

LEGISLATION FOR A FEW RATHER THAN THE MANY:
TESTING ASSUMPTIONS OF SEX OFFENDER LEGISLATION AMONG MEN
WHO SEXUALLY ASSAULTED CHILDREN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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December, 2018

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my sweet friend Aaron.

ABSTRACT

Steele, Sarah A., *Legislation for a few rather than the many: Testing assumptions of sex offender legislation among men who sexually assaulted children*. Master of Arts (Criminal Justice and Criminology), December, 2018, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Sexual offender legislation contains assumptions of sexual offending that are largely based on prolific cases of sexual abuse, which typically involved an adult male stranger perpetrator abducting, sexually abusing, and killing a child victim. The current thesis examined assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation pertaining to sexual offense characteristics, sexual recidivism risk, and sexual recidivism to determine whether or not they were supported in a sample of 2,074 adult male offenders who were incarcerated for a contact sexual offense against a child and were released into the community between 1996 and 2007. The findings of this thesis indicated that the assumptions examined were not supported among the majority of the offenders in the sample. The findings of this thesis suggest that current policies based on these assumptions would better serve the community if they were based on the nature of the majority of cases.

KEY WORDS: Sexual offense legislation, Child molester, Victim-offender relationship, Offense location, Sexual recidivism risk, Sexual recidivism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Holly Miller who helped me grow so much as a scholar throughout this process. The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without your direction and advice. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Elizabeth Jeglic who provided me with access to the data that were used to complete this thesis. Additionally, I would like to thank and acknowledge my committee members, Drs. Boisvert and Butler – thank you so much for your insightful comments and flexibility throughout this process. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge and thank Ethan Marshall, who provided me with support and advice.

On a personal note, I would like to acknowledge and thank Katherine Meeker, Alondra Garza, Channing Carpenter, and Amber Griffin for their camaraderie. I could not have survived the Master's program without y'all. I would like to acknowledge and thank my parents, for their invaluable advice and support. Dad, thank you for always providing me with advice that confirms what I was already thinking and Mom, thank you for giving me some perspective. I would like to acknowledge my siblings – Tiffany, Joshua, and Zachary – thank you for always being there. I would also like to acknowledge my best friends: Dana, Jason, Jamie, Morgen, and Nikki. Thank you for always being only a FaceTime call away and putting things into perspective for me.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Every jurisdiction in the United States has enacted sexual offense legislation to regulate offenders who have committed a sexual offense (United States Department of Justice, 2016). Specific sexual offense legislation varies per jurisdiction; however, measures such as mandatory sentencing, civil commitment, mandatory registration and community notification, driver's license notation, lifetime supervision, residence restrictions, internet restrictions, mobility restrictions, and electronic/GPS monitoring have been implemented to manage offenders in the community (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014; Mancini, Barnes, & Mears, 2011; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010). These policies are pervasive in society, yet sexual offense legislation is largely based on a small number of cases, which involved an adult male stranger perpetrator abducting, sexually abusing, and killing a child victim (Jenkins, 1998). The small number of cases which comprise the basis of sexual offense legislation has raised concern because it appears these policies aim to protect society under the assumption that sexual abuse occurs similarly to these prolific cases.

Subsequently, to inform legislation, research has both tested specific sexual offense policies to determine whether these sanctions are having their intended effect and examined specific assumptions of this legislation in samples of offenders as a means of describing typical offenders and cases of abuse. Indeed, this research provides juxtaposition between sexual offense legislation which contains assumptions of sexual offending derived from a few cases and empirical findings pertaining to sexual offending.

The current thesis intends to contribute to the body of research that aims to inform sexual offense legislation by determining whether or not support for the assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation exists among a sample of adult males who were convicted, incarcerated, and released into the community for a contact sexual offense against a child. This particular population warrants research because adult males are most often the reported perpetrators of sexual violence (Chilton, Major, & Propher, 1998; United States Department of Justice, 2015) and sexual offense legislation is predominantly based on a number of cases where a male offender committed a contact sexual offense against a child. Accordingly, this thesis will first describe sexual offense legislation and the effectiveness of this legislation. Next, this thesis examines assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation and empirical findings pertaining to these assumptions. In particular, studies which examined adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are primarily discussed because this is the population of analysis in this thesis. Research questions and hypotheses for the current thesis are stated, followed by a detailed description of the methodology that was used to answer the research questions. Finally, the results of this thesis are stated and the implications for criminal justice research and policy are discussed.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Sexual psychopath laws were enacted in the 1930's and were the first legal measures passed in the United States for specifically managing offenders who committed a sexual offense (Janus, 2000). Sexual psychopath laws authorized for offenders who committed a sexual offense and were considered unable to control their sexual impulses to be confined in a treatment facility until they were found to be rehabilitated (Janus, 2000). By the end of the 1970's, these laws were criticized and deemed ineffective by several professional associations, which included the American Bar Association, American Psychiatric Association, and the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, for being more punitive than rehabilitative and maintaining custody of individuals that prosecutors would have difficulty convicting in court (Fitch & Ortega, 2000; Tappan, 1950 in Lave, 2009). These laws were eventually abolished by the majority of states that used them, and more punitive measures, such as incarceration, took their place in the 1980's and 1990's (Fitch & Ortega, 2000; Lave, 2009).

In the 1990's and 2000's, a major wave of sexual offense legislation was introduced as a response to highly publicized prolific cases of sexual abuse (Jenkins, 1998). Subsequently, the majority of the names (e.g., Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act, Megan's Law) and content of these laws were a reflection of these cases. In 1990, Washington passed the Community Protection Act that established the first modern civil commitment laws for offenders who committed a sexual offense and were deemed a threat to the community (Harris, 2009). This law was passed after a series of highly publicized sexual offenses occurred in the

state, including the murder and sexual assault of a Tacoma boy by an offender who was recently released for a sexual offense. Several states have since adopted similar policies to Washington's (Harris, 2009).

Civil commitment laws are comparable to sexual psychopath laws because states have the power to retain individuals convicted of sexual offenses in state treatment facilities indeterminately. Like sexual psychopath laws, individuals civilly committed in treatment facilities are released when they are deemed as no longer a threat to society. States generally use similar criteria to lawfully maintain custody of these individuals. Under civil commitment, individuals that: have committed a sexually harmful offense, have a mental abnormality or personality disorder, were deemed at risk for committing future sexual offenses, and have a connection between an individual's mental abnormality/personality disorder and an individual's risk of committing a future sexual offense are eligible for civil commitment (Janus, 2000).

The next major piece of legislation passed was the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act of 1994, or the Wetterling Act. The Wetterling Act was passed at the federal level after Jacob Wetterling was abducted by an armed stranger in a similar manner to a crime that was committed in a nearby town to another boy who was abducted, sexually assaulted, and killed. It was assumed the same offender committed both crimes—leading the police to believe the offender was a repeat offender (Sample & Evans, 2009). Foremost, the Wetterling Act established standards for a sexual offender registry which enabled law enforcement to track known offenders who committed a sexual offense by requiring

offenders to register their address with state law enforcement agencies and discretionarily required offenders to publicly notify the community of their presence.

In 1996, Megan's Law was passed at the federal level after Megan Kanka was abducted from her home, sexually assaulted, and murdered by a sexual recidivist. Megan's parents petitioned congress to address sexual recidivists. Subsequently, Megan's Law expanded public notification in the Wetterling Act from discretionary to mandatory disclosure of information about offenders on the sexual offender registry (Sample & Evans, 2009).

Next, in 2005, Jessica's Law was passed in Florida after Jessica Lunsford was sexually assaulted and murdered by a sexual recidivist who lived near her home. Jessica's Law enacted residence restrictions which restricted convicted offenders who committed a sexual offense from living in a close proximity to places where children commonly congregate such as a school or daycare (Levenson, 2009). In addition to residence restrictions, Jessica's Law also required released offenders who committed a sexual offense to be actively monitored via GPS for the remainder of their lives in the community (Meloy & Coleman, 2009). Although many states have enacted residence restrictions and GPS monitoring for offenders who committed a sexual offense, these policies have not been mandated at the federal level (Meloy & Coleman, 2009; United States Department of Justice, n.d.).

In 2006, the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act was passed at the federal level after Adam Walsh was abducted and murdered by a stranger. Broadly, the Adam Walsh Act established a national sexual offender registry, streamlined offender registration and community notification into uniform nationwide standards, set forth

sentencing minimums and enhancements, and provided funding for civil commitment and GPS monitoring programs (Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, 2006).

In view of sexual offense legislation, these policies have considerably developed in recent years. Extant research indicates society favors these policies for offenders who committed a sexual offense (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Phillips, 1998; Schiavone & Jeglic, 2009). However, despite the quick development and public support for this legislation, this legislation has also received criticism for ineffectively managing offenders by assuming sexual offending occurs similarly to the highly publicized cases of sexual abuse which make up the basis of this legislation.

Sexual offense legislation in New Jersey. Many sexual offense policies are federally mandated; however, jurisdictions may implement additional policies such as residence restrictions and GPS/electronic monitoring to manage offenders. Due to potential variance in sexual offense legislation in different jurisdictions, a brief description of sexual offense policies in New Jersey is described below. New Jersey sexual offense legislation is described below because offenders in the sample of the current thesis are from New Jersey.

The death of Megan Kanka in New Jersey and substantial publicity surrounding Kanka's death initiated the enactment of many new sexual offense policies in the state (Brooks, 1996; Jenkins, 1998). These policies are known collectively as Megan's Laws. Megan's Law approved policies regarding offender registration, community notification, civil commitment, lifetime supervision for compulsive offenders, DNA testing, "good time" credit denial for offenders that refuse offered psychological treatment, and life

imprisonment and the death penalty for certain sexual crimes perpetrated against children (Brooks, 1996). Megan's Law was one of the first pieces of sexual offense legislation of its kind – leaving the state of New Jersey at the front of the most recent wave of sexual offense legislation (Mercado, Jeglic, Markus, Hanson, & Levenson, 2011).

Effectiveness of Sexual Offender Legislation

The rapid development of sexual offense legislation and the threat of sexual violence has prompted researchers to assess the effectiveness of these policies. Below, research on the efficacy of these policies is presented.

Community notification and registration. As stated, sexual offender registration and community notification was initially introduced as a part of the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act in 1994 (United States Department of Justice, 2016). Presently, the registry provides information such as a physical description and the home address of offenders as well as offense details to the public. Community notification and registration have raised concerns by some because providing this information to the public may produce more unintended consequences (i.e., loss of employment and relationships, social stigma) than benefits such as public safety to society (Tewksbury, 2005).

Several studies have assessed the effectiveness of community notification and registration. A study by Levenson and Cotter (2005a) surveyed adult male offenders subjected to notification laws as a consequence for a sexual offense. Offenders surveyed reported negative effects, such as social isolation, from notification laws (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). This finding is troubling because, as the authors note, these negative effects have been found to heighten the risk of sexual recidivism among offenders who

committed a sexual offense (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). However, this study also found that some offenders reported positive benefits in the context of notification laws and their future non-offending behavior.

A number of studies have examined the effectiveness of community notification and registration by examining rates of sexual offending before and after the implementation of these policies. A report published by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy examined recidivism in a sample of offenders who were released from prison either before or after the implementation community notification in the state (Barnoski, 2005). Although this study has been criticized for not addressing general crime rates in the study period (Calkins, Jeglic, Beattey, Zeidman, & Perillo, 2014), this study found that felony recidivism remained constant, and violent felony and sexual recidivism decreased after the implementation of community notification (Barnoski, 2005).

Zevitz (2006) compared recidivism rates in a sample of offenders who were released from prison in Wisconsin, eligible for extensive notification, and were subjected to either extensive or limited community notification for a sexual offense as a means of examining the effectiveness of community notification and registration. This study found there were no significant differences in recidivism among these offenders.

Sandler, Freeman, and Socia (2008) examined sexual offense rates before and after the implementation of registration and notification laws in New York. No evidence was found to support that this policy reduced sexual offending in this study; this study found arrest averages for sexual offenses, both rapes and child molestations committed

by recidivists and first-time offenders who committed sexual offenses, did not decrease after these laws were implemented.

Prescott and Rockoff (2011) utilized data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to examine offender registration and community notification. The authors found that the implementation of these laws deterred new sexual offenses and increased sexual recidivism. Additionally, this study found that sexual crimes perpetrated by non-strangers decreased and sexual crimes committed by strangers did not decrease after the implementation of community notification and registration (Prescott & Rockoff, 2011). The authors conclude that community notification and registration may not have the intended affect legislators anticipated (Prescott & Rockoff, 2011).

Calkins and colleagues (2014) reviewed several pieces of sexual offense legislation including community notification and registration by examining case law surrounding sexual offense policies, empirical findings surrounding these laws that are also related to justifications for their implementation, consequences of these policies, and recidivism outcomes of offenders who were subjected registration and community notification. The authors concluded that while current legislation overall has limited support for effectively curtailing sexual violence, studies regarding registration and community notification has provided mixed results (Calkins et al., 2014).

More recently, Levenson and Zgoba (2015) examined community notification and registration policies in Florida. This study examined recidivism rates via re-arrest rates among offenders who committed a sexual offense before and after the passing of community registration and notification laws in 1997. This study found sexual recidivism significantly increased after the passing of these laws. The authors concluded

that their findings may be attributable to repeat sexual offenses being more easily detected and that community notification and registration does not appear to be decreasing repeat sexual offenses.

Residence restrictions. Residence restrictions limit where offenders who committed a sexual offenses can live. These laws generally restrict offenders who committed a sexual offense from living in a close proximity to places where children commonly congregate (i.e., daycares, schools, etc.; Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014). Several studies have assessed the effectiveness of this policy since its implementation. Nobles, Levenson, and Youstin (2012) used sexual crime arrest history data to assess the effectiveness of resident restrictions in Florida to determine whether this sanction is reducing recidivism. This study examined arrest rates before and after residence restrictions were enacted and statistically controlled for several individual-level factors and aggregate-level variation in sexual crime arrests. Nobles and colleagues (2012) found sexual crimes (first time offenses and sexual crime re-offenses) increased after the laws were enacted. The authors concluded residence restrictions were ineffective at reducing sexual offending and speculated this may be because these laws were passed quickly without considering empirical findings pertaining to sexual offending (Nobles et al., 2012).

Socia (2012) used data from New York to examine sexual crime rates after the implementation of residence restrictions to examine whether this sanction was producing a deterrent effect. Socia (2012) found after the implementation of this policy there was a decrease in sexual crimes committed by first-time offenders who committed a sexual offense against an adult, but in the context of registered offenders who committed a

sexual offense against a child or adult victim and first-time offenders who committed a sexual offense against a child victim, residence restrictions did not decrease sexual offenses. Socia (2012, p. 628) posits “unique mechanisms” may influence some sexual crimes and not others, concluding this is why the findings of the study were mixed.

Huebner, Kras, Rydberg, Bynum, Grommon, and Pleggenkuhle (2014) used a sample of offenders from Missouri or Michigan to examine recidivism before and after the implementation of residence restrictions in the two states. The study found in both states the effects of residence restrictions regarding recidivism broadly were inconsistent. In the context of sexual recidivism, occurrences were so infrequent that differences could not be statistically assessed. The authors concluded that residence restrictions should be more targeted toward specific offenders who committed a sexual offense in order for this sanction to have its intended effect (Huebner et al., 2014).

In Iowa, Blood, Watson & Stageberg (2008) reported findings in a state legislation monitoring report regarding sexual offenses against children 12 months before and 24 months after residence restrictions were enacted. The authors found residence restrictions did not significantly decrease sexual crimes against children (Blood, Watson, & Stageberg, 2008). Conversely, the authors found these crimes increased during the study period—leading the authors to conclude that residence restrictions are ineffective and that making treatment for these offenders more accessible may be a better solution to curtailing sexual violence against children.

A study conducted by Barnes, Dukes, Tewksbury, and De Trove (2009) used spatial analysis to examine the implications of a residence restriction bill proposed in South Carolina that would require offenders who committed a sexual offense to live one

mile away from places where children congregate. The authors found the majority of offenders who committed a sexual offense would have an increased difficulty in receiving treatment if they are required to live one mile away from restricted zones— noting this finding is concerning because restricting access to treatment may have a negative effect on recidivism (Barnes et al., 2009).

Levenson and Cotter (2005b) used surveyed offenders who were subjected to residence restrictions as a way of determining the effect of this sanction on offenders. The authors found offenders in the sample reported negative effects from residence restrictions such as increased isolation, decreased stability, and financial stress (Levenson & Cotter, 2005b).

Electronic monitoring/GPS monitoring. Electronic and GPS monitoring allows offenders' locations to be tracked via satellite. This management tool has been referred to as the “magic bullet” for ending sexual violence because it has been believed to give criminal justice workers the ability to prevent sexual crimes (Meloy & Coleman, 2009, p. 263). However, empirical data provides mixed results for its use.

Renzema and Mayo-Wilson (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on recidivism studies that used moderate to high-risk offenders who committed sexual offenses and were subjected to electronic monitoring. This meta-analysis concluded that no sound evidence exists which supports the use of electronic monitoring (Renzema & Mayo-Wilson, 2005). Additionally, other studies have had similar findings. The Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole did not find significant differences in the number of technical violations and new charges committed by offenders who committed sexual offenses who were subjected to GPS monitoring and those who were not (Tennessee

Board of Probation and Parole, 2007). Similarly, a study conducted in California found no significant differences for technical violations, new crimes, or returns to custody between offenders who committed sexual offenses and were sanctioned to GPS monitoring and those who were not (Turner et al., 2007). Further, another study conducted in California which used propensity score matching, found no significant differences in rearrests for sexual crimes between offenders who committed a sexual offense and were subjected to GPS monitoring and those who were not (Geis et al., 2012). However, this study did find significant better supervision compliance and recidivism compliance among offenders who were subjected to GPS monitoring (Geis et al., 2012).

More recently, a study conducted by Gies, Gainey, and Healy (2016) found GPS conditions for offenders at a high-risk for sexual recidivism were associated with fewer parole registration violations and arrests (i.e., failure to register), arrests, and convictions. Although these studies provide some support for GPS/electronic monitoring increasing supervision compliance among these offenders, these studies did not find that GPS/electronic monitoring reduced sexual recidivism among offenders subjected to this sanction.

Civil commitment. Civil commitment laws allow states to detain offenders who committed a sexual offense after their custodial sentence is served. As stated, the exact criteria for selecting offenders for civil commitment varies per jurisdiction, but generally, offenders that (1) have committed a sexual offense, (2) have a mental abnormality or personality disorder, (3) are at risk for committing a future sexual offense, and (4) have a connection between the mental abnormality/personality disorder and the risk for

committing a future sexual offense are potential candidates for civil commitment (Janus, 2000). Once offenders are deemed rehabilitated and no longer a risk to society they are released into the community. Modern civil commitment laws for offenders who committed a sexual offense were enacted in the 1990's (Lave, 2009). Since the enactment of modern civil commitment statutes, very few offenders have been released from these programs (Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014). Subsequently, very few studies have been able to determine the effectiveness of civil commitment and offender outcomes. Extant research that has examined the effectiveness of civil commitment has only studied facets pertaining to the effectiveness of this sanction.

A study conducted by Levenson (2004) examined adult male offenders who were recommended for civil commitment. This study found that among offenders recommended for civil commitment in the sample, offenders who were deemed to be at a higher risk for sexual recidivism were selected for civil commitment over offenders who were at a lower risk for sexual recidivism (Levenson, 2004). Levenson (2004) notes this finding suggests that offenders are being adequately selected for civil commitment in the state. In addition to Levenson's (2004) study, the Washington State Institute for Public policy reported recidivism outcomes for adult male offenders in the state who committed a sexual offense, were referred for civil commitment, but were released into the community (Schram & Milloy, 1998). Reportedly, 28% of these offenders were arrested for a new sexual offense within the study follow-up period (Schram & Milloy, 1998). The number of offenders that recidivated in this report may be lower than expected because offenders eligible for civil commitment are anticipated to be certain sexual recidivists in the community.

Summary of Sexual Offense Legislation Effectiveness

Generally, there is limited support for the effectiveness of sexual offense legislation. The current body of research examining the effectiveness of these policies indicates that these policies have mixed effectiveness, are primarily ineffective, or even increase the likelihood of sexual recidivism. The consistent findings indicating the ineffectiveness of sexual offense legislation indicate inherent problems with these policies. Many of the researchers that found these policies were ineffective suggested their results stem from faulty assumptions of sexual offending (Levenson & Zgoba, 2015; Nobles, et al., 2012; Sandler et al., 2008).

Empirical Assessment of Sexual Offense Assumptions

Assumptions of sexual offending are prevalent in sexual offense legislation. These assumptions are present in the content, dissemination, and implementation of these policies. Broadly, these assumptions can be divided into two categories: assumptions pertaining to sexual offense characteristics and assumptions pertaining to risk and recidivism. However, as Soothill, Francis, Sanderson, and Ackerly (2000, p. 56) note, “to talk of ‘sexual offenders’ rather suggests that they are a homogeneous and coherent group ... [and] that they are somehow distinct from the general run of offenders.” Therefore, an underlying assumption of these two categories of assumptions is that offenders who committed a sexual offense are a homogeneous group that differs from other groups of offenders. Assumptions of sexual offending and empirical findings pertaining to these assumptions—with an emphasis on contact child sexual abuse—are discussed.

Empirical Assessment of Sexual Offense Characteristics Assumptions

Sexual offense characteristics are the characteristics surrounding instances of sexual abuse. Sexual offense characteristics include the victim-offender relationship and the place where a sexual offense occurred. In sexual offense legislation, there is an assumption that offenders are strangers to victims, sexual offenses occur in places where children commonly congregate, and offenders intentionally frequent child-dense areas or zones (i.e., places where children commonly congregate such as a school or park) in order meet and groom children they can sexually abuse.

Victim-offender relationship. Empirically, methods such as self-report data from victims or offenders as well as official criminal justice data has been used to study the relationship between the victim and offender in instances of child sexual abuse. Contrary to the assumption that offenders are often strangers to the victims, which is implied in registration and community notification laws that require offenders who committed a sexual offense to disclose information such as their physical description, address, and details of their sexual crime to the public—leading the public to believe that they should be concerned about individuals they do not know (i.e., strangers) perpetrating sexual abuse (Evans, Lytle, & Sample, 2015), extant self-report data from victims and offenders, indicate instances in which the offender is a stranger to the victim only comprises an approximate 4-14% of cases of child sexual abuse (Greenfeld, 1996; Langan & Harlow, 1994; Ullman, 2007). Similarly, findings via official criminal justice data (e.g., NIBRS) report 7% of child sexual abuse cases involve stranger perpetrators (Snyder, 2000).

Despite these findings pertaining to the victim-offender relationship in child sexual abuse, gaps remain in the current body of research. For example, a portion of the existing research has examined the victim-offender relationship in only index offenses of abuse (Greenfeld, 1996; Langan & Harlow, 1994), which precludes a description of victim-offender relationships in sexual offenses throughout the life-course. Studies that have explored lifetime victim-offender relationships in child sexual abuse either do not provide descriptive statistics for this variable and use a very small sample (Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989), were conducted with non-American samples (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001), or exclude instances of abuse that occurred before 5 and after 14 (Ullman, 2007). Another weakness of existing research is that several studies fail to differentiate or fully describe the relationship between the victim-offender relationship and the type of sexual abuse perpetrated against the child (i.e., contact or non-contact; Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001).

Location of sexual offenses. The location of sexual offenses includes the setting where an actual instance of child sexual abuse occurred as well as the place where an offender met or groomed the victim. In sexual offense policy, there is an assumption that offenders who committed a sexual offense meet, groom, or abuse victims in child-dense zones. For example, residence restrictions prohibit offenders who committed a sexual offense from living in close proximity to places where children commonly congregate (Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014). Restricting offenders who committed a sexual offense from living near child-dense zones seemingly implies that these offenders will either abuse victims in these areas or meet and groom victims in these areas for sexual abuse.

Empirically, Snyder (2000) used data reported via NIBRS from victims of child sexual abuse (N=60,991) to examine characteristics of child sexual abuse. Snyder (2000) found 70% of child sexual assaults occurred in the victim's home. Similarly, studies that have used multiple data sources such as archival and self-report data have found child sexual abuse typically occurs in private locations such as the offender's or victim's home (Colombino, Mercado, & Jeglic, 2009; Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury, 2008; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000).

Other studies have examined the location where offenders first meet the victim and begin to form relationships. A study conducted by Colombino, Mercado, Levenson, and Jeglic (2011) used archival data to examine where adult male offenders (N=1,557) who had committed a sexual offense against either child or adult victims first met their victims. Contrary to the assumption that offenders meet/groom victims in child-dense zones, this study found approximately 4% of offenders met their victim in these areas. A limitation of this study is that it did not parse child contact offenders (Colombino et al., 2011).

Similar findings were published in a study conducted by Smallbone and Wortley (2000) which used archival and self-report data from an Australian sample of adult male offenders (N=343) who were incarcerated for a sexual offense and had been convicted of at least one sexual offenses against a child. This study found offenders typically first met child victims in a friend's home (40%). However, in addition to this finding, Smallbone and Wortley (2000) reported tactics offenders used to gain access to child victims. Contrary to the assumption that offenders intentionally pursue children to sexually abuse

in child-dense locations, only an approximate 1.2% of offenders went to a child-dense location for the sole purpose of sexually abusing a child (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000).

Duwe, Donnay, and Tewksbury (2008) used a very different methodological approach than other studies that have examined the location of child sexual abuse offenses—despite this—the authors found similar results to prior research. Via spatial analysis Duwe and colleagues (2008) examined where offenders committed sexual offenses and first met their victims in a sample of offenders (N=224) who were released from a Minnesota correctional facility between 1990 and 2002 and were re-incarcerated for a new sexual offense before 2006 (i.e., the year when residence restrictions were introduced in the state). Duwe and colleagues (2008) found offenders who perpetrated sexually against child victims were more often introduced to the victim by a third party instead of meeting the victim directly, and of the offenders who directly met their child victim, none of the offenders met a child victim in a child-dense area.

Although a body of research has examined assumptions of offense characteristics in sexual offense legislation, there are gaps in this current body of research. Several studies that examined either where child sexual abuse occurs or where offenders meet/groom their victims have failed to explicate whether the offense involved sexual contact with the victim. Further, only one prior study which used a non-American sample examined whether offenders frequented a child-dense place for the sole purpose of sexually abusing a child (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). The exclusion of these details leaves a void in research which describes the characteristics of sexual violence against children in the United States.

Empirical Assessment of Offender Risk and Recidivism Assumptions

In the context of offender risk and recidivism, there is an assumption that offenders who committed a sexual offense are at a high risk for sexual recidivism and actually recidivate at high levels. This assumption is prevalent in sexual offense policies as well as the formation of this legislation. For example, in an address to the United States congress, Congressman Jim Ramstad cited a high level of recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense as a salient justification for passing community notification laws (C-SPAN, 1995).

In the context of assumptions in sexual offense policies, the assumptions of high risk and level of sexual recidivism are manifested in a few ways. First, sexual offense policies are applied directly to known offenders, which places value on curtailing sexual recidivism, not offenders' first sexual offense (Socia & Stamatel, 2010). This practice assumes that offenders who committed a sexual offense are at a high risk for sexual recidivism and repeatedly commit sexual offenses. Many times, multiple sanctions are used for offender management in the community. The use of multiple sanctions for these specific offenders implies that extensive supervision is necessary to prevent offenders from recidivating.

More specifically, residence restrictions and lifetime supervision imply these offenders are likely sexual recidivists. Residence restrictions which prohibit offenders from living in child-dense zones, seemingly imply that if offenders live in these areas, they will sexually recidivate. In particular, lifetime supervision policies that monitor offenders in the community for the remainder of their life are noteworthy because the duration of this policy carries the assumption that offenders' risk and level of sexual

recidivism remains constant and at rate which warrant lifetime supervision. Taken together, specific sexual offense policies seemingly imply offenders who committed a sexual offense recidivate at high levels and are at a high risk for sexual recidivism.

A large body of research has examined assumptions of recidivism and risk for sexual recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense. Recidivism studies have primarily been conducted by tracking a sample of offenders for a set period of time, or follow-up period, and recording recidivism in the sample to provide offender outcomes. Predominantly, extant research which has examined recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense have focused on these offenders collectively; fewer studies have examined specific types of offenders who committed a sexual offense (e.g., child molesters; Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005).

For example, a seminal and widely cited meta-analysis conducted on recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense (N=43,398) found 11.5% of sexual offenders reoffend with a sexual offense and approximately 33.2% of offenders who committed a sexual offense recidivate with any offense (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2009). This study indicated offenders who committed a sexual offense were more likely to reoffend with a non-sexual offense than a sexual offense. However, the authors did not compare recidivism based on types of offenders who committed sexual offenses, which leaves a gap in knowledge. In the context of child molesters specifically, a meta-analysis that distinguished sexual recidivism among various types of offenders who committed a sexual offense found an average of 12.7% of child molesters (N=9,603) sexually recidivated and 36.9% of child molesters recidivated with any offense (Hanson & Bussière, 1998).

In addition to Hanson and Bussière's (1998) meta-analysis, several studies which differentiate between types of offenders who committed a sexual offense have detailed recidivism among child molesters with varying follow-up periods. It should be noted that the duration of the follow-up time period is important because the chance of sexual recidivism and actual sexual recidivism has been shown to decrease as offenders who committed a sexual offense are in the community for longer periods of time (Hanson, Harris, Helmus, & Thornton, 2014). Langan, Schmitt, and Durose (2003a) tracked a sample of 4,295 male offenders from 15 different states who were incarcerated and released from prison for a child molestation offense for a three year follow-up period. Although this study used a relatively short follow-up period, it found among child molesters approximately 40% were arrested, 58% of the arrested were charged, and 20.4% were convicted for any offense during the follow-up period. In the context of new sexual crimes, this study found 5.1% of child molesters were arrested for a new sexual crime and 3.5% were convicted for a new sexual crime during the follow-up period (Langan et al., 2003a).

A couple of studies have used longer follow-up periods to examine recidivism in child molesters. Hanson, Steffy, and Gauthier (1993) followed 197 male child molesters (N=197) released from a maximum-security prison in Canada between 1958 and 1974. This study found during the follow-up period, which varied by the date the offenders were released into the community (93% of the sample were followed for more than 15 years; the average was 19 years), 42% were convicted for a sexual offense (Hanson et al., 1993). A study conducted by Prentky, Lee, Knight, and Cerce (1997) examined offender recidivism by tracking a sample of male offenders released for a sexual offense from a

Massachusetts treatment facility for 15-25 years. This study found, 32% of child molesters (n=78) received a charge, conviction, or were reincarcerated for a new sexual offense (Prentky et al., 1997).

Rice, Quinsey, and Harris (1991) examined recidivism among male child molesters (N=136) released from a maximum security psychiatric institution in Canada with extrafamilial victims (i.e., victims unrelated to the perpetrator) for a 6.3 year follow-up period. This study chose to examine child molesters with extrafamilial victims because more of these offenders have sexual age preferences for children than other child molesters (Quinsey, 1986 in Rice et al., 1991). This study found 31% of the sample was convicted of a new sexual offense, 43% were arrested or returned to prison for a violent offense (including sexual offenses), and 58% were arrested or convicted of any offense during the follow-up period. This study differs from other recidivism studies because it examined child molesters with extrafamilial victims, a very specific group of offenders.

In addition to studies that have examined recidivism only among offenders who committed a sexual offense, several studies have compared recidivism rates of general or non-sexual offenders to offenders who have committed a sexual offense. A study conducted by Hanson, Scott, and Steffy (1995) which used a varying follow-up period (15-30 years) compared recidivism, which was defined as a new conviction, among child molesters (n=191) and non-sexual offenders (n=137) released from a maximum-security prison. It was found child molesters had lower recidivism rates (61.8%) than non-sexual offenders (83.2%); however, more child molesters (35%) were convicted for a sexual offense than non-sexual offenders (1.5%) in the study. Langan, Schmitt, and Durose (2003b) also compared recidivism of general offenders and offenders who committed a

sexual offense released from prison. This study found 5.3% of offenders who committed a sexual offense were rearrested for a sexual offense and 1.3% of general offenders were rearrested for a sexual offense within 3 years of release.

Findings from recidivism studies are important not only because they can be used to inform sexual offense policy, but also because they provide data which guide the creation of actuarial sexual recidivism risk assessments for offenders who committed a sexual offense. For example, the Static-99 is an actuarial risk assessment that is normed via findings from recidivism studies conducted on offenders who committed a sexual offense (Harris, Phenix, & Williams, n.d.). Extant research has identified several risk factors relating to the offender and their criminal offense history that sexual recidivism is dependent upon because of recidivism studies (Hanson & Bussière, 1998).

Considering the body of research which has examined recidivism and the risk for sexual recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense, there are gaps in knowledge. Specifically, child molesters, are under-examined in recidivism and risk studies (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2009); current studies have the tendency to group all offenders who committed a sexual offense together, which may muddle recidivism and risk findings for specific offender groups. Studies examining recidivism specifically among child molesters have used relatively small samples consisting of less than 250 offenders – which is statistically problematic because small samples may produce unreliable conclusions. These gaps create a need for research which addresses these voids.

Summary of Sexual Offender Legislation Assumptions Efficacy

The threat of sexual violence and discernible assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation has prompted researchers to assess these assumptions. In particular, sexual offense characteristics, risk, and recidivism have been examined. However, gaps still remain in this research. The studies pertaining to sexual offense characteristics have not examined lifetime victim-offender relationships; many of the studies only reported the victim-offender relationship for one incident of abuse which precludes a more exhaustive description of this variable. Additionally, only a couple of studies examined where contact sexual offenses against children occurred, whether offenders meet/groom victims in child dense places, and only one study examined whether offenders visit child-dense places for the sole purpose of lurking/visiting/grooming victims. Many of the studies that examined sexual offense characteristics did not differentiate whether a contact sexual offense was perpetrated against the child victim or the studies were conducted on non-American or small samples which may mean the results of these studies may not be generalizable or reliable to American offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child. The body of research that examined recidivism and risk among offenders who committed sexual offenses has largely failed to differentiate between types of offenders who committed a sexual offense or used relatively small sample sizes. Since much of the sexual offense legislation is directed toward the abuse of children, there is a clear need to examine child-contact offenders separately with a larger sample size than prior studies.

Current Thesis

The current thesis aims to address several gaps in the literature by assessing assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation in a sample of adult males who were convicted, incarcerated, and released from incarceration into the community for a contact sexual offense against a child. As discussed, offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against children are important to examine because sexual offense legislation appears to primarily target this group.

The current thesis' research questions are based on assumptions of sexual offending found in sexual offense legislation. Research which has examined the efficacy of sexual offense legislation has indicated that these policies are broadly not effective. This outcome regarding sexual offense policies may be attributed to the fact that these policies are based on faulty assumptions of sexual offending. As stated earlier, an assumption underlying of the following hypotheses is that these offenders are homogenous. In view of this, the research questions and hypotheses of the present thesis are as follows:

- Research question 1: Are the assumptions pertaining to the sexual offense characteristics of child sexual abuse in sexual offense legislation empirically supported among adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against children?
- Hypothesis 1:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child will be significantly more likely to offend against children who are strangers than children who they know.

- Hypothesis 2:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child will be significantly more likely to commit offenses in child-dense zones than non-child-dense zones.
- Hypothesis 3:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child will be significantly more likely to meet and groom their child victim(s) in child-dense zones than non-child-dense zones.
- Hypothesis 4:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offenses against a child will be significantly more likely to gather intentionally than non-intentionally in child-dense zones to lure/meet/groom children for the sole purpose of sexually offending against them.
- Research question 2: Are the assumptions pertaining to offender recidivism and risk in sexual offense legislation empirically supported among adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against children?
- Hypothesis 5:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child will be significantly more likely to recidivate with a sexual offense than a general offense.
- Hypothesis 6:
 - Offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child will be significantly more likely to score as high risk on sexual recidivism risk

assessments (i.e., Static-99) than any other risk level (i.e., low, moderate-low, or moderate-high).

- Hypothesis 7:
 - Offenders who are categorized as high risk, have had a stranger victim, have had a prior conviction/charge for a sexual offense, committed a sexual offense in a child-dense zone, met/groomed a child victim in a child-dense zone, and have intentionally went to a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of sexually abusing a child will be significantly more likely to recidivate with a sexual offense than offenders without these characteristics.

CHAPTER III

Data and Method

This chapter details the data and methodology for the present thesis. This chapter begins by describing the offenders in the sample. Next, the data collection procedures are described followed by a description of the measures used for analysis and missing data.

Participants

Data used in this thesis are from a larger study ($N = 3,168$) which assessed management, treatment, and civil commitment of males convicted of a sexual offense in the state of New Jersey. The offenders in the sample were under state custody for a sexual offense at either a New Jersey prison-based treatment facility ($n = 824$) for sexual offenders or a New Jersey State prison ($n = 1,947$). A random sample of participants in custody at the treatment facility were selected. This random sample consisted of approximately 45% of all sexual offenders in custody at the treatment facility. All offenders in the sample were either released from custody to the community or civilly committed between 1996 and 2007. Participants that were civilly committed ($n = 375$) were not included in this thesis because this thesis aimed to assess assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation that pertained to offenders that were released into the community, and these offenders did not meet this criterion.

The sample for the present thesis was comprised of 2,074 adult male offenders whose index offense involved a contact sexual offense against a child (i.e., a victim aged 17 or younger). The descriptive statistics for offender characteristics were reported in Table 1. The offenders in the sample were on average released into the community at approximately 40 years old ($SD = 12.31$). Whites were the largest represented ethnic

group, followed by African Americans/Blacks, Latinos, and other ethnicities. The majority of the sample either had less than a high school degree upon entering prison or a high school diploma/GED. Approximately half of the sample was never married, 29% was married, 8% lived with a partner, and approximately 19% were divorced, separated, or widowed. The majority of the sample identified as heterosexual. While there is considerable missing data in regards to the socioeconomic status of the sample (55%), a lower socioeconomic status was the most common status (32%) in the sample. Females were most frequently the gender of victim(s) in the index offense. The mean of the average age of child victims in the index offense was approximately 11 years ($SD = 3.54$). The average time offenders were incarcerated for the index offense was approximately 3 years ($SD = 2.97$). Index offenses were primarily child molestation (97%) offenses in nature; the natures of the remainder of the index offenses were child molestation plus an additional sexual offense.

Table 1

Offender characteristic descriptive statistics

| | n | M/%(SD) |
|--|-----|---------|
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | |
| White | 873 | 42.17 |
| African American/Black | 688 | 33.24 |
| Latino | 476 | 23.00 |
| Other | 33 | 1.59 |
| <i>Highest Level of Education Upon Prison Entry</i> | | |
| Less than High School | 921 | 44.88 |
| High School Diploma/GED | 866 | 42.20 |
| College or Advanced Degree | 121 | 5.90 |
| Trade School Degree/Certificate or Some College | 144 | 7.02 |

(continued)

| | n | M/%(SD) |
|------------------------------------|------|---------|
| <i>Marital Status</i> | | |
| Never Married | 920 | 44.70 |
| Married | 592 | 28.77 |
| Lived with Partner | 164 | 7.97 |
| Divorced/Separated/Widowed | 382 | 18.56 |
| <i>Sexual Orientation</i> | | |
| Heterosexual | 1465 | 73.32 |
| Homosexual/Bisexual | 166 | 8.31 |
| Unknown | 367 | 18.37 |
| <i>Socioeconomic Status</i> | | |
| Lower | 655 | 32.36 |
| Middle | 204 | 10.08 |
| Upper | 57 | 2.82 |
| Unknown | 1108 | 54.74 |

(continued)

| | n | M/%(SD) |
|--|------|--------------|
| Index Offense Characteristics | | |
| <i>Nature of Index Offense</i> | | |
| Molestation of a Minor Child | 2008 | 96.82 |
| Molestation of a Minor Child and other sexual offense | 66 | 3.18 |
| <i>Age Upon Release (years)</i> | 2069 | 40.41(12.31) |
| <i>Time Incarcerated for Index Offense (years)</i> | 1984 | 3.41(2.97) |
| <i>Victim Gender in Index Offense</i> | | |
| Male | 273 | 13.46 |
| Female | 1695 | 83.58 |
| Male and Female | 60 | 2.96 |
| <i>Average Age of Child Victim (years)</i> | 2008 | 10.67(3.54) |
| <i>Follow-up Time in the Community (years)</i> | 1989 | 5.12(3.44) |

(continued)

| | n | M/%(SD) |
|---|-------|---------|
| <i>Offenders who Recidivated</i> | | |
| Recidivism | 661 | 39.80 |
| No recidivism | 1,000 | 60.20 |

Note: N=2,074

Procedure

Archival and recidivism data were collected on offenders in the sample between June and September of 2009 by trained research assistants through a collaboration of researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the New Jersey Department of Corrections, New Jersey Department of Human Services, and two leading researchers in the field of sexual offense risk and policy who served as consultants on the project.

Archival data were collected from records of the offenders and were coded onto a data coding sheet which contained information such as demographic information, custody admission and discharge information, institutional treatment and behavior information, information on the participants' index offense which included victim information, and prior offense history. Archival data was collected from police reports, psychiatric evaluations, criminal history records, sentencing information, prison records, and intake and termination reports. It should be noted that some of these documents provided information that was self-reported by the offenders (e.g., sexual orientation) in the sample. Additionally, because of the archival nature of the data, there was not a response rate among offenders in the sample.

Recidivism data included information such as prior offense history and probation violations. Recidivism data were gathered on offenders in the sample through June 2009 from the New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey State Police database, which also provided information from other states that shared information with this agency. On average, offenders in the sample were followed for approximately 5 years after they were released into the community.

Variables and Measures

The current thesis' measures for analysis included the victim-offender relationship, the location of the index sexual offense, the location where the offender met and/or groomed the victim in the index offense, whether the offender was in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of meeting/grooming/luring a child victim, recidivism, prior sexual offense charges/convictions, and sexual recidivism risk.

Victim-offender relationship. The victim-offender relationship in the index sexual offense and previous sexual offenses were used to measure this relationship. The victim-offender relationship in previous sexual offenses included sexual offenses prior to the index offense in which offenders received a formal charge and conviction and previous sexual offenses committed by offenders who did not have any prior formal charges or convictions for a sexual offense, but admitted to committing a prior sexual offense. Both the victim-offender relationship in the index sexual offense and previous sexual offenses were coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = stranger, 0 = non-stranger). To be conservative, if the offender had multiple victims in any incident, the most detached relationship was selected (i.e., if the offender was a stranger to one victim and an acquaintance to another victim then the victim-offender relationship was coded as a stranger).

Location of index sexual offense. The location of the index offense was coded as a dichotomous measure (1 = child-dense zone, 0 = non-child-dense zone). Child-dense locations included: park, boardwalk, football field, under the boardwalk, school bus, school, youth lodge, church, behind a church, beach, campground, gaming center, boys and girls day camp, boardwalk changing room, youth home, juvenile detention center,

public pool, outside church, offender's car – park, camping trip, local reservoir, movie theater, drive-in movie area, carnival, camp, street near park, and bathroom at McDonald's. Non-child dense areas included: in a home, woods, vehicle, inside a treatment facility, motel/hotel/hostel, construction site, restaurant, alley way, vacant building, behind a public building, parking lot, bakery where the victim and offender worked, substance abuse facility, while babysitting, street, sidewalk, college campus, mall, nursing home where victim and offender worked, hospital, outside victim's home while on a "walk," bar, 7/11 bathroom, consensual relationship, and next to a store. To be conservative, if the index offense occurred in multiple locations which included both a child-dense zone and non-child dense zone, a child-dense zone was used to describe the location of the index offense.

Location where the offender met and/or groomed the victim in the index offense. The location where the offender first met and/or groomed the victim was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = child-dense zone, 0 = non-child-dense zone). Child-dense locations included: juvenile detention center, church, youth programs, school, movie theater, fair, summer camp, walking home from school, boardwalk, baseball field, adolescent treatment facility for juveniles, amusement park, shelter, gymnastics school, around school, park, youth organization, skating rink, juvenile boot camp, arcade, boardwalk, school bus, youth lodge, gaming center, boys and girls daycamp, beach playground, youth home, and carnival. Non-child dense areas included: club, street, a home, neighborhood, relatives, consensual relationship, through a significant other or family member or friend, on the phone, internet, apartment building, taxi, family friends, train station, babysitting the victim, always acquainted, letters, motel, known for a couple

of years prior to offense, woods, mall, outside buying drugs, vehicle, in a relationship with the victim, neighborhood block party, substance abuse facility, store, restaurant, college campus, hotel, parking lot, while they were sea cadets, and hospital. To be conservative, if the location where the offender met/groomed the victim occurred in multiple locations which included a child-dense zone and non-child dense zone, a child-dense zone was used to describe the location where the offender met/groomed the victim in the index offense.

Offender was in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming the victim. In the archival data, offender's self-reported information regarding whether they were in the location that they met/groomed the victim in the index offense for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming the child victim for sexual abuse. Only cases in which the offender met/groomed the victim in a child-dense zone were included in this variable because of the assumption that offenders intentionally seek out child victims in these places. Whether the offender was in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose luring/meeting/grooming the victim for sexual abuse, was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = offender intentionally gathered in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming a child victim for sexual abuse, 0 = offender did not intentionally gather in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming a child victim for sexual abuse).

Recidivism. Recidivism was measured as a dichotomous variable (1 = sexual recidivism, 0 = general/non-sexual recidivism). Recidivism was defined as incarceration for an offense after offenders in the sample were released into the community for the index offense. Although measures of recidivism vary, a conservative measure was used

to define recidivism because incarceration for an offense requires sufficient evidence to be substantiated. General/non-sexual recidivism included violent, non-violent, drug, escape, general parole violations, and other offenses. Although information on whether offenders recidivated with a failure to register as a sexual offender offense, offenders who recidivated with only this offense (n=38) were not included in the recidivism measure. Failure to register was classified as a sexual offense, but because it was qualitatively different from other sexual offenses and did not directly involve a victim, it was excluded from the recidivism measure. On average, offenders in the sample were tracked for approximately 5 years after they were released into the community for the index offense. See Table 1. The follow-up time period in the current thesis was not fixed and was instead based on the time available to collect recidivism data.

Prior sexual offense charges/convictions. While the recidivism measure captured recidivism after offenders were released into the community, sexual offenses prior to the index offense were also examined. The data in this measure came from official criminal justice records which provided information on prior sexual offense charges/convictions. This measure was coded as a dichotomous measure (1 = prior sexual offense charge/conviction, 0 = no prior sexual offense charge/conviction).

Sexual recidivism risk. The Static-99 was used to measure offenders' sexual recidivism risk. The Static-99 was based on static characteristics related to sexual offending, has been cited as the most widely used risk assessment for predicting sexual recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense in the world, and has been found to produce reliable and valid estimates for measuring sexual recidivism risk (Hanson, 2006; Hanson & Thornton, 2000; Harris, Phenix, & Williams, n.d.).

The Static-99 consisted of 10-items which collectively provided an estimate of sexual recidivism. The items on the Static-99 included: number of prior sexual offenses (charges and convictions), prior sentencing dates (excluding the index offense), any convictions for non-contact sexual offenses, index non-sexual violence, any convictions for prior non-sexual violence, unrelated victims, stranger victims, male victims, age of the offender upon release into the community, and whether the offender ever lived with a lover for at least two years. The test indicated offenders that were at a higher risk for sexual recidivism were younger (18-24.99 year old), had never lived with a lover for at least two years, had convictions for index non-sexual violence, convictions for prior non-sexual violence, convictions for non-contact sexual offenses, charges and/or convictions for prior sexual offenses, had male victims, stranger victims, or unrelated victims, or had prior sentencing dates. Offenders with all these attributes were in the highest risk score category, whereas offenders with none of these attributes were in the lowest risk score category. See Appendix A for an example of the Static-99 coding form. Each offender in the sample was scored on the Static-99 by criminal justice personnel.

Missing Data

Missing data was a concern in the current thesis. All cases in the current thesis had information regarding the nature of the index offense as well as whether the offense involved physical contact with the victim (N = 2,074). Several of the measures used in the current thesis were missing a considerable amount of data. Approximately 2% of cases were missing data regarding the victim-offender relationship in the index offense. Approximately 45% of cases were missing data regarding the location of the index offense. Approximately 52% of cases were missing data regarding the location that the

offender met/groomed the victim in the index offense. Approximately 53% of cases were missing data regarding whether an offender was at the location they met/groomed the victim for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming the victim. In the recidivism measure, approximately 20% of cases were missing data regarding whether an offender recidivated or not. Among the cases that indicated an offender recidivated, in 254 cases (38%) it could not be determined whether an offender recidivated with a sexual offense. Additionally, 38 offenders who recidivated, recidivated with a failure to register offense only, as stated earlier, these cases were not analyzed. Approximately 5% of cases were missing data regarding whether an offender had a prior charge/conviction for a sexual offense. Approximately 25% of cases were missing data regarding the risk of sexual recidivism per the Static-99. After missing data was determined, analyses were conducted on the offender demographic variables and the missing values of each measure in order to ensure data was not systematically missing. The analyses revealed data was not systematically missing in the sample.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter details the findings for the current thesis. First descriptive statistics are provided on all variables that are used for analyses. Next, the results of the current thesis are presented.

Measure Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the measures used for hypothesis testing are shown in Table 2. The vast majority of the victim-offender relationships in the index offense are non-stranger relationships. The victim-offender relationship in previous sexual offenses (officially documented and self-report) are primarily non-stranger victim-offender relationships. The location of index sexual offenses is overwhelmingly in non-child-dense zones (96%). The location where offenders met/groomed victims are primarily non-child-dense locations (93%). The majority of offenders that met/groomed a child victim in the index offense in a child-dense zone more frequently did not intentionally go to a child-dense location for the sole purpose of sexually abusing the victim. The majority of offenders in the sample that recidivated did so with a general offense (85%). The vast majority of the sample was not scored high risk for sexual recidivism. Largely, offenders in the sample did not have any charges/convictions for prior sexual offenses (81%).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for measures

| | n | % |
|---|------|-------|
| <i>Victim Offender Relationship in Index Offense</i> | | |
| Stranger | 133 | 6.63 |
| Non-Stranger | 1872 | 93.37 |
| <i>Victim Offender Relationship in Previous Sexual Offenses</i> | | |
| Prior sexual off. charge/conviction: | | |
| Stranger | 9 | 15.79 |
| Non-Stranger | 48 | 84.21 |
| No prior sexual off. charge/conviction, but admitted to addt'l sexual offense: | | |
| Stranger | 118 | 25.79 |
| Non-Stranger | 41 | 74.21 |

(continued)

| | n | % |
|--|-------|-------|
| <i>Location of Index Sexual Offense</i> | | |
| Child-Dense Zone | 49 | 4.35 |
| Non-Child-Dense Zone | 1,077 | 95.65 |
| <i>Location Where Offender Met/Groomed Victim</i> | | |
| Child-Dense Zone | 74 | 7.50 |
| Non-Child-Dense Zone | 913 | 92.50 |
| <i>Gathered Intentionally in a Child-Dense Zone to Sexually Abuse a Child</i> | | |
| Gathered Intentionally | 10 | 20.00 |
| Did Not Gather Intentionally | 40 | 80.00 |
| <i>Recidivism</i> | | |
| Sexual Recidivism | 64 | 15.72 |
| Non-Sexual Recidivism | 343 | 84.28 |

(continued)

| | n | % |
|--|-------|-------|
| <i>Sexual Recidivism Risk</i> | | |
| High Risk | 55 | 3.56 |
| Low, Moderate-Low, and Moderate-High Risk | 1,491 | 96.44 |
| <i>Prior Sexual Offense Charge/Conviction</i> | | |
| Prior Conviction/Charge | 381 | 80.57 |
| No Prior Conviction/Charge | 1,580 | 19.43 |

Note: N=2,074

Sexual Offense Characteristics

Hypothesis 1 predicts that offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to offend against children who are strangers rather than children who are not strangers. The results of a chi-square test indicate that, in the index offense, adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to offend against non-strangers than stranger victims. In previous sexual offenses, chi-square tests indicate that offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child who had either a charge/conviction for a prior sexual offense or admitted to a previous sexual offense for which they were not formally charged and had no prior charges/convictions for a sexual offense were significantly more likely to be non-strangers to victims in previous offense (see Table 3). Taken together, all three chi-square tests indicate hypothesis 1 is not supported in the index offense or previous sexual offenses (see Table 3).

Table 3

Chi-square results

| | n | % | df | X ² |
|--|-------|-------|----|----------------|
| <i>Victim-offender relationship in the index offense</i> | | | | |
| Stranger | 133 | 6.63 | 1 | 1,508.29* |
| Non-Stranger | 1,872 | 93.37 | | |
| <i>Previous Sexual Offense Victim-offender relationship</i> | | | | |
| Prior sexual off. charge/conviction: | | | 1 | 37.29* |
| Stranger | 41 | 25.79 | | |
| Non-Stranger | 118 | 74.21 | | |

(continued)

| | n | % | df | χ^2 |
|---|-------|-------|----|----------|
| No prior sexual off. charge/conviction, but admitted to addt'l sexual offense: | | | 1 | 26.68* |
| Stranger | 9 | 15.79 | | |
| Non-Stranger | 48 | 84.21 | | |
| <i>Location of sexual offense</i> | | | 1 | 938.53* |
| Child-dense zone | 49 | 4.35 | | |
| Non-child-dense zone | 1,077 | 95.65 | | |
| <i>Location Met/Groomed Victim</i> | | | 1 | 713.19* |
| Child-dense zone | 74 | 7.50 | | |
| Non-child-dense zone | 913 | 92.50 | | |

(continued)

| | n | % | df | χ^2 |
|--|-------|-------|----|-----------|
| <i>Gather in Child-Dense Zone</i> | | | 1 | 18.00* |
| Intentionally | 10 | 20.00 | | |
| Not Intentionally | 40 | 80.00 | | |
| <i>Recidivism</i> | | | 1 | 191.26* |
| Sexual | 64 | 15.72 | | |
| General | 343 | 84.28 | | |
| <i>Sexual Recidivism Risk</i> | | | 1 | 1,333.83* |
| High Risk | 55 | 3.56 | | |
| Low, Moderate-Low, and Moderate-High Risk | 1,491 | 96.44 | | |

Note: * $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2 predicts that offenders who committed a contact sexual offenses against a child are significantly more likely to commit offenses in child-dense zones than non-child-dense zones. A chi-square test indicates that, in the index offense, male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to offend against a child in a non-child-dense zone (95%) than a child-dense zone (4%). Hypothesis 2 is not supported (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 3 predicts that offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to meet/groom child victims in child-dense zones than non-child-dense zones. The results of the chi-square test indicate that male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to meet/groom child victims in a non-child-dense zone (93%) than a child-dense zone (8%). Hypothesis 3 is not supported (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 4 predicts that offenders who committed a contact sexual offenses against a child are significantly more likely to gather intentionally rather than non-intentionally in child-dense zones to lure/meet/groom children for the sole purpose of sexually offending against them. A chi-square test indicates that male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to not intentionally gather in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of sexually abusing a child (80%) than intentionally gather in a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of sexually abusing a child (20%). Hypothesis 4 is not supported (see Table 3).

Risk and Recidivism

Hypothesis 5 predicts that offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to recidivate with a sexual offense than a

general offense. A chi-square test indicates that male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly more likely to recidivate with a general offense (84%) than a sexual offense (16%). Hypothesis 5 is not supported (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 6 predicts that offenders in the sample are significantly more likely to score as high risk on sexual recidivism risk assessments (i.e., Static-99) than any other risk level (i.e., low, moderate-low, or moderate-high). The chi-square test results indicate that male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are significantly less likely to be classified as high risk (4%) than any other risk level (96%) for sexual recidivism. Hypothesis 6 is not supported (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 7 predicts that offenders who are categorized as high risk, had a stranger victim in the index offense, have had a prior conviction and/or charge for a sexual offense, committed a sexual offense in a child-dense zone, met/groomed a victim in a child-dense zone, and have intentionally went to a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of abusing a child are significantly more likely to sexually recidivate than offenders without these characteristics. Before this hypothesis is tested, correlations between the variables are examined. Although variables are significantly correlated, the VIF and tolerance statistics indicates there are no multicollinearity issues in the model (see Table 4).

Table 4

Collinearity diagnostics

| | VIF | Tolerance |
|---|------|-----------|
| <i>Victim Offender Relationship</i> | 1.04 | .97 |
| <i>Location of Index Offense</i> | 1.61 | .62 |
| <i>Location Offender Met/Groomed Victim</i> | 1.51 | .66 |
| <i>Gathered in Child-dense Zone to Meet/Groom</i> | 1.46 | .69 |
| <i>Sexual Recidivism Risk</i> | 1.05 | .96 |
| <i>Prior Sexual Offense Charge/Conviction</i> | 1.02 | .98 |

A Cox regression was conducted to test hypothesis 7. The Cox regression is presented in Table 5. Only one variable in the Cox regression model, prior sexual offense charge/conviction, significantly predicts sexual recidivism in the sample. The victim-offender relationship in the index offense, location of the index offense, the location where the offender met/groomed the victim, whether the offender went to a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of meeting/grooming the victim, and sexual recidivism risk are not significant. Hypothesis 7 is not fully supported in the Cox regression model (see Table 5).

Table 5

Cox regression of sexual recidivism

| | Coefficient | Wald | SE | Hazard Ratio | 95% CI |
|--|-------------|-------|--------|--------------|----------------|
| <i>Stranger</i> | 1.50 | 2.98 | .87 | 4.47 | [.82, 24.46] |
| <i>Offense in Child-Dense Zone</i> | 2.64 | 1.57 | 2.11 | 14.03 | [.23, 869.99] |
| <i>Met/Groomed in Child-Dense Zone</i> | 1.57 | .58 | 2.07 | 4.80 | [.08, 276.33] |
| <i>Gathered in Child-Dense Zone to Meet/Groom</i> | -2.97 | 3.18 | 1.66 | .05 | [.002, 1.34] |
| <i>High Risk for Sexual Recidivism</i> | -.26 | .05 | 1.11 | .77 | [.09, 6.84] |
| <i>Prior Sexual Offense Charge/Conviction</i> | 3.64* | 16.16 | .91 | 37.96 | [6.45, 223.55] |
| -2 Log Likelihood | | | 73.13 | | |
| Chi-Square | | | 40.69* | | |

Note: N=358, * $p < .001$

Many cases in the sample are not included in the Cox regression because of missing data on one or more variables. As another way of determining the predictive power of each predictor of sexual recidivism, receiver operator characteristic (ROC) analyses are conducted on each predictor and the dependent variable to account for base rates. The ROC curve analyses provide similar results to the Cox regression. Prior sexual offense charges/convictions significantly predict sexual recidivism. The AUC in the ROC analysis for prior sexual offense charges/convictions is 0.72 which indicates a

large effect for prediction (Rice & Harris, 2005). The victim-offender relationship in the index offense, location of the index offense, the location where the offender met/groomed the victim, whether the offender went to a child-dense zone for the sole purpose of meeting/grooming the victim, and sexual recidivism risk are not significant. Hypothesis 7 is not fully supported in the ROC analyses (see Table 6).

Table 6

Areas under the curve of sexual recidivism

| | Recidivists/n | AUC | SE | 95% CI |
|--|---------------|------|-----|------------|
| <i>Victim Offender Relationship</i> | 60/1,330 | .54 | .04 | [.46, .62] |
| <i>Location of Index Offense</i> | 24/756 | .59 | .07 | [.46, .72] |
| <i>Location Offender Met/Groomed Victim</i> | 21/654 | .61 | .07 | [.47, .75] |
| <i>Gathered in Child-dense Zone to Meet/Groom</i> | 15/545 | .53 | .08 | [.37, .68] |
| <i>Sexual Recidivism Risk</i> | 50/1,019 | .54 | .04 | [.46, .63] |
| <i>Prior Sexual Offense Charge/Convictions</i> | 61/1,303 | .72* | .04 | [.65, .80] |

Note: * $p < .001$

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The problem of sexual violence and a few highly publicized cases of sexual abuse, which typically involved an adult male stranger perpetrator abducting, sexually abusing, and killing a child victim, contributed to the passing of sexual offense legislation (i.e., community notification and offender registration, residence restrictions, electronic/GPS monitoring, and civil commitment) in the 1990's and 2000's (Jenkins, 1998). Subsequently, the passing of many new policies for offenders who have committed a sexual offense resulted in researchers examining the effectiveness of these policies and testing assumptions of sexual offending found in this legislation. Policy-specific research that has examined the effectiveness of sexual offense policies has found mixed results (Calkins et al., 2014; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Prescott & Rockoff, 2011; Socia, 2012), findings of ineffectiveness (Levenson & Zgoba, 2015; Nobles et al., 2012; Renzema & Mayo-Wilson, 2005; Sandler et al., 2008; Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole, 2007; Zevitz, 2006), or findings that these policies increase the likelihood of sexual recidivism (Blood, Watson, & Stageberg, 2008)—leading many of these researchers to posit their findings are attributable to faulty assumptions of sexual offending which make up the basis of these policies.

While researchers have begun to assess the accuracy of the assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation, gaps remain in the current body of research. First, studies which have assessed assumptions regarding the victim-offender relationship in child sexual abuse have failed to examine lifetime victim-offender relationships (Greenfeld, 1996; Langan & Harlow, 1994) or only reported the victim-offender

relationship in limited instances of abuse (Ullman, 2007). Second, studies that have examined assumptions pertaining to the location where sexual offenses against children occur were conducted on non-American or small samples (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000) or did not differentiate the type of sexual abuse perpetrated in a specific location (Colombino et al., 2011; Duwe et al., 2008). Lastly, studies that have examined assumptions in sexual offense legislation relating to offender recidivism and risk often have failed to differentiate between offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child and those who committed a non-contact sexual offense against a child (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson et al., 1993; Langnan et al., 2003; Prentky et al., 1997; Rice et al., 1991), used a relatively short follow-up period for examining recidivism (Langnan et al., 2003), used a small sample (Prentky et al., 1997), or used a small and non-American sample (Hanson et al., 1993; Rice et al., 1991).

As a means of informing sexual offense legislation and extending the current body of research that has assessed the assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation, the current thesis used a sample of 2,074 adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child in the state of New Jersey to provide findings regarding the offense characteristics of contact child sexual abuse, recidivism, and sexual recidivism risk. In the sample, whites comprised the largest ethnic category, females were most commonly the victim in the index offense, and the majority of offenders in the sample lacked education past a high school diploma or GED, which is consistent with prior studies conducted on American samples (Langan & Levin, 2002; Prentky et al., 1997; Snyder, 2000). The average age of offenders in the sample is similar to the average of offenders in prior research (Greenfeld, 1996). Overall, the characteristics of the

offenders in the current thesis are comparable to that of prior research and generalizable to American offenders who committed a sexual offense against a child.

Sexual Offense Characteristics

The current findings indicate that adult male offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child were significantly more likely to have non-stranger victims in both the index offense and previous sexual offenses. These findings are similar to prior research which has examined the victim-offender relationship in child sexual abuse in that a non-stranger victim-offender relationship was more likely; however, these findings contribute to the current body of research because they provide information on the victim-offender relationship for contact sexual offenses against a child as well as the victim-offender relationship in previous sexual offenses committed by adult male offenders who committed at least one contact sexual offense against a child.

Prior research has found that stranger victim-offender relationships comprise between 4% and 14% of child sexual abuse cases (Greenfeld, 1996; Langan & Harlow, 1994; Ullman, 2007; Snyder, 2000). A limitation of prior studies is that the victim-offender relationship for specific types of child sexual abuse is often not stated. The current thesis addressed this limitation by specifically examining contact child sexual abuse and found that approximately 7% of the sample was a stranger to the victim in the index offense. This finding shows that the victim-offender relationship specifically in contact child sexual abuse is similar to that of child sexual abuse broadly.

In addition to the victim-offender relationship in the index offense, the current thesis provided data regarding the victim-offender relationship in previous sexual offenses via officially documented prior sexual offense charges/convictions and self-

reported incidents for which offenders did not receive a charge/conviction. In both officially documented and self-reported incidents of sexual violence, offenders in the sample were still significantly more likely to be non-strangers to victims. These findings are important because it shows that across various data sources (i.e., self-report, official criminal justice data) strangers are not likely to be the perpetrators of sexual abuse. Criminal justice data has been recognized to distort incidences of sexual violence (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987); however, the current thesis shows despite the data source stranger victim-offender relationships are not more likely in previous sexual offenses committed by adult male offenders who committed at least one contact sexual offense against a child. This finding is also important because it exhaustively provides information regarding the sexual offending history of offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child. Prior research has primarily examined the victim-offender relationship in one incident of sexual abuse, so the findings that non-stranger relationships are more likely in the current thesis fill the gap of the victim-offender relationship in multiple instances of abuse perpetrated by adult males who committed a sexual offense against a child.

Taken together, the findings of the current thesis contradict the assumption in sexual offense legislation that offenders are more likely strangers to victims. After all, non-stranger victim-offender relationships were more likely in both the index and previous sexual offenses. These findings show that the assumption in sexual offense legislation that states child victims of contact sexual offenses are offended against by a stranger is not supported. This finding provides evidence that indicates that legislation that targets sexual violence against children — specifically contact sexual offenses—

would be better directed if it were instead focused on incidents involving a victims and offenders who know each other, as this was the overwhelming relationship between victim and offender. Policies such as offender registration and community notification which work under an assumption that sexual abuse offenders are often strangers, may serve the community better if they are utilized less and instead resources devoted to these policies are directed toward educational campaigns which emphasize that sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by someone the victims knows.

Consistent with the assumption that offenders who commit sexual offenses will seek victims in child-dense zones to offend, the current thesis tested whether child sexual offenders were more likely to offend in child-dense zones, meet/groom victims in child-dense zones, and intentionally visit child-dense zones for the purpose of meeting/grooming children for abuse. The findings regarding the location of the index offense found, contrary to assumptions in sexual offense legislation, offenders were more likely to offend and meet/groom child victims in non-child-dense zones and were more likely to have unintentionally gathered in child-dense zones for the purpose of meeting/grooming children for abuse. Previous research which has addressed the location of child sexual abuse has found that child sexual abuse more commonly occurs in non-child-dense zones (Colombino et al., 2009; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000; Snyder, 2000) and that offenders are more likely to meet/groom victims in non-child-dense zones (Colombino et al., 2011; Duwe et al., 2008; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). However, prior research has not differentiated between where contact and non-contact offending occurs, and the findings of the current thesis refer specifically to incidences of contact child sexual abuse. Despite this difference concerning past studies and the current thesis,

offenders were still more likely to offend and meet/groom victims in non-child-dense zones. In light of prior research, these findings in the current thesis appear to indicate child sexual abuse more commonly occurs in non-child-dense zones.

The findings regarding whether offenders intentionally went to child-dense places for the sole purpose of luring/meeting/grooming child victims indicate that offenders who met/groomed victims in child-dense zones were not significantly likely to gather intentionally in these places for the sole purpose of sexually offending against children. Prior to this thesis, only one study (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000) has examined whether an offender was in a child-dense zone (i.e., youth organization) for ultimately sexually abusing a child victim. Smallbone and Wortley (2000) similarly used a sample of offenders who had committed contact sexual offense to examine whether offenders went to child-dense locations for the sole purpose of grooming a child into sexual abuse; however, they used a non-American sample. The present thesis found a similar percentage of offenders in the sample as a whole went to a child-dense location for the sole purpose of ultimately sexually abusing a child (3%) to Smallbone and Wortley's study (1%; 2000). However, in light of comparing offenders who went to a child-dense zone either intentionally or non-intentionally, prior studies have not statistically examined intentions among these offenders. In the current thesis, it was found that offenders were more likely to not have gathered intentionally in child-dense zones for the sole purpose of meeting/grooming a victim for abuse. Future research should assess the intentions of offenders in non-contact child sexual abuse because the findings of the current study may be specific to contact offending.

Collectively, the findings in the current thesis pertaining to the location surrounding sexual abuse refute the assumptions in sexual offense legislation that posit child sexual abuse occurs in child-dense zones. The location of abuse and the location the offender met/groomed the victim were more likely non-child-dense zones. Among offenders that went to child-dense zones, these offenders were more likely to not have intentionally gathered in these places to meet/groom victims. Current policies that aim to prevent sexual abuse by ensuring offenders do not live or frequent child-dense zones appear to be unwarranted by empirical data. Instead of the current policies, efforts toward curtailing child sexual abuse should focus on educating community members about the dynamics of sexual abuse.

Risk and Recidivism

Regarding recidivism, the current thesis found that offenders in the sample were significantly more likely to recidivate with a general or non-sexual offense than a sexual offense. Prior research has also found offenders are more likely to recidivate with a non-sexual offense than a sexual offense (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Langan et al., 2003a). However, the current thesis provides recidivism findings for contact child molesters—a group that has specifically been under examined or undifferentiated in prior research. Additionally, this thesis used a larger sample and longer follow-up period than many prior studies. Despite these differences, general recidivism was still more likely in the sample.

Currently, sexual offense policies such as community notification and registration and residence restrictions reportedly produce characteristics among offenders such as social isolation and instability among offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson &

Cotter, 2005b) which have been linked to actually increase general recidivism (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996). In view of this, sexual offense policies should consider limiting sanctions to offenders who have previously committed a sexual offense – rather than broadly implementing sexual offense policies to offenders who have only committed one prior sexual offense.

Another assumption in sexual offense legislation is that offenders who have committed a sexual offense are at a high risk to sexually reoffend in the community. Contrarily, offenders in the sample were significantly more likely to be low, moderate-low, or moderate-high risk for sexual recidivism than high risk. This finding indicates that despite sanctions that are applied to these offenders in the community, many of these offenders are not at a high risk for sexual recidivism. Because prior research has found some sexual offense policies may place some offenders at a higher risk for recidivism in the community (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a), and the current study found that offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child were not likely to be high risk for sexual recidivism, policies that aim to ultimately diminish sexual violence should consider these findings.

This thesis also provided findings regarding predictors of sexual recidivism in the community. The only significant predictor of sexual recidivism was a prior charge/conviction for a sexual offense. In view of prior research, studies have indicated that prior offense history has been shown to adequately predict sexual recidivism (Boccaccini, Murrie, Caperton, & Hawes, 2009). Despite what is assumed in sexual offense legislation to predict sexual recidivism among offenders who committed a sexual offense (i.e., victim-offender relationship, location surrounding abuse, offender risk), the

only predictor of sexual recidivism was having a prior charge/conviction for a sexual offense. These findings show that characteristics that are assumed to be associated with sexual offending in sexual offense legislation are not fully empirically supported predictors of sexual recidivism among adult males who committed a contact sexual offense against children. Because these variables were shown to be inadequate predictors of sexual recidivism, policies may better address sexual recidivism by mandating treatment for characteristics such as deviant sexual preferences and antisocial orientation, which have been shown to be strong predictors of sexual recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005).

Limitations

This thesis is not without limitations. This thesis only included offenders whose index offense was a contact sexual offense against a child. This thesis did not include offenders who have previously committed a contact sexual offense against a child, but were incarcerated and released into the community for another offense in the State of New Jersey. The sample selection precludes an exhaustive examination of these individuals, which is a limitation because the results aim to address all offenders who have committed a contact sexual offense against children, and there may be differences between these two groups that were unable to be examined in this thesis. Additionally, this thesis had more missing data than desired. The data for the current thesis came from various archival sources, and within each data source, the information available varied. There may also be issues of inter-rater reliability. Although research assistants were rigorously trained to code the data in the present thesis, inter-rater reliability may still be a concern.

There were also a couple of potential limitations regarding the measures used in the current thesis. The measure that captured the victim-offender relationship in previously committed sexual offenses does not provide data regarding whether the victim in those offenses was an adult or child. Additionally, in prior sexual offenses for which the offender was charged/convicted it cannot be determined whether the victim was that of a prior sexual conviction or a prior sexual charge. Next, the location of sexual offenses was coded liberally and not necessarily according to laws. For example, all places that offenders could reasonably avoid which are child-dense zones were coded as such (i.e., school), but places that offenders could not reasonably avoid and would interrupt daily living needs but may be places where children commonly congregate were coded as non-child-dense zones (i.e., store or restaurant). Another limitation in the current thesis is the measure of recidivism. Recidivism was measured by incarceration after offenders were released into the community for the index offense, which is a very conservative measure, and potentially an underestimate of subsequent offenses committed by offenders in the sample after they were released into the community.

Conclusion

Sexual violence, especially against children, has been portrayed in the media and legislation as occurring in a manner that distorts its true characteristics. Subsequently, many of these policies have been found to be ineffective at diminishing sexual violence. Research that has examined the characteristics of sexual violence against children has found that the way sexual violence against children is portrayed in the media and in legislation largely differs from these accounts. This thesis examined contact sexual offenses against children specifically and found similar results to prior research, in that

sexual violence against children is often perpetrated by non-strangers and in non-child-dense zones. Once offenders who committed a contact sexual offense against a child are released into the community many of them are not at a high risk to sexually reoffend, and of the offenders that reoffend, they are more likely to do so with a non-sexual offense. Despite findings in prior research and those of the current thesis which counter assumptions of sexual offending in sexual offense legislation, this legislation continues to purport assumptions of sexual abuse that target a small percentage of offenders, which leaves the majority of offenders and instances of child sexual abuse unaddressed. In order to fully and realistically address sexual violence, legislation should target the characteristics of the majority of cases, not just a few.

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APPENDIX

STATIC-99 – TALLY SHEET (Static99.org)

Subject Name: _____

Place of Scoring: _____

Date of Scoring: _____ Name of Assessor: _____

| Question Number | Risk Factor | Codes | Score |
|-----------------|--|--|------------------|
| 1 | Young | Aged 25 or older Aged 18 – 24.99 | 0 1 |
| 2 | Ever Lived With | Ever lived with lover for at least two years? Yes No | 0 1 |
| 3 | Index non-sexual violence – Any convictions? | No Yes | 0 1 |
| 4 | Prior non-sexual violence – Any Convictions? | No Yes | 0 1 |
| 5 | Prior Sex Offences | Charges Convictions None None 1-2 1 3-5 2-3 6+ 4+ | 0 1 2 3 |
| 6 | Prior sentencing dates (excluding index) | 3 or less 4 or more | 0 1 |
| 7 | Any convictions for non-contact sex offences | No Yes | 0 1 |
| 8 | Any Unrelated Victims | No Yes | 0 1 |
| 9 | Any Stranger Victims | No Yes | 0 1 |
| 10 | Any Male Victims | No Yes | 0 1 |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|--|
| | Total Score | Add up scores from individual risk factors | |
|--|--------------------|---|--|

| | <u>POINTS</u> | <u>Risk Category</u> |
|--|---------------|----------------------|
| Suggested Nominal Risk Categories | 0,1 | Low |
| | 2,3 | Moderate-Low |
| | 4,5 | Moderate-High |
| | 6+ | High |

VITA

Sarah A. Steele

EDUCATION

- 2018 – in progress Doctor of Philosophy, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*,
University of Nebraska at Omaha
- 2018 Master of Arts, *Criminal Justice and Criminology*, Sam
Houston State University
Thesis: *Legislation for a Few Rather Than the Many:
Testing Assumptions of Sex Offender Legislation Among
Men Who Sexually Assaulted Children*
Chair: Dr. Holly A. Miller
- 2015 Bachelor of Science, *Criminal Justice*, Sam Houston State
University, *with Honors, Cum Laude*
Minor: Forensic Anthropology

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sexual Deviance; Corrections; Community Corrections, Correctional Policy, Sex
Offender Policy

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Fall 2018 - Present Graduate Research Assistant, School of Criminal Justice
and Criminology, University of Nebraska at Omaha,
Omaha, NE Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Lisa L. Sample
- Fall 2016 - Spring 2018 Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Criminal
Justice and Criminology, Sam Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX

PUBLICATIONS

- Hayes, B.E., O’Neal, E.N., Meeker, K.A., **Steele, S.A.**, Brady, P.Q., & Bills, M.A. (2017)
“Assessing Online Strategies Aimed at Enhancing Campus Safety.” *Journal of
Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*,
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/JACPR-05-2017-0293>
- Hayes, B.E., O’Neal, E.N., Meeker, K.A., **Steele, S.A.**, Brady, P.Q., & Bills, M.A. 2018.
Safety initiatives and perceptions of campus safety. Campus Sexual Assault
Series, Vol. 2, Iss. 2. Crime Victims’ Institute.

Forthcoming Publications

Steele, S.A. & Teske, Jr., R. H. C. (2020) Beto, George. in *Criminal Justice in America: The Encyclopedia of Crime, Law Enforcement, Courts, and Corrections*, ed. Jeff Bumgarner and Carla Lewandowski. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Manuscripts in Progress

Steele, S.A., Miller, H.A., Jeglic, E.L., & Blasko, B.L. (in preparation) "Legislation for a Few Rather Than the Many: Testing Assumptions of Sex Offender Legislation Among Men Who Sexually Assaulted Children."

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Steele, S.A., Miller, H.A., Blasko, B.L., Jeglic, E.L. (2018) "Trends of Criminal Offending Among Males Who Committed a Contact Sexual Offense Against a Child." Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.

Steele, S.A., & Teske, Jr., R.H.C. (2017) "Failure and Success of Offenders on Deferred Adjudication for Possession of Child Pornography." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Kansas City, MO.

Steele, S.A. & Bernard, M. (2015) "Post-Mortem Determination in the Southeast Region of Texas." Poster presented at SHSU Undergraduate Research Symposium, Huntsville, TX.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Stable and Acute 2007 Assessment Training, Montgomery County Probation Department, Conroe, TX, August 2017

Teaching Online with Blackboard Certification Series, SHSU, Huntsville, TX, Summer 2017

Teaching Assistant Certification Series, SHSU, Huntsville, TX, 2016-2017

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Undergraduate Courses Assisted

Civil Liabilities (online)

Family Violence (online)

Legal Aspects of Corrections (online)

Special Problems in Criminal Justice: Sexual Violence

Problem Analysis in Victim Studies
Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Justice
Violence Against Women (online)
Violent Offenders (online)
White Collar Crime (online)

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Graduate Fellowship, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, SHSU, 2016-2018

Travel Scholarship, SHSU CJ Graduate Student Organization, 2017

MEMBERSHIP IN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

2017- Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences

2017- American Society of Criminology

SERVICE

Montgomery County Annual Sex Offender Halloween Compliance Meeting, October 2017