Persistence of Attempts to Reconcile a Terminated Romantic Relationship: A Partial Test of Relational Goal Pursuit Theory

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Drawing on Relational Goal Pursuit Theory, we predicted that the following factors would foster persistence of attempted reconciliation following the breakup of a dating or romantic relationship: (a) the rejected partner’s linking of the desired relationship with more important life goals; (b) the rejected partner’s rumination about the ex-partner and the former relationship; (c) the rejected partner’s belief that reconciliation attempts will be successful; and (d) the rejected partner’s emotional distress regarding the failure to accomplish reconciliation. Results showed strong support for the theory, with linking, rumination, and self-efficacy being particularly predictive of persistence of reconciliation attempts.

Keywords: Persistence; Reconciliation; Relationship Pursuit; Stalking

The vast majority of personal relationships die before we do. Wineberg (1994, p. 81) estimated that “approximately five million couples or 10% of all currently married couples in the United States have experienced a separation and reconciliation” in their marriage (see Wineberg & McCarthy, 1994). The occurrence of reconciliation in dating relationships is substantially higher, with reports ranging from 40% to...
more than 60% of young couples indicating they had broken up and reconciled at least once (Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). Some couples exhibit a cyclical pattern of repeatedly breaking up and getting back together (Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, 2011; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000). Dailey and colleagues refer to relationships characterized by cycles of dissolution and reconciliation as on-again/off-again relationships (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009).

Although reconciliations occur, relationship dissolution is often permanent. In the majority of cases dissolution is unilateral, such that one person desires to end the relationship while the partner wishes to continue it (e.g., Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). If an attempt to reconcile the relationship is rejected, the relationship pursuer can choose to accept the finality of relationship termination or persist in attempting to reestablish the lost relationship (Jason, Reichler, Easton, Neal, & Wilson, 1984). When reconciliation attempts are persistent, rejecting partners can feel guilty, annoyed, and harassed (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Dunn, 1999). Despite the occurrence of persistent attempts at relationship reconciliation, little is known about the factors that foster persistence. The purpose of this investigation is to perform a partial test of Relational Goal Pursuit theory (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Cupach, Spitzberg & Carson, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007) as a framework for explaining persistent pursuit of a former relationship partner.

Whether or not reconciliation attempts are successful, it is important to understand the factors that promote persistence in such attempts. Knowledge about the factors that motivate pursuer persistence could ultimately be used by rejecting partners who wish to more effectively and more quickly extinguish undesired reconciliation attempts. More effective thwarting of undesired persistence would diminish the unpleasant consequences of such pursuit for both rejected and rejecting partners (Baumeister et al., 1993). Moreover, knowledge about persistence in the context of reconciliation may shed light on persistence in other aspects of relationships, such as efforts to initiate a new relationship or solve problems in an existing one.

**Persistence of Reconciliation Attempts**

Relationship reconciliation attempts can be conceptualized, in part, as a process of compliance-gaining, whereby the relationship pursuer attempts to persuade the ex-partner to reunite (Bevan, Cameron, & Dillow, 2003; cf. Patterson & O’Hair, 1992). When the initial persuasive attempt meets resistance, the pursuer can either cease attempts to reconcile or persist in relationship pursuit. Persistence is manifested in both the frequency and intensity of relationship pursuit behavior. Thus persistence varies in degrees (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Davis et al., 2000; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Roberts, 2005), ranging from mild (e.g., repeated calls, messages, visits, and gifts) to extreme (e.g., surveillance, threats, verbal abuse, and physical violence). Although persistence can be successful insofar as the former partner is eventually convinced or even coerced to reconcile the relationship,
it more typically prolongs the unpleasantness of termination for both the rejected and rejecting parties (Baumeister et al., 1993).

When the desire for reconciliation is not mutual, persistence of relationship pursuit is intrusive and aggravating for rejecting partners (e.g., Clark & Labeff, 1986; Dunn, 1999; Jason et al., 1984), even if they are flattered by the jilted partner’s pursuit (Dunn; Haugaard & Seri, 2003). In a study of 681 students who experienced the termination of a romantic or dating relationship, Haugaard and Seri found that 20% reported being the target of intrusive contact and 8% indicated they had initiated intrusive contact. In another sample of female students reporting on their postbreakup experiences, Roberts (2002, 2005) found 32% experienced harassment from their former partners, particularly in the form of controlling behaviors and denigration.

When persistence of relationship pursuit induces fear in the rejecting partner, then it constitutes stalking (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Haugaard and Seri (2003) reported that 20% of their participants who received post-breakup harassment were fearful for their safety. In Roberts’s (2002, 2005) study of terminated romantic relationships, 34% of the participants were stalked by their former partners. Indeed, terminated romantic relationships represent the most common context in which stalking occurs (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Among the millions of stalking victims each year, the perpetrator is most commonly a former intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Although persistence of reconciliation attempts is well documented, theoretical explanations that account for this phenomenon have yet to be explored. In this study, we adopt Relational Goal Pursuit (RGP) theory and test it to discern if it can shed light on reconciliation persistence. We operationalize persistence in two ways. First, we assess the frequency with which a variety of relationship pursuit behaviors are enacted. Frequency of pursuit is one common representation of persistence (e.g., Davis et al., 2000; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). Second, we assess the global self-perception that the pursuer was persistent in attempting reconciliation. Such a measure taps into the cumulative effort exerted in pursuing a goal in ways that are not fully captured by behavior frequency alone (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004).

Relational Goal Pursuit Theory

Although RGP theory was proposed to explain unwanted relationship pursuit and stalking (Cupach et al., 2000), it seems well suited to explain persistence of relationship pursuit more generally. RGP theory is based on the idea that relationships can be conceptualized as goals (i.e., desired end states people wish to obtain). Persistent relationship pursuers exaggerate the importance of a relational goal because they believe it is the only pathway to a higher order goal such as life happiness. When the relational goal is thwarted, pursuers experience rumination, strong negative affect, and obsession with the target and the relationship. Pursuers rationalize their persistent behavior and exert greater effort in striving for the desired relationship. In the current investigation, we focus specifically on linking, rumination, self-efficacy, and emotional flooding as predictors of persistent reconciliation attempts.
Linking and Relational Goal Pursuit

Goal linking occurs when a person believes the attainment of specific lower order goals is essential to achieve a higher order goal (McIntosh & Martin, 1992). Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) proposed that persistent relationship pursuers tend to link their lower order relational goal to higher order goals such as life happiness and esteem: “They regard success in attaining the desired relationship as necessary for achieving happiness and they feel their self worth is predicated on attaining the desired relationship” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004, p. 101). Even if relational goal pursuit is met with resistance and obstacles, the natural inclination is to intensify goal-directed behavior rather than abandon the goal (DiPaula & Campbell, 2002). The importance of the relational goal, when linked to higher order goals, is greatly exaggerated and its achievement is viewed as supremely desirable (McIntosh, 1996; McIntosh & Martin, 1992). Consequently, the relationship is pursued in a much more determined and persistent manner.

Rumination

Another factor contributing to persistence in goal striving is rumination, which consists of nagging and persistent thoughts about an unmet goal (Martin & Tesser, 1989, 1996). “Because people may feel that failure to meet the goals to which they are devoted will threaten their self-worth, they may make dire predictions about the emotional impact of such failure” (Pomerantz, Saxon, & Oishi, 2000, p. 618). Thus, worrying about the consequences of not meeting the important relational goal would seem to constitute some of the content of a pursuer’s rumination. Rumination tends to increase over time, and it continues until the unmet goal is abandoned or attained. Like linking, rumination elevates the importance of goal fulfillment. When goal achievement is the only path believed to provide relief from the rumination, relationship pursuers intensify their efforts to reach the relational goal they so desperately desire (Cupach et al., 2000; Pomerantz et al., 2000).

Emotional Flooding

Concomitant with ruminative thoughts is aversive affect. The inability to attain an important goal can cause a flood of negative emotions such as anger, frustration, hurt, jealousy, and shame (Cupach et al., 2000). Rumination and negative affect reinforce one another, thereby perpetuating persistence of pursuit (Cupach et al., 2000).

Self-Efficacy

Persistent goal pursuit requires that a goal not only be desirable, but also obtainable (Locke & Latham, 1990). Pursuers must make an estimate about their ability to achieve the relational goal they are working toward and believe that this goal can
ultimately be attained. Persistent pursuers appear to have high self-efficacy in the sense that they are confident they can accomplish their goal and attain the desired relationship, given sufficient effort. Self-efficacy bolsters “the pursuer’s belief that persistence in goal striving will pay off” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004, p. 103). Therefore, as a pursuer’s confidence in his or her ability to attain the relational goal grows, pursuit efforts likewise escalate and can become persistent and even obsessive.

Summary/Predictions

RGP theory predicts that when a relationship is terminated, persistence in attempting reconciliation will be heightened by linking the relationship goal to higher order goals, ruminating about the unmet relational goal, experiencing negative affect about the unmet goal, and possessing self-efficacy beliefs that the relationship can be restored. These processes disinhibit normal goal pursuit processes, in which the pursuer would realize the relational goal is unrealistic and abandon it. Instead relational goal pursuit processes promote persistence of attempts at reconciliation. We therefore offer these predictions:

H1: Linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and self-efficacy predict the frequency of relational pursuit behaviors.
H2: Linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and self-efficacy predict perceived global persistence in relationship pursuit.

Method

Participants

Participants for the study (169 men, 264 women; $M_{age} = 20.4, SD = 2.1$, age range: 18–37 years; 42.6% White/Non-Hispanic individuals, 40.8% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 6.4% American Indian or Alaskan Natives, 2.3% Black/Non-Hispanics, 2.1% Hispanics, and 4.1% who classified themselves as “other”) were obtained through a nonrandom convenience sample of students from communication classes at two public universities (one located in the Midwest, the other located in the southwestern United States).

Procedures

To qualify for participation in the study, respondents had to have been involved in a romantic or dating relationship that lasted at least two months and that had been terminated in the last two years. Participants were asked to complete a survey that contained four sections. Participants were asked to (a) describe their former relationship, (b) answer questions regarding their evaluation of their former relationship and how they felt about the breakup, (c) report any attempts to reconcile or reestablish the relationship, and (d) provide descriptive and demographic information about themselves and their ex-partners.
Variables/Measures

Most of the items in this study were developed by the authors. In some cases, items were drawn or adapted from prior research. Except where noted, items were measured with a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree). Measures were created by averaging scale item scores (see Appendix for a list of all scale items). Measurement development was grounded in relevant conceptual literatures. Items exhibit strong face validity and a preliminary version of the measures used in a study of obsessive relational intrusion showed criterion-related validity (Kam & Spitzberg, 2005).

Goal linking

Linking was assessed through an eight-item measure, with each item preceded by the conditional phrase, “Before we broke up...” (e.g., “Having this person in my life seemed essential to becoming who I wanted to be,” “I determined that only this person could help me achieve my life’s goals”) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$).

Rumination

A 24-item scale was used to assess rumination, with each item preceded by the phrase, “After the breakup...” (e.g., “The more I tried to stop thinking of this person, the more I thought about him/her,” “I thought about this person constantly,” “I thought that not having the relationship I wanted with this person would be devastating”). Items were assessed on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all, 4 = somewhat, and 7 = very much) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$).

Emotional flooding

This variable was assessed through a 12-item scale (six items adapted from Dutton-Greene [2004] and six developed for this study), preceded by the conditional phrase, “After the breakup...” (e.g., “I felt overwhelmed with bad feelings about the situation with my ex-partner,” “Even now I get upset thinking about this person,” “I felt frustrated over the breakup”). Items were assessed on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all, 4 = somewhat, and 7 = very much) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$).

Self-efficacy

Eight items were written to assess self-efficacy, preceded by the lead-in, “After the breakup...” (e.g., “I still feel capable of getting back into a relationship with this person,” “I was confident I could get my ex-partner to reconcile with me”). One item depressed the reliability of the scale and was removed (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$).

Relational pursuit behaviors

Thirty-one items were used to assess the frequency of relational pursuit behaviors. Items were adapted from previous measures of unwanted relational pursuit behaviors.
(Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). The scale used for these items consisted of the following anchors: 0 = never, 1 = once since the breakup, and 2 = two or more times since the breakup. Participants were given the following instruction: “Whether you or your ex-partner initiated the breakup, you may have attempted to reconcile with your partner since the breakup. Please rate the extent to which you have engaged in any of the following behaviors since the most recent breakup in an effort to reconcile with your partner.” Each item was preceded by the phrase, “Since the breakup.”

Since responses to highly intrusive and threatening pursuit behaviors are usually very positively skewed, we divided the pursuit items into two separate measures (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). Seventeen items assessed ordinary milder relational pursuit behaviors. Examples included “Have you ever given letters, cards, or gifts to your ex-partner in person?”, “Have you ever contacted your ex-partner’s family, friends, or co-workers?”, “Have you ever watched your ex-partner from afar?”. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$). The remaining 14 items were used to assess severe relationship pursuit behaviors of the participants. Examples of these items included, “Have you ever verbally threatened your ex-partner?”, “Have you ever physically harmed your ex-partner?”, “Have you ever forced your ex-partner to engage in sexual contact?”. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .99$).

Global persistence

Global persistence in attempting reconciliation was measured through a seven-item scale, with 6 items preceded by the phrase, “After the breakup…” (e.g., “I vigorously attempted to reconcile our relationship,” “I was determined to do whatever was necessary to get this person back”). A seventh item asked, “To what extent would you say you have been persistent since the most recent breakup in attempting to reconcile with your partner” (1 = not at all and 7 = extremely) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$).

Data Analysis

The predictions were tested by conducting hierarchical multiple regression analyses for each criterion variable. In the first step of each equation, we entered time since the breakup as a control variable, given its negative association with postdissolution contact in other research (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). In the second step, the remaining predictors were entered: linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and self-efficacy. Reparameterized equations that included only the significant predictors were then computed, and these are the results that are reported. Alpha was set at 0.05.

Participants indicated their role in the relational termination by indicating if the breakup occurred primarily because they wanted out of the relationship (45.5% of the sample), their partner wanted out of the relationship (31%), or both wanted out of the relationship (23.5%). The participant’s role in the breakup was anticipated to affect reconciliation attempts (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000), and preliminary analyses confirmed this expectation. Those whose partners wanted out of the
relationship reported higher levels of linking ($F=22.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$), rumination ($F=13.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$), emotional flooding ($F=42.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$), and persistence in reconciliation attempts ($F=37.83, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$) compared to the other two groups (see Table 1). Individuals who reported that they themselves primarily wanted out of the relationship reported higher levels of self-efficacy ($F=20.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$) compared to the other two groups. Therefore subsequent analyses were conducted separately for each of these three groups.

### Results

**Predictors of Frequency of Milder Relationship Pursuit Behaviors**

Time since breakup and self-efficacy combined to predict frequency of pursuit behaviors for those whose partners wanted to end the relationship ($F=16.14, p < .001, R = .43$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$). Self-efficacy explained 6% of the variance in mild pursuit behaviors after controlling for time since breakup ($F=10.53, p < .001$). For those who terminated the relationship, time since breakup, rumination, and self-efficacy predicted frequency of pursuit behaviors ($F=22.02, p < .001, R = .49$, adjusted $R^2 = .22$). Rumination and self-efficacy explained 14% of the variance in pursuit behaviors after controlling for time since breakup. For those who reported that both partners wanted to end the relationship, rumination emerged as the only significant predictor ($F=14.68, p < .001, R = .43$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$). Standardized regression coefficients are shown in Table 2. Emotional flooding was not significant in any of the equations, although it demonstrated modest zero-order correlations with frequency of mild relationship pursuit behaviors (partner wanted out, $r = .18, p < .01$; participant wanted out, $r = .37, p < .01$; both wanted out, $r = .19, p < .01$).

### Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables Broken Down by Locus of Breakup Initiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Partner M (SD)</th>
<th>Participant M (SD)</th>
<th>Both M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linking</td>
<td>4.61a (1.41)</td>
<td>3.48b (1.53)</td>
<td>3.79b (1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination</td>
<td>4.61a (1.32)</td>
<td>3.18b (1.47)</td>
<td>3.44b (1.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>3.95a (1.11)</td>
<td>4.70b (1.12)</td>
<td>4.14a (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Flooding</td>
<td>4.56a (1.34)</td>
<td>3.15b (1.48)</td>
<td>3.36b (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>3.75a (1.32)</td>
<td>2.53b (1.29)</td>
<td>2.81b (1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Pursuit Behaviors</td>
<td>0.38 (0.33)</td>
<td>0.34 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.31 (0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Pursuit Behaviors</td>
<td>0.04 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Linking, rumination, self-efficacy, emotional flooding, and persistence were all measured on 1–7 scales. Relational pursuit behaviors and severe pursuit behaviors were measured on 0–2 scales. Row means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$. 

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Predictors of Frequency of Severe Pursuit Behaviors

None of the variables emerged as significant predictors of the frequency of severe pursuit behaviors, except for time since breakup, which was negatively associated with severe pursuit behaviors for those who terminated the relationship. This is likely due to the severely skewed distribution of this variable, as 81.3% of participants reported that they never engaged in any of the severe pursuit behaviors (skewness = 5.64).

Predictors of Global Persistence in Reconciliation Attempts

For those participants who reported that their partner wanted out of the relationship, linking, rumination, and self-efficacy predicted persistence ($R = .78$, adjusted $R^2 = .60$, $F = 74.40$, $p < .001$). For those participants who reported they wanted out of the relationship, linking and rumination emerged as significant predictors of persistence ($F = 162.29$, $p < .001$, $R = .78$, adjusted $R^2 = .60$). When both partners wanted to end the relationship, rumination was the only significant predictor of global persistence ($F = 51.20$, $p < .001$, $R = .66$, adjusted $R^2 = .43$). Standardized regression coefficients are reported in Table 3. Time since breakup was not associated with global persistence in any of the equations. Emotional flooding was not a significant predictor in any of the equations, although it demonstrated substantial zero-order correlations with persistence (partner wanted out, $r = .48$, $p < .01$; participant wanted out, $r = .60$, $p < .01$; both wanted out, $r = .46$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

RGP theory offers an account of why some people are likely to persist in attempts to reconcile a relationship after a relationship breakup. The theory suggests that people who link the desire to have a relationship with their former partner to higher order

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2 Reparameterized Multiple Regressions for Mild Pursuit Behaviors</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Wanted Out</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Since Breakup</td>
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<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
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<td><strong>Participant Wanted Out</strong></td>
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<td>Rumination</td>
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*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. 

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goals, ruminate more about the partner and the breakup, experience elevated negative emotions about the breakup, and believe that reconciliation is achievable, persist in their efforts to reconcile the relationship. The current study provides substantial support for most of these predictions. First, rumination was a potent and consistent predictor of persistence in attempting reconciliation. Repeated dwelling on the negative consequences of losing a desired relationship energizes activities designed to recover the lost relationship. Second, self-efficacy was modestly related to both global persistence and the frequency of relationship pursuit behaviors in unilateral breakups, suggesting that both desirability and attainability of a relational goal are forces that motivate persistence of relationship pursuit. This is largely consistent with Lannutti and Cameron’s (2002) finding in a gay and lesbian sample that hopefulness for reconciliation predicted postdissolution emotional and sexual intimacy (and simultaneously predicted decreased relational satisfaction). Third, relationship linking also showed modest associations with global persistence of relationship pursuit when breakups were unilateral. However, linking did not emerge as a significant predictor of the frequency of specific relationship pursuit behaviors.

As might be expected, participants exhibited differences in RGP variables based upon the locus of breakup initiation. When participants indicated that it was primarily their partner who wanted to terminate the relationship, they reported more linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and reconciliation persistence compared to participants who reported they themselves wanted to terminate the relationship or both partners wanted to end the relationship. Participants reported higher self-efficacy, however, when they wanted to end the relationship compared to when the partner wanted out or both wanted out. This latter finding is consistent with research by Bevan et al. (2003), who found that the more responsible individuals feel for terminating a romantic relationship, the more confident they feel about being able to reconcile successfully with their partner. Yet the overall amount of variance explained in global persistence and relational pursuit behaviors was quite similar.

| Table 3 Reparameterized Multiple Regressions for Global Persistence |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|
|                             | $\beta$  | $t$      |
| **Partner Wanted Out**      |          |          |
| Linking                     | .19      | 2.94**   |
| Ruminiation                 | .59      | 8.95***  |
| Self-Efficacy               | .16      | 3.00**   |
| **Participant Wanted Out**  |          |          |
| Linking                     | .14      | 2.80**   |
| Ruminination                | .70      | 14.17*** |
| **Both Wanted Out**         |          |          |
| Rumination                  | .66      | 7.15***  |

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
for those who wanted to end the relationship and those whose partners wanted to end the relationship. Thus, RGP theory appears to provide a good explanation of reconciliation persistence, regardless of whether the pursuer or the pursuer’s partner initiates the breakup. Although breakup initiators are less likely to persist in seeking reconciliation, when they do, linking, rumination, and self-efficacy play an important role.

RGP variables were not as powerful in predicting reconciliation persistence when both people wanted out of the relationship. Only rumination emerged as a significant predictor when dissolution was bilateral. This suggests that a mutual disaffection may be more likely to lead to a set of cognitive and behavioral processes that prepare the partners to accept the end of the relationship. The summary perception that “both” members of a relationship wanted out of a past relationship may reflect the end point of various conflicts, escalating disinterests, and opportunities to realize that the other person is not intrinsically linked to life ambitions or goals. Bilateral disengagements permit partners to negotiate amicable parting (Baxter, 1985) or to mutually redefine the previously romantic relationship as a friendship (Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989). In fact, reconciliation is generally less likely when relationship dissolution is mutual than when it is unilateral (Dailey et al., 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

Emotional flooding was correlated substantially with global persistence and relational pursuit behaviors; however, it did not emerge as a significant predictor in the multiple regression analyses. One likely explanation is multicollinearity. Emotional flooding was very highly correlated with rumination ($r = .82, p < .001$), as the theory predicts. Consequently, it is difficult to empirically disentangle these two predictors. Participants may not be able to distinguish between global negative affect and the sort of cognitive worrying that represents rumination. But it is also possible that our measure of emotional flooding is simply invalid. Some of our items attempted to represent intense feelings after the breakup, and others referenced experiences such as anger and frustration. Collectively these items may fail to capture the overwhelming experience of emotional flooding, especially when measured retrospectively. Better assessment of emotional flooding is needed to properly test this element of RGP theory.

Although global persistence and specific relational pursuit behaviors were effectively predicted, we were unsuccessful in predicting severe pursuit behaviors that involve threat and aggression. Some, but not many, of our participants admitted to engaging in such behaviors. Unfortunately, threatening relational pursuit behaviors are likely to be underreported by perpetrators due to a social desirability response bias. We attempted to employ a transformation of the severe pursuit variable to rectify the skewed data (by adding a constant of one and then computing the square root of each participant’s score), but this did not enhance any effects.
It is also possible that social desirability contaminated responses to our other measures. In recalling the events of a failed relationship and a failed reconciliation attempt, one may feel chagrined for prior obsessional thinking (in the form of linking and rumination) and overconfidence (in the form of self-efficacy). Current hindsight may cloud participants’ retrospective judgments of linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and self-efficacy.

The current study controlled for length of time since the breakup, which was negatively related to reconciliation persistence. Future tests of RGP theory should also attempt to control for additional variables that are likely to influence reconciliation attempts. For example, length and closeness of the terminated relationship undoubtedly influence the aftermath of breakup, including the possibilities and desires for reconciliation (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). More intimate relationships would likely yield higher scores on measures of linking, rumination, and negative affect compared to more casual relationships immediately following termination. Future investigations should take this into account. Other variables of interest include age and relationship history. Do reconciliation processes unfold differently across the life span? How do the attributed cause for the breakup and prior attempts at reconciliation influence persistence?

One element of RGP theory not tested here is that obsessive relationship pursuers entertain a number of rationalizations (other than self-efficacy) that promote persistence (Cupach et al., 2000). Future investigations should attempt to tap into the content of pursuer rationalizations and determine if they offer additional precision in predicting persistence. Finally, generalizability of the theory needs to be tested in more heterogeneous community samples.

In summary, the current study offers evidence that linking, rumination, and self-efficacy are important processes in accounting for persistence of attempts to reconcile a terminated romantic relationship. Persistence was strongly predicted whether or not the pursuer initiated the breakup. This offers strong support for portions of RGP theory.

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Appendix: Scale Items for Variables

**Linking**

1. I decided this person was “the” person for me.
2. I came to think this person was my ideal partner.
3. I believed no one could “complete” me other than this person.
4. I realized that a different partner would be better for me.*
5. I determined that only this person could help me achieve my life’s goals.
6. Having this person in my life seemed essential to becoming who I wanted to become.
7. I felt like our destinies were linked.
8. I realized that this person meant everything to me.

**Rumination**

1. I was obsessed with this person
2. I thought about this person even more when I tried not to.
3. The more I tried to suppress my thoughts or memories about our relationship, the more I thought and remembered.
4. I found myself fantasizing about this person.
5. I found myself considering scenarios and rehearsing old conversations with this person.
6. I thought about this person constantly.
7. My thoughts seemed to drift to this person regardless of what else was happening.
8. I daydreamed about this person.
9. I wished I could stop thinking about this person.
10. Thoughts of this person would just jump into my head.
11. I dwelled on what kind of relationship we might have had between us.
12. The more I tried to stop thinking of this person, the more I thought about him/her.
13. When I would distract myself or try to think of other things, I seemed to think about this person even more.
14. I worried that we might not ever get back together.
15. I thought about ways to try to keep my partner in the relationship.
16. I wondered how this person felt about me.
17. I dwelled on all the things I liked about this person.
18. I thought about how much I valued our relationship.
19. Thoughts of this person dominated my every waking moment.
20. I thought failing to obtain the relationship I wanted would make me feel miserable.
21. I thought I would be extremely happy if I were able to reestablish a relationship with this person.
22. I thought that not having the relationship I wanted with this person would be devastating.
23. I knew I would feel joy if I was successful at reestablishing the relationship.
24. I imagined I would feel very sad if I could not have the relationship I wanted.

Self-Efficacy

1. I believed that persistence in trying to reestablish the relationship with my ex-partner would pay off.
2. I was doubtful that my partner would ever get back together with me.
3. I believed I was capable of convincing my partner to get back together.
4. I was confident I could get my ex-partner to reconcile with me.
5. I knew it was unlikely my ex-partner would get back together with me.
6. I felt I would be able to reestablish the relationship I wanted with my ex-partner.
7. I still feel capable of getting back into a relationship with this person.
8. I was unsure that I could persuade my ex-partner to reconcile our relationship.

Emotional Flooding

1. I was really angry at this person.
2. I felt intense emotions after this person wanted out.
3. Even now I get upset thinking about this person.
4. I kept experiencing surges of unpleasant feelings.
5. As time went by, I got more and more upset about the situation with my ex-partner.
6. I experienced bad feelings about the way things ended with my ex-partner.
7. I experienced a lot of negative emotion.
8. I felt overwhelmed with bad feelings about the situation with my ex-partner.
9. I was distressed because I wanted our relationship to continue.
10. I felt frustrated over the breakup.
11. I felt really “raw” and emotional when this person tried to get out of our relationship.
12. I felt surprisingly normal.*

Global Persistence

1. I quickly gave up the idea of trying to get back together with this person.*
2. I was determined to do whatever was necessary to get this person back.
3. I adjusted quickly and got on with my life.*
4. I was persistent in attempting to reconcile with my ex-partner.
5. Nothing seemed to matter to me as much as getting this person back in my life.
6. I vigorously attempted to reconcile our relationship.
7. To what extent would you say that you have been persistent since the most recent breakup in attempting to reconcile with your partner? (rated 1 = not at all, 7 = extremely).

Relationship Pursuit Behaviors

1. Have you ever sent a letter, e-mail, fax, text, voice mail, gift, card, etc., to your ex-partner?
2. Have you ever left letters, cards, gifts, etc., at your ex-partner’s car, house, or place of employment?
3. Have you ever given letters, cards, gifts to your ex-partner in person?
4. Have you ever expressed extreme affection to your ex-partner?
5. Have you ever engaged in conversation in person with your ex-partner?
6. Have you ever held your ex-partner against their will? (SEVERE)
7. Have you ever planned to be in the same place as your ex-partner?
8. Have you ever interjected yourself into conversations your ex-partner is having with others?
9. Have you ever gotten too close or tried to touch your ex-partner during an interaction?
10. Have you ever entered into your ex-partner’s personal property without his or her knowledge or consent? (SEVERE)
11. Have you ever contacted your ex-partner’s family, friends, or coworkers?
12. Have you ever left or sent threatening objects to your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
13. Have you ever stolen or damaged your ex-partner’s possessions? (SEVERE)
14. Have you ever physically restrained your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
16. Have you ever told other people that you are still in a relationship with your ex-partner?
17. Have you ever asked your ex-partner if he or she was in a relationship with someone else?
18. Have you ever threatened to tarnish your ex-partner’s reputation? (SEVERE)
19. Have you ever left threatening messages for your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
20. Have you ever threatened to hurt yourself? (SEVERE)
21. Have you ever threatened to harm others your ex-partner cares about? (SEVERE)
22. Have you ever verbally threatened your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
23. Have you ever physically threatened your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
24. Have you ever monitored your ex-partner or his or her behavior?
25. Have you ever followed your ex-partner in your car or on foot?
26. Have you ever obtained private information about your ex-partner?
27. Have you ever persistently asked your ex-partner for another chance?
28. Have you ever physically harmed your ex-partner? (SEVERE)
29. Have you ever watched your ex-partner from afar?
30. Have you ever touched your ex-partner in an inappropriate way?
31. Have you ever forced your ex-partner to engage in sexual contact? (SEVERE)
32. Have you ever physically endangered your ex-partner’s life? (SEVERE)

Note. *denotes reverse-scored item.