

Mumm, S. S., & Cupach, W. R. (2010). Turning points in the progression of obsessive relational intrusion and stalking. *Violence and Victims, 25*(6), 707-727.

Theoretical Rationale:

This study attempts to explain the progression of ORI as a temporal pattern based on critical events (called “turning points”) rather than on specific incidents or categories of behavior. Prior to this study, much of the research focused on “stages approaches”, i.e., those systems which were designed to categorize all pursuit or response behaviors into a set number of categories. Mumm and Cupach discuss several previous studies which utilize this approach (see Canter and Ioannou, 2004; Burgess et al., 1997; and Emerson et al., 1998), and highlight potential limitations of the ‘stages’ design. One of the most common limitations of such designs, inherent in their nature, is the assumption that all ORI behaviors will fall along a linear path, smoothly escalating from benign to serious without de-escalations or regressions. The true nature of ORI accounts suggest otherwise, however, and using the critical incidents approach (CIA) to illustrate the erratic patterns of increasing and decreasing severity over time is the focus of this study.

Hypotheses/Research Questions:

The current study addresses three specific research questions, which are explicitly stated on page 711:

***RQ1:** What types of turning points characterize the progression of ORI/stalking?*

***RQ2:** What is the relationship between each turning point type and victims’ perceptions of changes in unwanted pursuit severity?*

***RQ3:** What patterns, or trajectories, of progression characterize ORI/stalking?*

Discussion:

As intended, this study provides the reader with a very different picture of the dynamic nature of ORI progression. It demonstrates well the idea that temporal patterns, consisting of specific critical events (i.e., turning points) make up the very different pathways in which pursuit shifts from acceptable to obsessive. However, there are noted limitations, many of which can be addressed through future extensions.

A common limitation, that of the study sample drawing mostly from the college student population, is evident here as many of the participants are young adults. Extensions which sample from other, more varied, populations are crucial to address the issue of generalizability.

A second noted limitation, also relatively common, is the reliance on retrospective self-reports. Arguably, information gathered from such methods is automatically suspect due to poor recollection or purposeful misrepresentation of reported events. The authors suggest a potential remedy, however; namely, that a longitudinal study be performed to allow for both long-term analysis and, importantly, immediate recording of events. This partial solution does not address the inherent problem of using self-reported data, however.

Ideally, future research will help to refine the operational definitions of each 'turning point' used in the CIA system to improve standardization and accuracy of the data collection/analysis. Also, extensions would do well to focus on the turning points as both potential cause/precursors and effects of one another. Doing so might allow future studies to better predict the pattern of ORI progression in specific cases as it unfolds, thus providing hope that the answers to many victims' questions such as: "What will happen to me/us next?" "What should/can I do to stop this?" might yet be found.

Critique:

I believe the rationale for this study was solid, such that it addresses a potential limitation from the previous research. In doing so, I feel that this study provides its audience with a better understanding of how unpredictable and varied the 'typical' ORI case truly is. This shift in understanding is crucial not only for the advancement of future studies in this area, but also in the development of sympathy toward the innocent victims of obsessive relational intrusion.

This study answers well my 'Ask Dr. K' post, as it helps to address the back-and-forth nature of pursuer action and victim response. Understanding how even the typically developing romantic relationship might demonstrate the erratic pattern of increasing and decreasing attachments, an implication one might draw from the temporal patterns created by the ORI victims, helps to demonstrate how the cyclical patterns of ORI might follow from a more disturbed/uneven typical pattern.