

**Types, Frequency, and Effectiveness of Responses to  
Unwanted Pursuit and Stalking**

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## Abstract

This study investigated the types, frequency, and effectiveness of responses to unwanted pursuit (UP) and stalking after relationship termination. Participants included female and male college students who were either pursued by a former partner or who pursued an ex-partner. Results provided partial support for Cupach and Spitzberg's (2004) typology of responses to UP and stalking. Targets reported engaging in *Moving Away* and *Moving Outward* responses most often. Pursuers reported that targets engaged in "Common" Responses most often. For targets, *Moving Outward* was perceived as the most effective response type. Among pursuers "Common" Responses and *Moving Against* responses were equally effective. Analysis of qualitative data indicate that a combination of target avoidance and the passage of time provides an opportunity for the pursuer to move on from the relationship, which results in the cessation of UP. Results have implications for stalking prevention and intervention.

## Literature Review

- Unwanted pursuit (UP) and stalking after relationship breakup are common (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000)
- Research indicates that targets of UP engage in a wide variety of responses (Brewster, 1998; Bjerregaard, 2000; Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000; Fisher et al., 2000; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Nicastro et al., 2000; Sheridan & Davies, 2001)
- Few studies have examined effectiveness of target responses to UP and stalking
- No research has tested Cupach and Spitzberg's (2004) typology of coping strategies

### *Cupach & Spitzberg (2004) Typology*

Cupach and Spitzberg developed a 5-category typology of coping strategies and tactics that victims use to avoid or end UP and stalking.

- ***Moving With***: Direct interaction with pursuer  
(e.g., confronting the pursuer, communicate behavior is unwanted)
- ***Moving Against***: Attempts to cause material harm to pursuer  
(e.g., take legal action, physically assault pursuer)
- ***Moving Away***: Efforts to avoid pursuer  
(e.g., moving, changing daily routines, getting caller ID)
- ***Moving Inward***: Focusing on repairing/empowering the self  
(e.g., seeking psychotherapy, using drugs/alcohol)
- ***Moving Outward***: Obtaining help from others  
(e.g., seeking assistance from family/friends, hiring security guard)

### Purposes of Current Study

- Assess the frequency and effectiveness of responses
- Explore targets' and pursuers' perceptions of what happened to end the pursuit and advice they would give to targets of UP
- Test Cupach and Spitzberg's (2004) typology of UP and stalking responses

## Methods

### *Participants*

- 296 undergraduate and graduate students
- **158 targets** of unwanted pursuit (95 women, 62 men, 1 sex unreported)
- **138 pursuers** (80 women, 58 men)
- Reported primarily mild forms of UP

Percent	<i>n</i>	Race/Ethnicity
74.3	220	Caucasian
10.5	31	African-American
4.1	12	Asian/Pacific Islander
2.7	8	Hispanic
2.0	6	Other
6.4	19	Information not provided

**Age:** 18 to 42 years ( $M = 20.83$ ,  $SD = 4.41$ )

### Measures

#### Frequency and Effectiveness of Responses to Unwanted Pursuit

- **ORI Coping Responses – Victim Form** (Nicastro et al., 1997)
  - Modified original measure
  - 19 items
  - *Frequency*: 4-point response scale (0 = *Never*; 3 = *Frequently*)
  - *Effectiveness*: 5-point response scale (0 = *Not at all effective*; 4 = *Extremely effective*)
- **ORI Coping Responses – Pursuer Form** (Nicastro et al., 1997)
  - Modified original measure
  - 19 items
  - *Frequency*: 4-point response scale (0 = *Never*; 3 = *Frequently*)
  - *Effectiveness*: 5-point response scale (0 = *Not at all effective*; 4 = *Extremely effective*)

#### What Happened that Led to Cessation of Unwanted Pursuit

- Participants asked to **describe anything that happened that led to the unwanted pursuit stopping**
  - Open-ended responses coded into 14 categories (*see Table 8*)
  - Two raters coded all responses

Percent agreement = 85%, Cohen's Kappa = .83

#### Advice for Those Being Pursued

- Targets and pursuers were asked **“What advice would you give to someone who is being pursued or harassed by a former partner?”**
  - Open-ended responses coded into 12 categories (*see Table 9*)
  - Two raters coded all responses

Percent agreement = 81%, Cohen's Kappa = .78

## Results

### *FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES TO UP*

Results from 2 (Group: Target v. Pursuer) X 2 (Sex: Female v. Male) multivariate analysis of variance:

- Main effect for **group**,  $F(17, 198) = 3.92$ ,  $p < .001$ 
  - Mean frequency ratings by **targets** were higher than ratings by pursuers for:
    - *Tried to ignore*
    - *Emotional appeals*
    - *Assertive verbal confrontation*
    - *Limited interaction*
    - *Avoided interaction*

- Mean frequency ratings by **pursuers** were higher than ratings by targets for:
  - *Gave up*
  - *Got involved [with pursuer] again*

### ***EFFECTIVENESS OF RESPONSES TO UP***

Results from ANOVAs comparing female and male targets' and pursuers' effectiveness ratings:

#### **Pursuers**

- Assigned significantly higher effectiveness ratings than did targets for 6 of 17 responses:
  - *Did nothing*
  - *Minimized the situation*
  - *Emotional appeals*
  - *Assertive verbal confrontation*
  - *Aggressive verbal confrontation*
  - *Became involved again*

#### **Both Targets & Pursuers**

- Males perceived *Aggressive verbal confrontation* as more effective than females

### ***TEST OF CUPACH AND SPITZBERG'S (2004) TYPOLOGY***

Results of principal components analyses of frequency responses, using orthogonal rotation:

#### **Targets: Four-factor solution**

Table 1: ***Factor Loadings for Response Type for Targets (n = 140)***

<b>Item</b>	<b><i>Moving Against</i></b>	<b><i>Moving With</i></b>	<b><i>Moving Away</i></b>	<b><i>Moving Outward</i></b>
Self-protection	.76			
Responded with physical aggression	.76			
Took legal action	.70			
Made threats	.67			
Involved again		.71		
Gave up		.66		
Limited interaction			.75	
Tried to ignore			.65	
Avoided interaction			.63	
Did nothing			.50	
Minimized the situation			.51	
Sought emotional Support				.72
Acted nicely				.63
Sought advice				.63

*Note:* 51.2% variance accounted for

**Pursuers: Two-factor solution**Table 2: *Factor Loadings for Response Type for Pursuers (n = 72)*

<b>Item</b>	<b>“Common” Responses*</b>	<b>Moving Against</b>
Aggressive verbal confrontation	.73	
Limited interaction	.68	
Minimized the situation	.60	
Verbal warnings	.59	
Tried to ignore	.58	
Got involved again	.55	
Gave up	.58	
Avoided interaction	.47	
Did nothing	.46	
Made threats		.86
Responded with physical aggression		.78
Self-protection		.61

Note: 38% of variance accounted for

\*“Common” Responses included less active/aggressive responses

**FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE FACTORS**

- Mixed-design ANOVAs conducted with mean frequency response scores and sex of participant as factors

**Targets**

- Main effect for **response type**,  $F(3, 150) = 190.98, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .56$
- Main effect for **sex**,  $F(1, 152) = 9.15, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$
- **Sex X response type** interaction,  $F(1, 152) = 3.98, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$

Post-hoc paired *t*-tests for response type:

- *Moving Away* used more often than *Moving With*,  $t(153) = 12.28, p < .001$ , and *Moving Against*,  $t(153) = 24.42, p < .001$
- *Moving Outward* used more often than *Moving With*,  $t(153) = 12.58, p < .001$ , and *Moving Against*,  $t(153) = 20.41, p < .001$
- *Moving With* used more often than *Moving Against*,  $t(153) = 6.66, p < .001$
- *Moving Away* and *Moving Outward* were not different from one another

Table 3: *Frequency Ratings for Targets*

<b>Response Factor</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<i>Moving Away</i>	1.61	.70
<i>Moving Outward</i>	1.60	.83
<i>Moving With</i>	.63	.80
<i>Moving Against</i>	.17	.41

**Sex differences**

- Women’s scores were higher than men’s on *Moving Outward*,  $t(153) = 3.93, p < .001$ , and *Moving Against*,  $t(152) = 2.22, p < .05$

**Pursuers**

- Main effect for **response type**,  $F(1, 127) = 204.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .62$ 
    - “Common” Responses were more frequent than *Moving Against* responses
  - Main effect for **sex**,  $F(1, 127) = 8.34$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$
  - **Sex X response type** interaction,  $F(1, 152) = 3.98$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$
- Post-hoc independent *t*-tests
- Women had higher frequency of response means than men for “Common” Responses,  $t(127) = 3.10$ ,  $p < .01$
  - No sex difference for *Moving Against*

Table 4. *Frequency Ratings for Pursuers*

Response Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
“Common” Responses	.96	.63
Moving Against	.13	.39

Table 5: *Frequency of Targets’ Use of Response Types and of Pursuers’ Perceptions of Targets’ Responses*

Response Factor	Targets			
	Females		Males	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
<i>Moving Against</i>	37.6	93	11.5	61
<i>Moving With</i>	53.8	93	50.8	61
<i>Moving Away</i>	100.0	95	96.7	61
<i>Moving Outward</i>	96.8	94	95.1	61

  

Response Factor	Pursuers			
	Females		Males	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
“Common” Responses	100.0	80	89.5	57
<i>Moving Against</i>	15.8	76	17.0	53

**EFFECTIVENESS OF RESPONSE FACTORS**

We calculated mean effectiveness scores using the ratings for items that loaded on the target and pursuer response factors.

**Targets**

- Conducted six mixed design ANOVAs with pairs of mean effectiveness scores to maximize *n* for comparisons
- One significant ANOVA
  - *Moving Outward* perceived as more effective than *Moving With*,  $F(1, 71) = 5.81$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$

Table 6. *Mean Effectiveness Ratings for Targets*

Response Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Moving Away</i>	1.76	.83
<i>Moving Outward</i>	1.89	.92
<i>Moving With</i>	1.45	1.41
<i>Moving Against</i>	1.59	1.32

**Pursuers**

A mixed design ANOVA revealed no effects for response effectiveness, sex, or the interaction of effectiveness and sex

Table 7. Frequency Ratings for Pursuers

Response Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
“Common” Responses	2.15	.81
Moving Against	1.92	1.39

**PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT HAPPENED TO END THE PURSUIT****Targets**

- Most likely to cite *avoidance* and *relocation*
- Least likely to mention that they *got back together* and *stayed friends*

**Pursuers**

- Most likely to say that they realized the *target was not “the one”* or that they *started a new relationship*.

**Comparing Responses from Targets and Pursuers**

- Analyzed participants’ responses using Chi-Square tests
- Significant differences for 7 of the 14 categories

Table 8: *What Happened to End the Pursuit*

	Targets		Pursuers		$\chi^2$
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Avoidance	24	25.8	2	2.7	16.73***
Relocation	24	25.8	9	12.2	4.84*
Pursuer started new relationship	21	22.6	26	35.1	3.21
Communication	19	20.4	4	5.4	7.83**
Target started new relationship	14	15.1	11	14.9	.00
Aggressive/hostile confrontation	10	10.8	0	0	8.46**
Sought/received advice, help, protection from family/friends	8	8.6	1	1.4	4.25*
Realized target was not “the one”	6	6.5	33	44.6	33.50***
Passage of time	5	5.4	5	6.8	.14
Legal intervention	4	4.3	0	0	3.26
Sought counseling	2	2.2	0	0	1.61
Be nice, supportive	2	2.2	1	1.4	.15
Stayed friends	1	1.1	4	5.4	2.66
Got back together	0	0	4	5.4	5.15*

Note: For comparisons with cell sizes less than 5, Fisher’s Exact tests results were the same as Pearson Chi-Square results.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**PARTICIPANT’S ADVICE FOR TARGETS OF UP****Targets**

- Most likely to recommend *avoidance* or *communication*
- Least likely to recommend *aggressive confrontation* or *staying friends*

**Pursuers**

- Most likely to recommend *communication* or *avoidance*
- Few likely to recommend *relocation*, *seeking counseling*, *aggressive confrontation*

Analysis of differences between Targets' and Pursuers' Advice

- Chi-Square tests revealed **three significant results** (see Table 9)
  - **Targets** more likely to recommend *legal intervention* and *do not give in*
  - **Pursuers** more likely to recommend *communication*

Table 9: *Advice Participants Would Give to Targets of Unwanted Pursuit*

Category	Targets		Pursuers		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Avoid	39	30.2	25	23.6	1.30
Communication	37	28.7	50	47.2	8.53**
Legal intervention	34	26.4	16	15.1	4.41*
Do not give in	20	15.5	4	3.8	8.73**
Seek/receive advice	16	12.4	10	9.4	.52
Be nice, supportive	11	8.5	15	14.2	1.87
Passage of time	8	6.2	3	2.8	1.48
Don't know what advice to give	7	5.4	2	1.9	1.98
Seek counseling	6	4.7	2	1.9	1.35
Relocate	6	4.7	2	1.9	1.35
Stay friends	3	2.3	3	2.8	.06
Aggressive/hostile confrontation	2	1.6	2	1.9	.04

Note: For comparisons with cell sizes less than 5, Fisher's Exact tests results were the same as Pearson Chi-Square test results.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**Discussion & Conclusions****CUPACH AND SPITZBERG'S (2004) TYPOLOGY****Targets**

- Four factors emerged that were characteristic of *Moving Against*, *Moving With*, *Moving Away*, and *Moving Outward*
- Our instrument did not ask about several *Moving Inward* behaviors, so the data are unlikely to reveal this factor

**Pursuers**

- Analyses yielded two factors: "*Common*" Responses and *Moving Against*
- Notably, the three items that loaded on the *Moving Against* factor for pursuers also loaded on the same factor for targets
- Pursuers' views of target responses are less differentiated; pursuers may not be fully aware of all measures targets have taken to stop the pursuit

**FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES**Individual responses

- Both targets and pursuers rated *Acted nicely* as the most common target response to UP and stalking

- Perhaps because targets are former romantic partners of the pursuers, there is a strong desire not to further exacerbate the rejected partner's hurt feelings
- Targets and pursuers also agreed that *Took legal action* was a very infrequent response
- Targets viewed themselves as more active in their efforts to stop the UP and perhaps were engaging in avoidance or support seeking behaviors that pursuers did not observe, leading pursuers to see their targets as giving up

#### Unwanted Pursuit Factors

#### **Targets**

- *Moving Away* and *Moving Outward* were both frequently reported response types and were reported more often than *Moving With* and *Moving Against*
- The least frequently reported response type was *Moving Against*

#### **Pursuers**

- Reported that targets engaged in *Common* Responses more frequently than *Moving Against* tactics

### ***EFFECTIVENESS OF RESPONSES***

#### Individual responses

- Although an infrequent response, female targets and pursuers rated *Took legal action* as the most effective and male targets rated it as the second most effective response
- Targets also rated *Made geographic change* as highly effective
- Male pursuers rated *Made threats* and *Aggressive verbal confrontation* as most effective
- These results suggest that the most active and even dramatic responses are seen as most effective
- Pursuers tend to view targets' responses as more effective than targets do
- Pursuers may be affected by targets' responses even before they stop the UP
- Targets may see the effect only when the pursuer leaves them alone and may assume that many of their efforts are futile
- Pursuers may see the final outcome as a result of a process in which targets' behaviors have a cumulative impact

#### Unwanted Pursuit Factors

#### **Targets**

- *Moving Outward* perceived as the most effective response and more effective than *Moving With*
- When engaging in *Moving Outward* responses, targets mobilize "a social network that can make it difficult for the pursuer to enact a campaign of pursuit" (p. 161; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004)
- Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) state that *Moving With* is not an effective response, and can reinforce UP by giving the pursuer hope for reconciliation

#### **Pursuers**

- No differences in effectiveness ratings for *Common* Responses and *Moving Against*

### ***WHAT HAPPENED TO STOP THE PURSUIT***

- The most common responses were *avoidance* and *relocation* (of either target or pursuer)
- Avoiding the pursuer is a popular response and, from the target's perspective, a relatively effective one
- *Made geographic change* was infrequently endorsed (although considered highly effective)
- Pursuers more likely than targets to report that they stopped their pursuit because they *realized the target was not "the one"* or because the pursuer and target *resumed their relationship*
- Pursuers seem to be asserting that they stopped when they "got over" the target and were ready to move on
- It is possible that the *Moving Away* responses helped the pursuers move on by making their targets less accessible (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004)

**ADVICE PARTICIPANTS WOULD GIVE TO TARGETS OF UP**

- The two most common responses to what advice they would give to targets were the same for targets and pursuers: *Avoidance* and *communication*
- Pursuers were more likely to mention *communication* (47.2%) than targets (28.7%)
  - This supports the view that during the breakup of a relationship, the person ending the relationship may not be clear and firm in their communication of their intention
  - Nearly half of the pursuers would advise targets to *be direct, explain their intentions, and communicate clearly*
- Targets were significantly more likely than pursuers to recommend *legal intervention*
  - More than 25% of targets advised legal intervention, whereas only 4.3% cited it as a reason the UP ended and 6.5% reported using it as a coping response
  - Target's qualitative responses indicate that many suggested other strategies first or qualified this advice with "if it is serious"
- 15% of pursuers also suggest *legal intervention* as an advisable response

**Limitations**

- The data are self reported and retrospective
- Very little effectiveness data for some responses because they were infrequently used
- Sample limited to college students who were formerly in a heterosexual relationship with their target or pursuer

**Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Practice**

- Targets and pursuers perceived all responses except the most extreme, such as *taking legal action* and making a *geographical change*, as relatively ineffective
- Targets rated *Moving Outward* to be the most effective type of response, suggesting that support from family, friends, and others is useful to targets of UP
- Qualitative data for targets revealed that avoidance and relocation were the most common reasons for the cessation of pursuit
  - In contrast, pursuers most often cited *realizing the target was not "the one" or getting into a new relationship*
- Results suggest that a combination of target avoidance and the passage of time provides an opportunity for the pursuer to move on from the relationship, which will result in the cessation of UP
- Targets should be encouraged to be clear and direct with their ex-partners that the relationship is truly over
- *Legal intervention* and *geographic changes* can be effective if the situation warrants such measures
- Targets should be informed that pursuers may regard the target's responses as effective, even when targets feel they have no impact

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