meet following hyperintimacy behaviors. Specifically, after the pursuit rises to the threat level, victims may feel helpless in doing anything, particularly taking unilateral action against the pursuer. However, as the behaviors become more personal and invasive to the victims, they become resolute to end the pursuit once again using active measures in an attempt to regain control of their privacy.

Victims chose to derogate their pursuers mainly in cases where they acted like someone they were not, sabotaged their private or professional reputation, or exposed private information about the object of pursuit to others. It was not unreasonable for objects of pursuit to publicly or privately insult or confront them when this occurred. In fact, since sabotage behaviors begin to involve close others in the pursuit, it provides more of an impetus for wanting to offend the pursuer.

It appeared that technological privacy maintenance strategies were used only in response to most the heinous intrusions. In no other behavior was this strategy reported. However, it is worth noting that when these privacy maintenance strategies were used in these scenarios, victims were likely to end the pursuit. This suggests that when pursuers attempted to breach the privacy of the victim, through his or her computer or online identity, the most fruitful technique for dealing with the invasion was to change usernames and passwords, e-mail addresses, and heighten the security of one's computer.

Finally, it was clear that seeking help from friends, acquaintances, family members, or a legal authority seemed to be associated with all of the various online ORI behaviors. High frequencies of help-seeking strategies were reported in response to both severe and non-threatening forms of intrusive behaviors. This could imply that seeking help was appropriate for any type of online ORI behavior. A more probable explanation, though, may lie in the range of tactics in the help-seeking strategy. For instance, seeking help may involve much less severe consequences such as getting assistance through a website, asking friends to respond to the pursuer, or keeping a log of all correspondence. A moderate form includes reporting the perpetrator to the web owner or ISP. Finally, the most severe forms of help-seeking include hiring a team of private investigators, pursuing temporary restraining orders, or filing criminal charges. In cases where the threat is minimal, lesser forms of help-seeking may have been used. In more intrusive cases, however, it may hay have been that legal means were pursued. Thus, the range of tactics within the help-seeking strategy explicates its suitability for the various behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this exploratory study provide clear descriptions and suggestions for what experienced Internet users do when entangled in instances of online ORI. The results also propose when and how a strategy may be used most effectively. The methodology of the current study, however, is not without limitations. One of the most significant issues was the small sample size. The restrictions for participating in the study made recruiting participants a struggle. Although the responses of the 51 participants were sufficient in uncovering what appears to be the most commonly used strategies to thwart online intrusions, it is not advocated that this list is exhaustive. There are possibilities of idiosyncratic tactics that may exist, similar to the technological role reversal strategy, which would likely be uncovered with a more extensive sample. This is also not to say, though, that the list of strategies that was produced and its perceived effectiveness are externally invalid. Because of the diversity in the sample, with both college students and victims from several cyberstalking support websites, the results reflect what is assumed to be the most common responses among most Internet users.

A larger sample would also make it possible to run chi-square analyses on the cross-tabulation tables. The statistics will better demonstrate the association between the coping strategies and online ORI behaviors, by suggesting whether an occurrence of a strategy used in response to a particular online ORI behavior was by chance or not.

The second limitation of the study was that all of the respondents reported having the highest degree of Internet experience (i.e., more than two years). Although this does not appear problematic at first glance, because the results identify how people, who are assumed to have the most familiarity and knowledge with the Internet, are responding to these threats, the study lacks generalizability. In fact, a report conducted by the Pew Research Center (1999) found that 46 percent of Internet users were considered novice (i.e., less than one year experience). Ward and Lee (2000) cited that because of the thousands of new users that go on the Internet each day, inexperienced Internet-users will likely outnumber experienced users in the near future. Furthermore, numerous scholars have reported that Internet experience plays an important role in how one behaves online (e.g., Eastin & LaRose, 2000; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2004). Thus, the study does not adequately address what novice or moderately experienced Internet users are doing when they encounter online ORI behaviors. This is significant considering that experienced user may be less cautious and more liberal to these events because they are comfortable and familiar with their surrounding environment. Thus, future studies should look into obtaining a more representative sample that reflects a range of novice and expert Internet users.

The final limitation of this study was the subjectivity in interpreting the results. Because no actual inferential tests could be run given the inadequate frequencies of cases, generalizations on patterns (specifically to answer Research Question 3) were made by looking at the cross-tabulation tables. It is important to note that future studies may not be consistent with these findings based upon its subjectivity. Consistent with what was stated above, a larger sample size may assist in solving this problem.

Furthermore, future research into the specific details related to these coping strategies will be fruitful in helping those who are experiencing these intrusions. For instance, the current study asked participants to log the various mediated channels that pursuer used, simply to provide a description of these channels. However, future research might look at whether the coping strategies are related to specific channels, and whether channel use affects the strategy's overall successful outcome. It might be hypothesized, for example, that technological active disassociation and disengagement strategies are most effective when used in response to hyperintimacy behaviors which take place on social networking sites and through an instant messenger. Thus, taking into account the communication channel might be a useful next step for this line of research.

Another possible area for future research is to investigate whether there are differences in coping strategies that are used based on the gender composition of the dyad (i.e., when males are pursued by females, males are pursued by males, females are pursued by females, and females are pursued by males). Since it has already been established that males and females tend to use different strategies when encountering online ORI behaviors, it might be useful to see whether distinct differences are upheld for these aforementioned divergent scenarios. If differences are detected, it may provide clearer directions to thwart the intrusion for objects of pursuit.

Implications

The study was undertaken to explore the application of the theoretical principles of the communication private management theory in the domain of online obsessive relational intrusions. The findings of the study, taken as whole, suggest that definite strategies exist to manage privacy boundaries in these situations. With respect to the current study, eight different styles were identified, although it is not suggested that all Internet users have the knowledge of all eight of these mechanisms for boundary management.

With regard to the second assumption of the CPM, if the level of threat in instances of online ORI is akin to the intensity of the private disclosure shared between couples, then it is hypothesized that strategies related to the lesser threatening behaviors constitute looser privacy boundary management, whereas strategies associated with greater threatening behaviors entail tighter boundary management. Thus, it is argued that ignoring and avoiding, technological disassociation and disengagement, negotiation and threat, compliance and excuses, and technological role reversal all constitute the most peripheral (i.e., loose) forms of boundary management. In the same vein, interaction and derogating tactics represent moderate boundary management. Finally, technological privacy maintenance represents the tightest form of boundary management. The help-seeking strategy interestingly represented a blending of the tightness or looseness of boundary management.

The notion of Cupach and Spitzberg's (2004) move with, against, and away strategies was also considered at the end of the study, to explore whether the eight strategies discovered could be organized within them. Although a crude placement of the eight strategies into these "move" construct was possible, it was determined that the richness of strategies, which are specific to the mediated context, would be lost. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of the technological coping variable which was phased out in later victimization and coping literature.

In sum, it appears that relating the struggles between autonomy and interdependence in private information sharing between couples, to the struggles experienced in the pursuer-victim relationship may have been reasonable. Many of the theoretical principles of CPM apply to this particular domain of online ORI. Furthermore, the axioms of CPM can be useful in arranging the coping strategies' taxonomic structure by providing a gradation of its internal organization. In other words, by using CPM, the strategies can be arranged on a continuum from loosest management to tightest management.

Conclusion

Although these results should not substitute expert advice, the study provides suggestions for strategies that have been used in various online relationally intrusive events. For instance, although there are six strategies that one might turn to when encountering hyperintimacy behaviors, victims have used technological active disassociation and disengagement tactics with success in handling this situation. In cases that involve threatening behaviors, seeking some type of help seems to be the only recourse. When one's reputation is sabotaged, although many people impulsively try derogating their pursuer, it is more advantageous to, again, seek help. Finally, it situations where the most invasive behaviors are used, the best way to handle the problem would be to use tactics consistent with technological privacy maintenance.

While these results are anticipated to be of use to the growing number of Internet users and the similarly growing rate of Internet cyber-intrusions, it is nevertheless important to note that further work must continue to elucidate the interaction between the pursuer and the pursued. Hopefully, in the end, a larger and more detailed picture will emerge from empirical data that will offer more specific guidelines which can be used for victims in any given situation.

Table 1.

Initial Coding of Participants' Responses to the Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion into 31 Coping Tactics.

Tactic
Ignore/avoidance
1. Ignore
2. Avoided sites and programs that pursuer contacted him/her through
3. Changed the subject
4. Used language that showed a lack of interest
5. Acted like it didn't bother him/her
Technological active disassociation/disengagement
6. Deleted old account and made a new account
7. Deleted/declined pursuer as a friend
8. Deleted messages before reading them
9. Made information private so that only accepted "friends" could access it
10. Blocked pursuer's messages
Help-seeking
11. Contacted local law authorities/filed charges
12. Kept a hardcopy of all written evidence
13. Hired a team of private investigators
14. Asked a third party to respond to the pursuer
15. Talked about pursuer to others (e.g., pursuer's peers, significant others)
16. Got help through a support website
17. Reported the pursuer to the web owner/Internet Service Provider (ISP)
Negotiation/threatening
18. Threatened the pursuer
19. Argued with the pursuer
20. Told the pursuer that s/he wanted it to stop/was not interested
Compliance/excuses
21. Played along
22. Falsely disclosed about themselves
23. Made excuses of not being able to or wanting a relationship
Technological privacy maintenance
24. Changed profile picture
25. Changed username and/or password
26. Changed e-mail addresses
27. Downloaded antivirus software
Interaction/derogate
28. Confronted the pursuer as a fraud
29. Directly insulted the pursuer
30. Posted a public discursive note to the pursuer
Technological Role Reversal
31. Electronically monitored the pursuer (e.g., through IP address, etc.)

Table 2.

Frequencies of Strategies as a First and Second Response Following an Instance of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion.

Strategy	No. of 1st responses	No. of 2nd responses	Total frequency	Percent frequency
Ignore/avoidance	96	30	**126**	34.62%
Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	49	25	**74**	20.33%
Help-seeking	54	15	**69**	18.96%
Negotiation/threaten	37	14	**51**	14.01%
Compliance/excuses	17	4	**21**	5.77%
Technological: privacy maintenance	8	5	**13**	3.57%
Interaction/derogate	7	2	**9**	2.47%
Technological role reversal	1	0	**1**	0.27%

Table 3.

Means and Standard Deviations of First Response Effectiveness Scores Based on a 7-Point Likert Scale for Coping Strategies.

Strategy	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Technological privacy maintenance	7	5.57	2.30
Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	47	4.68	1.73
Ignore/avoidance	95	4.16	2.04
Technological role reversal	1	4.00	
Help-seeking	54	3.96	2.39
Negotiation/threaten	36	3.68	2.25
Compliance/excuses	17	2.82	1.47
Interaction/derogate	7	2.43	1.81

Table 4.

Means and Standard Deviations of Second Response Effectiveness Scores Based on a 7-Point Likert Scale for Coping Strategies.

Strategy	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Technological privacy maintenance	5	6.2	1.79
Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	26	4.88	2.02
Help-seeking	15	4.13	2.10
Ignore/avoidance	29	3.93	2.05
Negotiation/threaten	14	3.36	2.13
Compliance/excuses	3	2.33	2.05
Interaction/derogate	2	1	.00

Table 5.

Frequencies of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion Behaviors Reported.

Behavior	Frequency	Percent frequency
Sending tokens of affection	134	16.75%
Sending exaggerated messages of affection	102	12.75%
Sending excessively disclosive messages	88	11.00%
Sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages	86	10.75%
Sending pornographic/obscene images or messages	48	6.00%
Sending threatening written messages	38	4.75%
Sending sexually harassing messages	40	5.00%
Sending threatening pictures or images	17	2.13%
Exposing private information about you to others	40	5.00%
Pretending to be someone she or she wasn't	56	7.00%
Sabotaging your private or social reputation	40	5.00%
Sabotaging your work/school reputation	22	2.75%
Attempting to disable your computer	34	4.25%
Obtaining private information without permission	18	2.25%
Using your computer to get information on others	10	1.25%
Bugging your car, home, or office	0	0.00%
Altering your electronic identity or persona	12	1.50%
Taking over your electronic identity or persona	15	1.88%

Table 6.

Cross-Tabulations of Observed Frequencies of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion Behaviors and First Response Coping Strategies.

	Ignore/avoidance	Help-seeking	Technological active disassociation/disengagement	Negotiation/threaten	Compliance/excuses	Technological privacy maintenance	Interaction/derogate	Technological role reversal	Total
Sending tokens of affection	18	4	16	4	6				48
Sending exaggerated messages of affection	20	3	6	7					36
Sending excessively disclosive messages	11	5	6	2	5		1	1	31
Sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages	16	1	2	11	2				32
Sending pornographic/obscene images or messages	6	4	4	1	1				16
Sending threatening written messages	4	5	1	1			1		12
Sending sexually harassing messages	7	3	1	2					13
Sending threatening pictures or images	1	1	1						3
Exposing private information about you to others		6	2	3			1		12
Pretending to be someone he or she wasn't	5	4	2		3		3		17
Sabotaging your private or social reputation	3	4	1	2			1		11
Sabotaging your work/school reputation	1	3		2					6
Attempting to disable your computer	1	2	3			5			11
Obtaining private information without permission	1	2	2	1		1			7
Using your computer to get information on others	1	3							4
Bugging your car, home, or office									0
Altering your electronic identity or persona			2			2			4
Taking over your electronic identity or persona		3		1					4
Directing others to you in threatening ways	1	1							2
Total	96	54	49	37	17	8	7	1	269
Observed percentages (%)	35.7	20.1	18.2	13.8	6.3	3.0	2.6	0.4	

Table 7.

Cross-Tabulations of Observed Frequencies Percentages of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion Behaviors and First Response Coping Strategies.

	Ignore/avoidance	Help-seeking	Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	Negotiation/threaten	Compliance/excuses	Technological privacy maintenance	Interaction/derogate	Technological role reversal
Sending tokens of affection	37.5	8.3	33.3	8.3	12.5			
Sending exaggerated messages of affection	55.5	8.3	16.7	19.4				
Sending excessively disclosive messages	35.5	16.1	19.4	6.5	16.1		3.2	3.2
Sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages	50.0	3.1	6.3	34.4	6.3			
Sending pornographic/obscene images or messages	37.5	25.0	25.0	6.3	6.3			
Sending threatening written messages	33.3	41.7	8.3	8.3			8.3	
Sending sexually harassing messages	53.8	23.1	7.7	15.4				
Sending threatening pictures or images	33.3	33.3	33.3					
Exposing private information about you to others		50.0	16.7	25.0			8.3	
Pretending to be someone he or she wasn't	29.4	23.5	11.8		17.6		17.6	
Sabotaging your private or social reputation	27.3	36.4	9.1	18.2			9.1	
Sabotaging your work/school reputation	16.7	50.0		33.3				
Attempting to disable your computer	9.1	18.2	29.4			45.5		
Obtaining private information without permission	14.2	28.6	28.6	14.2		14.2		
Using your computer to get information on others	25.0	75.0						
Bugging your car, home, or office								
Altering your electronic identity or persona			50.0			50.0		
Taking over your electronic identity or persona		75.0		25.0				
Directing others to you in threatening ways	50.0	50.0						

Table 8.

Cross-Tabulations of Observed Frequency Percentages of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion Behaviors and Second Response Coping Strategies.

	Ignore/avoidance	Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	Help-seeking	Negotiation/threaten	Compliance/excuses	Technological privacy maintenance	Interaction/derogate	Technological role reversal	Total
Sending tokens of affection	10	6	1	4			1		22
Sending exaggerated messages of affection	4	3	2	2	1	1			13
Sending excessively disclosive messages	5	2	4	2					13
Sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages	2	6	2	1	1	2	1		15
Sending pornographic/obscene images or messages	1	3			1				5
Sending threatening written messages	1		2	2					5
Sending sexually harassing messages	1	1		2					4
Sending threatening pictures or images			1			1			2
Exposing private information about you to others	1								1
Pretending to be someone he or she wasn't		2	1	1					4
Sabotaging your private or social reputation	2				1				3
Sabotaging your work/school reputation	1		1						2
Attempting to disable your computer	2	1	1						4
Obtaining private information without permission					1				1
Using your computer to get information on others									0
Bugging your car, home, or office									0
Altering your electronic identity or persona									0
Taking over your electronic identity or persona									0
Directing others to you in threatening ways		1							1
Total	30	25	15	14	5	4	2	0	95
Observed percentages (%)	31.6	26.3	15.8	14.7	5.3	4.2	2.1	0.0	

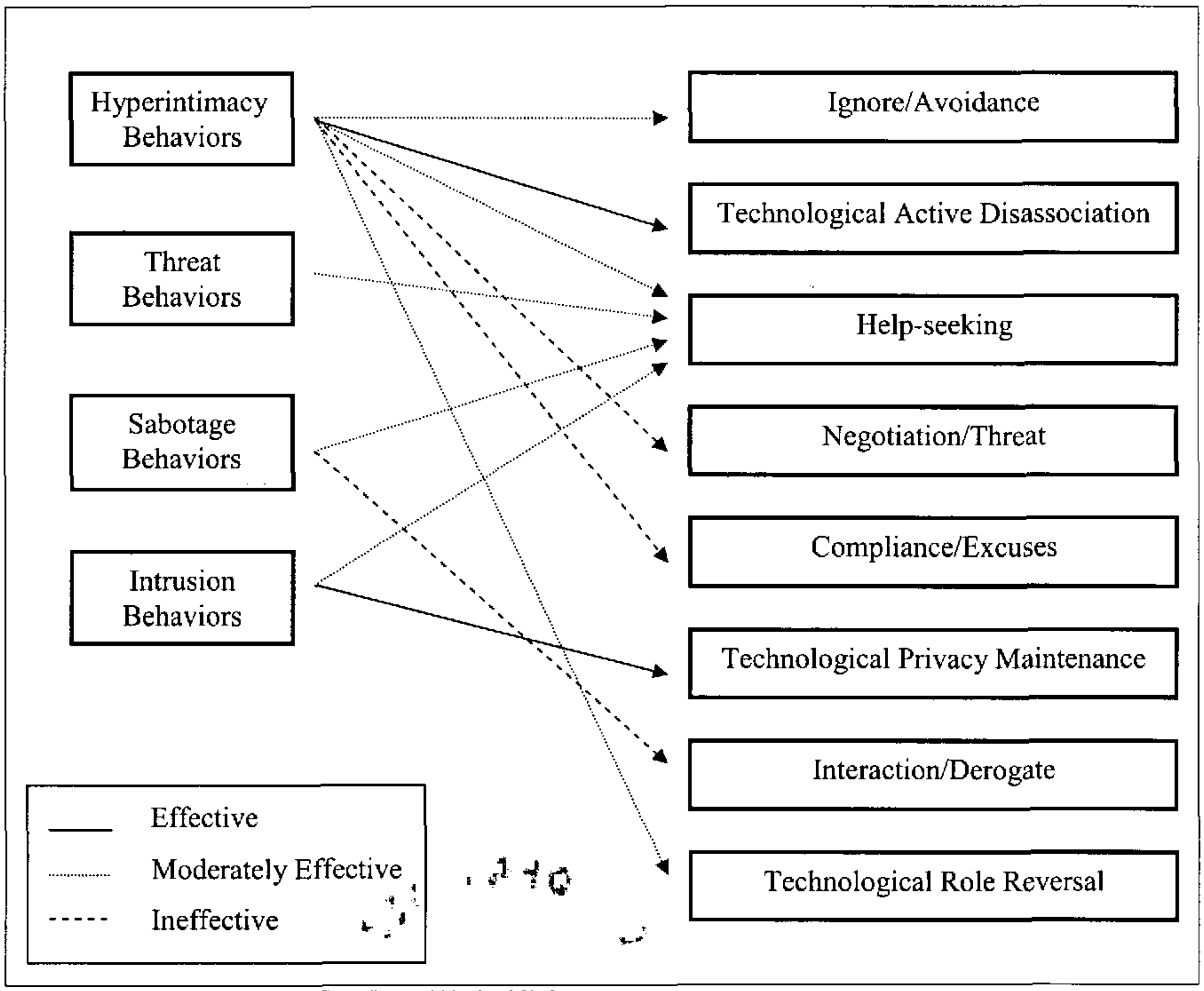
Table 9.

Cross-Tabulations of Observed Frequencies Percentages of Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion Behaviors and Second Response Coping Strategies.

	Ignore/avoidance	Technological active disassociation/ disengagement	Help-seeking	Negotiation/threaten	Compliance/excuses	Technological privacy maintenance	Interaction/derogate	Technological role reversal
Sending tokens of affection	45.5	27.3	4.5	18.2			4.5	
Sending exaggerated messages of affection	30.7	23.1	15.4	15.4	7.7	7.7		
Sending excessively disclosive messages	38.5	15.4	30.7	15.4				
Sending excessively "needy" or demanding messages	13.3	46.2	13.3	6.7	13.3	6.7	6.7	
Sending pornographic/obscene images or messages	20.0	60.0			20.0			
Sending threatening written messages	20.0		40.0	40.0				
Sending sexually harassing messages	25.0	25.0		50.0				
Sending threatening pictures or images			50.0		50.0			
Exposing private information about you to others	100							
Pretending to be someone he or she wasn't		50.0	25.0	25.0				
Sabotaging your private or social reputation	66.6					33.3		
Sabotaging your work/school reputation	50.0		50.0					
Attempting to disable your computer	50.0	25.0	25.0					
Obtaining private information without permission								
Using your computer to get information on others								
Bugging your car, home, or office								
Altering your electronic identity or persona								
Taking over your electronic identity or persona								
Directing others to you in threatening ways		100						

Figure 1.

Interaction between Online ORI Behaviors and Coping Strategies and Their Perceived Degrees of Effectiveness.



APPENDIX A

Agreement to Participate in an
Interpersonal Communication Study

Robert Tokunaga
Primary Investigator

You are invited to participate in a research project on interpersonal communication. The purpose of this study is to identify specific behaviors that you have engaged in following an event of unwanted relational pursuit.

Participation in this study will involve the completion of one survey. In the survey, you will be asked to respond to measures inventorying how many times specific unwanted intrusions have happened to you online, and how you responded to these behaviors. No personal identifying information will be detailed in the results of this research. If you decide to participate, you will be one of a minimum of at least 150 individuals who will participate in this study. It will take you about 40 minutes to complete this entire survey.

The investigator believes there is little risk to participating in this study. There is, however, a possibility that participants may experience slight psychological discomfort when recalling details of the unwanted pursuit. If you feel that you do not want to continue participation, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and there will be no penalty or loss of benefit as a result of withdrawal.

Participating in this research will not directly benefit you. However, the results of this study may help to identify tactics that are used in cases on online pursuit.

All information in this study will remain confidential. By law, however, agencies such as the UH Committee on Human Studies have the authority to review research data. All records associated with this study will be locked in the investigators' office for the duration of this study. All research records will be destroyed upon the completion of this research project.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 539-3955, write to 2540 Maile Way, Spalding Hall 253, Honolulu, Hawai`i 96822, or send an e-mail to uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Should you have any questions regarding this research, please contact Robert Tokunaga at (808) 956-8202 or you send an e-mail to rstokuna@hawaii.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX B

Descriptive Information about the Online Pursuit

Directions: Please answer the following questions about the experience that you talked about in Part I on page 1.

1. What was the sex of the person who was the most persistent unwanted pursuer?
   ____ (1) male ____ (2) female ____ (3) unknown

2. Approximately how long did the online pursuit occur? ____ year(s)
   ____ month(s) ____ day(s)

3. On average, how many times a month did this person do something online to intrude your life in unwanted ways? ____ / month

4. What type of relationship did you have, if any, prior to the time when the unwelcomed pursuit began? (*Select only one*)

_____ Stranger	_____ Acquaintance relationship
_____ Friendship	_____ Family member or relative
_____ Colleague or service relationship	_____ Casual dating relationship
_____ Serious dating relationship	_____ Spouse, or Ex-Spouse

   _____ Other (Please specify :________________________________)

5. How long did the relationship in question #4 last before it became unwanted?
   _____ year(s) _____ month(s) _____ day(s)

6. How long ago did the relationship in question #4 begin? _____ year(s)
   _____ month(s) _____ day(s)

APPENDIX C

Cyber-Obsessional Pursuit

Directions: Over the next nine pages, you will be given a list of different online obsessively intrusive behaviors. You will be asked to circle how many times, if at all, the specific obsessively intrusive behavior has happened to you.

1. Received unwanted tokens of affection online (e.g., poetry, songs, electronic greeting cards, praise, etc.)
2. Received exaggerated messages of affection online (e.g., expressions of affections implying a more intimate relationship than you actually have, etc.)
3. Received excessively disclosive messages online (e.g., inappropriately receiving private information about his/her life, body, family, hobbies, sexual experiences, etc.)
4. Received excessively "needy" or demanding messages online (e.g., assertively requesting you go out on a date, arguing with you to give him/her "another chance," etc.)
5. Received pornographic/obscene images or messages online (e.g., photographs or cartoons of nude people, or people or animals engaging in sexual acts, etc.)
6. Received threatening written messages online (e.g., suggested harming you, your property, family, friends, etc.)
7. Received sexually harassing messages online (e.g., described hypothetical sexual acts between you, made sexually demeaning remarks, etc.)
8. Received threatening pictures or images online (e.g., images of actually or implied mutilation, blood, dismemberment, property destruction, weapons, etc.)
9. Private information about you been exposed to others online (e.g., pursuer sent messages out to others regarding your secrets, embarrassing information, unlisted numbers, etc.)
10. Encountered another pretending to be someone s/he wasn't online (e.g., falsely representing him- or herself as a different person or gender, claiming false identity, status or position, pretending to be you, etc.)
11. Someone sabotaged your private or social reputation online (e.g., spreading rumors about you, your relationships or activities to friends, family, partner, etc.)
12. Someone sabotaged your work/school reputation online (e.g., spreading rumors about you, your relationships, or activities in organizational networks, electronic bulletin boards, etc.)
13. Someone attempted to disable (e.g., sent you a virus, you received too many messages for your system to handle, etc.)
14. Someone obtained private information without permission online (e.g., covertly entered your computer files, accessed chat logs, or the files of a co-worker, friend, or family member, etc.)
15. Someone used your computer to get information on others (e.g., information stolen about your friends, family, co-workers, etc.)
16. Someone bugged your car, home, or office (e.g., pursuer planted a hidden listening or recording device, etc.)

17. Someone altered your electronic identity or persona (e.g., broke into your system and changed your signature, personal information, or how you portray yourself electronically, etc.)
18. Someone taken over your electronic identity or persona (e.g., pursuer represented him or herself to others as you in chat rooms, bulletin boards, pornography or singles sites, etc.)
19. Someone directed others to you in threatening ways online (e.g., pursuer pretended to be you on chat lines and requested risky sex acts, kidnapping fantasies, etc.)

APPENDIX D

Communication Channel Use

<u>Directions</u>: Over the next nine pages, you will be given a list of different online obsessively intrusive behaviors. You will be asked to report which electronic device(s) (e.g., e-mail, IM, MySpace, etc.) were used for each particular behavior.

Legend: Internet Media (*Please use this legend to answer the Internet media related questions below*)					
E	=	E-mail	**IM**	=	Instant Messaging
CR	=	Chat Rooms	**SN**	=	Social Networking Site
NM	=	Newsgroup/Message Board	**PH**	=	Personal Homepage
B	=	Blogs	**O**	=	Other (*Please specify)*

1. What Internet media were used? (*Please refer to the legend above*) ____

APPENDIX E

Coping with Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion

<u>Directions</u>: Over the next nine pages, you will be given a list of different online obsessively intrusive behaviors. You will be asked what actions you took in response to this behavior.

1. In the space provided here, please describe the first action that you took in response to this behavior. ____
2. In the space provided here, please describe the second action, if applicable, that you took in response to this behavior. ____

APPENDIX F

Strategy Effectiveness

<u>Directions</u>: Over the next nine pages, you will be given a list of different online obsessively intrusive behaviors. You will be asked to rate the effectiveness of your response to the online obsessively intrusive behavior.

1. I felt that the first response listed above was effective in stopping the intrusive behavior.
2. I felt that the second response listed above was effective in stopping the intrusive behavior.

APPENDIX G

Internet Experience, Exposure, and Self-Efficacy

<u>Directions</u> Please answer the following Internet-use related questions.

<u>Experience</u>

1. How long have you been using the Internet? ____ (1) less than 2 months ____ (2) 2 to 6 months ____ (3) 6 months to 1 year ____ (4) 1 to 2 years ____ (5) more than 2 years.

<u>Exposure</u>

1. On average, how many hours a day do you spend using the Internet? _____ hours/day

<u>Self-Efficacy</u>

1. I feel confident understanding terms/words relating to Internet hardware.
2. I feel confident understanding terms/words relating to Internet software.
3. I feel confident describing functions of Internet hardware.
4. I feel confident learning advanced skills within a specific Internet program.
5. I feel confident turning to an online discussion group when help is needed.
6. I feel confident using the Internet to gather data.
7. I feel confident trouble shooting Internet problems.
8. I feel confident explaining why a task will not run on the Internet.

APPENDIX H

Demographics

Directions Please answer the following questions about yourself

1. You are ____ (1) male ____ (2) female

2. You are ____ years of age.

3. Which of the following best represents your ethnic or racial background? (*please circle all that apply*)

(1) Caucasian
(2) African American/African
(3) Mexican/Hispanic
(4) Asian
(5) Native American
(6) Pacific Islander
(7) Other ________________________________
(*please specify*)

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