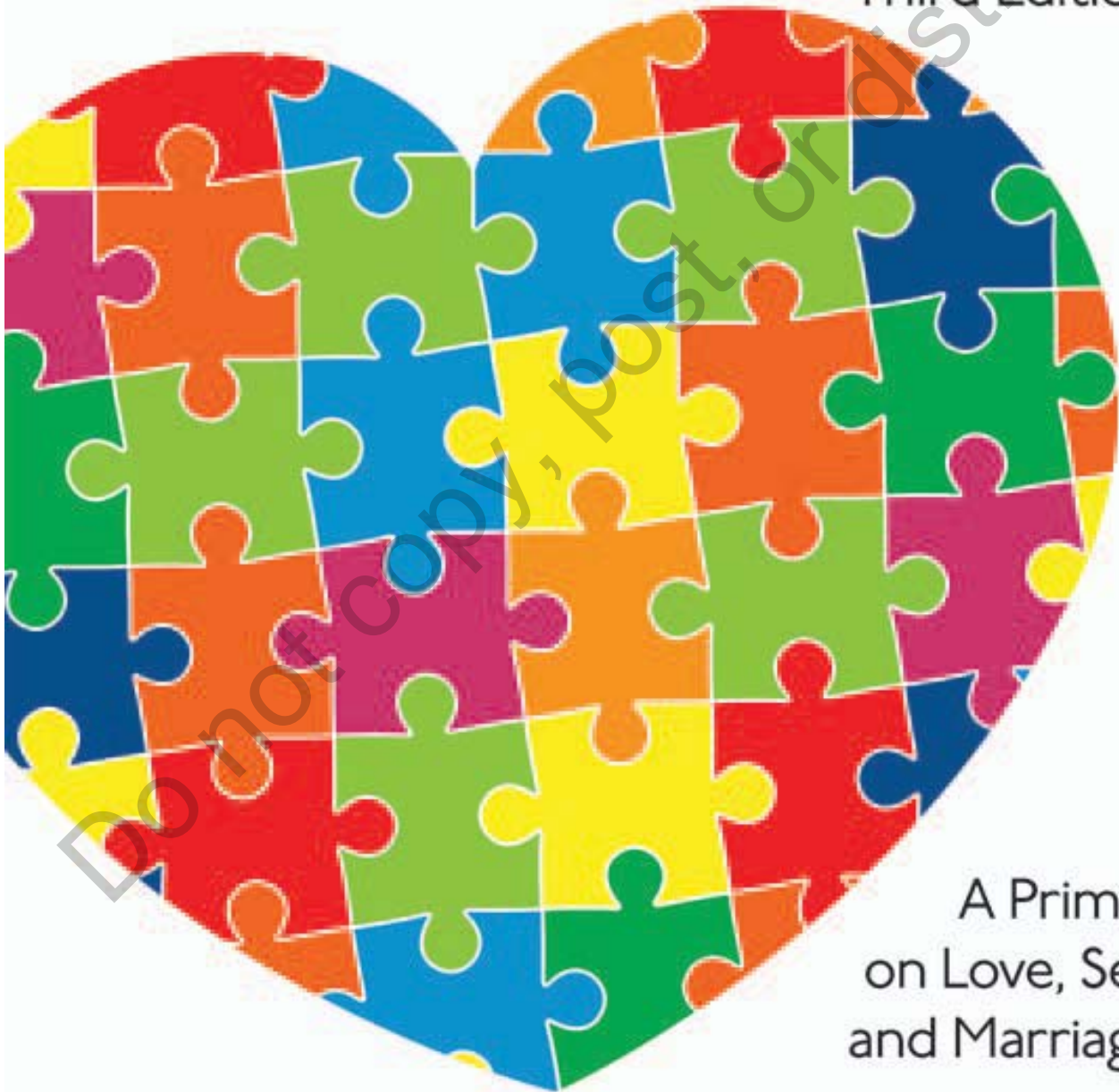


THE MATING GAME

Third Edition



A Primer
on Love, Sex,
and Marriage

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Love Gone Bad

Problematic Aspects of Love



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Summary

Love is associated with a variety of positive events. For example, the experience of loving another person may allow us to feel intimacy, contentment, and satisfaction; to experience passion, joy, and excitement; and to provide and receive emotional and social support. All of

these experiences, in turn, can enhance and promote our psychological and even our physical well-being. But there is another side to love as well—a dangerous, destructive, and problematic side that is associated with dysfunction, negative emotion, and other harmful outcomes. This chapter examines the “dark” side of love.

❖ UNREQUITED PASSIONATE LOVE: WHEN THE ONE WE LOVE DOES NOT LOVE US

The very first time I fell in love was when I was a freshman in college and it was unrequited—she never knew, or if she did, she probably thought I had a slight crush on her. I never showed my real feelings to her. But I loved her so much. I would spend my day hoping for a glimpse of her, and when I did see her, I would be overcome with these waves of longing. I spent more time daydreaming and creating these elaborate romantic scenarios in my mind than I did studying for all my classes combined. Nothing came of it, but I look back on that experience with great fondness—it was my first love and it was wonderful.

—40-year-old man interviewed by the author

In high school, I was friends with a boy who was kind of awkward and unattractive, not very popular. But I was nice to him, because he sat next to me in class and he was smart and actually a pretty decent guy. One day, he passed me a note before class asking me out—he said he loved me, and he listed all the ways I’d shown that I felt the same way about him, and he basically said that because of this I was obligated to go out with him. I was embarrassed and kind of pissed off, because all I had been doing was being nice. I decided to talk with him after class and it was really awkward—I didn’t want to hurt his feelings or make him feel bad, but at the same time it’s really annoying to have your innocent, friendly behaviors completely misinterpreted and then used against you. I had to work really hard to maintain a friendly relationship with him after that. Overall, it was not a very pleasant experience for me (I’m sure it wasn’t fun for him, either, but honestly, I was the one who had to fix things—he did not make it easy for me).

—27-year-old woman interviewed by the author

Folk wisdom (actually, Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson) tells us that “it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” And perhaps this is sound advice. After all, love is usually associated with a wonderful and rewarding mix of positive outcomes, events, and feelings. However, passionate love—particularly when it is *unrequited* or not reciprocated by the beloved—has the potential to be just as strongly associated with negative outcomes.

In one of the first studies to attempt to explore the dynamics of unrequited love, Roy Baumeister, Sara Wotman, and Arlene Stillwell (1993) asked 71 people who had been in this situation to write autobiographical accounts of their experiences as would-be suitors and rejectors. The results indicated that unrequited lovers experienced a panoply of both positive and negative emotions. Many (44%) would-be suitors reported that their unreciprocated passion caused them pain, suffering, and disappointment; jealousy and anger (which were usually directed at the loved one's chosen partner); and a sense of frustration. Similarly, 22% experienced worries and fears about rejection. In addition to these unpleasant experiences, however, the lovelorn suitors also reported many pleasant emotional outcomes; in fact, positive feelings far outweighed negative ones in the accounts they gave of their experience. For example, happiness, excitement, the blissful anticipation of seeing the beloved, sheer elation at the state of being in love, and other positive emotions were reported by the majority (98%) of would-be suitors. More than half (53%) also looked back upon their unrequited love experiences with some degree of positive feeling. In explaining this finding, the researchers noted the following:

Apparently, positive feelings can be remembered in a positive way even if the memory is linked to suffering and disappointment. People remember the warmth of their feelings for another person, and the memory is at least somewhat pleasant. Some of our participants expressed gladness at being able to preserve the friendship that could have been jeopardized if their romantic overtures had become too insistent. Others simply treasured the memory or retained a soft spot in their heart for the one they loved. (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992, p. 60)

When the researchers examined the experiences reported by the rejectors, however, they found little evidence of positive outcomes. Specifically, although roughly one fourth of the rejectors reported feeling flattered by the attention of their potential lovers, the majority also viewed these unwanted advances as annoying (51%), felt uncomfortable about delivering rejection messages (61%), and experienced a host of negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and resentment (70%). In addition, their recollections of the entire experience were far less suffused with warmth, with only 33% indicating any positive affect in retrospect. The researchers concluded:

Unlike the would-be lover, it was hard for the rejector to feel that his or her life had been enriched by this experience. For many, apparently, it was a useless and pointless set of aggravations. They were forced to

respond to a situation they never wanted, and these responses were difficult for them, bringing uncertainty, guilt, aggravation, all of which went for naught. For some, a valued friendship was destroyed in the bargain. Thus they had plenty to resent and regret. (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992, p. 62)

Other researchers have reported similar findings (e.g., Sinclair & Frieze, 2005). Unrequited love clearly is an emotionally difficult experience for both the rejector and the would-be suitor. Unfortunately, it also is a common event in the lives of adolescents and young adults, particularly men (Hill, Blakemore, & Drumm, 1997), and there is no easy way to recover from romantic rejection. Time is, perhaps, the only cure.

❖ RELATIONAL STALKING: WHEN ROMANTIC INTEREST BECOMES OBSESSION

At first I thought it was sort of cute and romantic that he wanted to be with me all the time. He would ask me to give him a detailed account of my day, all the places I went, the people I talked with, the things I did. . . . I felt flattered that I had a boyfriend who loved me so much. But then it got out of hand. I mean, he wouldn't even let me drive to the store by myself! After we broke up, he began calling me at home, usually several times a night. He also started calling me at work, which made things difficult for me with my boss. So I stopped taking his calls at work and I changed to an unlisted number at home. I think what really made me realize that I needed to take some action and tell people what was going on was when he started spying on me. One morning, I was standing by the window looking outside and I noticed his car. He was just sitting there, watching me. I have no idea how long he had been there, but it really scared me. I felt trapped and violated.

—32-year-old woman interviewed by the author

I met a woman I thought I liked. She was attractive, bright, seemed to have a good sense of humor and to be stable and well grounded. We went out on a couple of dates and it turned out that we didn't have that much in common, so I didn't pursue the relationship. No big breakup or anything, we just weren't suited to each other. That should have been the end of it, but it wasn't. She lived about 10 miles from me, and she would drive over to my neighborhood, park in front of my house, and then go jogging around the block for what seemed like hours. I would see her as she passed my house again and again, every single day. She began to eat in the local restaurants I frequented. She called my house and left messages about getting together to "work things out." She was everywhere I went and she did her best to invade every single moment of my day. My friends laughed about it and made jokes about what a

lucky guy I was to have this woman chasing after me, but believe me it wasn't funny. Fortunately, I relocated due to my job and I haven't seen her since.

—46-year-old man interviewed by the author

As we have seen, most people at some time or another become attracted to or fall in love with individuals who do not reciprocate their feelings. And although these experiences often are not pleasant, the majority of men and women manage to deal with them. Sometimes, however, individuals respond to unrequited love or unreciprocated passion with obsessive thinking and inappropriate (and even violent) behavior (Meloy, 1989; Mintz, 1980; Sinclair & Frieze, 2002).

Relational stalking is a harmful behavioral syndrome that involves one person (the pursuer or stalker) desiring and actively attempting to create or obtain an intimate relationship with another person (the target or victim) who either does not want this particular kind of relationship or who wants no relationship at all (see Emerson, Ferris, & Gardner, 1998; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003). This phenomenon also has been called *obsessive relational intrusion* or ORI (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998), *domestic stalking* (Dunn, 1999), and *intimate partner stalking* (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Relational stalking behavior has three characteristic features: (1) intentional and persistent contact (or attempted contact) by the pursuer that is (2) unwanted and (3) psychologically aversive (unpleasant or offensive) to the recipient. Beginning with California in 1991, every state and district in the United States has enacted antistalking laws designed to protect victims and punish offenders. Although the specifics of these laws vary widely (as does the extent to which they are enforced), relational stalking generally becomes a crime when it poses a credible threat that places the recipient in reasonable fear for his or her safety (see Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Meloy, 2007).

Surveys of college and community samples in the United States and other countries (e.g., Italy, Germany) reveal that relational stalking is disturbingly common, with rates ranging from 12% to 40% and with women at greater risk than men for this type of victimization (e.g., Amar & Alexy, 2010; Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; Maran, Varetto, Zedda, & Munari, 2014; Sheridan, Gillett, & Davies, 2002; Spitzberg, Cupach, & Ciceraro, 2010; Turmanis & Brown, 2006). In addition, sizeable numbers of men and women report having been the target of unwanted pursuit or “pre-stalking” behaviors including receiving unwanted letters, notes, phone calls, visits, or gifts, or being followed or watched (Herold, Mantle, & Zemitis, 1979; Jason, Reichler, Easton, Neal, & Wilson, 1984; Leonard et al., 1993; Roscoe, Strouse, & Goodwin, 1994). Most

victims of stalking are acquainted with their pursuers; in fact, former romantic partners make up the largest proportion of relational stalkers (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Factors Associated With Relational Stalking

What factors contribute to relational stalking? There is some evidence that personality traits (e.g., neuroticism) and disorders (e.g., narcissistic, borderline, and other Cluster B disorders), social skills deficits, and other individual-level factors are associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in unwanted pursuit behavior (Ménard & Pincus, 2012; Tassy & Winstead, 2014; for reviews, see Cupach & Spitzberg, 2008, and Miller, 2012). Relational factors, however, appear to play the most important role. For example, relational stalking may emerge from the normal courtship process—in particular, from the indirect manner in which relationship initiation is typically enacted. Recall from Chapter 2 that most people rely on indirect, nonverbal cues to convey attraction and signal romantic interest to another person. These indirect behaviors—eye contact, smiling, and the like—may pass unnoticed by the target (or may be noticed but not interpreted as a meaningful reflection of romantic interest). Consequently, the target may fail to clearly communicate his or her acceptance or rejection of the overture. And, in the absence of any unequivocal response one way or the other, the pursuer may conclude that the target reciprocates his or her feelings and may persist in (or even escalate) the pursuit behavior. Indeed, research conducted with college student samples reveals that men and women often engage in persistent, unwanted pursuit or “pre-stalking” behaviors during the early stages of courtship (Sinclair & Frieze, 2002; Williams & Frieze, 2005) as well as after the unwanted termination of a romantic relationship (Dutton & Winstead, 2006), and they often fail to accurately perceive the negative impact that their behavior has on the targets of their desire (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005; also see Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000).

Similarly, pursuers often seek to promote their connection with a target through the same interpersonal processes that characterize normal courtship and relationship development. For example, the development of most romantic relationships is marked by reciprocal and progressively deeper levels of self-disclosure and intimacy, social exchange, interdependence, and commitment (see Chapter 3). During interactions with the target, the pursuer may engage in behaviors that presumably convey and reflect these processes; from the pursuer’s perspective, he or she is simply following the path of natural

relationship progression. However, in a relational stalking situation, the self-disclosure that occurs typically is one-sided, premature, and excessive (i.e., too much, too personal, too nonreciprocal). Additionally, extreme possessiveness takes the place of closeness, and familiarity and interdependence are created through violations of privacy rather than through the mutual exchanges that characterize normal relationship development. In sum:

ORI [stalking] relationships are characterized by forms of intimacy that are distorted, exaggerated, accelerated, more intense, and more desperate, compared to the normal prototype for developing intimacy. Although the same dimensions of intimacy that characterize normal relations apply to ORI [stalking] relations, their manifestations are more forced, fabricated, prematurely escalated, and disinhibited. (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002, p. 206)

The environmental or sociocultural context also may contribute to relational stalking. As discussed in Chapter 2, most men and women believe that it is appropriate for men to initiate dates and actively pursue dating opportunities; given this normative belief, it may be difficult for a man to recognize when his initiation behavior has become inappropriately persistent and threatening. Similarly, a commonly held romantic assumption (and one that is frequently portrayed in movies, literature, and other media) is that “persistence pays.” On screen and in the pages of novels, suitors often persist in—and are rewarded for—their efforts to gain attention and affection from a potential mate, and even partners who have ended a relationship sometimes “come around” and renew their love and their commitment to one another (see such early classics as *The Philadelphia Story* [1940] and *His Girl Friday* [1940], as well as a host of more contemporary films including *The Parent Trap* [1961, 1998], *Say Anything* [1989], *Sense and Sensibility* [1995], *Beastly* [2011], and *Chef* [2013], to name a few). Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that a would-be lover would make repeated attempts to woo a potential or former partner—and would view these actions in a positive light.

By making it difficult for both pursuers and targets to recognize when pursuit behaviors have crossed out of the realm of “normal courtship,” these contextual factors—the ambiguity that often surrounds relationship initiation, the occurrence of interpersonal processes that characterize normal relationship progression, and the cultural glorification of persistence in the face of romantic disinterest or rejection—create a situation that is conducive to relational stalking.

Types of Pursuit or Stalking Behavior

Data gathered by communication scholars William Cupach and Brian Spitzberg (1997, 1998, 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1996, 2002) and others (e.g., Brewster, 2003; Geistman, Smith, Lambert, & Cluse-Tolar, 2013; Turmanis & Brown, 2006) reveal that pursuers use a variety of tactics to promote relationships with their unwilling targets. Some of these strategies are *mildly intrusive and invasive*, including leaving repeated messages, giving gifts and other tokens of affection, unexpectedly “showing up” at places frequented by the target, using third parties to obtain information about the target, and making exaggerated expressions of devotion or affection. Many of these milder forms of pursuit resemble variations of flirting behavior, and most targets consider them annoying but not unduly bothersome or frightening. Examples of *moderately intrusive and invasive* behaviors include surveillance of the target (e.g., following, monitoring, watching, or spying on the target, driving by the target’s home or place of work), trespassing, stealing information or property, intentionally sabotaging the target’s reputation, and intruding on the target’s friends and family. These forms of harassment are much more distressing to the target and often constitute criminal acts (for example, it is illegal to remove mail from a person’s mailbox, to steal, damage, or deface someone’s private property, and so forth). *Extremely intrusive or invasive* tactics are those that are most likely to induce high levels of fear (in which case the behaviors would legally constitute stalking); examples of these behaviors include threatening to harm the target or his or her loved ones, physically restraining or assaulting the target, injuring or killing the target’s pet(s), coercing or forcing the target to engage in sexual activities, damaging the target’s property, and invading the target’s home or work.

The milder forms of intrusive behavior are the most frequently experienced. For example, approximately 70% of the participants in Spitzberg and Cupach’s studies, 75% of the participants in criminologist Mary Brewster’s (2003) study, and over 40% of the participants in a recent study conducted by James Geistman and colleagues (2013) reported that their pursuer engaged in the following activities:

- Repeatedly called them on the phone
- Sent letters or gifts
- Asked them if they were seeing someone romantically
- Called and hung up without speaking
- Begged them for another chance

- Watched or stared at them from a distance
- Visited their workplace, school, or university
- Made exaggerated claims about his or her affection
- Gossiped or bragged about the supposed relationship with others

About 10% to 40% of victims reported that their pursuer had engaged in the following less common, but significantly more invasive and threatening, behaviors:

- Threatening to physically or sexually assault the target
- Physically or sexually assaulting the target
- Following the target from place to place
- Damaging or stealing the target's property or possessions
- Trespassing
- Breaking into the target's home or apartment
- Exposing himself or herself to the target
- Taking photos without the target's knowledge or consent
- Recording conversations without the target's consent

Cyberstalking: A Growing Problem

I had to remove my Facebook profile because of my ex. I would be at a restaurant or a club, and he would show up. When I'd go online in the morning or late at night, my phone would immediately start ringing and it would be him. It was like he knew where and what I was doing all the time. I finally realized that he was using Facebook to keep track of me. He knew when to call because he could see that I was online, and he knew where I was because I would post something. Even changing my privacy settings didn't work because he was also following my friends.

—22-year-old woman interviewed by the author

Not surprisingly, given the increased reliance on computer-mediated forms of communication and the proliferation of social networking sites, pursuers are increasingly using online forums to contact, surveil, intrude upon, and attempt to force intimacy from the targets of their obsession. Surveys of college samples reveal that approximately 40% have experienced *cyberstalking* victimization (Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2012), and the majority (about 75%) of

pursuers report utilizing both face-to-face and online methods of intrusion and invasion (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty, 2011).

Many of these online methods of pursuit mimic their face-to-face counterparts—and have the advantage (from the pursuers' perspective) of not being limited by physical boundaries. In an analysis of Facebook functionality, for example, researchers Kasey Chaulk and Tim Jones (2011) noted that cyber pursuers can easily engage in a multitude of invasive and intrusive activities, including:

- Leaving unwanted gifts (e.g., using Facebook applications to send presents, flowers, or other unwanted objects)
- Leaving unwanted messages (e.g., using chat to send messages, e-mailing, posting on the target's wall, messaging/e-mailing/posting on the walls of target's friends or family)
- Making exaggerated displays of affection ("poking" the target, sending kisses/hugs/caresses or any other form of intimate contact using Facebook applications)
- Watching and monitoring the target (e.g., joining and visiting the same groups/events as the target, adding the same applications, reading the target's feed and wall conversations, checking the target's profile for updates, using Facebook to keep "tabs" on the target)
- Intruding on the target and his or her friends, family, or coworkers (e.g., sending friend requests, commenting on posts, photos, or conversations)
- Damaging the target's reputation (e.g., posting inappropriate or unflattering pictures of the target, spreading false rumors about the target on various walls or via chat or e-mail)
- Following the target from place to place (e.g., showing up at physical locations or events the target has mentioned or RSVP'd to on Facebook)
- Sending threatening objects (e.g., sending pornographic, bizarre, or sinister gifts, photos, or applications)

These researchers found evidence that Facebook users do, in fact, engage in a significant amount of cyberpursuit. Almost two thirds of their participants (approximately 65%) acknowledged using Facebook to contact, surveil, and seek continued intimacy from their ex-partners (e.g., by sending messages, posting on the ex's wall, visiting groups the ex has joined, checking out the events the ex will be attending and

friends the ex has recently added, looking at photos the ex has posted or that have been posted of the ex, reading the ex's mini-feed, sending "friend" requests to the ex).

The ready access to personal information that Facebook and other online social networking sites provide appears to have both positive and negative consequences—on the one hand, such sites allow people to form and maintain healthy connections with loved and valued partners; on the other hand, they provide a fertile ground for surveillance and harassment.

Responses to Victimization

Given the range of invasive and threatening actions in which pursuers commonly engage, it is hardly surprising that victims of relational stalking often experience a number of negative emotional reactions, including fear, anxiety, paranoia, depression, self-blame, and anger (e.g., Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002; Mullen & Pathé, 1994; Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998; Wallace & Silverman, 1996). In addition, they may change their lifestyle or activity patterns, develop a heightened distrust of others, and exhibit sleeplessness, illness, and other physical symptoms (Amar, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001). Victims often face another difficult challenge—convincing others that they are, in fact, being stalked (see Leitz-Spitz, 2003). Because stalking emerges most commonly from preexisting relationships, other people may blame the victim for contributing to the situation (e.g., by "leading" the stalker on or not sufficiently communicating disinterest), may minimize the extent of the threat, and may disbelieve the victim's claims of harassment (Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw, & Patel, 2003). The quotations below illustrate this all-too-common reality:

My stalker was my ex-boyfriend, and the behavior went on for over a year and got to the point where I ended up with a restraining order against him. The stalking was horrible, but what hurt me the most was the fact that my best friend didn't truly believe me, not deep down. She claimed she did, but she would change the subject, she laughed off the phone calls, texts, gifts, spying, threats, and she even told me once that she thought I'd overreacted and that if I'd just get back together with [name deleted] things would "go back to normal."

—18-year-old woman interviewed by the author

One of the biggest problems I faced was getting my boss to take the situation seriously. It was only when the person (a coworker) made threats in front of witnesses on multiple occasions and I provided proof of this in the form of

signed statements and video documentation that he took any action. And the action he took was to simply reassign the person to another department. What a joke. I ended up leaving because the harassment started up again not long after the reassignment.

—38-year-old man interviewed by the author

Scientists have identified several ways in which targets attempt to deal with relational stalking (Amar & Alexy, 2010; Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009; de Becker, 1999; Dutton & Winstead, 2011; Pathé, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998, 2001). The single most common reaction is *avoidance*—most targets simply ignore the situation or make no response at all. The prevalence of this particular reaction may reflect the fact that many men and women lack a clear script for responding to unwanted romantic attention. According to Baumeister and his colleagues (1993), this “scriptlessness” produces feelings of confusion and self-blame on the part of the target and thus contributes to a passive avoidance of the pursuer or the situation. Research reveals that targets also may employ *direct confrontation*, which includes such actions as admonishing or attempting to reason with the pursuer and requesting that he or she refrain from further contact. *Retaliation* represents a third strategy for dealing with unwanted attention. Retaliatory actions range from verbal threats and attempts to belittle or shame the pursuer to physical violence. Targets may seek *informal support* from friends, family members, counselors, and others who are available to provide guidance, advice, or assistance. And finally, *formal protection* may be sought from law enforcement officials or through administrative channels at work or school (e.g., human resource departments, supervisors, campus police, and workplace safety personnel).

Each of these coping strategies carries a potential cost. For example, because avoidance is an indirect and somewhat ambiguous strategy, the pursuer may fail to interpret it as rejection. Similarly, since the pursuer’s goal is to connect with the target, direct confrontation by the target may prove to the pursuer that persistence pays off—that is, that pursuit will eventually bring contact with the object of obsession. Retaliation may demonstrate the target’s lack of interest; however, it may also anger the pursuer and push him or her to escalating levels of intrusion and threat. A similar outcome may be associated with formal protection efforts; for example, the seriousness of obtaining a restraining order or having police intervene in the situation may trigger anger and heightened aggression from the pursuer (as well as serve to demonstrate that he or she is finally gaining the target’s notice).

So what should a target of obsessive pursuit do? What responses are most effective at minimizing or eliminating intrusive behavior? What strategies can targets employ to reduce their chances of negative outcomes in stalking situations? Some professionals believe that statements and actions that directly and unequivocally convey rejection are most effective at managing unwanted attention (e.g., de Becker, 1999, 2002; Mumm & Cupach, 2010). For example, an individual should refuse gifts and other forms of attention offered by the pursuer, should directly state his or her disinterest, and should cease all further contact and communication with that person. In addition, targets should inform others of the situation, should document all stalking-related incidents, should improve or increase security at home, on campus, or in the workplace, and should devise an escape plan should a threat occur (see Leitz-Spitz, 2003).

Unfortunately, researchers have yet to clearly determine which, if any, of these responses is most effective at managing relational stalking situations. For example, although targets often report that moving away (a form of avoidance) or taking legal action (a type of formal protection) is the most effective way to stop unwanted pursuit, many pursuers state that direct confrontation and retaliation (such as making threats or engaging in assertive or aggressive verbal confrontations) are the most effective methods (Dutton & Winstead, 2011). The effectiveness of the various coping methods also may depend on the nature of the stalking behaviors. One recent survey (Geistman et al., 2013) found that when pursuers were violent, most coping strategies that victims employed either exacerbated the stalking behavior or made no difference at all (in fact, the only strategies that worked were those that involved other people directly confronting or retaliating against the pursuer on behalf of the target). There is still a great deal we do not know about how to effectively manage this particularly problematic syndrome.

❖ RELATIONAL AGGRESSION: WHEN LOVE TURNS VIOLENT

Intimate partner violence—violence occurring within romantic, marital, family, friend, and other intimate relationships—represents another deeply problematic (and disturbingly common) relational issue. Survey research reveals that minor acts of physical aggression (such as slapping, pushing, or shoving) occur in roughly one third of dating relationships (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005). Severe acts of

aggression also are quite prevalent among partners in marital or other long-term romantic relationships (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). Although different types of intimate partner violence can and do occur between partners, the two types that have received the most attention from relationship scientists are situational couple violence and coercive controlling violence (e.g., Johnson, 1999, 2008; Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

Situational Couple Violence

One day my girlfriend came over after school and started complaining about something that happened at her work. I was sitting on my bed watching TV and she was standing in the doorway going on and on about the same thing she always complains about. It was irritating so I didn't look at her but kept staring straight ahead at the screen. She got really mad! She started yelling at me and then she came over to the nightstand and picked up the remote control and hurled it at me. It hit me in the face and actually busted my lip wide open.

—18-year-old man interviewed by the author

My best friend's boyfriend was physically aggressive to her on multiple occasions. Mostly when she would disagree with him. He would pinch her, grab at her, you know, grab her jacket and pull her up in his face, sort of shove her around. She would tell him to stop but then he'd just laugh and pretend like he didn't really mean it, his temper got the better of him, same old story every time. It was really disturbing. One day, we were all at a restaurant and they were kind of arguing and then she got up to go to the restroom and he reached out and grabbed her hair so hard that she fell back against the table and bruised her arm. I was so happy when they broke up. I hated him.

—22-year-old woman interviewed by the author

These quotations describe the type of aggression that most typically occurs between romantic partners. *Situational couple violence* (sometimes called *common couple violence* or *conflict-motivated violence*) refers to violent behavior that arises primarily in the context of interpersonal conflict (Ellis & Stuckless, 1996; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). This type of intimate partner violence typically is not accompanied by a chronic pattern of coercion, manipulation, and control; rather, it is associated with poor anger management, communication skill deficits, or ineffective conflict resolution strategies on the part of one or both partners. Situational couple violence typically erupts during a heated argument or disagreement during which one or both partners lose their tempers and impulsively resort to pushing, shoving, or other physical actions to resolve the conflict. Because these lapses of control are

situational in nature (i.e., associated only with that particular argument), they tend to result in milder forms of physical aggression and do not commonly recur in the relationship.

Researchers interested in exploring situational couple violence typically use the 12-item Physical Assault Subscale of the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2) developed by Murray Straus and his colleagues (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). When responding to the items, participants indicate the frequency with which both they and their partners engaged in various physically violent actions during the past year, including

- throwing something at the partner that could hurt
- twisting the partner's arm or hair
- pushing or shoving the partner
- grabbing the partner
- slapping the partner
- using a knife or gun on the partner
- punching or hitting the partner with something that could hurt
- choking the partner
- slamming the partner against a wall
- beating up the partner
- burning or scalding the partner on purpose
- kicking the partner

The first five items are considered to reflect relatively minor forms of physical aggression, whereas the last seven items are assumed to reflect more severe violence. The CTS-2 also includes an Injury Subscale, which assesses the extent to which individuals are physically injured by their partners' violent behavior (e.g., "I went to a doctor because of a fight with my partner," "I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner," "I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner").

Surveys of nonclinical samples (e.g., community or college student samples) reveal that fairly high (and roughly equal) proportions of men and women engage in situational couple violence (e.g., O'Leary & Williams, 2006; Straus & Ramirez, 2007; but see Archer, 2000). In one investigation, Straus (2004) asked more than 8,000 students from 31 universities located around the world (e.g., Asia, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, South America, Canada, the

United States) to complete the Physical Assault and Injury Subscales of the CTS-2. Although violence rates varied across samples (ranging from a low of 17% in the Braga, Portugal, student sample to a high of 45% in the Louisiana, United States, student sample), a substantial proportion of the participants (almost one third) reported having physically assaulted a dating partner in the previous 12 months. Most of these assaults were minor, such as slapping a partner or shoving a partner in anger; however, the rate of severe violence—ranging from punching, choking, and attacking the partner with weapons—was still disturbingly high (9%). Moreover, 7% of the students indicated that they had inflicted an injury on their dating partners (with men more likely than women to have inflicted severe injuries [e.g., broken bone, head trauma]). Similar results were reported more recently by researchers James McNulty and Julianne Hellmuth (2008), who administered items from the Physical Assault Subscale to a sample of newlywed couples; 36% of couples reporting having experienced at least one act of physical violence during the previous 12 months.

Although both men and women perpetrate situational couple violence, the sexes appear to differ in the type of violence they use. Psychologist John Archer (2002) conducted a meta-analysis using data from 58 previously published studies. Each study provided information on the occurrence of nine of the individual acts of physical violence measured by the original version of the CTS. These nine acts included throwing something; pushing, grabbing, or shoving; slapping; kicking, biting, or punching; hitting with an object; beating; choking or strangling; threatening with a gun or knife; and using a gun or knife. Archer's analysis of the numbers of men and women who inflicted each of these acts on their partners (according to those partners' self-reports) indicated that women were more likely than men to perpetrate acts of minor violence, whereas men were more likely than women to commit acts of severe violence. Specifically, a higher proportion of women than men engaged in four of the five acts of minor violence, including throwing something at the partner, hitting the partner with an object, slapping the partner, and kicking, biting or punching the partner. Conversely, a higher proportion of men than women had perpetrated three of the four acts of severe violence, including beating, choking or strangling, and using a knife or a gun on their partners. Other researchers have found that men are more likely than women to repeatedly aggress against their partners, and that women are more likely than men to suffer physical injury as a result of their partners' aggressive behavior (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Morse, 1995; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007). Thus,

both sexes can be (and often are) aggressive—but the aggression perpetrated by women typically is less severe than that perpetrated by men.

In sum, research on situational couple violence reveals that (minor) violence is a relatively common occurrence in romantic relationships and that both men and women can and do commit a variety of physically aggressive acts against their intimate partners.

Coercive Controlling Violence

Coercive controlling violence (also called *intimate terrorism* and commonly referred to as *domestic violence*, *spousal abuse*, or *battery*) is the type of intimate partner violence that is encountered most often by workers in agency settings such as hospitals and clinics, domestic violence shelters, public safety or law enforcement departments, and the legal system (Coker, Smith, McKeown, & King, 2000; Frieze & Browne, 1989; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Johnson, 2006). Unlike situational couple violence, which typically arises in the context of interpersonal conflict and tends to involve minor forms of physical aggression, coercive controlling violence involves physical violence that is associated with a chronic pattern of emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control (e.g., Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Coercively controlling and violent relationships typically involve one partner (the abuser) engaging in a persistent effort to frighten, manipulate, terrorize, hurt, humiliate, injure, and otherwise dominate and control the other partner (the victim). Abusers frequently employ a variety of tactics in their quest for power and control, ranging from physical and emotional abuse, to economic or financial abuse, to isolation and denial (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2015; Pence & Paymar, 1993; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). It is important to recognize that coercive controlling individuals do not necessarily use all of these tactics to dominate their partners; rather, they tend to use the combination they believe will be most effective at maintaining their control. For example, in many abusive relationships—particularly those with a history of prior physical violence—the abuser may no longer need to employ physical force to dominate the partner; as a result, coercive controlling violence does not always manifest itself in high levels of physical aggression (see Johnson, 2008).

There is strong evidence of sex asymmetry in coercive controlling violence; that is, among heterosexual couples, abusers are predominantly male and victims are predominantly female. In addition, although physical violence is not always present in high amounts throughout the relationship, it tends to occur with greater frequency

than in relationships characterized by other types of intimate partner violence, is likely to escalate over time, and produces more serious consequences in terms of injury (see Johnson, 1999). For example, sociologist Joseph Michalski (2005) analyzed data on intimate partner violence collected as part of a national survey. Over 16,000 men and women involved in romantic relationships were asked whether their partners had ever engaged in acts of physical violence (e.g., “beaten you,” “kicked, bit, or hit you with his/her fist,” “choked you”) and coercive control (e.g., “tried to limit your contact with family or friends,” “put you down or called you names,” “damaged or destroyed your possessions or property”). The results revealed that domestic violence was relatively infrequent; only 4% of the entire sample reported experiencing physical violence embedded in a pattern of coercive control (indeed, almost 90% of participants reported having never experienced physical aggression or coercive control from their partners). However, although the overall prevalence rate was low, a significantly higher proportion of women (5.2%) than men (3.0%) reported having a violent and coercively controlling partner. Moreover, participants in coercive and controlling relationships experienced twice as many instances of physical violence as other participants, and the violence that occurred was more severe.

Many victims of domestic violence are forced to resort to aggression themselves in order to thwart the actions of their abusers (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006; Pagelow, 1981; Stuart et al., 2006). Called *violent resistance* (or *resistive/reactive violence*), this type of intimate partner violence is motivated by self-defense. Because most (heterosexual) abusers are male and most victims are female, it is not surprising that violent resistance is primarily enacted by women. For example, 96% of the abused women in one study (Johnson, 1999) had resorted to violence in an effort to protect themselves from injury from their abusive husbands. Unfortunately, self-protective violence may result in additional abuse; faced with physical resistance, an abusive partner may become enraged and perpetrate additional (and more severe) violence (Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Pagelow, 1981). Indeed, Ronet Bachman and Dianne Carmody’s (1994) analysis of National Crime Victimization Survey data revealed that women who defended themselves against physical attacks from their intimate partners were twice as likely to sustain injuries as women who did not (also see Bachman, Saltzman, Thompson, & Carmody, 2002).

In addition to physical injury and trauma, victims of domestic violence experience a number of serious and adverse psychological outcomes. Women who are terrorized by their intimate partners often

live in a state of chronic fear and anxiety; they also frequently report lowered self-esteem, depression, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (e.g., Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Gelles & Harrop, 1989; Golding, 1999; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Tyson, Herting, & Randell, 2007). Although less is known about the consequences of domestic violence for male victims, there is evidence that men who are abused experience the same constellation of physical and psychological outcomes as their female counterparts (for reviews, see Dutton, 2007; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005). They may also experience an additional adverse consequence—namely, revictimization by a domestic violence system that is designed to assist female victims and that consequently often does not recognize that men, too, can be abused. When criminal justice scholars Denise Hines, Jan Brown, and Edward Dunning (2007) analyzed calls to a national domestic abuse hotline for men, they discovered that many male victims reported having sought help in the past but having been turned away, laughed at, not taken seriously, and treated as batterers (rather than victims) by agency workers. For many callers, this unfair treatment was as traumatic as the abuse itself.

Relationship scholars have sought to identify the risk factors or correlates of domestic abuse. Comprehensive reviews of the existing literature have revealed the following personal, relational, and environmental correlates (Christopher & Lloyd, 2000; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005; Slep, Foran, Heyman, & United States Air Force Family Advocacy Research Program, 2014; Wong & Mellor, 2014):

- Biological sex: As discussed earlier in this chapter, domestic abuse perpetration and victimization demonstrate sex asymmetry, such that the majority of perpetrators are male and the majority of victims are female.
- Age: Intimate partner violence peaks among adults in their 20s and steadily declines in older cohorts.
- Socioeconomic status: Low income, poverty, lower occupational status (e.g., blue collar or working class as opposed to white collar or middle class), and lower educational attainment are among the strongest predictors of domestic violence.
- Immigrant status: There is some evidence within the United States that immigrant women are at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence (evidence linking immigrant status and coercive controlling violence risk is stronger in other countries, in part because the question has received greater empirical attention from researchers employing non-U.S. samples).

- Prior exposure to domestic violence: Women who were exposed to interparental violence growing up are more likely to experience domestic abuse later in their own lives; men who witnessed interparental violence are more likely to be violent toward their female partners.
- Childhood abuse: Women who were psychologically, physically, or sexually abused as children are more likely to be victimized by an intimate partner later in their own lives; men who were abused as children are more likely to perpetrate violence against their romantic partners.
- Attitudes and beliefs: Abusers (and, often, their victims) tend to endorse interpersonal violence and hold highly traditional attitudes toward marriage and sex or gender roles (e.g., they believe that husbands should be the dominant partner in marriage and that it is acceptable for a husband to hit a wife).
- Mental health and psychopathology: Male batterers are more likely than nonbatterers to exhibit symptoms of diminished mental health, as well as a variety of severe clinical disorders ranging from major depression and anxiety to personality disorders (e.g., antisocial, borderline, narcissistic).
- Physical health: Men who perpetrate, and women who experience, domestic abuse report poorer physical health (e.g., greater pain, lower energy, more sleep disturbances) than those who are not in relationships characterized by coercive controlling violence.
- Relationship status: Compared with dating and married couples, couples who cohabit have higher rates of physical assault.
- Relationship satisfaction: Lowered levels of relationship satisfaction are associated with higher likelihood of domestic abuse.
- Alcohol use: Men who abuse alcohol are more likely to assault their romantic partners, and women who abuse alcohol are more likely to be assaulted by an intimate partner.
- Economic pressure: Financial stress is positively correlated with the likelihood of intimate partner violence; the greater the economic pressure a couple is under, the more likely they are to be in a marriage marked by domestic abuse.
- Social isolation: Domestic abuse is more likely to occur when a couple is socially isolated and the partners have few sources of social support.

It is important to recognize that the research in this area is correlational, and researchers thus cannot know with any degree of certainty the extent to which these personal, relational, or environmental risk factors function as true *causes* of intimate partner violence. For example, it is likely that marital conflict or dissatisfaction contributes to a hostile interpersonal climate that is conducive to physical violence; at the same time, it is quite likely that the occurrence of physical abuse leads to marital distress and dissatisfaction. Similarly, individuals with poor mental and physical health may be more likely to perpetrate (or experience) intimate partner violence; yet intimate partner violence itself contributes to difficulties with mental and physical function.

Domestic abuse is among the most pernicious forms of interpersonal violence that can arise in romantic relationships, and additional research on ways to prevent its occurrence and effectively combat its adverse effects is clearly needed.

❖ LOSS OF PASSION: WHEN ATTRACTION FADES

It's not that I don't desire him anymore, it's simply that I don't desire him as much. In a way, our relationship is stronger now, built more solidly on other, less sexual feelings. But there are times when I have to admit I become a bit nostalgic for the passion that we've lost. It used to be that I would glimpse him making a certain gesture, or hear his voice on the phone, or catch the scent of his cologne, and I would literally be infused with this feeling of desire, of need, of sheer want. And it was almost indescribable, a mingling of the physical and the emotional. But we've been together for a long time, and somehow, somewhere that feeling just faded. I love him deeply, maybe more than I ever did before, and I know that we'll grow old together, but it's not the same.

—35-year-old man interviewed by the author

The emotional intensity and feelings of sexual attraction that are associated with passionate love frequently fade over time in romantic relationships (Sprecher & Regan, 1998). To some extent, we owe this occurrence to our biological design; our bodies simply are not equipped to sustain for long periods the physiological arousal associated with passionate love, desire, and other intense emotional experiences. It is definitely the case that a sudden loss of passion or an intense “falling out of love” may indicate that some degree of emotional conflict or interpersonal dysfunction exists in a couple’s

relationship. However, it may also serve as a sign that the couple has moved into a different, and no less positive, relational phase. In Chapter 8, we reviewed evidence suggesting that as passion and excitement fade within a relationship, they may be replaced by trust, acceptance, respect, fondness, and the other elements of companionate love.

In addition, passion, desire, and excitement may fade or fluctuate because of changes in the physical or psychological state of the individual partners that have nothing to do with larger relationship issues. Some people regularly experience fluctuations in their feelings of passion and desire (Kaplan, 1979; Levine, 1984; Regan, 2015b). Others may find their ability and/or motivation to experience passion impaired by poor health, hormonal imbalances, chronic drug use, depression and other mood disorders, and so on (see Regan & Berscheid, 1999). It is hard to feel passionately enthralled by the beloved when one is ill or otherwise feeling poorly. Thus, the sense that one is “falling out of love” with, or even losing some degree of sexual attraction to, the partner is not necessarily a sign that the relationship is in trouble. It is only when one or both partners disagree about or are troubled by some element of their relationship that professional intervention may be helpful.

Summary

Although most men and women find their love relationships to be both positive and life affirming, difficulties may arise. Unrequited passionate love, obsession and relational stalking, violence and aggression, and loss of passion all are problematic experiences that may result in extremely negative outcomes. Understanding the types of love that exist, the changes that commonly occur over time in romantic relationships, the signs and symptoms of interpersonal problems, and the coping mechanisms that are available can enable us to effectively alleviate the difficulties that may develop in our love relationships.

Key Concepts

Unrequited love (p. 196)	Informal support (p. 206)
Relational stalking (p. 199)	Formal protection (p. 206)
Cyberstalking (p. 203)	Intimate partner violence (p. 207)
Avoidance (p. 206)	Situational couple violence (p. 208)
Direct confrontation (p. 206)	Coercive controlling violence (p. 211)
Retaliation (p. 206)	Violent resistance (p. 212)

Discussion Questions

1. Is being in love always a positive experience? In what ways can passionate love be problematic? Have you ever found yourself in an unrequited love situation, either as the unrequited lover or the unwilling object of affection? If so, how did you feel? How well does your own experience match the experiences reported by the people who participated in Baumeister et al.'s (1993) unrequited love study?
2. Relational stalking has been portrayed in a variety of movies, including *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Fear* (1996), *Swimfan* (also called *Swimf@n*, 2002), *Enduring Love* (2004), *Obsessed* (2009), and a host of others. Select two movies that depict obsession and relational stalking and watch each one carefully. Using your knowledge of relational stalking, determine how well these cinematic portrayals match the features and characteristics of relational stalking identified by scientific research.
3. Have you or someone you know ever used the Internet to follow, surveil, or find out information about a potential or former romantic partner? Has someone you were not interested in ever used the Internet to follow, surveil, or seek intimacy from you? How did this make you feel? What did you do to manage the situation?
4. Compare and contrast the two primary types of intimate partner violence that relationship scientists have explored. What are the risk factors and the consequences of these experiences (for victims and for perpetrators)?
5. Why does passion seem to inevitably fade over time in most romantic relationships? Is the loss of passion a sign of interpersonal dysfunction?

Recommended Readings

This book was written for the reading public and presents a nice blend of scientific research and narrative about the experience of unreciprocated love.

Baumeister, R. F., & Wotman, S. R. (1992). *Breaking hearts: The two sides of unrequited love*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This is an excellent, if oftentimes terrifying, glimpse into stalking. De Becker discusses his own extensive experiences working with people (including many celebrities) who have been the recipients of unwanted (and sometimes violent) attention from others. Although many of the stories are graphic and intense, the author gives his readers helpful advice on how to avoid and manage these situations. This is an excellent and informative read and is available on Amazon and other websites.

de Becker, G. (1999). *The gift of fear and other survival signals that protect us from violence*. New York, NY: Dell.

This journal issue and these edited books present a collection of pieces written by theorists and researchers who have explored problematic aspects of close relationships, including relational stalking, violence, loss of passion, and other “dark” interpersonal experiences.

Cupach, W. R., & Spitzberg, B. H. (Eds.). (2011). *The dark side of close relationships II*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Davis, K. E., Frieze, I. H., & Maiuro, R. D. (Eds.). (2002). *Stalking: Perspectives on victims and perpetrators*. New York, NY: Springer.

Frieze, I. H. (Ed.). (2012). Issues of gender in stalking research [Special issue]. *Sex Roles*, 66(5–6).

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (Eds.). (1998). *The dark side of close relationships*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

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