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# Emotional, Social, and Cognitive Correlates of Stalking and Intrusive Harassment.

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EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND COGNITIVE CORRELATES OF STALKING AND  
INTRUSIVE HARASSMENT

By

Allissa Marquez

A DISSERTATION

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EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND COGNITIVE CORRELATES OF STALKING AND  
INTRUSIVE HARASSMENT

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University of Nebraska, 2013

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Although stalking has been recognized as social problem for the last twenty years, few studies have examined the treatment needs or effectiveness with these persistent offenders. The dearth of information on appropriate intervention is in part related to the difficulty of operationalizing stalking behavior in empirical studies. Accordingly, the present study sought to examine clinically relevant indicators of functioning using both categorical and continuous definitions of stalking behavior. Two hundred and fifty male prisoners were surveyed about their engagement in intrusive and aggressive behaviors during a significant conflict, as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. Results indicated quantitative cutoffs recommended by previous research overincluded generally aggressive offenders. Still, the stalking group identified by this approach displayed the ruminative patterns suggested by theorists. Furthermore, few proposed functioning variables predicted violence and pursuit intensity during multivariate modeling. Violence was only predicted by greater self-reported trait rumination, while pursuit intensity was predicted by greater substance use, greater event-specific rumination, and poorer conflict management skills.

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### Dedication

I would like to thank my family and friends who supported me over the last decade. All my love and appreciation to my parents for teaching me the value of hard work and education, as well as their emotional and financial support. Many thanks to my friends for getting me out of the books and keeping me sane.

Para las tres generaciones que vinieron antes; desde los campos a la universidad.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

First criminalized in 1990, stalking disrupts the lives of hundreds of thousands of men and women across the United States each year. In 1998, Tjaden and Thoennes published what was the largest epidemiological study of stalking of the time. Their report estimated that approximately 1.4 million men and women are stalked annually in the United States, with lifetime prevalence ranging from two percent of men to eight percent of women. More recently, Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose (2009) surveyed over 65,000 adults aged 18 and over in the United States in a supplemental section of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Based on their results, the researchers estimated that approximately 3.4 million Americans were stalked in the past twelve months and an additional 2.4 million who did not meet the fear standard were harassed. Furthermore, as computer-mediated communications (CMCs) become increasingly integrated into our society, interest in cyber-stalking and harassment has grown amongst researchers and public policymakers. Research indicates that although purely online stalking is infrequent, CMCs are frequently used in the course of general stalking cases (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Baum et al., 2009). In fact, Baum et al. (2009) found that approximately one-fourth of victims reported experiencing cyber-stalking or electronic monitoring, predominantly through e-mail and instant messaging technologies.

Given that stalking campaigns can include a variety of seemingly minor transgressions (e.g., phone calls, gifts) it would be easy to discount the seriousness of the behavior. However, research reveals serious risks associated with victimization. Recent studies estimate that physical violence toward victims occurs in 19-56% of stalking incidents (Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie, Meloy, Green-McGowan, & Williams, 2006;



McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2009; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Blaauw et al., 2002), with 1.6-5.0% involving sexual assault (Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie et al., 2006). Even though research indicates that the majority of stalking-related violence involves relatively minor acts and rarely results in lasting physical damage (Rosenfeld, 2004; Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie et al., 2006), stalking is a significant risk factor for intimate partner femicide (Campbell et al., 2003; McFarlane et. al., 2002; McFarlane et al., 1999). Likewise, research reveals an array of social, emotional, and economic damage experience by victims. Victims consistently report experiencing psychological morbidity associated with stalking, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g., Amar, 2006; Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004). Almost half on average reported some damage to their social health and resources (e.g., going out less, mistrust new partners, etc.; Spitzberg, 2002). Victims lost time from work due to fear for their safety or to pursue legal remedies in 12-17% of cases (Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie et al., 2006) and 130,000 victims reported being fired or asked to leave their jobs because of the stalking (Baum et al., 2009).

### **Defining Stalking and Intrusive Harassment**

Meloy and Gothard (1995, p. 259) defined *obsessional following*, their clinical term for stalking, as “an abnormal or long term pattern of threat or harassment directed toward a specific individual,” which includes “more than one overt act of unwanted pursuit of the victim that was perceived by the victim as being harassing.” A more recent legal definition of stalking describes the behavior as occurring when a person engages in “a course of conduct directed at a specific person and knows or should that the course of conduct would cause a reasonable person to: (a) fear for his or her safety or the safety of

a third person; or (b) suffer other emotional distress is guilty of stalking” (The National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007). In truth, researchers and legislators have struggled to agree on a definition which adequately classifies offenders whose behavior breaches a level of concern without the over inclusion of misguided and annoying, but negligible social transgressions. This struggle occurs because stalking is considered to exist along a continuum of unwanted, intrusive and persistent behaviors. Along this continuum is intrusive harassment, which can be understood as “menacing and intimidating contacts across multiple settings (e.g. business, home) that also impacts those close to the target (e.g. family, co-workers)” (Marquez & Scalora, 2011).

The continuum on which stalking and intrusive harassment exist is often noted for its course of conduct or pattern of behaviors, rather than a restriction to a single behavior. True to form, victims frequently portray their perpetrator’s pursuit as encompassing a range of distressing behaviors. Research estimates that about three fourths of stalkers use multiple methods to communicate with or harass their targets (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999) and between two thirds and half of victims report being subjected to at least one unwanted behavior each week (Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie et al., 2006). Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) developed the most in depth description of the behavioral themes of stalking campaigns. Their research focuses on a variant of unwanted pursuit termed Obsessive Relational Intrusion (ORI) which is defined “as repeated and unwanted pursuit and invasion of one’s sense of physical or symbolic privacy by another person, either stranger or acquaintance, who desires and/or presumes an intimate relationship” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1998, pp. 234–235). Although ORI is not synonymous with stalking, it contains many similar behaviors, including

mediated contacts, interactional contacts, hyperintimacy, surveillance, boundary invasions, harassment, and threats.

Stalking cases involve a considerable amount of direct and indirect communications with the victim. Spitzberg (2002) described *mediated contacts* as those communications that occurred through technological or indirect means (e.g., e-mail, telephone, internet, etc.). In a meta-analysis of over one hundred stalking studies (pre-2002), Spitzberg (2002) found that over 25% of cases involved electronic contacts with the victim. A more recent file review study observed unwanted telephone calls were reported in 52% of cases (Mohandie et al., 2006). *Interactional contacts* are communications that occur in proximal space or in face-to-face exchanges. Research estimates that between half and two thirds of stalking cases exhibit physical approach of the target (Spitzberg, 2002; Monhandie et al., 2006). Still, much of stalking behavior may occur without the victim's knowledge.

*Surveillance behaviors* are attempts to either overtly or covertly seek information and/or monitor the target. Research indicates that in approximately one third of cases perpetrators engage in physical following, lying in wait, or watching (Spitzberg, 2002; Baum et al., 2009). Mohandie et al. (2006) found that half of stalking cases obtained from law enforcement/security agencies exhibited some degree of surveillance type behaviors, but less than 10% obtained private information. Spitzberg and Cupach (2007, p. 71) described *invasion* as behaviors which "violat[e] normatively prescribed personal and legal boundaries, such as the theft of information, breaking and entering into a person's premises, and trespassing." Spitzberg (2002) found that approximately one quarter of cases involved invasion type behaviors. For example, Baum et al. (2009)

demonstrated over half of victims surveyed reported some degree of interferences with their financial accounts. Stalking is still further set apart from normative pursuit by the quality of its contacts, not just presence of unwanted contact.

Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) described *hyperintimacy* as behaviors that may typically occur during courtship (e.g., ingratiation, bids for relationship escalation, etc.) that are taken to excessive levels. Often these behaviors reflect boundary violation either because of their inappropriateness in the context of the relationship (e.g., bids for relationships with public figures) or their intensity (e.g., hundreds of roses instead of a dozen). Across studies, over half of cases on average involved exaggerated expressions of affection (Spitzberg, 2002). Likewise, between one-fifth and one-fourth of cases on average evidenced hypersexuality and ingratiation, while more than 40% included bids for relationship escalation (Spitzberg, 2002).

*Harassment* and *intimidation* can be understood as encompassing a variety of socially aggressive tactics to annoy, bother, or otherwise distress a target. These behaviors can include attempts to sully the reputation of another through rumors, irritatingly persistent low-level behaviors (e.g., frequent phone calls), and socially aggressive behaviors that do not reach the level of threat or violence. Among a large national sample of stalking victims, over 35% reported that their perpetrator spread rumors about them (Baum et al., 2009), with 31% of studies on average reporting such reputational harassment (Spitzberg, 2002). *Threats* and *coercive* behaviors include both explicit and implicit suggestions of potential harm to the victim (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Estimates of the occurrence of threats in stalking cases range between 30-60%

(Spitzberg, 2002; Baum et al., 2009; Mohandie et al., 2006; McEwan, Mullen, & Purcell, 2007).

Operationally defining stalking within a research paradigm has been difficult for scholars since the inception of the construct. The difficulty of creating a gold standard stems from the lack of concise, unambiguous, and universal indicators for the construct. Of course research on other forms of aggressive behavior (e.g., rape, domestic assault) has also struggled with definitional ambiguities, but there are more concrete and specific indexes for these offenses than for stalking. For example, one could define assault as physical contact with another person which is unwanted and causes physical or emotional harm. Even though this may not capture all types of assault or methods of contact, it still limits target behavior to a single genre of behavior. Because stalking can include a range of behaviors, it also carries with it all the definitional flaws included in the individual behaviors. The specificity and sensitivity rates will still be better than that for stalking definitions. As a result of these difficulties, researchers have employed a variety of operationalizations of stalking and have yet to agree on a standard.

Methods based on criminal history (e.g., index offense, past charges) are problematic because research demonstrates that offenders are infrequently prosecuted using stalking legislation. Prosecutors opt for a variety of lesser charges including terroristic threats, assault, disturbing the peace, trespassing and so on (Huffines, 2001; Jordan et al., 2003; Mohandie et al., 2006). Though some researchers have studied samples of stalkers identified by their legal status (e.g., Rosenfeld et al., 2007), this necessarily requires a jurisdiction sensitive to stalking issues or a long duration of data collection to ensure an adequate sample size. Similarly, it is assumed any person without

stalking-related convictions has not engaged in such behaviors, which again is less certain given prosecutorial practices may have led to other charges. Additionally, many of the studies defining stalking by legal status gather their sample from forensic settings (e.g., Meloy et al., 2001), which may over-represent the proportion of mentally ill stalkers.

Self-report methods likewise have drawbacks in regards to its quality of disclosure and base rates of more severe behaviors. To begin with, research participants may not disclose stalking behaviors due to poor insight, attempts at impression management, or embarrassment. Even if disclosures are provided truthfully, research reveals that the vast majority of survey participants engage in some form of unwanted pursuit (e.g., Williams & Frieze, 2005). It is difficult to decide where to draw distinction between normal and abnormal pursuit since stalking may include a variety of the behaviors which may be legal or socially acceptable in other contexts (e.g., pleads for forgiveness, flirtation, phone calls, etc.). For example, a pursuit may breach the level of inappropriateness with a high frequency of a low severity behavior (e.g., phone calls), a low frequency of a high severity of behavior (physical following), or even a moderate frequency of several types of high and low severity behaviors. The base rates of the more severe and aggressive behaviors will further depend on the type of sample used, with forensic and correctional samples being more likely to report harassment and physical violence than student or community samples. Although student samples are more cost efficient and readily available, overuse in aggression studies fails to address the needs of those individuals most likely to be targeted by mental health and criminal justice interventions. Such approaches further complicate attempts to discriminate problematic

from non-problematic behavior as well as stalking from other forms of antisocial behavior.

Within the self-reporting paradigm, operationalization of stalking generally focuses on the quantification of behavior. Legislative approaches to defining stalking similarly incorporate a quantified behavioral component by defining the construct as involving a *course of conduct* or *pattern of behaviors*. In several states, these terms are further defined as being two or more behaviors. This is a low threshold which legislators have supplemented by requiring that the offender knew or should of knew the behavior was likely to cause fear or emotional distress for the victim. Direct questioning of these cognitive elements in research, however, is again dependent on the honest, insightful, and empathic responding of the participant. Alternatively, researchers have focused on the number, frequency, and/or nature of the disclosed behavior. Researchers have commonly utilized inventories of intrusive and aggressive behaviors within an unwanted context to provide a total score of stalking behavior. This approach places all respondents on a continuum of stalking such that any behavior endorsed is an indicator of stalking and not a normal course of conflict or another form of aggressive behavior (e.g., robbery). Some have attempted to account for this by creating detailed introductions to limit the contextual scope of the responses (e.g., Obsessive Relational Intrusion scale), whereas other researchers have only surveyed for a subset of the most intrusive and harassing behaviors thought to uniquely represent stalking (e.g., loitering, physical following, etc.). Still, each approach maintains the risk of over including non-stalkers and under including actual stalkers.

In 2008, Thompson and Dennison published a series of analyses attempting to address the sometimes arbitrary nature of stalking research definitions. The researchers used an earlier version of the Obsessive Relational Intrusion scale which quantified stalking in total scores representing the frequency and number of behaviors. The measure also focused on pursuits which sought the initiation or continuance of an intimate relationship with a person who did not reciprocate. Their findings revealed that higher cutoffs for repetition of behaviors resulted in a target sample who engaged in more serious forms of pursuit, including threats and violence (Thompson & Dennison, 2008). Thompson and Dennison (2008) concluded a cutoff of five or more behaviors would sufficiently limit the proportion of the sample labeled as stalking without sustaining a considerable loss in the proportion of threatening or violent cases identified. Yet, it seems imprudent to automatically categorize even moderate levels of persistent pursuit as stalking since most people are likely to engage in at least some contact behaviors to resolve conflicts and some assaultive acts require an escalation of behaviors short of stalking. More informative is the finding that higher levels of repetition corresponded to greater admission to engage in the behavior to frighten, harm, or intimidate (Thompson & Dennison, 2008), thus cutoffs at ten or more behaviors may be more telltale of stalking. Purcell, Pathé, and Mullen (2004) in their study of victims within the community, also endorsed the threshold of ten or more behaviors.

Temporal cutoffs have also been explored given the lengthy nature of some stalking pursuits. Thompson and Dennison (2008) further reported that definitions based on the duration of pursuits were less useful and were unrelated to the proportions of violence and threats observed. This finding contrasts those of Purcell et al. (2004) who



determined that a duration of two weeks provided a watershed mark for identifying more intrusive, violent, and psychosocially harmful pursuits. Denying the importance of duration seems to oversimplify the categorization of samples. Certainly there are several other groups of offenders who engage in intrusive and aggressive acts in response to rejection or conflicts without rising to a level of stalking (e.g., barroom brawlers, domestic assaulters, gang members, etc.). These other types of offenders might necessarily need to engage in several contact behaviors in order locate their target or escalate in aggression. Interpersonal conflicts and rejection under typical conditions are likely to be resolved fairly quickly for the average person. Therefore, it may be reasonable to include a requirement for duration.

Given the lack of agreement within the literature regarding appropriate operationalizations, the first main purpose of this study was to examine two measurement approaches within an offender sample. The first approach views stalking as a continuous construct with the total score representing the degree to which intrusive and aggressive behavior has been generalized. This approach avoids artificially carving up the construct and, thereby, losing variance and power during hypothesis testing. The second approach recognizes the clinical need to provide diagnostic labels at times in order to determine when intervention is necessary. This categorical approach applies the repetition and temporal cutoffs suggested in the literature to the continuous data. Direct comparison of the approaches would be inappropriate since neither can be tested against a gold standard indicator for stalking and the distribution of responses would remain similar across approaches. Still, applying the continuous approach to behavioral measurement is most consistent with previous research methodology with samples not based on legal status.

At the same time, the categorical approach allows one to examine the utility of the recommended cutoffs and to study experimental variables in a manner more translatable to clinical practice. It further allows for between group comparisons on experimental variables. Accordingly, both sets of results will be reported and discussed.

### **Understanding Stalking and Intrusive Harassment**

Research on stalking has increased exponentially over the last twenty years, yet a dearth of information remains about how to best intervene in these pursuits. Some clinical experts in the field have provided recommendations for the treatment of stalkers (e.g., Mullen et al., 2001), but many of these proposals lack sufficient empirical testing to confirm or refute them. In fact, the vast majority of clinical research on stalking focuses on measuring risk and diagnosing offenders, but says little about the processes which drive the behavior. Several writers have casually discussed their impression about the progression of stalking behavior, but only two have formally presented hypothesized models- Meloy's psychodynamic attachment pathology theory and Spitzberg's relational goal pursuit theory. Neither has become generally accepted as explanations for stalking, but both have provided theoretical bases for preliminary studies of intrusive and aggressive pursuit behavior.

Meloy (1998) presented a psychodynamic theory of stalking which conceptualized the behavior as attachment pathology. According to Meloy (1998), a stalker's pursuit is grounded in a disturbed progression of narcissistic linking fantasies involving the target. Meloy argued this linking was not per se pathological, but only became stalking as the result of the perpetrator's inability to see the target as a complete, meaningful, and separate entity. After being rejected by an object of pursuit, well-

balanced individuals can view the target as having such qualities and will progress through typical reactionary emotions (e.g., empathy, grief, etc.) while withdrawing from their pursuit. Because the stalker's pathological narcissism makes them sensitive to rejection and the associated emotions (e.g., shame, humiliation), they derogate the target as a defensive tactic. Engaging in the stalking behaviors allows the perpetrator to restore balance to their linking fantasy, which is characterized by perceptions of some form of relation to the target (e.g., idealization, mirroring, twinship, merging).

To date, no study has specifically examined Meloy's (1998) model, but some research on the individual components is supportive. In regards to pathological linking to the victim, researchers have consistently found insecure attachments styles amongst those who stalk (Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Lewis, Fremouw, Del Ben, & Farr, 2001; Mackenzie, Mullen, Ogloff, McEwan, & James, 2008; Montero, 2002; Patton, Nobles & Fox, 2010; Tonin, 2004; Wisternoff, 2008). Though it is unclear whether the linking observed in stalking cases actually takes on a narcissistic quality, research shows that narcissistic personality traits increase aggressive reactions to rejection and provocation among students (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Martinez, Zeichner, Reidy & Miller, 2008; Twenge, & Campbell, 2003). Consistent with this view, at least one study has also observed small-to-moderate positive correlations between narcissistic personality traits and engagement in obsessive relational intrusive among college students (Montero, 2002). Additionally, Meloy's psychodynamic theory states stalkers display sensitivity to rejection. Experimental research has shown trait rejection sensitivity enhances the relationship between social rejection and aggressive behavior (Ayduk, Gyurak, &

Luerssen, 2008). These results are further supported by results highlighting interpersonal and rejection sensitivities among stalkers (Kamphuis et al., 2004; Kropp, 2008).

Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) posited an interactionist theory to explain obsessive relational intrusion (ORI). Though ORI is not synonymous with stalking, it makes sense to consider this theory given the behavioral overlap between the two constructs. The Relational Goal Pursuit theory (RGP) is based on the principle that an individual will increase their efforts in pursuing a thwarted goal to the degree to which the goal is desirable and attainable. If the effort required exceeds the value of the goal, then the goal will be abandoned. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) hypothesized that, for individuals exhibiting ORI behaviors, higher-order goals (e.g., self worth, life happiness, etc.) become contingent on the attainment or maintenance of a relationship with the target. When this goal is threatened, the individual displays an inflated anticipation of the consequences associated with the failure (e.g., negative affect) which results in rumination. These cognitive and emotional processes encourage the individual to increase the persistence and intensity of their efforts to (re)establish a relationship with the target. Finally, the individual rationalizes the use of ORI behaviors as a means for goal achievement and, at the same time, over-estimates his likelihood for success.

Similar to the psychodynamic pathological attachment theory, the RGP theory of obsessive relational intrusion has received little empirical attention. To begin with, Carson and Cupach (2002) found relationship-specific higher order goal linking had small, positive correlations with possessiveness, compensatory efforts to restore the relationship, negative affect expression, and violence towards objects among college students. The construct was unrelated to surveillance and violence toward others. As for

emotional flooding, research has found that feelings of anger and jealousy positively predict the stalking behaviors (Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Montero, 2002 for women but not men; Sinclair & Frieze, 2002; Wisternoff, 2008) and mediate relationship between anxious attachment and stalking (Davis et al., 2000). Physical aggression was also associated with a greater degree of negative affect toward the target (Dennison & Stewart, 2006; Morrison, 2008). Some research also supports the notion that rumination influences the onset of stalking behaviors after relationship termination (Dennison & Stewart, 2006). In fact, relationship-specific rumination is positively correlated with control-oriented (e.g., surveillance, manipulation, possessiveness) and socially aggressive behaviors (e.g., violence, derogation of competitors) among college students (Carson & Cupach, 2002). Contrary to the RGP theory, relationship-specific higher order goal linking was not associated with rumination (Carson & Cupach, 2002). Finally, at least one study observed behavioral rationalization among students who engaged in unwanted relationship pursuit (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005).

Despite their different orientations, the two theories share similar components. At face value this assertion may seem odd, but their common components which may be reframed as cognitive-behavioral concepts. To begin with both the psychodynamic and RGP theories speculate that persistently intrusive individuals infuse symbolic meaning into their targets. In the psychodynamic model, this takes the form of a narcissism-based identity linking (e.g., twinship, margining, etc.), whereas the RGP theory posits relationship attainment is merged with larger, abstract intrapsychic needs (e.g., validation, status, power/control, etc.). Likewise, the two models highlight the use of techniques for avoiding self-critical evaluation. The RGP theory frames this attempt as

rationalizations for one's behavior, whereas the psychodynamic model focuses on victim derogation. From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, one could describe these components as interplay between schemata and cognitive distortions. The schemata act as a mental framework defining the role of the victim as they relate to the offender, while the cognitive distortions manipulate information from the environment that is inconsistent with this framework. Furthermore, both models also touch on components of emotion regulation and coping strategies. The RGP theory focuses on an overload of emotional stimuli and its relation to rumination, while Meloy's psychodynamic model describes more generally a stalker's tendency to poorly regulate normal emotional responses to rejection.

The reinterpretation of these theories into cognitive and emotion regulation concepts is consistent with predominant theories of criminal behavior in general. Clinical researchers in the last two decades have especially emphasized cognitive social learning theories of criminal behavior (e.g., Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Walters & White, 1990). Cognitive social learning theories underscore the interdependence of internal processes (regulation, cognitions, decision-making processes) and the offender's socio-environmental situation in explaining behavior and personality. In this regard, stalking is a behavioral manifestation of cognitive-emotional processes that occur in reaction to social stressors within the victim-stalker relationship. Preliminary research demonstrates that relationship context influences the progression of stalking behavior, particularly as it relates to risk of harm, and that many stalkers experience significant psychosocial stressors prior to the onset of their behavior (Coleman, 1999; Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O'Reagan, & Meloy, 1997; Meloy & Boyd, 2003; Morrison, 2008). Less is

known about the internal processes motivating stalking; however, clinical experts in the field have reported some treatment progress when targeting maladaptive cognitions (Badcock, 2002; Mullen et al., 2001; Warren et al., 2005), emotional regulation/distress tolerance (Rosenfeld et al., 2007), and social skills (Kropp et al., 2002; Mullen et al., 2001). Still, the theoretical basis of behaviors is only one consideration in research on aggressive forms of behavior.

Theoretical principles are only useful in developing treatment programs insofar as the components are related to risk outcomes. Persons who engage in such socially intrusive and aggressive behavior as stalking can certainly be expected to have problems in several domains of functioning. Part of task at hand is to identify key areas of need among stalkers as compared to other groups of individuals (aggressive and non-aggressive). However, a simple comparison of stalkers with non-stalking groups is insufficient. Andrews et al. (1990) explain treatment of criminal populations should be based on areas of need that are predictive of the risks one seeks to prevent. To this end, not only may improvements in the psychological wellbeing occur, but also decreases harmful behaviors. For stalkers risk is multifaceted because their pursuit can include an array of behaviors which do not always breach a legal threshold. The risk to be considered when identifying treatment needs lies beyond violence to include continued pursuit of the victim. Still little is known about such dynamic risk factors among stalkers. Accordingly, a second purpose of this study was to examine the social, emotional, and cognitive functioning of stalkers as it relates to their risk of violence and overall pursuit in an effort to identify potential treatment targets.

**Social skills.** A review of the general construct of social skills indicates the definitions and measurement of social skills are many and varied (Nangle, Grover, Holleb, Cassano, & Fales, 2010). Even in clinical practice the types of skills targeted can range from learning appropriate self-disclosures to managing interpersonal conflict. In the present study we use the term social skills to generally refer to sets of cognitive-behavioral and interpersonal processes which aid in developing and maintaining positive social interactions and relationships.

At its core, stalking is a problem within social interactions and in that regard researchers have sought insight from examination of these interactions. Research has consistently demonstrated that social supports among stalkers often have been unstable and/or lacking across their lifetime, with many having childhood abuse/neglect histories and an absence of intimate adult relationships (e.g., Kienlen et al., 1997; Mohandie et al., 2006). At the same time, victims commonly have had a prior intimate relationship with their pursuer (e.g., Mohandie et al., 2006). These intimate relationships are often characterized by a history of controlling (e.g., Brewster, 2003; Davis et al., 2000) and abusive behavior perpetrated by the stalker (e.g., Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999). Interpersonally stalkers have been described as overly sensitive, guarded, and hostile (Kamphuis et al., 2004; Kropp, 2008; Spencer, 1998). Using student, community, and forensic samples, researchers have consistently found insecure attachments styles amongst those who stalk (e.g., Kamphuis et al., 2004; Mackenzie et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2001). Taken as a whole, the social behavioral evidence on stalker demonstrates major deficits in social functioning.



Considering the prevalence of social problems, it is unsurprising that several experts in the field have argued for the inclusion of social skills training in treatment programs for stalkers (e.g., Kropp et al., 2002; Mullen et al., 2001). Mullen and colleagues (2001) explain their clinical experience has found most stalkers display difficulty developing and maintaining relationships, often appearing awkward and oversensitive. The present study was unable to identify any studies which specifically examined social skills of stalkers. However, at least two studies on aggression more generally lend support to this proposal. McMurran, Blair, and Egan (2002) observed students' self-reported aggression decreased with better social problem solving skills. Likewise, inmates admitting to pure bullying behavior favored aggressive solutions to social conflict as opposed to victims of bullying or mixed offenders (Ireland, 2001). In an effort to obtain information about a range of social skills, the present study surveyed the abilities to initiate interactions and relationships, assert of displeasure in others, self-disclose personal information, provide emotional support to others, and manage interpersonal conflicts.

**Emotion regulation & distress tolerance.** Due to their relation to psychological morbidity, interest in emotion regulation and distress tolerance has rapidly grown in the last two decades. Emotion regulation has been described as “the processes by which individual’s influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experiences and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Distress tolerance is a related construct and refers to “an individual’s ability to withstand either emotional or physical discomfort and maintain goal-oriented behavior in light of that distress” (Selby & Joiner, 2009 referencing Simons & Gaher, 2005). These constructs have been

particularly studied for their contribution to the understanding of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and its skills-based trainings within Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Linehan (1993) explained that BPD clients' erratic behaviors (e.g., interpersonal conflict, self-harm, other-harm, etc.) result from emotion dysregulation which consists of a heightened sensitivity to emotional stimuli, extremely intense emotions, and a slow return to baseline. Unable or unwilling to withstand the intensity of their negative affect (distress intolerance) these individuals frequently engage in self-defeating efforts to manage their emotions (poor emotion regulation).

The success of DBT with BPD clients, who are known to be extremely difficult to treat, has led clinicians to explore the expansion of these constructs and treatments to other settings and problematic populations. Fruzzetti and Levensky (2000) explained training in distress tolerance can help offenders to better utilize healthy, effective emotion regulation strategies for altering their behavior by creating a window for more processing time. In fact, forensic and correctional institutions across the United States and Canada are increasingly applying DBT practices to their programs for violent and personality disordered clientele (Berzins & Trestman, 2004). The use of DBT has also been proposed for treatment programs for stalkers (Rosenfeld et al., 2007). Even though stalkers are not exclusively diagnosed with BPD, research has observed the association of BPD traits with their socially aggressive behaviors (Lewis et al., 2001). Rosenfeld et al. (2007) reported preliminary findings of the first clinical trial of DBT for stalkers revealed treatment completers were significantly less likely to reoffend with a stalking-related offense than non-completers. These results support the consideration of clinical feature such as distress tolerance and emotion regulation in the treatment of stalkers.

Although research in this field is growing, there remains a dearth of information about emotional regulation processes among aggressive populations. To date no study has examined the distress tolerance of stalkers but research does suggest this population is motivated by their emotions. For instance, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) observed that on average 42% of stalkers expressed dependency and 33% expressed love toward the victim across studies. At the same time, feelings of anger and jealousy positively predicted stalking behaviors by students (Davis et al., 2000; Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Montero, 2002 for women only; Sinclair & Frieze, 2002; Wisternoff, 2008) and mediated relationship between anxious attachment and stalking (Davis et al., 2000) within student samples. Therefore, the present study will examine global abilities for distress tolerance and emotion regulation as well as two specific coping strategies identified in the stalking literature as potentially influencing- rumination and substance abuse.

***Rumination.*** Rumination occurs when someone “direct[s] attention inward on the self, and particularly on one’s negative mood” (Bushman, 2002, p. 726). Laboratory inductions of rumination have been found to increase aggressive behavior toward others after provocation (Bushman, 2002; Bushman et al., 2005; Denson, Pederson, Friese, Hahn, & Roberts, 2011) and hostility after rejection (Ayduk et al., 2002). Likewise, studies of inmates have found small significant correlations between rumination and aggressive behavior (Wydo, 2003). Coid (2006) further observed that 19% of inmates with histories of serious behavioral problems and violence within the institution were motivated by morbid ruminations about violence. A specific form of trait rumination, angry rumination has been defined as “unintentional and recurrent cognitive processes that emerge during and continue after an episode of anger experience” (Sukhodolsky et

al., 2001 p. 690). Sukhodolsky (2001) explained that angry rumination consists of “memories of past anger experiences, attention to immediate anger experiences, and counterfactual thoughts about anger experiences” (p 690).

The relational goal pursuit theory posits that ruminative thinking is a key factor in motivating unwanted pursuit behaviors. Few studies have examined rumination as it relates to stalking and intrusive harassment. Carson and Cupach (2002) found that relationship-specific ruminations positively correlated with control-oriented (e.g., surveillance, manipulation, possessiveness) and socially aggressive behaviors (e.g., violence, derogation of competitors) within relationships among college students. Dennison and Stewart (2006) also found that engaging in covert pursuit behaviors while pursuing or after termination of a relationship had a small-to-moderate positive correlation with rumination in a university sample. Marquez and Scalora (2011) reported preliminary findings from a survey examining coping strategies used by college students after a significant social conflict. Results revealed that hyperintimacy behaviors, electronically-mediated contact, interpersonal contact, surveillance behaviors, and harassment directed at the student’s opponent had small positive associations with ruminative thinking in reaction to the event. Accordingly, the present study sought to examine the influence of state and trait rumination on intrusive/aggressive behaviors by offenders.

**Substance abuse.** Several studies have found between one fourth and one half of stalkers exhibit substance use problems (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999; Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2001; Sandberg, McNiel, & Binder, 1998; Whyte, Petch, Penny, & Reiss, 2008), but others have observed lower rates (James & Farnham, 2003;

McEwan et al., 2009; Rosenfeld et al., 2007; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002) and one found higher rates (Kienlen et al., 1997). In student samples, the relationship of alcohol use with the amount of stalking perpetration varies depending on the time frame. Alcohol use in the past year exhibited weak correlations with stalking perpetration (Fox, 2006), while alcohol use in the past month displayed moderate-to-large correlations (Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000). Still, drugs and alcohol were only perceived by victims as a motivating factor for stalking behaviors in 6-27% of cases (Brewster, 1998, 2000; Meloy & Boyd, 2003).

Substance abuse has overwhelmingly been regarded as a significant risk factor for general violence and is often targeted in treatments of aggressive behaviors. In fact, Andrews and Bonta (2010) list substance abuse as one of the eight core treatment needs of offenders in general. Research on stalking reveals that substance abuse displays an inconsistent role in stalking-related violence. At least four studies have found a significant relationship between the substance use disorders and violence in stalking situations (McEwan et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999; Roberts, 2005; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Marquez & Scalora, 2011), though some evidence suggests that this effect is more apparent in rejected/ex-intimate contexts (McEwan et al., 2009). Brewster (2000) found statistically significant effects for drug and alcohol abuse only for predicting physical injury during an assault, whereas James and Farnham (2003) observed that the absence of substance abuse corresponded to a higher risk for stalking-related homicide. Therefore the influence of substance abuse on stalking behaviors and related outcomes will continue to be examined in this study.

**Criminal thinking patterns.** Cognitive distortions, maladaptive and irrational thoughts, have long been a focus of psychological treatments for their ability to perpetuate a variety of psychopathological disorders and behaviors. Within the cognitive-behavioral model, these thoughts are believed to skew one's perceptions of events thereby increasing negative affect and maladaptive behavioral responses. In recent decades, researchers have increasingly become interested in investigating the impact of offense-specific and general criminal thinking errors in motivating problematic behavior. Research demonstrates that antisocial thinking patterns and attitudes are important dynamic risk factors for violence and recidivism (e.g., Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996; Craig, Browne, Stringer, & Beech, 2005; Wong & Gordon, 2006). Crime-specific cognitive distortions allow offenders to enhance their own self-image and abilities as well as insulate themselves from self-criticism, each process in turn perpetuating criminal behavior (Chambers, Eccleston, Day, Ward, & Howells 2008). Though most offender cognitive distortions fall under the traditional categories identified by cognitive-behavioral researchers (e.g., fortune telling, discounting the positive, etc.), unique content themes have been identified for offenders overall and specific to their offense history (see Walters, 1995; Ward, Gannon, & Keown, 2006; and Henning, Jones, & Holdfold, 2005 for reviews).

Walters and White (1990) in particular described eight types of cognitive errors common among general offenders. Mollification refers to the tendency to rationalize one's behavior, minimization and blaming. The cutoff style describes the rapid purging of emotional deterrents (e.g., fear, anxiety) for engaging in criminal behavior, while an overestimate of positive and underestimation of negative consequences encompass the

superoptimism style. Entitlement entails beliefs of privilege, ownership, and confusion of wants and needs, whereas the use of aggression to gain control and manipulate defines a power orientation. Walters (1995, p. 309) defined sentimentality as the “self-centered attempts to atone for one’s past criminal violations by performing various good deeds.” The short-cut, uncritical thinking style observed among criminal offender is referred to as cognitive indolence and, finally, discontinuity describes the failure to self-regulate and premeditate resulting in difficulty in follow-through with well intentioned ideas. These eight cognitive patterns, as measured by Walters’ Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS), predict problematic institutional behavior (Walters, 2005a; Walters, 2006a; Walters & Geyer, 2005; Walters & Schlauch, 2008), treatment completion (Walters, 2004; Walters 2005a), and recidivism (Walters, 2005b; Walters, 2009) in general samples of offenders.

More recent analysis of the criminal thinking patterns measured by the PICTS reveals that the instrument is best characterized by a proactive and a reactive criminal thinking styles factors (Walters, 2007a). Proactive criminal thinking emphasizes planning toward a goal and favorable anticipations of future benefits from criminal behavior, whereas the reactive style involves impulsive and emotionally driven thinking in response to situational cues (Walters, 2007b). Preliminary research with these new composite scales reveals more proactive styles of thinking are related to positive expectancies about the outcome of criminal behavior, while the reactive scale was associated with hostile attribution biases (Walters, 2007a). Both scales predict the occurrence of aggressive disciplinary infractions among inmates (Walters, 2007b). Stalkers, who engage in persistent pursuits, may exhibit more proactive thinking in that

they strategically tailor their behavior to achieve a desired goal (fear or intimacy). At the same time, stalkers may still engage in some reactive thinking given findings describing them as interpersonally hostile (e.g., Kamphuis et al., 2004) and as displaying significant levels of anger (e.g., David et al., 2000).

There is currently not enough known about the thought content of stalkers to do more than speculate about stalking-specific distortions. Stalkers are often described as failing to accurately perceive the social cues and preferences of their victims, especially those seeking intimacy. Clinical descriptions have also painted stalkers as being entitled, self-righteous, and narcissistic (Mullen et al., 2000), thus, distortions which embody these attitudes may be prevalent. Sinclair and Frieze's (2005) survey observed that when university students reported on their own engagement in unwanted relationship pursuit, they were more likely to perceive their target as flattered, reciprocating interest, and playing "hard to get." Inasmuch as stalking cases are dominated by intimate partner relations, research demonstrating minimization, blame and denial frequently occur among domestic batterers may also be informative (Henning et al., 2005). Therefore, the present study will investigate the general criminal thinking and other affective and behavioral patterns endorsed by offenders reporting engaging in intrusive and aggressive behavior.

### **Hypotheses**

The present study sought to examine potentially clinically relevant variables among offenders reporting engaging in an array of intrusive and aggressive behaviors. The first major purpose of this study was to explore two approaches for the operationalization of stalking based on self-report measurement- continuous and categorical. Although continuous behavioral operationalizations are frequently used in



the stalking literature and allow for fuller measurement of the broad construct, they fail to meet the needs of clinicians who sometimes require clear thresholds for treatment determinations. At the same time, where there are no clear, universal indicators for a construct, like with stalking, categorical operationalizations may artificially break apart the construct. Temporal and quantitative cutoffs have been recommended based on student and community samples, but it is unclear how useful these are within a more aggressive sample. Accordingly, the present study specifically tested the effect of suggested cutoffs on the sample characteristics of offender reporting intrusive and aggressive pursuits. .

- HYPOTHESIS ONE: Participants labeled as stalkers should display a higher number of charges and convictions for threat crimes (e.g., violation of protective orders, terroristic threats, stalking, harassment, etc.) than non-stalkers.
- HYPOTHESIS TWO: Given the tendency for stalking to emerge from intimate relationships, participants labeled as stalkers are expected to be more likely to report their pursuit behaviors were associated with domestic violence and less likely with drug or gang related crimes.

A second major purpose was to examine the ability of social, cognitive, and emotional functioning traits to predict violent and overall pursuit behaviors. Even though hypotheses about between group differences within the categorical operationalization approach are made, the predictive hypotheses were a more significant focus of the present project. The emphasis on predictive hypotheses is based in the principle that treatment targets should be related to the risk outcomes one seeks to prevent. Correlational and predictive hypotheses were the same for the categorical and continuous approaches.

**Social functioning.** Though there are nearly no empirical findings to support such claims, clinical experts in the field anecdotally report social skills deficits among stalkers (Kropp et al., 2002; Mullen et al., 2001). At least some research supports the notion that social problem solving are associated with increases in aggressive behavior generally (McMurran et al., 2002). Therefore, stalkers are expected to display more pronounced general social skills deficits.

- **HYPOTHESIS THREE:** Stalkers are expected to report lower self-perceived competence for the following types of social skills than their non-stalking offender counterparts:
  - a. conflict management,
  - b. relationship initiation,
  - c. disclosure, and
  - d. emotional support.
- **HYPOTHESIS FOUR:** Participants' reports of lower self-perceived competence in conflict management should have significantly bivariate correlations with violence within the pursuit and overall pursuit independently.

**Emotional functioning.** Theoretical descriptions of stalkers suggest that they are highly ruminative and have general difficulties with appropriately regulating their emotions (e.g., Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Although emotion regulation difficulties are expected to be characteristic of aggressive individuals in general, stalkers are expected to display worse emotional functioning given the persistent nature of their behavior.

- **HYPOTHESIS FIVE:** The stalkers should demonstrate worse emotional functioning on the following variables compared to their non-stalking offender counterparts:
  - a. negative affect (higher scores on total affect scale)
  - b. emotion regulation (higher scores on DERS),
  - c. distress tolerance (lower scores on DTS),
  - d. substance use (higher scores on COPE drug-alcohol disengagement scale),
  - e. conflict-specific rumination (high scores on CERQ rumination scale), and
  - f. trait angry rumination (higher scores on ARS).
  
- **HYPOTHESIS SIX:** Scores evidencing worse emotional functioning on the following variables are hypothesized have significantly bivariate correlations with violence and overall pursuit independently:
  - a. negative affect (higher scores on total affect scale)
  - b. emotion regulation (higher scores on DERS),
  - c. distress tolerance (lower scores on DTS),
  - d. substance use (higher scores on COPE drug-alcohol disengagement scale),
  - e. conflict-specific rumination (high scores on CERQ rumination scale), and
  - f. trait angry rumination (higher scores on ARS).

**Cognitive Functioning.** Theoretical and clinical descriptions of stalkers suggest they often engage in thinking patterns which minimize their responsibility or harm caused, and focuses blame on the victim (e.g., Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Anecdotal writings of expert clinicians also depict stalkers as evidencing a self-righteous entitlement (e.g., Mullen et al., 2000). Furthermore, even though stalkers generally engage in

planned pursuits, at least part of their behavior may be a reactive response to poor emotion regulation.

- **HYPOTHESIS SEVEN:** Stalkers are predicted to display the following patterns relative to the non-stalking offender group:
  - a. higher scores on the mollification scale,
  - b. higher scores on the entitlement scale,
  - a. higher scores on the proactive criminal thinking factor, and
  - b. equivalent scores on the reactive criminal thinking factor.
- **HYPOTHESIS EIGHT:** The following patterns of cognitive distortion endorsements are hypothesized to have significantly bivariate correlations with violence and overall pursuit independently:
  - a. higher scores on the mollification subscale,
  - b. higher scores on the entitlement subscale,
  - c. higher scores on the reactive criminal thinking, and
  - d. higher scores on the proactive criminal thinking (pursuit only).
- **HYPOTHESIS NINE:** the final hypothesis proposes the following pattern of variables will produce a significant model for predicting violence and overall pursuit independently:
  - a. lower conflict management subscale scores,
  - b. higher reported negative affect,
  - c. higher difficulty with emotion regulation total scores,
  - d. lower distress tolerance total scores,
  - e. higher trait angry rumination total scores,

- f. higher substance use subscale scores,
- g. higher conflict-specific rumination scores,
- h. higher mollification subscale scores,
- i. higher entitlement subscale scores (violence only)<sup>1</sup>
- j. higher reactive criminal thinking scores, and
- k. higher proactive criminal thinking scores (pursuit only).

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<sup>1</sup> The entitlement scale was not included in the final model reported for the pursuit outcome because it is used to calculate the proactive criminal thinking factor. Follow-up analysis revealed its substitution did not have a major impact on the strength of the model or its pattern of significant predictors.

## Chapter 2: Method

### Participants

Two hundred forty-eight male inmates were recruited from a large Midwestern prison intake center using informational flyers placed in welcome packets. Inmates requested to participate via interview request forms. The intake facility was chosen for its access to potential participants with a greater breadth of criminal offenses, institutional histories, security classifications, and risk levels. Inmates were eligible to participate if they were English literate and 19 years of age or older (age of majority in Nebraska). No eligibility restrictions were made based on criminal offense history since research indicates that stalkers are often charged and convicted of assaults or lesser misdemeanor crimes due to the difficulty of building a strong case (e.g., Huffines, 2001; Mohandie et al., 2006). In exchange for their participation, inmates received five dollars deposited in their institutional account. All participants were treated in accordance to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association's policies on research with human subjects.

### Procedure

Data collection for the inmate sample consisted of a survey battery and an institutional file review. After inmates indicated a willingness to participate, the primary investigator scheduled a group testing sessions by housing units. Inmates were given a battery of questionnaires in paper-and-pencil format and told their responses would remain confidential until the end of data collection, at which time they would be de-identified.

The overall survey was divided in to two halves which were counterbalanced to prevent an order effect based on response fatigue and to avoid confusion. Section one contained a series of counterbalanced questionnaires pertaining to the participant's demographics, relationship history, socially desirable responding, social problem solving skills, distress tolerance skills, trait difficulties with emotion regulation, and endorsement of criminal thinking. The second section asked participants about their reaction to a *significant conflict*. Significant conflict was defined as one which “was sufficient to cause [them] an emotional impact for an extended period of time (e.g., not merely a minor disagreement, bickering, or momentary emotion); and which was difficult for [them] to accept and move on from (e.g., let go, made persistent efforts to re-engage, etc.); and in which there was a single identifiable person with whom [they] had the conflict.” The term included the series of events that followed the conflict until the situation was resolved. More specifically, participants were asked to think of a time when they persistently pursued a significant conflict with another person and prompted them with the following paragraph:

“People sometimes continue a conflict with someone, even though the other person does not seem to want to. When one continues a conflict despite the fact the other person does not seem to want it, then they are being persistent. We are interested in finding out to what extent YOU have engaged in persistent pursuit of a conflict with a person who expressly did not want you to. Particularly, we are interested the time when you have been the most persistent in a significant conflict with another individual as an adult.”

Furthermore, the second section included questionnaires about the context of the conflict as well as engagement in substance use, rumination, and intrusion/aggression. The individual questionnaires contained in section two were not counterbalanced in order to establish a coherent progression of ideas; however, the section as a whole was counterbalanced with section one.

File coding for the inmate participants was conducted by the primary investigator and undergraduate research assistants at the correctional institution. A coding manual was created and used to train the research assistants to reliability. Participant files were coded for information about their criminal history and initial security classification (coded: Community, Minimum, Medium, Maximum). Criminal history was coded for the total number of current and past criminal charges and convictions. A separate variable for threat crimes was calculated based on the total number of past and current charges and convictions for terroristic threats, stalking, harassment, and protection order violations. Interrater reliability exceeded .80 for all criminal history variables. Interrater reliability was not possible for the security classification variable since many participants were not classified at the time of survey completion or file review. Instead this information was collected directly from an institutional database after recruitment was completed.

## **Measures**

**Background Information.** Demographic information was recorded for each participant based on their responses to five items asking them to note their age, race/ethnicity, and marital status (coded: Single (never married)-not currently in a



relationship, single (never married)-currently in a relationship, engaged, married, separated, divorced, widowed).

**Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form C (MCSDS-C).** The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale- Short Form C is a thirteen items instrument which measures biased self-presentation aiming to place oneself in a positive light. Items are rated on in a true/false format such that a higher total score reflects a greater degree of socially desirable responding. Reynolds (1982) created the form and research has since found the instrument has internal consistency estimates ranging from .62 to .76 (Ballard, 1992; Loo & Thorpe, 2000; Reynolds, 1982; Zook & Sipps, 1985) and six-week test–retest correlation of .74 (Zook & Sipps, 1985). Scores on the MCSDS-C correlate highly with the scores on the original MCSDS with values of .91 to .965 reported in the literature (Fischer & Fick, 1993; Loo & Thorpe, 2000; Reynolds, 1982). The MCSDS-C has since been normed in forensic samples where it displays higher mean scores than with community samples (Andrews & Meyer, 2003), though corrections-specific norms were not found. The Cronbach’s alpha’s for the MCSDS-C was .791.

**Interpersonal Competency Questionnaire- Short Form (ICQ).** The 40-item self report instrument was designed to measure five subtypes of social skills (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). Each item of the survey describes a common interpersonal situation for five separate domains: initiating relationships (INTIATION; e.g., “Finding and suggesting things to do with new people whom you find interesting and attractive.”), disclosing information (DISCLOSURE; e.g., “Telling a close companion about the things that secretly make you feel anxious or afraid.”), negative assertion (ASSERTION; e.g., “Confronting your close companion when he or she has

broken a promise.”), emotional support (SUPPORT; e.g., “Helping a close companion cope with family or roommate problems.”), and conflict management (MANAGEMENT; e.g., “Refraining from saying things that might cause a disagreement to build into a big fight.”). All items are rated on a five point scale such that higher scores indicate greater interpersonal competence in the domain (1 = “I’m poor at this; I’d feel so uncomfortable and unable to handle this situation, I’d avoid it if possible,” 5 = “I’m EXTREMELY good at this; I’d feel very comfortable and could handle this situation very well”). Buhrmester et al. (1988) reported that the full scale version produced adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .77-.87$ ) and test-retest ( $r = .69-.89$ ) estimates for the five factors. Scores on the ICQ were also moderately-to-strongly correlated with dating skill, dating frequency, perceived popularity, dating initiation, and assertion, as well as other measures of social skills (Buhrmester et al., 1988). A 20 item short form of the ICQ was recommended by Buhrmester et al. (1988) based on the four most reliable items from each subscale. The Cronbach’s alpha’s for the initiating relationships (.637) fell below adequacy, but the disclosure (.876), negative assertion .839), emotional support (.875), and the conflict management (.780) scales displayed adequate reliability.

**Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS).** The 36-item self-report instrument was used to measure participant’s global (in)ability to manage their negative affect in upsetting situations (Grantz & Roemer, 2004). Participants were asked to indicate how frequently the items (generally focused on regulation problems) apply to them based on a five-point Likert type scale (1-“Almost Never (0-10%)” to 5-“Almost Always (90-100%)”). Items were (re)coded so that higher scores reflected more problems with emotion regulation. Psychometric testing for the DERS has been

completed with student samples and has found the instrument has high internal consistency (.93; all subscales  $>.80$ ), had adequate to good test-retest reliability for its subscales and total score, is well correlated with related constructs, and has significant moderate correlations with partner abuse among men (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Factor analysis has revealed the instrument consists of six related factors: Non-Acceptance of Emotional Responses (NON-ACCEPTANCE; e.g., “When I’m upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way”), Difficulties Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior (GOAL DIRECTED; e.g., “When I’m upset, I have difficulty concentrating”), Impulse Control Difficulties (IMPULSE CONTROL; e.g., “When I’m upset, I lose control over my behaviors”), Lack of Emotional Awareness (AWARENESS; e.g., “I’m attentive to my feelings”), Limited Access to Emotion Regulation Strategies (STRATEGIES; e.g., “When I’m upset, I believe I will remain that way for a long time”), and Lack of Emotional Clarity (CLARITY; e.g., “I have no idea how I am feeling”). Since the DERS has not yet been validated within a correctional population, the basic psychometric properties will be reported for the sample. For the present sample, Cronbach’s alphas for the non-acceptance (.864), goal-directed behavior (.864), impulse control (.913), emotional awareness (.823), regulation strategies (.871), emotional clarity (.778), and overall DERS (.939) scales all met adequate reliability.

**Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS).** The 15-item self-report instrument was used to measure participant’s global (in)ability to withstand unpleasant emotional and/or physical stimuli (Simons & Gaher, 2005). Participants were asked to indicate how frequently the experiences described by the items applied to them during distressing or upsetting situations. Responses were based on a five-point Likert type scale (1-“Strongly Agree”

to 5-“Strongly Disagree”). Items were coded so that higher scores reflected greater distress tolerance. Psychometric testing for the DTS has been completed with student samples and has found the instrument has good internal consistency (.89), evidenced temporal stability (.61), and is appropriately associated with related constructs (Simons & Gaher, 2005). Factor analysis further revealed that the instrument is best fit as a four factor hierarchical model with 15 items (Simons & Gaher, 2005). The four factors included tolerance of emotional distress (TOLERANCE; e.g., “I can’t handle feelings distressed or upset), subjective appraisal of distress (APPRAISAL; e.g., “My feelings of distress or being upset are not acceptable”), attention being absorbed by negative affect (ABSORPTION; e.g., “When I feel distressed or upset, I cannot help but concentrate on how bad the distress actually feels”), and regulation efforts to alleviate distress (EFFORTS; e.g., “When I feel distressed or upset I must do something about it immediately”) (Simons & Gaher, 2005). For the present sample, Cronbach’s alphas for the distress tolerance (.720), negative absorption (.801), regulation efforts (.730), and overall DTS (.885) scales all met adequacy, but not subjective appraisal of distress (.652).

**Anger Rumination Scale (ARS).** The 19-item self-report instrument was used to measure participant’s “tendency to think about current anger-provoking situations and to recall anger episodes from the past” (Sukhodolsky, Golub, & Cromwell, 2001). Participants were asked to rate each item on a four-point Likert type scale (1= “Almost Never” to 4 = “Almost Always”) in terms of how well the statement applied to them. Items were coded so that higher scores reflected a greater tendency to engage in angry rumination. Psychometric testing for the ARS has been completed with student samples and has found that the instrument had good internal consistency (.93; all subscales >.70),

test-retest reliability, and was associated with other measures of anger expression. A CFA estimated a good-fitting four factor model which included the following subscales: Angry Afterthoughts (AFTERTHOUGHTS; e.g., “I re-enact the anger episode in my mind after it has happened”), Thoughts of Revenge (REVENGE; e.g., “I have long living fantasies of revenge after the conflict is over”), Angry Memories (MEMORIES; e.g., “I ponder about the injustices that have been done to me”), and Understanding of Causes (CAUSES; e.g., “I think about the reasons people treat me badly”). For the present sample, Cronbach’s alphas for the angry afterthoughts (.799), thoughts of revenge (.814), angry memories (.875), understanding causes (.768), and overall ARS (.943) scales all met adequate reliability.

**Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS).** The 80-item self report instrument was designed to measure eight thinking patterns that perpetuate criminal behavior. Items are rated on a four point Likert type scale (4 = “Strongly Agree”, 1 = “Disagree”) that are summed into eight subscales- Mollification (MO), Cutoff (CO), Entitlement (EN), Power Orientation (PO), Sentimentality (SN), Superoptimism (SO), Cognitive Indolence (CI), and Discontinuity (DI). Initial research found that the PICTS demonstrates moderate to high internal consistency for the subscales (alpha = .55-.79), with the mollification, sentimentality, entitlement, power orientation, and superoptimism scales failing to meet adequacy (Walters, 1995). Scores on the PICTS are positively associated with past criminal history (Walters, 1995), poor institutional adjustment (Walters, 2005a; Walters, 2007b), recidivism (Walters, 2005b; Walters & Schlauch, 2008), and are sensitive to changes during treatment (Walters, 2009; Walters, Trgovac, Rychlec, DiFazio, & Olson, 2002). The Cronbach’s alphas for the

cutoff (.781), cognitive indolence (.712), discontinuity (.764), and power orientation scales (.719) all met adequately reliability, but not for the entitlement (.553), mollification (.595), sentimentality (.492), super-optimism scales (.668). More recently, research has shown the PICTS to be composed of two overarching factors with better internal reliability (alpha = .83-.91)- proactive (PROACT) and reactive (REACT) criminal thinking (Walters, 2007). The Cronbach's alphas for both the proactive (.839) and reactive (.880) criminal thinking scales reached adequacy.

**Conflict Information.** Fifteen items were used to question participants about the details surrounding their significant conflict. One item asked about the participant's relationship to the other person in the conflict (Intimate Partner, Close Social Contact, Acquaintance, Family Member, Stranger, and Other). Gender of the target (Male, Female, Unknown), length of the conflict (number of months), and legal response against them (Yes-List/No) were also assessed. Three items asked participants to indicate whether the conflict was related to gangs, selling drugs, or domestic violence (coded: yes/no). Finally, participants rated six emotion words on a five point Likert type scale (0 = "Not at All," 4 = "Very Strong"; Angry, Rejected, Anxious, Disrespected, Hurt, Jealous,) which were summed to create an overall negative affect score (AFFECT).

**Modified COPE.** The COPE (Carver, Scheier & Kumari-Weintraub, 1989) was designed to measure various types of coping responses which may be either adaptive or maladaptive. The full version of the cope measures 15 coping styles, but the author of the COPE notes the subscales can be used independently and can be modified. For the present study the only the four-item alcohol-drug disengagement scale (SUBUSE; "I used alcohol or drugs to help me get through it") subscales was used. The instructions were

modified to say, “Please indicate how frequently you engaged in the following behaviors from the time your conflict with the person you just discussed began until it was resolved.” The 20-item version was rated on a four point Likert-type scale (1= “I usually didn’t do this at all,” 4= “I usually did this a lot”). The original alcohol-drug disengagement scale consisted of one item and, therefore its Cronbach’s alpha was not estimated (Carver et al., 1989). For the present sample Cronbach’s alpha was .771.

**Modified Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ).** The CERQ was created to measure nine cognitive coping strategies people use after negative life experiences (Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2002). The present study only utilized the rumination (RUMINATION; “I often thought about how I felt about what I had experienced”) subscale from the original 36-item measure. The four-item subscale was rated on a five point Likert-type scale (1= “Almost Never,” 5= “Almost Always”). Ruminative thinking refers to a tendency to overly focus or dwell on the feelings and thoughts associated with the negative event. The subscale displayed adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .83$ ) as well as small-to-moderate positive correlations with other measures of coping, depression, and anxiety (Garnefski, & Kraaij, 2002). The Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .747. Instructions were modified to read as described in the COPE section.

**Stalking/Intrusive Harassment.** The 50-item Obsessive Relational Intrusion-Perpetration Scale (ORI-PS) was originally designed to measure persistent, intrusive, and aggressive behaviors that occurred within the limited context of relationship pursuit (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2010). The authors of the scale clarified that such behaviors were not synonymous with stalking as context was limited and behaviors might not necessarily

breach the threshold for invoking fear in the target. Still, the items of the scale provide a fairly inclusive list of stalking related behaviors. The instrument consists of seven subscales that are rated on a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = “Never”; 7 = “Greater than 25 Times”): Hyperintimacy (e.g., “Leaving unwanted gifts (e.g., flowers, stuffed animals, photography, jewelry, etc.)”), Interactional Contacts (e.g., “Making appearances (e.g., showed up at person's work, school, gym, place of worship, etc.)”), Mediated Contacts (e.g., “Sending messages through the mail (e.g., mailed notes, letters, pictures, etc., through the mail)”), Surveillance (e.g., “Loitering or hanging around (e.g., waited around places in the hope of encountering or seeing this person, etc.)”), Invasion (e.g., “Invading person’s living space (e.g., broke into home, trespassed on lawn or property, etc.)”), Harassment (e.g., “Negatively influencing reputation (e.g., spread untrue or negative rumors about the person, ruined reputation or status with friends, family, colleagues, etc.)”), Threat (e.g., “Leaving or sending person threatening objects (e.g., marked up photographs, photographs taken of person without their knowledge, pornography, weapons, etc.)”), Violence.

In the present study, the scale was modified to broaden the context to behaviors engaged in after a significant social conflict and participants were prompted to respond to items in the same manner as described in the CERQ and COPE as well as with the introduction from the second section. Though this modification arguably changed the underlying context-specific construct of the measure, the face validity of the items should still allow for appropriate identification of stalkers/intrusive harassers emerging from more general conflict situations. In an attempt to more broadly examine unwanted pursuit behaviors, the present study takes a multi-method approach to defining stalking.



Categorical determinations of stalking will be made using a combination of cutoff of criteria recommended by Thompson and Dennison (2008) and Purcell et al. (2004). The categorical stalking group was defined as those offenders who reported engaging in ten or more behavior types; or in more than ten occasions of a single behavior type (response option 6 and 7) on the ORI-PS; and whose pursuits occurred longer than two weeks. Stalking was also examined continuously as the total frequency and number of behaviors reported on the ORI-PS.

## Chapter 3: Results

### Sample Characteristics

Two-hundred forty-eight male inmates were recruited for the survey, but 30 were dropped prior to analysis due to failure to follow directions (e.g., reporting on conflicts with multiple people, making patterns with responses, etc.) and/or excessive missing values. Descriptive statistics for the sample characteristics are presented in Table 3.1. Of the 218 participants used in the final analyses, the average age was in their early thirties. The vast majority of the sample identified as White and African-American/Black was the second largest racial group represented. Over half of participants were not presently in a committed romantic relationship (e.g., single, separated, divorced). The majority of the sample was classified as either maximum or minimum security, while approximately 12% had not been classified at the completion of data collection. Including their index offense, the average aggregate number of criminal charges and convictions was 37.56 ( $SD = 35.1$ ). Over one-fifth of participants had a current or historical threat offense (22.9%). Two-thirds of participants had a current or historical violent offense (67.4%): physical only (47.7%), sexual only (8.3%), physical and sexual (11.5%).

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics for Sample Characteristics

		<b>Stalkers M (SD)</b>	<b>Non- Stalkers M (SD)</b>	<b>Total M (SD)</b>
<i>Age</i>		32.74 (9.75)	33.90 (11.47)	33.24 (10.50)
<i>Threat Crimes History</i>		.41 (.91)	.74 (2.06)	.55 (1.52)
<i>Sexual Crimes History</i>		.42 (1.06)	.42 (1.13)	.42 (1.09)
<i>Violent Crimes History</i>		2.44 (3.41)	2.83 (3.32)	2.61 (3.37)
<i>Total Criminal History</i>		38.31 (32.13)	36.63 (38.85)	37.56 (35.19)
		<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
<i>Race</i>	White	92 (74.8%)	66 (71.0%)	158 (73.1%)
	African-American	20 (16.3%)	18 (19.4%)	38 (17.6%)
	Hispanic/Latino	12 (9.8%)	7 (7.5%)	19 (8.8%)

	Native American/ Alaskan Native	3 (2.4%)	4 (4.3%)	7 (3.2%)
	Other	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (.5%)
<i>Marital Status</i>	Never married/ Not in a relationship	41 (32.8%)	29 (31.2%)	70 (32.1%)
	In a relationship/ Engaged	33 (26.4%)	30 (32.3%)	63 (28.9%)
	Married	20 (16.0%)	16 (17.2%)	36 (16.5%)
	Separated/ Divorced	31 (24.8%)	18 (19.4%)	49 (22.5%)
<i>Security Classification</i>	Maximum	39 (31.2%)	23 (24.7%)	62 (28.4%)
	Medium	15 (12.0%)	12 (12.9%)	27 (12.4%)
	Minimum	44 (35.2%)	40 (43.0%)	84 (38.5%)
	Community	7 (5.6%)	12 (12.9%)	19 (8.7%)
	Not Classified	20 (16.0%)	6 (6.5%)	26 (11.9%)

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ .

### **Conflict Characteristics**

Participants were asked to describe a significant social conflict which was caused an emotional impact for an extended period of time, was difficult to move on from, and involved an identifiable individual. Descriptive statistics for the characteristics of the reported conflicts are presented in Table 3.2. Approximately half (52.3%) of the sample described a conflict with a current or former intimate partner. The remaining breakdown for relationship type was as follows: Family Member (17.9%), Acquaintance (11.9%), Close Social Contact (8.7%), Stranger (2.8%), and Other (6.4%). Of the targets identified, over half were female (59.6%) and just over one sixth were reportedly related to domestic violence (17.9%). Less than 5% of the conflicts were reportedly related to gang activity, while 14.7% were drug-related. The conflicts lasted an average of 16.4 months, but had a wide range of variability. Nearly one third reported they sustained legal action as the result of their behavior. Participants reported an average negative affect score of 14.01 which corresponded to the moderate range. Nearly all of participants identified a conflict in which they engaged in at least one pursuit behavior

(96.8%). The average ORI-PS total score was 85.19 ( $SD = 32.9$ ) and 75% of the sample's total score fell below 99. In regards to more serious forms of aggression, 44.0% of the sample admitted to at least one form of violence and 41.3% to threatening behaviors.

Table 3. 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Significant Conflict Characteristics

		<b>Stalkers M (SD)</b>	<b>Non-Stalkers M (SD)</b>	<b>Total M (SD)</b>
Length of Conflict		17.91 (39.57)	14.09 (53.76)	16.41 (45.59)
Hyperintimacy*		26.12 (13.15)	15.45 (9.62)	21.57 (12.89)
Mediated Contact*		14.14 (7.44)	8.91 (4.77)	11.91 (6.93)
Interactional Contact*		11.12 (4.99)	7.23 (3.72)	9.46 (4.89)
Surveillance*		8.46 (5.10)	6.13 (2.87)	7.46 (4.44)
Invasion*		5.54 (2.81)	4.72 (2.44)	5.19 (2.68)
Harassment*		14.00 (5.39)	10.45 (4.54)	12.49 (5.33)
Threat*		8.67 (4.31)	7.29 (3.45)	8.08 (4.02)
Violence*		9.76 (4.51)	8.06 (3.22)	9.04 (4.09)
Total modified ORI-PS*		97.80 (32.42)	68.25 (25.36)	85.19 (32.98)
		<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
Relationship with Target*	<i>Intimate Partner</i>	79 (63.2%)	35 (37.6%)	114 (52.3%)
	<i>Close Social Contact</i>	7 (5.6%)	12 (12.9%)	19 (8.7%)
	<i>Acquaintance</i>	15 (12.0%)	11 (11.8%)	26 (11.9%)
	<i>Family</i>	19 (15.2%)	20 (21.5%)	39 (17.9%)
	<i>Stranger</i>	1 (.8%)	5 (5.4%)	6 (2.8%)
	<i>Other</i>	4 (3.2%)	10 (10.8%)	14 (6.4%)
Target's Sex*	<i>Male</i>	40 (32.3%)	41 (45.6%)	81 (37.9%)
	<i>Female</i>	84 (67.7%)	46 (51.1%)	130 (60.7%)
	<i>Unknown</i>	3 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.4%)
Gang Related	<i>No</i>	122 (97.6%)	87 (93.5%)	209 (95.9%)
	<i>Yes</i>	3 (2.4%)	6 (6.5%)	9 (4.1%)
Drug Sales	<i>No</i>	108 (86.4%)	77 (83.7%)	185 (85.3%)
	<i>Yes</i>	17 (13.6%)	15 (16.3%)	32 (14.7%)
Domestic Violence*	<i>No</i>	95 (76.0%)	83 (90.2%)	178 (82.0%)
	<i>Yes</i>	30 (24.0%)	9 (9.8%)	39 (18.0%)
Legal Charges	<i>No</i>	85 (68.0%)	67 (72.8%)	152 (70.0%)
	<i>Yes</i>	40 (32.0%)	25 (27.2%)	65 (30.0%)

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

### Group Characteristics

Based on the categorical operationalization of stalking requiring both temporal and behavioral cutoffs, 57.3% of the sample was identified as a stalker. Over one-third of the total sample engaged in more than ten occasions of a single behavior (38.1%), nearly two-thirds engaged in ten or more types of behavior (61.5%), and 89.3% pursued their target for more than two weeks. Group comparisons based on the temporal and behavioral cutoffs found no significant differences on nearly all of the demographic and conflict variables. Participants identified as stalkers reported a significantly greater degree of negative affect than their non-stalking counterparts,  $F(1, 200) = 5.31, p = .022$ . The groups were also significantly different in regards to the types of relationships they targeted, such that stalkers more frequently targeted intimate relationships than did non-stalkers,  $\chi^2(5) = 19.09, p = .001$ . Contrary to Hypotheses One and Two, offenders identified as stalkers had as many threat charges/convictions on average than their non-stalking counterparts and were just as likely to report on conflicts involving drug or gang-related crimes. However, in partial support of Hypothesis Two, offenders labeled as stalkers were significantly more likely to describe conflicts related to domestic violence than were their non-stalking counterparts,  $\chi^2(1) = 7.266, p = .007$ .

### Covariate Analyses

The influence of age, race/ethnicity, socially desirable responding, and total criminal history on the outcome and clinical variables were evaluated. Table 3.3 displays the correlation matrix. Participant's reported engagement in violence was significantly related to their age and SDR, while overall pursuit was only significantly related to SDR. In regards to hypothesized variables, age was significantly related to entitlement and

proactive criminal thinking. Being White was significantly associated with reactive criminal thinking, relationship initiation skills, and emotional support skills. Being African-American was significantly associated with higher relationship initiation scores. Finally, socially desirable responding was significantly related to poorer functioning on most all of the variables. Subsequent bivariate and multivariate analyses will include the respective covariates for the examined variables.

Table 3.3. Correlation Matrix for Suspected Covariates

Experimental Factors		Age	White	A-A	SDR	Offense History
<i>Risk</i>	<i>Violence</i>	-.14*	.04	-.06	-.14*	.10
<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Pursuit</i>	-.08	.05	-.09	-.20*	.07
<i>Social Skills</i>	<i>Initiation</i>	-.11	-.22*	.18	-.02	.00
	<i>Assertion</i>	-.04	-.21*	.16	.04	.02
	<i>Disclosure</i>	.10	-.05	.04	.12	.01
	<i>Support</i>	.00	-.14*	.01	.08	-.01
	<i>Management</i>	.04	-.04	.01	.18*	-.10
<i>Emotion Regulation/Coping</i>	<i>SubUse</i>	.00	.12	-.13	-.08	.17
	<i>Affect</i>	.04	.13	-.11	-.28*	-.03
	<i>Rumination</i>	.10	-.02	.01	-.14*	.09
	<i>Afterthoughts</i>	-.06	.08	-.05	-.33*	.01
	<i>Revenge</i>	-.11	.03	-.04	-.34*	-.10
	<i>Memories</i>	-.05	.06	-.04	-.29*	-.04
	<i>Causes</i>	-.07	.06	-.04	-.27*	-.04
	<i>Total ARS</i>	-.08	.07	-.05	-.34*	-.04
	<i>Tolerance</i>	-.07	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.04
	<i>Appraisal</i>	.03	.02	-.03	.00	-.05
	<i>Absorption</i>	-.06	-.01	.02	.00	-.07
	<i>Efforts</i>	.09	.11	-.13	-.13	-.11
	<i>Total DTS</i>	-.01	.02	-.04	-.04	-.07
	<i>Non-Acceptance</i>	.08	.09	-.09	-.09	-.02
	<i>Goal Directed</i>	-.12	.11	-.09	-.21*	-.02
	<i>Impulse Control</i>	-.11	.01	-.01	-.09	.05
<i>Awareness</i>	-.06	.03	-.03	-.05	.03	
<i>Strategies</i>	.01	.12	-.11	-.13*	.01	
<i>Clarity</i>	-.05	.14*	-.18*	-.13	-.03	

	<i>Total DERS</i>					
		-0.05	.11	-.11	-.16*	.01
<i>Criminal Thinking Scales</i>	<i>Mo</i>	-.12	-.06	0.1	-.23*	.16*
	<i>C</i>	-.05	.19*	-.11	-.34*	.15*
	<i>En</i>	-.19*	.10	-.02	-.23*	.05
	<i>Po</i>	-.20*	.02	-.08	-.34*	.02
	<i>Sn</i>	-.02	-.04	.03	-.09	.12
	<i>So</i>	-.19*	.03	.03	-.32*	.08
	<i>CI</i>	-.06	.12	-.12	-.31*	.09
	<i>DS</i>	-.04	.12	-.08	-.32*	.08
	<i>PROACT</i>	-.15*	.08	.01	-.34*	.15*
	<i>REACT</i>	-.04	.17*	-.11	-.34*	.10

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

### Group Comparisons

A series of one-way ANCOVAs were conducted to compare categorical groups on the 34 social skills, emotion regulation, and cognitive distortion variables while controlling for identified covariates. Table 3.4 displays the descriptive statistics for the clinical variables. Contrary to Hypothesis Three, there were no significant group differences for conflict management, relationships initiation, and disclosure skills. Additionally, stalkers reported greater, rather than poorer, confidence in their ability to provide emotional support in their relationships,  $F(1, 206) = 4.163, p = .043$ . In partial support of Hypothesis Five, results revealed offenders identified as stalkers reported significantly greater engagement in substance abuse ( $F(1, 212) = 7.746, p = .006$ ) and rumination during their conflicts ( $F(1, 213) = 6.390, p = .012$ ). Although total trait rumination scores were not significantly different between groups, exploratory analyses indicated stalkers reported more regularly engaging in thoughts of revenge than their non-stalking counterparts,  $F(1, 214) = 4.259, p = .040$ . Contrary to Hypothesis Seven, none of the criminal thinking scales significantly differed between groups. No other variables displayed statistically significant differences between groups.

Table 3.4. Means and Standard Errors/Deviations for Clinical Factors by Group

<b>Clinical Factors</b>		<b>Stalking M (SE)</b>	<b>Non-Stalking M (SE)</b>	<b>Total M (SD)</b>
<i>Social Skills</i>	<i>Initiation</i>	14.69 (.43)	13.49 (.49)	14.15 (4.90)
	<i>Assertion</i>	12.89 (.35)	12.51 (.41)	12.73 (3.86)
	<i>Disclosure</i>	11.97 (.34)	12.30 (.41)	12.11 (3.78)
	<i>Support*</i>	15.52 (.28)	14.65 (.32)	15.14 (3.13)
	<i>Management</i>	13.24 (.27)	13.22 (.31)	13.23 (3.03)
<i>Emotion Regulation/ Coping</i>	<i>SubUse*</i>	9.84 (.42)	8.09 (.47)	9.09 (4.61)
	<i>Affect</i>	14.47 (.49)	13.39 (.58)	14.01 (5.57)
	<i>Rumination*</i>	10.97 (.33)	9.678 (.39)	10.42 (3.76)
	<i>Afterthoughts</i>	21.75 (.63)	20.74 (.73)	21.32 (7.37)
	<i>Revenge*</i>	13.16 (.49)	11.58 (.58)	12.49 (5.91)
	<i>Memories</i>	16.57 (.59)	15.41 (.69)	16.07 (6.95)
	<i>Causes</i>	11.41 (.45)	10.89 (.53)	11.19 (5.23)
	<i>Total ARS</i>	62.89 (1.94)	58.63 (2.26)	61.09 (22.99)
	<i>Tolerance</i>	10.09 (.26)	10.59 (.30)	10.30 (2.89)
	<i>Appraisal</i>	19.97 (.37)	20.87 (.47)	20.35 (4.24)
	<i>Absorption</i>	10.79 (.24)	10.86 (.33)	10.82 (2.89)
	<i>Efforts</i>	9.31 (.24)	9.83 (.28)	9.53 (2.68)
	<i>Total DTS</i>	50.1 (.95)	52.19 (1.22)	51.00 (10.78)
	<i>Non-Acceptance</i>	12.74 (.44)	11.89 (.55)	12.38 (5.10)
	<i>Goal Directed</i>	13.38 (.41)	12.38 (.49)	12.95 (4.71)
	<i>Impulse Control</i>	11.86 (.46)	11.29 (.56)	11.62 (5.20)
	<i>Awareness</i>	15.97 (.48)	15.86 (.49)	15.93 (5.10)
	<i>Strategies</i>	15.80 (.54)	15.41 (.64)	15.63 (6.07)
	<i>Clarity</i>	8.57 (.29)	8.15 (.34)	8.38 (3.25)
	<i>Total DERS</i>	78.13 (1.94)	75.19 (2.27)	76.89 (21.77)
<i>Criminal Thinking Scales</i>	<i>Mo</i>	14.04 (.42)	13.23 (.48)	13.69 (4.76)
	<i>C</i>	17.02 (.43)	15.93 (.49)	16.58 (5.12)
	<i>En</i>	14.84 (.35)	14.54 (.41)	14.69 (4.03)
	<i>Po</i>	14.09 (.33)	13.53 (.39)	13.84 (3.99)
	<i>Sn</i>	17.39 (.37)	16.74 (.37)	17.11 (3.88)
	<i>So</i>	16.16 (.35)	15.63 (.41)	15.95 (4.19)
	<i>CI</i>	17.12 (.36)	16.30 (.42)	16.77 (4.25)
	<i>DS</i>	16.98 (.40)	16.86 (.46)	16.93 (4.68)
	<i>PROACT</i>	82.45 (1.91)	80.42 (2.23)	81.52 (22.80)
<i>REACT</i>	91.86 (2.16)	89.59 (2.49)	91.06 (25.38)	

\*  $p < .05$



**Outcome Correlates and Prediction Models.** Two outcome variables were assessed in the present study- violence and overall pursuit. The occurrence of violence during the pursuit is measured by the violence subscale of the ORI-PS and overall pursuit was represented by total ORI-PS score. Bivariate and multivariate analysis controlled for age and SDR when violence was the outcome and SDR when overall pursuit was the outcome. All variables were converted to z-scores prior for multivariable analyses. The sample sizes of the categorical groups provided insufficient power to test hypothesized relationships within group membership and, therefore, only bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted using the continuous outcome variables.

Partial correlations were calculated first to examine the bivariate associations between the experimental and outcome variables (detailed in Table 3.5). In regards to social skills, better conflict management skills were associated with less violence and fewer overall pursuit behaviors as hypothesized (Hypothesis Four). Though no specific hypothesis was asserted, exploratory analysis revealed relationship initiation skills were positively correlated with overall pursuit behaviors despite the scale's less than adequate internal reliability.

Examination of emotion regulation variables revealed they were more often associated with overall pursuit than violence. Consistent with Hypothesis Six, results indicated emotion regulation difficulties, substance abuse, and trait angry rumination increased along with increases in both overall pursuit and violence. In partial support of Hypothesis Six, participants reported greater negative affect, greater conflict-specific rumination, and poorer distress tolerance as they engaged in more pursuit behavior, although neither variable was associated with violence. Exploratory analyses revealed

poorer impulse control abilities corresponded with greater violence and overall pursuit. Greater difficulties with goal directed behaviors and limited emotional regulation strategies were also related to increases in pursuit behavior, while non-acceptance displayed only a marginal positive correlation with pursuit. Better emotional appraisal and regulation abilities were associated with fewer pursuit behaviors. Both increases in violence and pursuit behavior were reported when participants displayed greater tendencies to engage in angry afterthoughts, thoughts of revenge, angry memories, and attempts to understand the causes.

*Table 3.5. Partial Correlations between Clinical Factors and Outcome Variables.*

<b>Clinical Factors</b>		<b>Violence</b>	<b>Pursuit</b>
<i>Social Skills</i>	<i>Initiation</i>	.01	.14*
	<i>Assertion</i>	.09	.09
	<i>Disclosure</i>	-.13	-.05
	<i>Support</i>	-.05	-.02
	<i>Management</i>	-.16*	-.20*
<i>Emotion Regulation/ Coping</i>	<i>SubUse</i>	.15*	.35*
	<i>Affect</i>	.08	.28*
	<i>Rumination</i>	.03	.22*
	<i>Afterthoughts</i>	.19*	.16*
	<i>Revenge</i>	.26*	.16*
	<i>Memories</i>	.21*	.17*
	<i>Causes</i>	.24*	.20*
	<i>Total ARS</i>	.25*	.19*
	<i>Tolerance</i>	-.09	-.14*
	<i>Appraisal</i>	-.09	-.16*
	<i>Absorption</i>	.00	-.13
	<i>Efforts</i>	-.03	-.17*
	<i>Total DTS</i>	-.07	-.18*
	<i>Non-Acceptance</i>	.12	.13 <sup>m</sup>
	<i>Goal Directed</i>	.09	.14*
<i>Impulse Control</i>	.21*	.25*	
<i>Awareness</i>	.13	.05	
<i>Strategies</i>	.12	.17*	

	<i>Clarity</i>	.07	.07
	<i>Total DERS</i>	.17*	.19*
<i>Criminal Thinking Scales</i>	<i>Mo</i>	.23*	.25*
	<i>CO</i>	.24*	.31*
	<i>En</i>	.18*	.23*
	<i>Po</i>	.24*	.25*
	<i>Sn</i>	.14*	.21*
	<i>So</i>	.18*	.23*
	<i>CI</i>	.08	.21*
	<i>DS</i>	.04	.13*
	<i>PROACT</i>	.19*	.26*
	<i>REACT</i>	.15*	.24*

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . <sup>m</sup>  $p = .052$

Many of the hypothesized and exploratory cognitive distortion variables also exhibited significant correlations with the outcome variables after controlling for their respective covariates. As noted in Hypothesis Eight, greater violence was associated with higher scores on the mollification, entitlement and reactive criminal thinking scales. Likewise, greater overall pursuit behaviors were significantly related with higher scores on the mollification, entitlement, proactive criminal thinking, and reactive criminal thinking scales. Although no specific hypotheses were proffered for the remaining PICTS scales, exploratory analysis revealed higher cutoff, power orientation, sentimentality, super-optimism scores, and proactive criminal thinking corresponded to reports of more violence during the pursuit. Likewise, higher cutoff, power orientation, sentimentality, cognitive indolence, and discontinuity were associated with more intense pursuits.

In addition their respective covariates, the eleven experimental variables were entered into a multivariate regression predicting the overall number and frequency of pursuit behaviors. Results revealed a significant model which accounts for nearly 20% of

the variance,  $F(11, 169) = 4.985, p = .000, R^2\text{-adjusted} = .196$ . In partial support of Hypothesis Nine, examination of the beta weights (listed in Table 3.6) indicated poorer conflict management skills, more substance abuse, and greater conflict specific rumination significantly predicted greater overall pursuit after accounting for the variance explained by social desirability and the other clinical variables. Affect displayed a non-significant trend in the hypothesized direction, such that greater negative affect was associated with more violence. However, none of the remaining hypothesized clinical variables were significant.

*Table 3.6. Predictors of Overall Pursuit Behaviors*

<b>Model Variables</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>95% CI</b>
SDR <sup>C</sup>	-0.02	[-.19, .14]
Management	-0.15*	[-.32, -.00]
Affect	0.14	[-.12, .30]
SubUse	0.20*	[.05, .37]
Rumination	0.17*	[.02, .34]
Total ARS	0.01	[-.18, .20]
Total DTS	-0.06	[-.26, .11]
Total DERS	-0.11	[-.33, .09]
Mo	0.13	[-.05, .32]
PROACT	0.10	[-.12, .34]
REACT	-0.04	[-.29, .19]

*Note.*  $N = 181$ . CI = confidence interval. <sup>C</sup> covariate.

\*  $p < .05$ .

The model significantly also predicted violence within the pursuit, though it accounted for only 11% of the variance,  $F(12, 167) = 2.953, p = .001, R^2\text{-adjusted} = .114$ . In partial support of Hypothesis Nine, examination of the beta weights (listed in Table 3.7) indicated only a greater endorsement of trait angry rumination (.268) significantly predicted higher violence after accounting for age, socially desirable responding, and the other clinical variables. The mollification scale displayed a non-

significant trend in the hypothesized direction, such that greater rationalization of offending behavior was associated with a greater incidence of violence (.168,  $p = .065$ ).

However, none of the remaining hypothesized clinical variables were significant.

*Table 3.7. Predictors of Violence during the Pursuit*

<b>Model Variables</b>	<b>Beta Weight</b>	<b>95% CI</b>
SDR <sup>c</sup>	0.02	[-.15, .21]
Age	-0.09	[-.25, .06]
Management	-0.12	[-.31, .03]
Affect	0.00	[-.17, .17]
SubUse	0.10	[-.31, .03]
Rumination	-0.01	[-.19, .16]
Total ARS	0.26*	[.07, .50]
Total DTS	0.11	[-.07, .32]
Total DERS	-0.00	[-.24, .24]
Mo	0.16 <sup>m</sup>	[-.01, .36]
En	0.06	[-.15, .29]
REACT	-0.10	[-.38, .15]

*Note.*  $N = 180$ . CI = confidence interval.<sup>c</sup>  
covariate. \*  $p < .05$ . <sup>m</sup>  $p = .054$ .

## Chapter 4: Discussion

The present study sought to examine potentially relevant clinical variables among offenders reporting to have engaged in an array of intrusive and aggressive behaviors. In pursuing this objective, the study explored two operationalizations of stalking (continuous and categorical) based on recommendations from previous research. Results revealed applying cutoffs for number of behaviors (10 or more), frequency of behaviors (11 or more occasions), and length of pursuit (more than two weeks) led to over half of the offender sample being labeled as a stalker. Although the measurement of stalking in the present study was more broadly defined in context than the original ORI-PS, it found that the vast majority of participants reported engaging in some form of pursuit behavior similar to previous studies focusing on relational pursuit (e.g., Williams & Frieze, 2005). Such findings highlight the difficulty of measuring stalking behaviors independent of normative conflict behavior and general aggression.

The present study utilized literature-suggested cutoffs to create a subgroup based upon theoretically and clinically relevant characteristics. In particular, results revealed offenders labeled as stalkers were significantly more likely to report engaging in ruminative thinking during their conflict than their non-stalking counterparts. Despite the fact trait anger rumination as a whole did not differ between groups, offenders labeled as stalkers reported a greater tendency to engage vengeful thinking when angered than non-stalkers. These findings are consistent with the RGP theory of stalking which postulates pursuits are driven by ruminative thinking about the consequences of goal-attainment failures (e.g., break-up, rejection; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Likewise, stalking offenders reported more substance use to cope with their conflict than non-stalkers,

consistent with research noting the prevalence of substance abuse disorder in clinical samples of stalkers (e.g., Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999). Inasmuch as stalking occurs most frequently in intimate relationships, offenders labeled as stalkers were significantly more likely to report conflicts involving intimate partners and domestic violence than non-stalkers.

As previously discussed, no universal indicator for stalking exists and so it is impossible to speculate on an appropriate proportion of stalkers for an offender sample. Despite the promising group differences just discussed, logic would suggest the examined cutoffs are still over-inclusive. Within an offender population where aggressive behavior occurs at a higher level than community and student populations, the suggested cutoffs may be failing to discriminate the borderline inappropriate individuals from those who are highly intrusive and aggressive. Consistent with this argument, the present study failed to find significant differences in the number of prior threat crimes between stalkers and non-stalkers. Of note, the threat variable included charges and convictions for Terroristic Threats, many of which involved general criminal behavior in the presence of a firearm, rather than specific threatening statements. Had this variable been coded differently, significant group difference may have appeared. Notwithstanding, these results indicate the cutoffs are not only over-including general criminal behavior, but also under-including individual known to engage in threatening and stalking behavior. Given that clinical intervention is likely to be mandated to those at the more intense end of the intrusive/aggressive spectrum, future research using students and community members should use higher cutoffs in order to ensure their results are likely to generalize appropriately.

Experts previously suggested social skills deficits were a necessary treatment target for stalkers. Contrary to this hypothesis, stalkers were more likely to report confidence in their ability to provide emotional support within their close relationships. While it is possible this is an accurate description of their abilities, this conclusion seems counterintuitive given their socially inappropriate and aggressive behavior. A notable feature of the social skills measures is that it asks participants to rate their subjective impression of their own abilities. Accordingly, this finding may actually be representative of a false confidence among stalkers, helping to insulate them from critical self-evaluation. Stalkers may rationalize their pursuit with the notion that they had been positively contributing to their interaction and it is their target that instigated the conflict. Future research should continue to examine the particular social skills deficits exhibited by stalkers, rather than assuming global functional deficits.

A second purpose of the present study was to examine the ability of the social, emotional, and cognitive functioning variables to predict risk outcomes. Ultimately, only the continuous outcome variables were examined since the size of the stalking group did not yield sufficient power to test for the expected effects sizes. As previously discussed, experts argue that variables which predict risk outcomes, particularly recidivism, are more useful for identifying treatment targets than mere group differences. To this end, of the 46 significant bivariate relationships observed, only four variables showed promise as treatment targets- substance use, rumination, trait angry rumination, and conflict management. Such findings suggest, although many functional abilities influence violence and overall pursuit, it is more practical to target some in treatment than others.



Similar to the results regarding group differences, predictive analyses supported the importance of rumination in explaining stalking-related violence and pursuit intensity. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) argued rumination motivates pursuit by creating excessive focus on the consequences of failing to initiate or continue a relationship with the target. Behavioral activation techniques operate on a similar approach-oriented mindset with its commonly used acronym RCA or Rumination Cues Actions. For stalkers, however, the specific action-oriented coping behaviors engaged in are maladaptive and inappropriate. This proposal is further supported by results implicating conflict management skills as accounting for a unique proportion of the pursuit variance. Accordingly, the use of a dually-focused intervention for intrusive and aggressive offenders is indicated. Thought stopping and acceptance based techniques may help offenders decrease their rumination, while social problem solving skill building may help increase the prosocial and adaptive behaviors used to resolve conflicts.

The effect of rumination and conflict management skills on pursuit intensity may be explained by problems with disinhibition. A substantial body of research exists which demonstrates the negative impact drug use has on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. In this same vein, substance use has long been implicated as a major risk factor for aggression, including violence and stalking (e.g., e.g., Mullen et al., 1999; Quinsey, Harris, Rice & Cormier, 2006). Additionally, laboratory research suggests that rumination is a mentally-taxing process which consumes a person's mental resources for self-control and increases aggression (Bushman, 2002; Bushman et al., 2005; Ayduk et al., 2002). The social problem solving skills necessary to facilitate conflict management require the ability to quickly produce and evaluate multiple behavior options. Such

abilities likely require more mental resources than more primitive aggressive behaviors. Inasmuch that conflict management requires more mental resources, ruminative activities and substance abuse may impair a person's ability to self-regulate. Though not significant in the multivariate model, the significant correlations of impulse control subscale of the DERS and the discontinuity subscale of the PICTS with pursuit intensity lends some support to this proposal. Future research should continue to examine the mediating pathways between risk outcomes and their major predictors.

Even though many of cognitive, social, and emotional functioning variables were not significant in the multivariate model, their significant bivariate relationships may still provide insight into the larger set of factors influencing stalking behavior. To begin with, better self-perceived relationship initiation skills were associated with more intense pursuits. This effect may merely reflect poor self-evaluation, given that the instrument's subjective nature. Perpetrators of unwanted relationship pursuit have been found to engage in self-serving thoughts that portray the target as receptive and taunting (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005). Alternatively, the ability to be outgoing and assertive early on in social interactions may be related to the inability to let them go. At least one study using college students found persistence, surveillance, and approach behaviors during courtship had positive associations with similar behaviors after break-up (Williams & Frieze, 2005). Future research should continue to examine the influence of social skills on stalking behaviors using more objective measures of social functioning.

The suggestion that stalkers may not accurately perceive the nature of their behavior or the conflict's impact is at least partially supported by the numerous bivariate relationships observed between criminal thinking styles and the outcome variables.

Despite their less than adequate reliability, the tendency to rationalize one's behavior (mollification) and entitled attitudes were significantly related to violence and pursuit. Consistent with the RGP theory of intrusive pursuit, such attitudes may insulate stalkers from self-critical evaluation as they engage in socially inappropriate behaviors. Still, due to the constructs lack of reliability further research is warranted. Further consistent with the RGP theory, results indicate intrusive and aggressive behaviors increase as offenders remove emotional deterrents for their behavior, overestimate the likely of goal achievement, and accept aggression as a suitable method to manipulate their target. Still, due to some constructs lack of reliability and their overall lack of significance in the multivariate model, further research is warranted before cognitive distortions may be implicated as a treatment target.

Results of the present study indicate that while distress tolerance and emotion regulation skills display significant relationships with risk outcomes, treatment is better spent targeting other functional skills. Negative affect, distress tolerance, and problems with emotional regulation were all positively related to pursuit intensity, suggesting that poor emotional functioning contributes to the maladaptive behaviors. Still, none significantly contributed to the prediction of violence or pursuit intensity when all functioning variables were accounted for. These results indicate the specific management approaches- rumination, substance use, and conflict management skills- are more important than global abilities for coping and emotional management. However, if not emotion regulation, what leads one to engage in these maladaptive coping strategies? These results seem to conflict with those of Rosenfeld et al. (2007) which found that a treatment approach which targeted distress tolerance and emotion regulation. The use of

DBT with stalkers may still be supported by the present study insomuch as the interpersonal effectiveness component covers appropriate conflict management skills. Accordingly, future research should continue to study the specific change producing mechanisms of DBT within stalking treatment populations.

As with any study, several limitations must be considered in regards to the interpretation and generalizability of our results. First and probably the biggest is the retrospective design for the analyses pertaining to stalking risks. The present study tested whether current functioning predicted *past* violence and emotional harm as opposed to future risk. It is uncertain whether participants were operating at the same level of functioning as they were during the conflict. To the extent that social skills and trait emotion regulation skills are stable over time where intervention has not occurred, one could argue this limitation may be negligible. Still, for cognitive functioning and specific coping skills consistency is difficult to ascertain. For at least rumination, we attempted to account for this issue by querying both trait and context-specific tendencies. Ultimately, the best strategy for managing these limitations is to conduct longitudinal, predictive studies; however, such an approach is costly and logistically difficult for most researchers. Researchers in the field of stalking have instead opted to accept designs such as this one (e.g., Lewis et al., 2001), relying on replication and convergence between studies over a program of research.

A second limitation of this study is certainly one suffered by all studies on stalking- operationally defining the behavior. As discussed previously, stalkers are difficult to identify within research because of the lack of clarity surrounding the construct's quantification. Although though this project took steps to base its boundaries

in previous research, our categorical outcome variable likely over-included “true non-stalkers” and under-included “true stalkers, while our continuous outcome variable likely failed to discriminate between types of aggressive offenders. To assist future research in defining stalking and its correlates, the present study reported both versions of the results.

A third limitation is the lack of reliability demonstrated by some of the instruments and the borderline-sized sample size. Funding limitations restricted our ability to collect a larger sample which may have given us the power and additional consistency needed to find significant results for the smaller effect sizes. Compared to laboratory studies, research based in field settings notoriously displays smaller, but still meaningful effect sizes due to the lack of environmental controls. The examined relationships will necessarily require continue replication and convergence before generalizability can be more reliable.

Stalking has only been recognized as a construct for twenty years and, to date, little is known about how to effectively treat offenders. Mullen, Pathé, and Purcell (2001) explain that where “[less is] known the longer and more convoluted become discussions of management ” (Mullen et al., 2001, p. 335). The present study sought to contribute empirical data to the discussion of treatment. It was not intended to usurp the recommendations of clinical experts, but rather to provide an empirical foundation in a framework consistent with present trends in correctional treatment. Given that stalkers are unlikely to be a population motivated to seek treatment independently, psychological intervention is most likely to occur through court mandate or in correctional/forensic settings. As we enter the third decade of stalking research, greater effort should be made to studying stalking in a manner that informs treatment. The present suggested substance

use, rumination, and conflict management skills in particular should be targeted. Future research using prospective designs should continue to examine these variables as well as other social, emotional, and cognitive variables left unexamined by this study, such as stalking-specific thinking errors.

## Chapter 5: References

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