I have several lines of research mostly focused on the topic of unwanted pursuit and relational stalking. The goal of the first line of research is to identify theory-driven predictors of perpetration of unwanted pursuit. Fewer researchers study perpetration than victimization, but true understanding must involve perpetrators. A second line of research examines the real-world consequences stalking, including how a previous consensual relationship shapes victims’ experiences. The third area of research of psycho-legal aspects of stalking includes examining how gender influences the legally-required fear component for stalking, how lay persons judge potential stalking victims, and an action research grant proposal on how law enforcement officers handle stalking cases in the Southeast. The fourth area of research concerns perceptions of and predictors of sexual aggression. Studies include specifying what discriminates men who use force or manipulation as assault tactics and investigating high school coaches’ perceptions of sexual assault.

Predictors of perpetration

I am especially interested in investigating the predictors of unwanted pursuit perpetration. Although commonly found in adolescent populations, this type of perpetration still crosses the line into obsession and results in negative consequences for victims. Little empirical research has tested theoretically-grounded models of unwanted pursuit perpetration and even less has examined predictors with data from pursuers.

Pursuant to this goal, I have developed a theory-guided meditational model of unwanted pursuit perpetration. We predicted a fully mediated model in which the anxiety-related traits of anxious attachment, self-esteem, and rejection sensitivity would predict two cognitive factors of rumination and linking, which would in turn predict anger and jealousy. We hypothesized that these emotions would predict perpetration of unwanted pursuit. Preliminary analyses reveal partial support for the mediational model in which jealousy, rejection sensitivity, and anxious attachment contribute to linking, which then predicts unwanted pursuit. We have added to the dataset and will soon be analyzing those data using structural equation modeling.

A second study in the revise and resubmit status continues the theme of theory-based rejection and unwanted pursuit by experimentally manipulating scenario-based types of attribution for rejection and depletion of self-regulation. Participants who role-played being rejected with an internal attribution reported a higher probability of engaging in acts of unwanted pursuit compared to participants who were rejected with an external attribution. Potential perpetration was highest in participants who had been depleted of their self-regulation and couldn’t inhibit their aggression when confronted with this rejection-based threat to the self. These results directly contradict common advice to stalking victims that they should be direct and harsh in their rejection of their pursuer, as this actually increased potential perpetration.

A third study currently under review examines Facebook stalking. Like any new form of technology, Facebook can be abused. While the media have reported stories of such abuse, research has lagged behind. We developed a survey measuring how much people “Facebook stalk” their ex-partners have found three factors of provocation, public harassment, and venting;
perpetration of each which is associated with an increase in the odds in also perpetrating cyberpursuit and traditional unwanted pursuit.

**Consequences for victims**

The focus for this line of research is to examine the real-world consequences of misperceptions of relational stalking. Relational stalking involves victims and perpetrators who were previously in romantic relationship. This type of stalking is the most frequent, severe, and even deadly form, but it also is plagued by stereotypes similar to those found in the rape literature.

I have had the privilege of working with a colleague who has a unique international sample of stalking victims. Our recently accepted manuscript tests the relative predictive power of the victim-perpetrator relationship and victim gender to predict the psychological, physical, social, and economic consequences to victims. An international survey of 1,214 valid self-defined stalking victims revealed that victims who had a prior relationship with their stalkers were more likely to experience a greater number of psychological, physical, and social costs than victims who had no such relationship. However, our results suggest that women do experience more psychological and physical consequences than men, and that this pattern is not due solely to the fact that women are more often stalked by ex-intimates. One potential reason why is that women reported much higher levels of fear than did men; in fact victim fear mediated the relationship between the predictor variables of prior relationship, victim fear and the psychological and physical consequences of stalking victimization.

The line between unwanted pursuit and stalking is at least partially crossed when victims become afraid. I believe that this legally-required fear standard is often used as a heuristic for severity. There is also the question to which this standard influences the differing prevalence of female vs. male victims. Therefore, I am currently interviewing both male and female victims of relational stalking and unwanted pursuit. The goal is to examine how the heterosexual romantic relationship scripts and expectations of masculinity and femininity influence perceptions of pursuit by an ex-partner and what influences the experience of fear.

**Psycho-legal aspects of stalking**

While the previous study examined negative consequences to victims, another important source of information is how stalkers are handled by the legal system. Due to the way our society views romantic persistence, relational stalking may be minimized or viewed as “romantic.” It is vital to examine how law enforcement handles such complaints and cases.

In a study currently under review, we used an archival analysis of stalking case opinions (N = 216) from ten different states focusing on the relationship between the severity of the stalking incident, the victim-perpetrator relationship, and the legal outcome. Results showed that although intimate stalking victims experienced the most serious forms of stalking, resulting sentences were disproportionately light. In these court appeals, the judges affirmed that the defendant stalked or otherwise harassed the victim, but perpetrators were punished less if the stalking occurred in a romantic context than when perpetrated by a stranger or non-romantic acquaintance.

The ideal situation is to directly examine individuals who are on the front lines of law enforcement and stalking. Thus, we currently have a grant proposal under review at the National Institute of Justice in which we take an action-based research approach to evaluate and enhance
justice system responses to stalking cases. Over a three year period, we plan to assess legal system responses to stalking cases with a series of experimental and non-experimental surveys of victims, victim advocates, police, prosecutors, and judges in two states. Concurrent with the surveys, we will collaborate with existing training programs to offer stalking-specific training for professionals throughout each state. Training will integrate feedback from surveys with existing research on stalking to create a training model including information on stalking facts, victim services, and threat management.

**Sexual aggression**

As with my work on unwanted pursuit and stalking, I have focused on perpetrators of sexual aggression. One method was to examine the predictors of perpetrators’ strategies to gain sexual access to women, while another questions whether high school coaches could be an ally – or a roadblock – to early prevention programs.

This published study examined the types of sexual coercion tactics that men used to obtain contact with an unwilling partner and its relationship between perpetrator characteristics and situational contexts. Men were grouped according to whether they used consent, manipulation, or force. As predicted, men who used force reported more childhood sexual abuse, witnessed more domestic violence, were more accepting of male violence, and were less likely to endorse love as a motive for sex than men in both the manipulation and consent groups. Men in the force group were also more likely to have had a casual relationship with the woman, and to be drinking and also intoxicated during the coercive incident than men in the manipulation group.

As part of a group of colleagues examining the potential to engage coaches in sexual violence prevention, we conducted open-ended key informant individual and focus group interviews with high school coaches and administrators. The results revealed five emergent themes: (1) coaches believe they have influences over athletes' character and life; (2) coaches lack education in gender-based sexual aggression; (3) coaches endorse rape myths; (4) coaches minimize the problem of male sexual aggression; and (5) coaches are resistant to being engaged in sexual aggression prevention. Our study suggests that coaches may need in-depth training on gender-based sexual aggression even if they do not want to engage in prevention efforts because they may be transmitting values and beliefs that support and condone male sexual aggression to their athletes. This study is currently under review.