

# Romantic Partner Monitoring After Breakups: Attachment, Dependence, Distress, and Post-Dissolution Online Surveillance via Social Networking Sites

Jesse Fox, PhD<sup>1</sup> and Robert S. Tokunaga, PhD<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Romantic relationship dissolution can be stressful, and social networking sites make it difficult to separate from a romantic partner online as well as offline. An online survey ( $N=431$ ) tested a model synthesizing attachment, investment model variables, and post-dissolution emotional distress as predictors of interpersonal surveillance (i.e., “Facebook stalking”) of one’s ex-partner on Facebook after a breakup. Results indicated that anxious attachment predicted relational investment but also seeking relationship alternatives; avoidant attachment was negatively related to investment but positively related to seeking alternatives. Investment predicted commitment, whereas seeking alternatives was negatively related to commitment. Commitment predicted emotional distress after the breakup. Distress predicted partner monitoring immediately following the breakup, particularly for those who did not initiate the breakup, as well as current partner monitoring. Given their affordances, social media are discussed as potentially unhealthy enablers for online surveillance after relationship termination.

## Introduction

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNSs) provide a novel way for romantic partners to gather information about each other throughout relationship escalation, maintenance, conflict, and dissolution.<sup>1–5</sup> Persistent monitoring of a partner’s online activity is known as interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES).<sup>6</sup> SNSs are commonly used to monitor one’s romantic partner or ex-partner<sup>5,7–11</sup>; this behavior is colloquially referred to as “Facebook stalking.”<sup>10</sup>

Recent evidence suggests that SNSs facilitate sustained connections between ex-partners after a breakup.<sup>5,8,10</sup> Even if partners are not communicating directly, remaining “friends” on SNSs (i.e., keeping an active link between each other’s profiles) often allows an individual to receive updates about the ex-partner’s life.<sup>9,11,12</sup> At this time, however, little is known about what relational factors predict online surveillance after the relationship ends.

Examining the factors that predict IES is important because maintaining connections to the ex-partner, including monitoring their online presence, increases negative affect and delays recovery.<sup>5,13–15</sup> Identifying the psychological and relational variables that predict IES will help expand theorizing about partner monitoring and also indicate what factors make an individual more susceptible to this behavior. Several scholars have noted the compatibility of attachment

theory and the investment model in explaining relational behaviors.<sup>16–18</sup> This study integrates these theories to enhance the understanding of online surveillance of former romantic partners in the wake of relationship dissolution.

## Attachment theory

Attachment theory<sup>19,20</sup> posits that the relationships one experiences with primary caregivers early in life shapes how relationships unfold across the lifespan. Attachment is a key predictor of relational behavior in adulthood, particularly within romantic relationships.<sup>16–18,21</sup> The dimensions of attachment—*anxiety* and *avoidance*—are based on individuals’ perceptions of their self-worth and their trust in others. Anxious attachment is associated with a diminished sense of self-worth and is related to feelings of uncertainty about relationships. Avoidant attachment is associated with diminished trust in others, resulting in a tendency to avoid close relationships.<sup>19,20</sup>

Attachment also predicts how individuals behave following relationship dissolution. Attachment avoidance is associated with minimizing contact with the partner,<sup>22</sup> whereas attachment anxiety is associated with greater preoccupation with the ex-partner, higher levels of distress, and more frequent attempts to reform the relationship.<sup>22,23</sup> Anxious attachment is also associated with unwanted pursuit behavior

<sup>1</sup>School of Communication, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Communicology, University of Hawai’i at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii.

after a breakup, which entails persistent attempts to contact the ex-partner or re-establish a relationship when the ex-partner is not interested.<sup>24,25</sup>

A few studies have investigated attachment and SNS surveillance. Attachment anxiety is positively associated with Facebook surveillance, whereas attachment avoidance is negatively related to it.<sup>26</sup> Another study found that anxious attachment predicts online surveillance of ex-partners.<sup>8</sup> These studies indicate a link between anxious attachment and IES, but variables specific to the relationship may mediate this association.

#### Interdependence theory and the investment model

Interdependence theory is a social exchange theory that suggests two conditions predict commitment in a relationship.<sup>27</sup> Dependence refers to the degree an individual's needs are met by the relationship. Quality of alternatives refers to the perceived value of options other than the relationship, such as leaving the relationship in pursuit of another one.<sup>27</sup> Rusbult's extension of interdependence theory—the investment model—elaborated several aspects of interdependence.<sup>28,29</sup> Satisfaction is the feeling that the relationship is meeting one's needs. Investment size refers to the amount and value of the resources put into the relationship, such as intimacy, shared friends, and money. Commitment level refers to an individual's devotion to the relationship.<sup>28,29</sup> Meta-analysis has supported the investment model, revealing that commitment is consistently predicted by satisfaction, investment size, and quality of alternatives.<sup>30</sup>

At this time, minimal research has investigated the role of SNSs in relation to the investment model. One study applied the investment model to friendships on SNSs and found that greater perceived alternatives lowered commitment in these relationships, which in turn provoked distancing behaviors, such as defriending.<sup>31</sup> SNSs are also used to identify or maintain romantic relationship alternatives.<sup>32,33</sup> Given that relationship-specific variables have been shown to predict SNS behaviors,<sup>26,34</sup> investment model variables may provide additional insight into the phenomenon of online partner monitoring.

#### Post-dissolution distress

The magnitude and longevity of emotional distress after a breakup is contingent on factors such as investment, perception of alternatives, attachment style, and who initiated the breakup.<sup>22,35,36</sup> Maintaining contact with the partner after

the breakup often impairs the process of post-breakup adjustment, slowing the decline of love and sadness and leading to a longer period of distress.<sup>13–15</sup>

In the wake of termination, it is not uncommon for ex-partners to remain “friends” on Facebook.<sup>5,11,12</sup> This lingering connection—as well as access to the ex-partner's post-breakup experiences via Facebook posts and pictures—may encourage more surveillance of the partner, particularly in the wake of a stressful breakup.

#### Proposed model

The proposed model of post-breakup partner surveillance integrates tenets of attachment theory and the investment model to understand factors driving online monitoring of ex-partners. Several studies have attempted to synthesize these theories.<sup>16,18,37–39</sup> As existing synthesized models indicate,<sup>16</sup> dispositional variables (e.g., attachment) are mediated by relational variables (e.g., investment, alternatives, and commitment) when examining relational outcomes (see Fig. 1). These synthesized approaches consistently find a negative relationship between anxious attachment and commitment.<sup>16,18,38,39</sup> Avoidant attachment is also negatively related to investment and commitment.<sup>16,39</sup> Quality of alternatives and investment size mediate the relationship between avoidant attachment and commitment.<sup>16,37</sup>

Individuals who develop an anxious attachment style are generally insecure about their later adult relationships and question their partner's intent to stay in the relationship.<sup>19</sup> Previous research has shown that the anxiously attached use sites such as Facebook to explore relational alternatives.<sup>32</sup> Although anxious individuals are invested in their current relationship,<sup>16</sup> they consider alternatives to hedge any possible losses given the belief that the relationship might not last. Therefore, it is expected that anxious attachment will be positively associated with relational investment and seeking alternatives through SNSs.

Individuals high in attachment avoidance also express more interest in and attraction to relationship alternatives than their less avoidant counterparts do.<sup>40,41</sup> For avoidant individuals, Facebook may be ideal for identifying alternatives. Therefore, avoidant attachment is expected to be associated positively with seeking alternatives through Facebook. Given avoidant individuals are reluctant to devote and share resources in relationships,<sup>16,19</sup> it is expected that attachment avoidance will be negatively associated with investment. According to the investment model, seeking

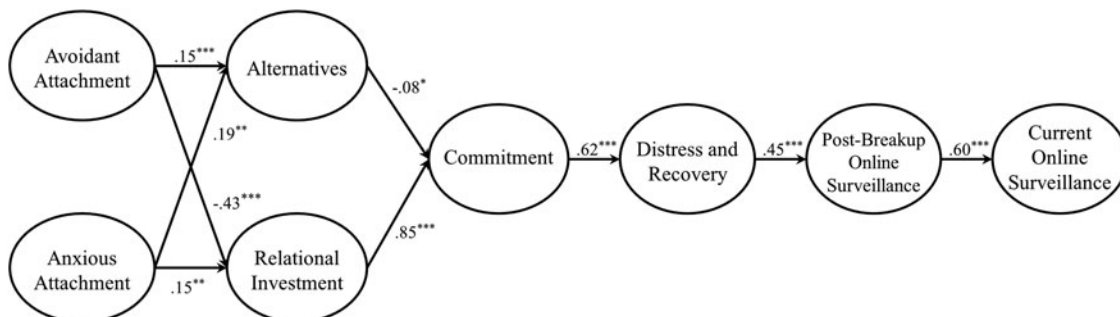


FIG. 1. The final structural model with standardized path coefficients. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

alternatives and investment are two important predictors of commitment, and thus these paths are predicted in the model.

Higher levels of commitment, in turn, are associated with greater distress in the wake of a breakup. Distress following a breakup, particularly for those who felt they were in committed relationships, initiates a series of healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms.<sup>36</sup> One such coping mechanism conventionally used in the wake of a breakup is surveillance,<sup>42</sup> and individuals often turn to SNSs to gather this information.<sup>5,8,11</sup> This relationship is expected to be stronger in cases where the individual was the recipient, rather than the initiator, of the breakup. Therefore, it is predicted that distress will be positively associated with online surveillance of the former romantic partner immediately following the breakup, especially if the individual did not initiate the breakup, and this surveillance will also be related to their current surveillance.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the study. Participants ( $N=431$ ) were recruited from a large Midwestern university and offered course credit for completing the survey. Individuals were eligible if they had experienced a breakup in the past year and if both partners were on Facebook. To minimize discomfort given the topic of the survey, participants were advised to take the online survey in a private location of their choosing.

Participants included 150 male and 281 female Facebook users aged 18–42 years ( $M=20.34$  years,  $SD=2.28$  years) who identified as White/European/European-American ( $n=342$ ; 79.4%); Black/African/African American ( $n=21$ ; 4.9%); Asian/Asian-American ( $n=25$ ; 5.8%); Latino/a/Hispanic ( $n=10$ ; 2.3%); multiracial ( $n=25$ ; 5.8%); or other ( $n=5$ ; 1.2%). Participants identified themselves as heterosexual ( $n=415$ ; 96.3%), gay/lesbian ( $n=8$ ; 1.9%), or bisexual ( $n=7$ ; 1.6%). One participant declined to report sexual orientation. Participants reported spending an average of 99.72 minutes ( $SD=107.66$  minutes) each day actively using Facebook (i.e., not just logged in but using the interface).

### Measures

**Attachment.** Attachment was assessed using the short form of the Experiences in Close Relationships measure.<sup>43,44</sup> Two subscales of three items each measured attachment avoidance ( $M=2.33$ ,  $SD=0.95$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.76$ ) and anxiety ( $M=4.16$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.58$ ). Participants responded on a 7-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree").

**Investment.** Investment was measured with four items derived from Rusbult et al.<sup>45</sup> Participants responded on a 5-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree";  $M=4.21$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.83$ ).

**Alternatives.** Participants assessed their relationship alternatives before the breakup occurred. Participants responded to five items on a 5-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree";  $M=2.14$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.93$ ).

**Commitment.** Participants completed four items derived from Rusbult et al.<sup>45</sup> Participants responded on a 5-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree";  $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.88$ ).

**Post-dissolution distress.** The Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index measured post-dissolution distress.<sup>35</sup> Three items assessed the emotional intensity of the breakup (1 = "not at all"; 5 = "extremely"), and one item assessed the duration of those feelings (1 = "no time at all"; 8 = "more than 2 months";  $M=3.78$ ,  $SD=1.23$ ; standardized-item  $\alpha=0.87$ ).

**Interpersonal electronic surveillance.** The Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance Scale assessed partner monitoring via Facebook immediately following the breakup as well as currently.<sup>6</sup> Participants responded to seven items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree"; Time 1  $M=3.06$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ; Time 2  $M=2.13$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ). Reliabilities for the measure at Times 1 and 2 were Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.95$  and  $\alpha=0.94$ , respectively.

**Breakup initiation.** Participants were asked to indicate who they thought initiated the breakup. Participants responded on 5-point scale (1 = "I did"; 2 = "mostly me"; 3 = "we both did"; 4 = "mostly my partner"; 5 = "my partner did").

## Results

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to examine the dimensionality (internal consistency and parallelism) of the latent constructs in the measurement model. All analyses were conducted using SAS v9.4 (SAS Institute, Inc.). The factor loadings, means, and standard deviations of all individual items in these measures can be found in Table 1. A zero-order correlation matrix of all variables in the model is presented in Table 2.

This model consisted of eight latent factors, which were free to co-vary, that measured their respective manifest variables. The fit indices demonstrated that the model had good fit,  $\chi^2(601)=1,093.90$ ,  $p<0.001$ , CFI=0.96, RMSEA=0.044 [90% CI 0.040–0.048], SRMR=0.04. The satisfactory fit of the measurement model made it possible to test the structural model in the second step of the analysis. Structural equation modeling was then used to test the model hypothesized in this investigation (Fig. 1). The structural model fit the data well,  $\chi^2(611)=1,173.98$ ,  $p<0.001$ , CFI=0.95, RMSEA=0.046 [90% CI 0.042–0.050], SRMR=0.07, demonstrating good overall fit of the model.

Path coefficients indicated that anxious attachment was positively associated with alternatives ( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $SE=0.07$ ,  $p=0.003$ ) and relational investment ( $\beta=0.15$ ,  $SE=0.06$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Avoidant attachment was positively associated with alternatives ( $\beta=0.15$ ,  $SE=0.06$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) but negatively associated with investment size ( $\beta=-0.43$ ,  $SE=0.05$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Consistent with predictions, commitment was inversely related to alternatives ( $\beta=-0.08$ ,  $SE=0.03$ ,  $p=0.03$ ) and positively associated with relational investment ( $\beta=0.85$ ,  $SE=0.02$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Greater commitment to the relationship made the breakup more distressing and impaired recovery ( $\beta=0.62$ ,  $SE=0.04$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The distress stemming from the breakup precipitated subsequent online surveillance

TABLE 1. FACTOR LOADINGS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ALL MEASUREMENT ITEMS

Items	Factor loading	M	SD
<i>Avoidant attachment</i>			
1. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner. [R]	0.65	2.50	1.24
2. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need. [R]	0.80	2.19	1.13
3. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance. [R]	0.73	2.30	1.09
<i>Anxious attachment</i>			
1. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	0.51	3.30	1.59
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.	0.71	4.58	1.64
3. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.	0.48	4.60	1.51
<i>Investment</i>			
1. I invested a lot of time in our relationship.	0.80	4.22	0.88
2. I told my partner many private things about myself.	0.69	4.24	0.89
3. My partner and I shared many memories.	0.67	4.29	0.85
4. I felt very involved in our relationship, like I put a great deal into it.	0.80	4.07	0.95
<i>Alternatives</i>			
1. I used Facebook to investigate new possible dating interests.	0.86	2.05	1.12
2. I used Facebook to connect to or friend new people I might want to date.	0.85	1.90	1.04
3. I checked out the profiles of other people I would be interested in dating.	0.93	2.24	1.16
4. I checked to see if other people I wanted to date were in relationships or not.	0.92	2.21	1.18
5. With Facebook, I realized there were "plenty of other fish in the sea."	0.74	2.29	1.21
<i>Commitment</i>			
1. When we were together, I wanted our relationship to last a very long time.	0.87	4.12	0.94
2. I was committed to maintaining a relationship with my partner.	0.77	4.19	0.87
3. I felt very attached to our relationship and strongly linked to my partner.	0.84	4.07	0.97
4. I wanted our relationship to last forever.	0.81	3.44	1.25
<i>Post-dissolution distress</i>			
1. Immediately after the breakup occurred, how difficult was it for you to make an emotional adjustment?	0.89	3.48	1.14
2. Immediately after the breakup occurred, to what extent did it disrupt your typical, everyday function?	0.74	3.06	1.19
3. How upset were you immediately after the breakup?	0.82	3.67	1.19
4. How long were you upset after the breakup?	0.75	4.92	2.24
<i>Post-breakup interpersonal electronic surveillance</i>			
1. When visiting my ex-partner's Facebook page, I would read the new posts of his/her friends.	0.88	3.32	1.33
2. I often spent time looking through my ex-partner's Facebook pictures.	0.85	2.95	1.37
3. I paid particularly close attention to news feeds and posts that mentioned my ex-partner.	0.91	3.13	1.35
4. I noticed when my ex-partner updated his/her Facebook page.	0.88	3.14	1.36
5. If there were messages on my ex-partner's wall or pictures I didn't understand, I tried to investigate them.	0.76	2.82	1.40
6. I was generally aware of my ex-partner's Facebook activities.	0.84	3.11	1.32
7. I would explore my ex-partner's Facebook page to see if there was anything new or exciting.	0.89	2.98	1.33
<i>Current interpersonal electronic surveillance</i>			
1. When visiting my ex-partner's Facebook page, I read the new posts of his/her friends.	0.84	2.33	1.27
2. I often spend time looking through my ex-partner's Facebook pictures.	0.76	2.00	1.11
3. I pay particularly close attention to news feeds and posts that mentioned my ex-partner.	0.85	2.15	1.21
4. I notice when my ex-partner updated his/her Facebook page.	0.83	2.17	1.20
5. If there are messages on my ex-partner's wall or pictures I don't understand, I try to investigate them.	0.78	1.92	1.10
6. I am generally aware of my ex-partner's Facebook activities.	0.85	2.17	1.18
7. I explore my ex-partner's Facebook page to see if there is anything new or exciting.	0.84	2.14	1.19

( $\beta=0.45$ ,  $SE=0.04$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Individuals who monitored their ex-partners online immediately following the dissolution of their relationship were more likely to monitor their ex-partners online currently ( $\beta=0.60$ ,  $SE=0.03$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Next, the study examined whether attributing the relational breakup to oneself, the ex-romantic partner, or a mutual decision corresponded to changes in the relationships of

the hypothesized model. A multigroup path model was used to test this research question. Multigroup analyses can be useful when determining if a proposed model produces similar estimates across homogeneous subsamples in a larger sample.<sup>46</sup> The sample used to test the overall fit of the proposed model was therefore partitioned into three different groups: self ( $n=202$ ), other ( $n=157$ ), or mutual ( $n=72$ ).

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Anxious attachment	—	-0.19 <sup>‡</sup>	0.20 <sup>‡</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.18 <sup>‡</sup>	0.25 <sup>‡</sup>	0.26 <sup>‡</sup>	0.19 <sup>‡</sup>
2. Avoidant attachment		—	-0.46 <sup>*</sup>	0.07	-0.30 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.19 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.18 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.10 <sup>*</sup>
3. Investment			—	-0.11 <sup>*</sup>	0.74 <sup>‡</sup>	0.52 <sup>‡</sup>	0.24 <sup>‡</sup>	0.11 <sup>*</sup>
4. Alternatives				—	-0.16 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.16 <sup>‡</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>
5. Commitment					—	0.54 <sup>‡</sup>	0.24 <sup>‡</sup>	0.10 <sup>*</sup>
6. Distress recovery						—	0.43 <sup>‡</sup>	0.24 <sup>‡</sup>
7. Surveillance (post-breakup)							—	0.57 <sup>‡</sup>
8. Surveillance (current)								—

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; † $p < 0.001$ ; ‡ $p < 0.0005$ .

Multigroup path modeling constrains the paths across the models of the three groups to be equal and then releases those equality constraints that significantly improve model fit.

The indicators of each latent variable were averaged into unit parcels for the multigroup analysis. The proposed model was evaluated across the three groups to determine between-group equivalence of the factor loadings. The path coefficients of the models for the three groups were constrained to be equal. The between-group equivalence model demonstrated modest fit to the data,  $\chi^2(72) = 142.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.083 [90% CI 0.063–0.103], SRMR = 0.10. The modification indices were consulted to see whether releasing a constraint would significantly improve model fit. The modification indices suggested that the equality constraint of the path between distress and online surveillance immediately after the breakup for the group that attributed the breakup to their ex-romantic partner could be freed. Freeing this constraint significantly improved model fit,  $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1) = 8.38$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . The relationship between distress and online surveillance is stronger for individuals who attribute the breakup to their ex-partners ( $b = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) than it is for those who took personal responsibility or recognized the breakup as a mutual decision ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The next constraint that the modification indices recommended freeing—the path between anxious attachment and alternatives for the group that attributed responsibility of the breakup to the ex-partner—did not significantly reduce the model chi-square,  $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1) = 2.83$ ,  $p = 0.09$ . Therefore, the constraint was retained. The results of the multigroup analysis, with the common and unshared unstandardized path coefficients for each group, are reported in Figure 2.

Discussion

This study tested a model that integrated attachment theory and elements of the investment model to predict interpersonal electronic surveillance in the wake of romantic relationship dissolution. It was found anxious attachment was positively associated with alternatives and investment, whereas avoidant attachment was positively associated with alternatives and negatively associated with investment. Investment was positively and strongly related to commitment, whereas alternatives were negatively related to commitment. Higher levels of commitment were associated with increases in emotional distress after the breakup, which in turn predicted surveillance both immediately after the breakup and currently. Moreover, the relationship between distress and surveillance was stronger among individuals who attributed the breakup to their partner compared with those who initiated the breakup or claimed it was mutual. These results contribute to a growing literature showing the complementarity of attachment theory and interdependence theory in predicting relational outcomes and behaviors, and existing research is extended to include online behaviors.

The present results suggest that individuals most traumatized by a breakup are most likely to monitor their ex-partners online, which previous research indicates may further postpone their emotional recovery.<sup>5</sup> Practically, this finding indicates that individuals experiencing a high level of distress from a breakup should consider disconnecting from the ex-partner on SNSs, either temporarily or permanently. At this point, there is no clear clinical definition or boundary for what is considered psychologically healthy and unhealthy levels of online surveillance of one’s partner, particularly

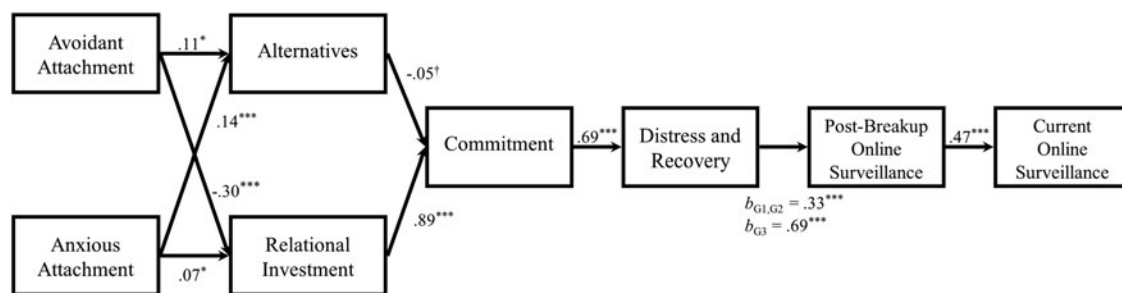


FIG. 2. The multigroup path model with unstandardized path coefficients. G1 represents the group of individuals who attributed the breakup to themselves. G2 represents the group that attributed the breakup mutually. G3 represents the group that attributed the breakup to the ex-partner. † $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

after a breakup. This study focused primarily on dispositional and relational antecedents and did not address many post-dissolution consequences, such as rumination, depressive symptoms, or desire to rekindle the relationship, which may determine whether these behaviors are successful coping mechanisms or effectively prolong distress. These variables may also help determine the threshold at which IES is acceptable after a breakup.

This study also supports previous literature indicating that attachment style is a key predictor of both offline<sup>16–24</sup> and online relational behavior.<sup>5,8,12,26</sup> From a counseling perspective, understanding a client's attachment style is important to understanding how they will experience a relationship, as well as how they will cope with its dissolution. Further, attachment may provide insights into other sites of relationship problems tied to communication technologies, such as Internet addiction<sup>47–49</sup> or jealousy and conflict related to couples' Internet use.<sup>50,51</sup> The present findings also demonstrate that traumatic events may be triggers for problematic Internet use; counselors may want to assess changes in usage during periods of stress, particularly for anxiously attached individuals.

One limitation of the current approach is that it does not account for the likely cyclical relationship between distress and online surveillance; distress may promote surveillance, but surveillance may also promote distress. Seeing social information on an ex-partner's SNS page after a breakup, such as flirting with other potential partners or a change in the relationship status, can trigger negative affect<sup>33,50</sup> and prolong distress.<sup>5</sup> Although it is difficult for researchers to track relationships before and after breakups occur, such data would lend insight to these processes.

One qualification of this study is that it relied upon retrospective self-report data. Because of biases in how anxiously attached individuals report satisfaction in terminated relationships, this variable could not be assessed retrospectively.<sup>38</sup> Future longitudinal research may be able to track these variables over time. Other measures of attachment may also be employed. Although confirmatory factor analyses indicated coherence among the remaining anxiety items, the resultant alpha was low. Additionally, future research may explore how attachment and relational variables predict different motivations for online surveillance of ex-partners.<sup>9</sup> For example, anxiously attached individuals may monitor an ex-partner in the hope of rekindling the relationship, whereas avoidant individuals may visit an ex-partner's page to remind themselves why they are no longer in that relationship.

The time spent monitoring the ex-partner's SNS presence was measured in this study, but more specific SNS consumption should be investigated.<sup>51</sup> SNSs can serve as virtual scrapbooks for relationships, as they serve as an anthology of past posts, interactions, and photos shared on the site.<sup>12</sup> Viewing one's own SNS content may promote reflection or rumination about the breakup, which is associated with prolonged emotional distress, particularly for anxiously attached individuals.<sup>23</sup> Another possibility is that users spend time investigating the ex-partner's new romantic interest and engaging in social comparison, which may lead to negative affect.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, with the growing popularity of SNSs such as Twitter and Instagram, a more holistic approach to SNS consumption may be informative. Differences in affordances,

practices, or audiences across these sites may present interesting angles for future research. Future studies may also compare online surveillance behaviors with offline surveillance behaviors. With the affordances SNSs provide to encourage self-disclosure<sup>52</sup> and the amount of personal information many people are willing to disclose on SNSs,<sup>53</sup> this may diminish the need for individuals to engage in offline surveillance. Alternatively, the information gleaned from SNSs may trigger more curiosity or uncertainty, leading to greater offline surveillance.

SNSs and other mediated interpersonal channels will continue to play integral roles in the escalation, maintenance, and dissolution of romantic relationships. Scholars, and users themselves, must continue to delineate whether SNS behaviors are constructive or destructive forces at both an individual and dyadic level.

### Author Disclosure Statement

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Address correspondence to:

*Dr. Jesse Fox*  
*3084 Derby Hall*  
*154 North Oval Mall*  
*Columbus, OH 43210-1339*

*E-mail: fox.775@osu.edu*