Partners of Registered Sex Offenders: Cultural Stereotype and Discrimination Experiences

Tyler Plogher

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Margaret C. Stevenson

University of Evansville

Author Note

February 4, 2015

Abstract

Family members of registered sex offenders experience significant psychological and socioeconomic distress (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009), yet research has largely ignored societal perceptions of these individuals, particularly sex offenders' partners (wives, girlfriends). Study 1 sought to document the characteristics of a societal stereotype of sex offenders' partners, as a first step toward understanding their stigmatization and experiences of discrimination. In line with hypotheses, results suggest that people primarily perceive sex offenders' partners as fearful, vulnerable, and deviant, but also as mentally ill and loyal; that is, people perceive sex offenders' partners, in part, as similar to registered sex offenders themselves. Study 2 aimed to develop an Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders' Partners Scale capable of predicting discriminatory inclinations toward sex offenders' partners. As predicted, negative attitudes toward sex offenders' partners predicted greater support for sex offender policy and less support for hiring sex offenders' partners, in a variety of employment contexts. Implications for public policy are discussed.

Table of Contents

Partners of Registered Sex Offenders: Cultural Stereotype and Discrimination Experiences

In 1994, the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act became the first federal law to establish registration policies for sex offenders in the United States (Windlesham, 1998). Registration policies require sex offenders to provide information such as their home address, photograph, and details about their sex crime to their local law enforcement agency (Windlesham, 1998; Zevitz, 2006). Then, in 1996, the first of a series of federal laws known as "Megan's Laws" required that sex offender registration information be made available to the public, providing the basis for today's online, publicly accessible sex offender registries (Zevitz, 2006). More recently, the 2006 Adam Walsh Act, also known as the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, established federal standards for community notification and sex offender registration, providing the public with a nationwide network of registered sex offenders and allowing the public to track sex offenders' whereabouts (SORNA; 42 U.S.C. § 16911).

In general, the public supports the registration of both adult and juvenile sex offenders, because, contrary to research, they believe sex offender registration and notification laws to be highly effective at reducing recidivism (Anderson, Evans, & Sample, 2009). However, many fail to realize that sex offender registration and notification laws are limited in their efficacy and that they, unfortunately, perpetuate the poverty, instability, and stigma known to contribute to criminal recidivism within the registered sex offender population (Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury, 2008; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Meloy, Miller, & Curtis, 2008; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). These effects are commonly referred to as the collateral consequences of sex offender registration and notification laws.

Regrettably, little empirical attention has been given to the collateral damage associated

with sex offender policy, particularly with regard to the family members of registered sex offenders. Exploratory research indicates that the collateral consequences of sex offender registration and notification laws extend the stigma and burden of registration to immediate family members, especially those residing with the registered sex offender (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). However, no research to date has explored the possibility that sex offender registration and notification policies might facilitate discriminatory hiring practices against the partners (i.e., wives and girlfriends) of registered sex offenders. In the present research, the possible existence of a societal stereotype about the partners of registrants' will be explored, as a first step toward understanding its potentially stigmatizing consequences.

Collateral Damage and Efficacy of Sex Offender Registration and Notification Laws

Although research indicates that sex offender registration and notification laws do not prevent sex crimes (e.g., Duwe et al., 2008), comparatively little research has addressed the unintended consequences of these laws. Yet, emerging studies consistently show that sex offender registration and notification laws perpetuate the very risk factors responsible for increased recidivism within the registered sex offender population (Duwe et al., 2008; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). Specifically, registered sex offenders experience the following as a direct result of sex offender registration and notification laws: job loss, transience and housing disruption, property damage, harassment, stress, loss of hope, and impaired quality of relationships (Levenson et al., 2007; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). Indeed, studies of adult sex offender recidivism reveal that dynamic factors such as family discord, anxiety, depression, and socioeconomic instability are

among the best predictors of sex offenders' criminal recidivism (e.g., Gendreau, Little, Goggin,

1996; Hanson & Bussiere, 1998).

For instance, Levenson, D'Amora, and Hern (2007) administered questionnaires to 239

registered sex offenders participating in group therapy sessions throughout Indiana and

Connecticut. Respondents were asked to indicate perceived socioeconomic and psychosocial

harm resulting from Megan's Law (i.e., community notification laws). A significant minority of

respondents, 21%, reported harassment and job loss as a direct result of community notification.

Moreover, 46% of respondents reported fear for personal safety, with 18% experiencing property

damage and 10% being forced from their homes. These results were comparable to an earlier

study administered to registered sex offenders in Florida, suggesting that community notification

laws contribute substantially to the instability and poor social integration experienced by many

registered sex offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005).

Collateral Damage and Efficacy of Sex Offender Residence Restriction Laws

More recently, both state and community governments across the United States have

begun to enact sex offender residence restrictions, laws preventing sex offenders from living

within close proximity to schools, daycares, parks, and other locations commonly associated

with children (Meloy et al., 2008). Typically, these restrictions forbid sex offenders from

residing within 1,000 feet of such locations, although some states and communities forbid

residence within 2,500 feet (Levenson & Hern, 2007). Importantly, researchers argue that

residence restriction laws, like registration and notification laws, were developed to prevent

highly sensationalized, rare, violent sexual assaults (Meloy et al., 2008). In reality, most sex

crimes, including crimes against children, are committed by a family member or close family

friend of the victim (76%; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), and sex offenders are one of the least

likely felony groups to recidivate, with reconviction rates between 22% and 27%, as opposed to 37% for kidnapping, 44% for assault, and 46% for robbery (Greenfeld, 1997; Langan & Levin, 2002). Further, someone who molests a child is relatively unlikely to target a child again, even if he or she goes on to perpetrate other crimes (Miethe, Olson, & Mitchell, 2006). Thus, researchers question both the efficacy and necessity of residence restriction laws (e.g., Duwe et al., 2008; Levenson, 2008; Meloy et al., 2008; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2006; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2008).

Research regarding the efficacy of residence restriction laws has found no evidence to support the notion that such laws provide more than marginal effects in preventing recidivism (Colorado Department of Public Safety, 2004; Duwe et al., 2008). Specifically, Duwe and colleagues (2008) analyzed the case outcomes of all 3,166 Minnesota sex offenders released from prison between 1990 and 2002, as, at that time, only two Minnesota communities had implemented such laws. Two hundred and twenty-four sex offenders (approximately 7% of the total 3,166) were re-incarcerated for new offenses during this time, but the researchers found that residence restriction laws would not have prevented their offenses. Only 28 re-offenders (12.5% of the 224) committed new offenses in locations that might have fallen within residence restriction buffers. Twelve cases involved adults, and the remaining sixteen sexual contacts were either committed against neighbors, against acquaintances, or at prohibited areas up to ten miles from the offender's residence. Given these results, and drawing from past studies, the researchers concluded that residence restrictions are less likely to protect the public than they are to inhibit the offender's ability to successfully reenter society, due to the social-structural barriers these laws create.

Similarly, residence restriction laws commonly force registered sex offenders into neighborhoods marked by socioeconomic hardships and crime, decrease their housing stability, and decrease their access to jobs, mental health services, and loved ones (Duwe et al., 2008; Levenson, 2008; Meloy et al., 2008; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2006; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2008). Why? Very few residences exist that do not fall within 2,500, or even 1,000, feet of forbidden locations (Levenson, 2008). In Orange County, Florida, for instance, only 37 out of 137,944 residences can legally be occupied by sex offenders ordered to observe 2,500 foot restrictions from children (Zandbergen & Hart, 2006). As a result of this limited availability and the reluctance of many landlords to rent to registered sex offenders, registered sex offenders are frequently unable to comply with residence restrictions, resulting in homelessness and, sometimes, legal repercussions (Levenson, 2008).

Levenson (2008) surveyed 109 Broward County, Florida registered sex offenders, asking them to detail the economic, psychosocial, and practical consequences they had experienced as a result of residence restriction laws. Sixty-five percent reported considerable difficulty finding a place to live, perhaps best summarized by the report of one participant: "It's been about 3 months . . . and we have given our probation officer at least over 100 addresses and still haven't found a place to live yet" (p. 157). Furthermore, 28% had been found in violation of their probation due to residence restrictions, 17% reported homelessness, and 13% spent time in jail due to residence restriction violations. Importantly, however, Levenson's results also indicate the need for further research regarding the impact of such laws on the family members of registered sex offenders. In particular, 43% of registered sex offenders reported being unable to live with dependent family members, such as children, and 22% indicated that a family member had been forced to find a new, separate residence.

Stress Experiences and Collateral Consequences for Family Members of Sex Offenders

While sex offenders are commonly perceived as reclusive, antisocial individuals (e.g., Sanghara & Wilson, 2006), many continue to reside with supportive family members out of mutual desire and dependency (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). However, sex offender registration, notification, and residence restriction laws reduce housing and employment outcomes to such significant degrees that, in many cases, family members are nearly as likely to experience psychosocial and economic disadvantage as their sex-offending loved ones (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). The implications of this phenomenon are particularly salient when one considers the crucial role family members play in the maintenance of a stable, rehabilitative environment; it is likely that the collateral consequences of these laws greatly reduce the family's ability to curb recidivism. Despite these ramifications, only two studies to date have explored the collateral consequences of sex offender registration and notification laws experienced by family members of registered sex offenders (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009).

Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) collected data from 584 registered sex offender family members enrolled in registered sex offender-related support groups across all 50 states. While children under the age of 18 were not permitted to respond, their parents were allowed to convey information in their stead. A significant number of respondents (81%) stated that their family had experienced financial hardship as a direct result of discriminatory hiring practices. However, Levenson and Tewksbury found that effects extend far beyond this form of vicariously experienced instability: Respondents reported being the direct target of threats (44%), having their property damaged (27%), and being physically assaulted (7%) because of their relationship to a registered sex offender. Furthermore, parents reported that the children of registered sex

offenders had experienced the following: anger (80%), harassment (47%), physical assault

(22%), exclusion (65%), depression (77%), and suicidal tendencies (13%). Similarly,

Tewksbury and Levenson (2009) discovered that sex offender registration and notification

policies contribute to significant fear and stress experiences among family members.

Specifically, the family members of registered sex offenders reported experiencing stress

(98.9%), isolation (97.1%), the loss of close friends or relationships (89.8%), and fear for

personal safety (90.7%), all as a result of having a family member placed on the sex offender

registry.

Study 1

Although evidence indicates that sex offenders bear a particular stigma (Fuselier,

Durham, & Wurtele, 2002; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006), research has yet to explore whether

registrants' family members bear similar stigma – stigma that has the potential to destroy lives

(Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). Given that the family members of registered sex offenders

report being the targets of vigilantism and general societal backlash (Levenson & Tewksbury,

2009), this study explores the characteristics of a societal stereotype of registered sex offenders'

partners (i.e., wives and girlfriends).

We expected that people would endorse two subtypes of the sex offenders' partners

stereotype, to varying degrees. First, courtesy stigma suggests that individuals acquire the

stigma of those with whom they associate (Goffman, 2009). Thus, a "deviant and predatory"

stereotype subtype was theorized to closely resemble the stereotype of sex offenders themselves:

that they are dangerous, immoral, unpredictable, predatory, and mentally ill (Weekes, Pelletier,

& Beaudette, 1995). In contrast, it was also expected that participants would indicate

endorsement of a "fearful and vulnerable" subtype, because it seemed likely that people might

perceive partners of sex offenders as similar to battered wives, who are perceived as passive, socially isolated (Blackman, 1990), or as having been victims of child neglect (Frank & Golden, 1992).

Consistent with previous research (Brigham, 1971; Devine, 1989), we also expected that participants would be knowledgeable about the content of the two hypothesized stereotype subtypes of sex offenders' partners -- "deviant and predatory" versus "fearful and vulnerable" -- regardless of their personal endorsement of said stereotypes. Yet, due to social desirability concerns (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987), we anticipated that participants would report that others endorse negative stereotypes against sex offenders' partners (e.g., that they are deviant and predatory) more than they, themselves do.

Method

Participants

Participants were 166 U.S. citizens (34% male, *M* age = 36.5) who were recruited through *Mechanical Turk,* an online workforce of over 100,000 people that provides more nationally representative samples than typical college samples, with at least equal reliability (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The sample was 83.67% White, 3.40% Black, 5.44% Hispanic, 5.44% Asian, and 2.04% indicated "Other." The sample was also predominately heterosexual (88.90%) and well educated, with 50.34% reporting college or graduate degrees. Forty percent of participants identified as Christian, but a substantial minority identified as agnostic (17.69%) and atheist (22.45%), with the sample generally scoring low on religiosity (53.74% never attend church). Finally, the sample was notably more liberal (49.65%) than conservative (25.52%) or moderate (24.83%).

Materials

Stereotype content. To assess the cultural components of the stereotype of sex offenders' partners, participants were asked to provide open-ended responses to a series of four questions. Specifically, participants were asked to detail: (1) their personal beliefs regarding the characteristics of sex offenders' partners; (2) their knowledge of the general public's beliefs regarding the characteristics of sex offenders' partners; (3) their knowledge of the predicted "deviant and predatory" subtype; and (4) their knowledge of the predicted "fearful and vulnerable" subtype. For a list of these items, see Appendix A.

Stereotype endorsement. Participants provided *yes* or *no* responses to two items assessing explicit endorsement of the "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable" stereotype subtypes ("Some people think of partners of sex offenders as ['deviant and predatory' / 'vulnerable and fearful.'] Do you think of partners of sex offenders in this way?").

Demographics. Numerous demographic characteristics were assessed, including participant age, gender, and ethnicity. Educational attainment was also measured, by asking participants "What was your last year at school?" Participants selected a response from the following range of choices: 1 (*Less than completion of high school*), 2 (*Completed high school*), 3 (*Technical school*), 4 (*Some college*), 5 (*Junior college degree (AA)*), 6 (*College degree*), and 7 (*Post graduate*). To assess political orientation, participants selected 1 (*Extremely liberal*), 2 (*Liberal*), 3 (*Somewhat liberal*), 4 (*Moderate*), 5 (*Somewhat conservative*), 6 (*Conservative*), or 7 (*Extremely conservative*), in response to the question, "When it comes to politics, how liberal or conservative are you?" Similarly, participants responded to "How often do you attend religious services?" This item was designed to measure religiosity and consisted of the options 1 (*Less*

than once a year), 2 (*About once a year*), 3 (*A few times a year*), 4 (*About once a month*), 5 (*A few times a month*), 6 (*About once a week*), 7 (*A few times a week*), and 8 (*Once a day*).

Participants were also asked to provide relevant information about their relationships with registered sex offenders, using the following items: "Has any friend, family member, or close acquaintance revealed to you that he or she is a registered sex offender?" "If yes, how was this person related to you? That is, was this person your friend, coworker, father, partner, etc.?" Finally, respondents were asked to respond either *yes* or *no* to the question, "Are you, or have you ever been, a registered sex offender?"

Procedure

Participants were randomly recruited through *Mechanical Turk*, an online workforce of over 100,000 people who complete tasks in exchange for monetary compensation (Pontin, 2007). After clicking on the study's link, all participants read a cover letter that briefly addressed the nature of the study, including that they would be compensated $1.50, $2.00, or $3.00 (the incentive was increased overtime, in order to increase its effectiveness). By clicking *next*, participants indicated their informed consent and began the survey.

First, participants completed open-ended items designed to measure the content of the stereotype of registered sex offenders' partners. These items were modeled after those used by Devine (1989) and Haegerich (2002), and the methodological approach was adapted from Devine's (1989) research, as well. Moreover, assessing both personal beliefs about sex offenders' partners and participants' knowledge of the public's beliefs about sex offenders' partners is an effective method of accounting for social desirability concerns (Devine, 1989).

Respondents then indicated their personal, explicit endorsement of the predicted "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable" stereotype subtypes and completed a series of

demographic questions. After completing the study, participants read a debriefing statement,

received their monetary incentive, and were thanked for their participation. Participants took

approximately 25 minutes to complete the study, and data collection occurred over 3 weeks. The

University of Evansville's Institutional Review Board approved this study, in its entirety.

Coding Scheme Development. Following data collection, participants' open-ended

responses were coded and subjected to inter-rater reliability, using a theoretically-driven coding

scheme, which included the following four codes: (1) the "deviant and predatory" code applied

to statements indicating that sex offenders' partners are sexually deviant, immoral, and

dangerous; (2) the "fearful and vulnerable" code applied to statements indicating that sex

offenders' partners have suffered trauma, are weak, or have low self-esteem; (3) the "mentally

ill" code applied to statements indicating that sex offenders' partners suffer from a specific

mental illness or are "crazy;" and (4) the "loyal" code applied to statements that portrayed sex

offenders' partners as strong, supportive, or possessing traditional values. These codes were

primarily informed by this study's hypothesis regarding courtesy stigma (e.g., Goffman, 2009),

but also a review of literature concerning battered wives (e.g., Blackman, 1990; Frank & Golden,

1992), reviewed earlier. Inter-rater reliability was achieved on all codes (inter-coder agreement

$\geq$ 81%). See Appendix B for this study's codebook.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

When asked to detail their personal beliefs regarding sex offenders' partners, 19.3% of

participants mentioned "deviant and predatory" characteristics (e.g., "Some are abusers who

share the mindset of the offender…they are sexual offenders as well"), 67.5% mentioned "fearful

and vulnerable" characteristics (e.g., "They may be weak or submissive. They might be abused

by their partners"), 5.4% mentioned "mentally ill" characteristics (e.g., "I think there must be

something inherently psychologically skewed about [sex offenders' partners]"), and 48%

mentioned "loyal" characteristics (e.g., "They are dedicated, fair-minded individuals") (see

Figure 1).

Supporting our social desirability hypothesis, when asked to indicate the public's

stereotype about sex offenders' partners, "deviant and predatory" characteristics were more

frequently mentioned (41.6%) than when participants had indicated personal beliefs about sex

offenders' partners (19.3%). Indeed, although many participants (63%) reported that their

beliefs are the same as the public's (regarding deviant characteristics), when participants'

attitudes differed from the public's, they were significantly more likely to believe that the public

endorses the "deviant and predatory" subtype, but that they do not (30%), rather than vice versa

(7%), $\chi^2 = 79.24$, $p = .001$. This finding might also reflect pluralistic ignorance: believing that

one's private thoughts are different from those of others, even when actual attitudes are identical

(Miller & McFarland, 1991). In addition, 51.2% of participants mentioned that the public

believes sex offenders' partners have "fearful and vulnerable" characteristics, 15.1% mentioned

"mentally ill" characteristics, and 5.4% mentioned "loyal" characteristics (see Figure 2).

When asked directly, significantly fewer participants endorsed the belief that partners of

sex offenders are "deviant and predatory" (20.4%) than did not (79.6%), $\chi^2 = 55.09$, $p = .001$. In

addition, significantly more participants directly endorsed the belief that partners of sex

offenders are "fearful and vulnerable" (65.6%) than did not (34.4%), $\chi^2 = 15.29$, $p = .001$.

Yet, supporting hypotheses, participants were able to identify the content of these

stereotypes. When asked to describe the "deviant and predatory" subtype of the stereotype of

sex offenders' partners, the vast majority of participants (75.3%) spontaneously mentioned

"deviant and predatory" characteristics. Only, 13.3% mentioned "fearful and vulnerable"

characteristics, 6.6% mentioned "mentally ill" characteristics, and 1.2% mentioned "loyal"

characteristics.

Similarly, when asked to describe the "fearful and vulnerable" subtype of the stereotype

of sex offenders' partners, the vast majority of participants (82.5%) mentioned "fearful and

vulnerable" characteristics. Only approximately 9% of participants mentioned "deviant and

predatory" characteristics, 3% mentioned "mentally ill" characteristics, and 3% mentioned

"loyal" characteristics.

Discussion

In line with hypotheses, participants were knowledgeable about the cultural stereotype of

registered sex offenders' partners, as illustrated by their descriptions of their own, personal

beliefs and their awareness of the general public's perspectives. Similarly, results supported our

hypothesis that the cultural stereotype of sex offenders' partners consists of four, distinct

subtypes, including the originally predicted "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable"

subtypes. Participants were able to elaborate on the content of these stereotype subtypes, even

when they claimed not to personally endorse them.

Responses also appear to support the hypothesis that participants might censor their own,

personal beliefs concerning the partners of registered sex offenders, due to a desire to appear

socially acceptable and appropriate. That is, open-ended responses regarding the general

public's beliefs contained more references to sex offenders' partners being "deviant and

predatory" and "mentally ill," and fewer references to sex offenders' partners being "loyal."

Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, it is possible that these results may represent a

phenomenon akin to pluralistic ignorance: believing that one's private thoughts are different

from those of others', even when actual attitudes are identical (Miller & McFarland, 1991). This

possibility deserves empirical attention, because pluralistic ignorance has been identified as a barrier to the elimination of stigmatizing and discriminatory policies throughout history (e.g., segregation; O'Gorman, 1975, 1979; O'Gorman & Garry, 1976). That said, our methodological approach does not allow us to rule out one or the other of these alternative explanations.

Recall that this study's methodology was informed by Devine's (1989) approach – we asked participants to describe their own, personal beliefs about sex offenders' partners characteristics, as well as their beliefs about what the general public thinks of sex offenders' partners. When the potential exists for participants to censor their open-ended responses about a group's stereotype, asking them to discuss what others believe, regardless of their own endorsement, is an effective way to collect a more authentic representation of a stereotype. Thus, in this study, it is likely that the stereotype of sex offenders' partners is more genuinely represented by what participants thought the public believes. That is, the wives and girlfriends of registered sex offenders are likely viewed in near-exclusively negative terms, with only a small fraction of people recognizing this group's potential for loyalty, bravery, and resilience.

In either case, however, these data lend support to sex offenders' partners' anecdotal accounts of perceived stigma, discrimination, and harassment (e.g., Women Against Registry, Not the Life we Chose). For example, the partners of sex offenders claim to be ostracized from family, friend, community, and professional circles. Participants demonstrated that they were aware of the stereotype of registered sex offenders' partners and that sex offenders' partners are perceived in an overwhelmingly negative and stigmatizing manner, in many ways consistent with the common stereotype of registered sex offenders. That is, given the common occurrence of statements such as "[they] get off on seeing other people suffer, and [they] actually go out

seeking the suffering of others" and "[they] may use [their] female partner to lure young girls," it is clear that registered sex offenders' wives and girlfriends face courtesy stigma.

However, the frequency with which participants' personal beliefs referenced "loyal" characteristics was unexpected, even if such statements were simply artifacts of socially desirable response patterns. Indeed, following data collection, the "loyal" code was newly developed, to accommodate a large number of positive, empathic comments about partners of sex offenders, including "they tend to be more intelligent, less judgmental, and more responsible than average individuals." On one hand, this suggests that some people recognize the diversity of registered sex offenders, as a group, and perceive sex offenders' partners' traits as being independent from those of their sex-offending partners. Alternatively, however, it is possible that participants made relatively positive statements concerning sex offenders' partners to censor their true, personal beliefs. In support, participants rarely made statements that received the "loyal" code alone (only 8.43% of participants made solely "loyal" statements when describing their personal beliefs). That is, participants typically discussed sex offenders' partners in terms of both positive and negative characteristics, rarely describing sex offenders' partners as possessing only positive or loyal characteristics. Specifically, of the participants who made "loyal" statements, 14.81% of those participants also made "deviant and predatory" or "mentally ill" statements, and 62.96% also made "fearful and vulnerable" statements. This tendency is exemplified in the following response: "they are understanding and patient, but they may be self-destructive. Being with someone who is a sex offender may be a challenge that someone who likes conflict can put into their lives."

Study 2

Previous research (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009) and anecdotal accounts (Women Against Registry) indicate that sex offenders' family members are the targets of vigilantism, general societal backlash, and overwhelming stigma. Indeed, the results of Study 1 lend credence to the latter; sex offenders' wives and girlfriends are viewed in much the same way as sex offenders, themselves (e.g., deviant, predatory, mentally ill). Yet, many questions still remain unanswered. In particular, it is important to determine whether sex offenders' partners face discrimination because of their stigma and, similarly, it is important to determine whether individuals' endorsement of the stereotype of sex offenders' partners predicts discriminatory behavior toward partners. After all, anecdotal evidence (Women Against Registry) suggests that partners do experience discrimination, especially in employment contexts.

An important first step toward understanding any discrimination experience lies in the ability of researchers to predict the discrimination in question. Thus, the primary purpose of the present study was to develop a reliable scale to directly assess attitudes toward sex offenders' partners, developed from the results open-ended stereotype endorsement items from our previous study. Another fundamental goal of this study was to statistically identify subscales within our new scale, using an exploratory factor analysis. Specifically, we predicted that a factor analysis would reveal 4 dominant factors and that these factors would correspond with the 4 stereotype subtypes identified in Study 1: "deviant and predatory," "fearful and vulnerable," "mentally ill," and "loyal."

Further, this study explored the relationship between participants' attitudes toward sex offenders' partners and their attitudes toward sex offender registration, notification, and residence restriction laws (i.e., sex offender policy). Sex offender policy appears to have

emerged from utilitarian goals to protect society (Williams, 2009), given that many falsely believe that sex offenders often murder their victims, victimize children and strangers, and are highly recidivistic (Sample, 2009). Importantly, these beliefs, although largely inaccurate (Francis & Soothill, 2000; Quinsey, Khanna, & Malcolm, 1998; Sample & Evans, 2009), are consistent with many of the beliefs and attitudes encompassed by the "deviant and predatory," "fearful and vulnerable," and "mentally ill" stereotype subtypes identified in Study 1. This suggests that endorsement of any one subtype might predict support for sex offender legislation, because such fears and beliefs were likely the impetus of these laws in the first place. Thus, we predicted that, as agreement with the Fearful and Vulnerable, Deviant and Predatory, and Mentally Ill Subscales increases, support for registering adult sex offenders might also increase, as might support for public notification laws and residence restriction laws.

Moreover, because sex offender legislation was at least partially motivated by utilitarian concerns, it seems logical that, as agreement with the Fearful and Vulnerable, Deviant and Predatory, and Mentally Ill Subscales increases, participants' support for hiring a sex offenders' partner might decrease. After all, these stereotype subtypes consist of almost exclusively negative beliefs about sex offenders' partners' characteristics, including beliefs that sex offenders' partners are sex offenders, themselves. Thus, participants might be reluctant to recommend hiring individuals who they perceive to be dangerous, unpredictable, and sexually perverse. In contrast, higher scores on the Loyal Attitude Subscale might correspond with participants' greater support for hiring sex offenders' partners, generally (i.e., less discriminatory attitudes). That is, participants who score high on the Loyal Subscale might be more likely to recommend hiring sex offenders' partners, because the "loyal" stereotype subtype consists, primarily, of positive evaluations of partners' strength and compassion.

Finally, we took attribution theory into account when considering the potential relationship between participant political orientation and stereotype endorsement. Specifically, political orientation emerges as a predictor of the fundamental attribution error: the tendency to blame the individual instead of the situation (Jones & Harris, 1967). Although both liberals and conservatives make the fundamental attribution error, conservatives tend to be less likely than liberals to correct their initial internal attributions by taking the situation into account (Carroll et al., 1987; Pellegrini, Querolo, Monarrez, & Valenzuela, 1997; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Thus, we predicted that political conservatives would score significantly higher than political liberals on the Fearful and Vulnerable, Deviant and Predatory, and Mentally Ill Attitude Subscales, because, when participants endorsed these stereotypes in Study 1, they often did so in a manner that suggested the partner's willful complicity in their relationship's deviant ways (i.e., an internal attribution).

Method

Participants

Participants were 168 U.S. citizens (51% male, M age = 33.2) who were recruited through *Mechanical Turk*. The sample was 80.75% White, 5.59% Black, 5.59% Hispanic, 7.45% Asian, and 0.62% indicated "Other." The sample was also predominately heterosexual (93.17%) and 38.51% reported college or graduate degrees. Thirty-six percent of participants identified as Christian, but a substantial minority identified as agnostic (19.88%) and atheist (32.92%), with the sample generally scoring low on religiosity (61.49% never attend church). Finally, the sample was notably more liberal (57.77%) than conservative (16.14%) or moderate (26.09%).

Materials

Attitudes toward sex offender policy. Prior to assessing participants' attitudes toward sex offender registration, notification, and residence restriction laws, participants were asked to read the following informational vignette: "Adults found guilty of a sex offense must be listed on a public sex offender registry. In various states, this registry includes information such as name, social security number, age, race, gender, birth date, physical description, address, place of employment, details about the offense(s), fingerprints, a photo, a blood sample, and a hair sample. This information is available to the public upon request, sometimes by being posted on the Internet. In some cases, the police directly notify the people who live in the same area as the registered sex offender (i.e., they post fliers, notify neighbors door-to-door, send out automated telephone calls). Sex offenders are required to register anywhere from a few years to their entire life, depending on the state."

Afterward, attitudes toward registration laws were assessed using the item "Indicate the extent to which you believe that registration is an appropriate outcome for adult convicted sex offenders," and attitudes toward notification laws were measured by asking participants "Indicate the extent to which you believe that public notification is an appropriate outcome for adult convicted sex offenders." In responding to these items, participants chose from the following range of response options on a 6-point Likert scale: 1 (*Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Disagree*), 3 (*Somewhat Disagree*), 4 (*Somewhat Agree*), 5 (*Agree*), and 6 (*Strongly Agree*).

Participants indicated their support for a variety of specific public notification techniques using the same 6-point Likert scale. These items were as follows: "Residents should be notified via posted fliers," "Residents should be notified door-to-door," "Residents should be notified via automated telephone calls," "Notification letters should be sent home with school children,"

"Residents should be notified via public meetings," and "Residents should be notified via the newspaper."

We then provided participants with a brief description of residence restriction laws ("Some registered sex offenders are restricted from residing near schools, parks, bus stops, and other places that children frequent. Residency restriction distances vary from state to state") and asked "Which of the following options best reflects your attitude toward residency restriction laws?" Participants then responded to the following options, ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represented a lack of support for residence restrictions and 5 represented support for the full application of residence restrictions: 1 (*Registered sex offenders should not have their housing options restricted*), 2 (*Registered sex offenders should be required to live at least 500 feet from places frequented by children*), 3 (*Registered sex offenders should be required to live at least 1,000 feet from places frequented by children*), 4 (*Registered sex offenders should be required to live at least 1,500 feet from places frequented by children*), and 5 (*Registered sex offenders should be required to live at least 2,000 feet from places frequented by children*).

Attitudes toward sex offenders' partners. Participants were presented with 51 preliminary Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders' Partners Scale items (see Table 1), modeled after the 4 stereotype subtypes identified in Study 1: "deviant and predatory" (e.g., Most sex offenders' partners are probably sexually deviant); "fearful and vulnerable" (e.g., Most sex offenders' partners are vulnerable); "mentally ill" (Most sex offenders' partners are probably crazy); and "loyal" (Most sex offenders' partners are naturally forgiving). Agreement with these items was measured using the same 6-item Likert scale as before, where 1 corresponded to *Strongly Disagree* and 6 corresponded to *Strongly Agree*. These items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis, described in the results section.

Support for hiring sex offenders' partners. To determine participants' support for

hiring sex offenders' partners, participants first read, "Imagine that you are in a position of

authority to make the following hiring decisions. For each job scenario, imagine that you have

just discovered that the applicant is married to a registered sex offender. Please, indicate the

extent to which finding out that the applicant is married to a registered sex offender would affect

your decision to hire the applicant for the following positions." Participants then responded 1 (*I*

would refuse to hire the applicant), 2 (*I would be much less likely to hire the applicant*), 3 (*I*

would be less likely to hire the applicant), 4 (*I would be somewhat less likely to hire the*

applicant), or 5 (*I would be no more or less likely to hire the applicant – my hiring decision*

would be unaffected by this knowledge) for each of the following positions: a childcare position;

a factory position; a school bus driver; a healthcare position; a librarian; a school coach; a food

service position; and a non-elected government position.

Demographics. Participants provided the same demographic information as in Study 1.

Procedure

Participants were randomly recruited through *Mechanical Turk*, as in Study 1. After

clicking on the study's link, all participants read a cover letter that briefly addressed the nature of

the study, including that they would be compensated $2.00. By clicking *next*, participants

indicated their informed consent and began the survey.

First, participants read informational vignettes about sex offender registration,

notification, and residence restriction laws, before completing a series of questions to assess their

attitudes toward these laws. Respondents then completed our preliminary Attitudes Toward Sex

Offenders' Partners Scale items and indicated their support for hiring a sex offender's partner,

for a variety of positions. Finally, participants completed a series of demographic questions.

After completing the study, participants read a debriefing statement, received their monetary incentive, and were thanked for their participation.

Results

Factor Analyses

We subjected our scale items to a maximum likelihood factor analysis, employing varimax rotation. Inspection of a scree plot and eigenvalue criteria (> 1) revealed evidence of 8 factors that accounted for 75.75% of the covariance among the scales. Inspection of the rotated factor loadings revealed that 4 items had cross-loadings greater than .5, indicating poor discriminant validity (i.e., "Most sex offenders' partners are psychologically unstable," "Most sex offenders' partners are mentally ill," "Most sex offenders' partners were probably abused as children," and "Most sex offenders' partners aren't good parents and neglect their children"). Finally, one item ("Most sex offenders' partners probably suffer from PTSD") loaded highest (.63) on a factor that included only two items, and according to Costello and Osborne (2005), scales require at least 3 items. Therefore, all five items were excluded. Factors 6 and 7 included no items that loaded above .4, and factors 4, 5, and 8 had only one item that loaded above .4, but all such items loaded more highly on another factor. Thus, according to Costello and Osborne, factors 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were weak. Moreover, factors 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 accounted for only 12.16% of the variance. That is, the first 3 factors accounted for a majority (63.6%) of the variance (49.28% for factor 1, 9.72% for factor 2, and 4.61% for factor 3). For these reasons, we subsequently conducted a factor analysis forcing a 3-factor solution.

The results of a forced 3-factor solution, employing varimax rotation, revealed that the first 3 factors similarly accounted for 63.05% of the covariance among the scales. Yet, 5 items revealed evidence of poor discriminant validity (their factor loadings on two different factors did

not differ by more than .20): "Most sex offenders' partners are probably abused by their sex

offending partner," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably damaged goods," "Most sex

offenders' partners probably have no friends," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably

masochistic," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably low-income." These items likely had

poor discriminant validity, because they generally appear to reflect both sympathetic attitudes

and negative attitudes, resulting in them being pulled between the two more dominant factors

that reflected more positive versus negative attitudes. Thus, we conducted a third forced 3-factor

solution, excluding those five items.

Results of the third forced 3-factor solution revealed that the first 3 factors accounted for

63.57% of the covariance among the scales. Yet, one item ("Most sex offenders' partners

probably have Stockholm Syndrome") had poor discriminant validity (its factor loadings did not

differ by more than .20). Thus, we conducted a final, fourth forced 3-factor solution, excluding

this single item.

Results of our final, forced 3-factor solution, employing varimax rotation, revealed that

the first 3 factors accounted for 63.76% of the covariance among the scales. The first factor

accounted for the majority of the variance (45.58%), the second factor accounted for 12.14% of

the variance, and the third factor accounted for 6.05% of the variance. Factor loadings were

considered noteworthy if they loaded at .35 or greater on our extracted rotation (see Table 1).

The first factor was primarily comprised of items related to the "deviant and predatory" subtype

(e.g., "Most sex offenders' partners are predatory and tend to prey on the weak," "Most sex

offenders' partners probably help their partners commit sexual crimes," "Most sex offenders'

partners are probably psychopaths or sociopaths"). The second factor included items related to

the "fearful and vulnerable" subtype (e.g., "Most sex offenders' partners have low self-esteem,"

"Most sex offenders' partners are too trusting," "Most sex offenders' partners probably want to leave but are too afraid"). The third factor included items related to the "loyal" subtype (e.g., "Most sex offenders' partners are very loyal to their sex-offending partner," "Most sex offenders' partners are supportive of their partner's recovery," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably very nonjudgmental and open-minded people").

Reliability of Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders' Partners Subscales

Relying on the results of the forced 3-factor solution from our final factor analysis, we developed 3 reliable scales designed to measure participants' attitudes toward sex offenders' partners. The first factor, which was primarily comprised of items related to the "deviant and predatory" subtype, became the basis of our Deviant and Predatory Scale. Similarly, the second factor became the Fearful and Vulnerable Scale, and the third factor became the Loyal Scale. That is, we used only those items that loaded highest in a given factor to create that factor's corresponding scale.

Specifically, our Deviant and Predatory Scale consisted of 15 items. Five representative items were: "Most sex offenders' partners are probably sexually deviant," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably crazy," "Most sex offenders' partners are probably evil," "Most sex offenders' partners probably lack empathy for others," and "Most sex offenders' partners are dangerous" (for a complete list of all 15 items, see Appendix C). Two items ("Most sex offenders' partners are kind" and "Most sex offenders' partners are empathic and emotionally understanding") were reverse-scored. The Deviant and Predatory Scale had very high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$).

Our Fearful and Vulnerable Scale consisted of 17 items, five of which were: "Most sex offenders' partners are vulnerable," "Most sex offenders' partners have dependent personalities,"

"Most sex offenders' partners are easily manipulated," "Most sex offenders' partners lack self-respect," and "Most sex offenders' partners are weak-willed" (for a complete list of all 17 items, see Appendix D). One item ("Most sex offenders' partners are resilient and strong-natured") was reverse-scored. The Fearful and Vulnerable Scale also had very high internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.95).

Finally, our Loyal Scale consisted of 7 items, which were: "Most sex offenders' partners are supportive of their partner's recovery," "Most sex offenders' partners are naturally forgiving," "Most sex offenders' partners are very loyal to their sex-offending partner," "Most sex offenders' partners probably genuinely care for their sex-offending partner, despite their past," "Most sex offenders' partners are faithful and devoted to their partner," "Most sex offenders' partners probably full-heartedly believe in their sex-offending partner's innocence," and "Most sex offenders' partners are probably very non-judgmental and open-minded people." This Loyal Scale had high internal validity (Cronbach's α = 0.75).

Main Effects of the Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders' Partners Scales

In line with hypotheses, as agreement with the Fearful and Vulnerable and Deviant and Predatory Attitude Scales increased, support for registering adult sex offenders significantly increased, as did support for public notification laws, each of the most common notification techniques, and residence restriction laws (see Table 2 for correlations). Further, as agreement with the Fearful and Vulnerable and Deviant and Predatory Attitude Scales increased, participants were significantly less supportive of hiring a sex offenders' partner for a childcare position, a factory position, a healthcare position, a food service position, a non-elected government position, as a school bus driver, librarian, or as a school coach. In contrast, higher scores on the Loyal Attitude Scale significantly predicted greater support for hiring sex

offenders' partners for a factory position, a healthcare position, a food service position, a non-elected government position, or as a librarian. No other main effects reached statistical significance.

Main Effects of Individual Difference Variables

In line with hypotheses, political conservatives were significantly more likely than political liberals to endorse the fearful and vulnerable stereotype and the deviant and predatory stereotype. No other main effects reached statistical significance (see Table 3 for a correlation matrix of demographic variables).

Discussion

In line with predictions, "deviant and predatory," "fearful and vulnerable," and "loyal" dominant factors emerged from our exploratory factors analyses, allowing us to develop a reliable Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders' Partners Scale consisting of distinct subscales. However, it should be noted that our hypothesized Mentally Ill Subscale did not emerge as a dominant factor. Upon examination of our final, dominant factors, we discovered that many of our "mentally ill" items loaded most strongly within the two most dominant factors: "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable." Why? Stereotypes and assumptions about mental illness are highly nuanced, ranging beliefs that the mentally ill are dangerous and unpredictable (Romer & Bock, 2008) to beliefs that some mental illnesses, such as depression, are characterized by laziness (Aromaa, Tolvanen, Tuulari, & Wahlbeck, 2010), weakness, and sensitivity (Aromaa, Tolvanen, Tuulari, & Wahlbeck, 2011). Thus, some "mentally ill" items, though clearly containing references to mental illness, actually loaded better on the "deviant and predatory" (e.g., "Most sex offenders' partners are probably crazy") and "fearful and vulnerable"

("Most sex offenders' partners need psychiatric help") factors than they did in a single, shared "mentally ill" factor.

Further, in line with hypotheses, agreement with the Fearful and Vulnerable and Deviant and Predatory Attitude Subscales was significantly related to support for sex offender legislation, such that, as attitude agreement increased, so did support for the application of sex offender registration, notification, and residence restriction laws. Agreement with these subscales was also predictive of participants' reluctance to hire sex offenders' partners, perhaps because, generally speaking, these subscales represent clusters of characteristics that are undesirable. Endorsement of the Deviant and Predatory and Fearful and Vulnerable Subscales might also be cognitively related to some important third variable (e.g., the belief that hiring a sex offenders' partner would put consumers in danger). Future research should examine this and related possibilities.

Finally, political conservatives were significantly more likely than political liberals to perceive sex offenders' partners as "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable," whereas political liberals were significantly more likely than political conservatives to perceive sex offenders' partners as "loyal." Why? Political conservatives are more likely than political liberals to blame individuals, rather than the situation (Carroll et al., 1987; Pellegrini, Querolo, Monarrez, & Valenzuela, 1997; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Thus, when seeking to explain why some women are in relationships with sex offenders, political conservatives might focus on the partner's potential weakness (e.g., she is insane), while political liberals might focus on more complicated characteristics of the relationship itself (e.g., her husband has always treated her well, despite his mistakes, and she loves him).

There are a number of implications stemming from these results that warrant consideration. Support for sex offender legislation stems from utilitarian goals to protect society (Williams, 2009). Society needs to be protected from sex offenders, many might reason, because of the dangerous qualities they are perceived to possess (e.g., Sample, 2009). Yet, our findings indicate that support for sex offender legislation can also be predicted by beliefs about sex offenders' partners, which lends credence to the primary conclusion of our first study – sex offenders' partners are viewed in much the same way as sex offenders themselves. In fact, the association between sex offenders and their partners appears to be so strong that, when participants perceived sex offenders' partners negatively, they openly admitted that they would refuse to hire the applicant for virtually every listed position. This suggests that, where sex offenders' partners are concerned, prejudiced individuals might feel justified in discriminating against women who, to them, are essentially as bad as sex offenders, themselves.

General Discussion

Anecdotal evidence of online support groups for registered sex offenders' partners (e.g., Women Against Registry, Not the Life I Chose) indicates that the stigma sex offenders' partners face has dire consequences in terms of employment, general psychological well-being, and vigilantism. Specifically, sex offenders' partners state that, when their coworkers or employers discover that they are married to a registered sex offender, they often lose their jobs (Women Against Registry). Similarly, these women claim that, if their sex-offending partner's status is discovered during the hiring process, they are promptly removed from consideration (Women Against Registry).

The results of our research lend tentative support to these possibilities. We have found that participants endorse significant negative stereotypes about sex offenders' partners. Further,

those who perceive sex offenders' partners as "deviant and predatory" and "fearful and vulnerable" are significantly more likely to recommend against hiring a sex offenders' partner (to discriminate) than those who do not hold such views. Yet, in our future research, we plan to experimentally manipulate a job candidate's marital status (she is versus is not married to a sex offender), to explore causal evidence of discrimination against spouses of sex offenders. Given that sex offenders' partners are often perceived as "deviant and predatory," we expect that participants will be less likely to recommend hiring a woman for a childcare position when she is portrayed as married to a sex offender versus a non-sex offender. We also plan to explore whether similar discrimination against sex offenders' partners will manifest in job contexts less relevant to children, including for instance, a warehouse stock position. Finally, we plan to survey sex offenders' partners, to develop a better understanding of their objective and subjective experiences of discrimination and stigma.

Future research should also examine the cultural stereotype of registered sex offenders' other family members, particularly their children. It is possible that beliefs about the heritability of sexual deviancy may exist and that such perspectives might limit the life outcomes of the known offspring of registered sex offenders. For example, people might believe that the children of sex offenders possess genes that predispose them to commit sexually deviant acts, or that environmental factors (i.e., being raised by a sex offender) lead to the development of undesirable or immoral sexual tendencies.

Limitations

Although research indicates that *Mechanical Turk* produces more nationally representative samples than college samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), our studies' samples were disproportionately well-educated, liberal, and non-religious. Further, our

samples primarily consisted of heterosexual Whites. As such, it is possible that these studies'

results do not accurately represent the diversity of beliefs held about registered sex offenders'

partners, across the United States.

Specifically, due to our samples' liberal-leaning political stance and high levels of

educational attainment, Study 1's results might represent a conservative estimate of the extent to

which the stereotype of sex offenders' partners is comprised of negative characteristics. Indeed,

past research has revealed that more educated individuals (versus less educated individuals) are

less supportive of the extension of sex offender registration policies to juvenile sex offenders

(Stevenson, Smith, Sekely, & Sorenson, 2013). Finally, Study 2's correlational design prevented

us from drawing causal conclusions – a limitation that is particularly constraining when

attempting to predict and explain instances of discrimination. Thus, future research should

include a more representative sample and utilize an experimental design.

Conclusion

Sex offenders' family members may facilitate sex offenders' successful reintegration into

society, by providing them with financial and emotional support (Levenson & Tewksbury,

2009). However, living with a registered sex offender – in a residence-restricted home that is

publicly listed on the registry – stigmatizes not only the offender, but his family members as

well. As a result, sex offenders' family members are nearly as likely to experience psychosocial

distress as sex offenders themselves (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson,

2009), including significant negative stigma and, based on the results of the present research,

discrimination. To reduce sexual offending recidivism, researchers and policy-makers must re-

evaluate current sex offender policy and develop empirically supported programs and policies

designed to reduce stigma and discrimination experienced by family members of sex offenders.

References

Anderson, A. L., Evans, M. K., & Sample, L. L. (2009). Who accesses the sex offender

registries? A look at legislative intent and citizen action in Nebraska. *Criminal Justice

Studies*, *22*(3), 313-329.

Blackman, J. (1990). Emerging images of severely battered women and the criminal justice

system. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *8*(2), 121-130.

Brigham, J. C. (1971). Ethnic stereotypes. *Psychological bulletin*, *76*(1), 15.

Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk a new source

of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data?. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *6*(1), 3-5.

Colorado Dept of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, & United States of America.

(2004). Report on safety issues raised by living arrangements for and location of sex

offenders in the community.

Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: their automatic and controlled components.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *56*(1), 5.

Duwe, G., Donnay, W., & Tewksbury, R. (2008). Does residential proximity matter? A

geographic analysis of sex offense recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *35*(4),

484-504.

Frank, P. B., & Golden, G. K. (1992). Blaming by naming: Battered women and the epidemic of

codependence. *Social Work*, *37*(1), 5-6.

Fuselier, D. A., Durham, R. L., & Wurtele, S. K. (2002). The child sexual abuser: Perceptions of

college students and professionals. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and

Treatment*, *14*(3), 271-280.

Goffman, Erving. (2009). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York:

    Simon & Schuster.

Greenfeld, L. A. (1997). *Sex offenses and offenders: An analysis of data on rape and sexual*

    assault. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Haegerich, T. M. (2002). *Influences of stereotypes on individual and group decisions in a novel*

    context: Juvenile offenders in court. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.

Langan, P. A., & Levin, D. J. (2002). Recidivism of prisoners released in 1994. *Federal*

    Sentencing Reporter, *15*(1), 58-65.

Levenson, J. S. (2008). Collateral consequences of sex offender residence restrictions. *Criminal*

    Justice Studies, *21*(2), 153-166.

Levenson, J. S., & Cotter, L. P. (2005). The effect of Megan's Law on sex offender reintegration.

    Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, *21*(1), 49-66.

Levenson, J. S., D'Amora, D. A., & Hern, A. L. (2007). Megan's law and its impact on

    community re- entry for sex offenders. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *25*(4), 587-602.

Levenson, J. S., & Hern, A. L. (2007). Sex offender residence restrictions: Unintended

    consequences and community reentry. *Justice Research and Policy*, *9*(1), 59-74.

Levenson, J., & Tewksbury, R. (2009). Collateral damage: Family members of registered sex

    offenders. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *34*(1-2), 54-68.

Meloy, M. L., Miller, S. L., & Curtis, K. M. (2008). Making sense out of nonsense: The

    deconstruction of state-level sex offender residence restrictions. *American Journal of*

    Criminal Justice, *33*(2), 209-222.

Miller, D. T., & McFarland, C. (1991). When social comparison goes awry: The case of

    pluralistic ignorance. In J. Suls & T. Wills (Eds.), *Social Comparison: Contemporary*

Theory and Research (287-313). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pontin, J. (2007). Artificial intelligence, with help from the humans. *New York Times*, *25*.

Sanghara, K. K., & Wilson, J. C. (2006). Stereotypes and attitudes about child sexual abusers: A

comparison of experienced and inexperienced professionals in sex offender treatment.

Legal and Criminological Psychology, *11*(2), 229-244.

Tewksbury, R., & Levenson, J. (2009). Stress experiences of family members of registered sex

offenders. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *27*(4), 611-626.

Tewksbury, R., & Mustaine, E. E. (2006). Where to find sex offenders: An examination of

residential locations and neighborhood conditions. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *19*(1), 61-75.

Tewksbury, R., & Mustaine, E. E. (2008). Where registered sex offenders live: Community

characteristics and proximity to possible victims. *Victims and Offenders*, *3*(1), 86-98.

Zandbergen, P. A., & Hart, T. C. (2006). Reducing housing options for convicted sex offenders:

Investigating the impact of residency restriction laws using GIS. *Justice Research and*

Policy, *8*(2), 1-24.

Zerbe, W. J., & Paulhus, D. L. (1987). Socially desirable responding in organizational behavior:

A reconception. *Academy of Management Review*, *12*(2), 250-264.

Zevitz, R. G. (2006). Sex offender community notification: Its role in recidivism and offender

reintegration. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *19*(2), 193-208.

*Table 1. Results of final, forced 3-factor factor analysis of Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders'
Partners Scale items.*

Scale items	Final, forced 3-factor solution		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Most sex offenders' partners are probably sexually deviant	*.68*	.32	-.18
Most sex offenders' partners are probably crazy	*.71*	*.46*	-.07
Most sex offenders' partners are probably evil	*.88*	.24	-.05
Most sex offenders' partners are kind	*-.63*	-.26	.24
Most sex offenders' partners probably lack empathy for others	*.68*	.32	-.13
Most sex offenders' partners are dangerous	*.77*	.32	-.09
I feel that most sex offenders' partners are the scum of the earth	*.73*	.19	-.10
Most sex offenders' partners are predatory and tend to prey on the weak	*.77*	.19	-.23
Most sex offenders' partners are probably psychopaths or sociopaths	*.87*	.31	-.10
Most sex offenders' partners probably help their partners commit sexual crimes	*.83*	.29	-.12
Most sex offenders' partners are probably also sex offenders themselves	*.73*	.26	-.14
Most sex offenders' partners tend to prey on the weak	*.83*	.14	-.15
Most sex offenders' partners are empathic and emotionally understanding	*-.43*	-.17	.29
Most sex offenders' partners are probably manipulative	*.82*	.18	-.09
Sex offenders' partners are immoral	*.74*	*.41*	-.01
Most sex offenders' partners are vulnerable	.12	*.58*	.08
Most sex offenders' partners have dependent personalities	*.36*	*.63*	-.01
Most sex offenders' partners are easily manipulated	.23	*.76*	-.01
Most sex offenders' partners lack self-respect	*.45*	*.79*	-.09
Most sex offenders' partners are weak-willed	*.46*	*.78*	-.08
Most sex offenders' partners are resilient and strong-natured	.01	*-.65*	.16
Most sex offenders' partners need psychiatric help	*.46*	*.71*	-.12
Most sex offenders' partners have low self-esteem	.32	*.84*	-.12
Most sex offenders' partners are too trusting	.11	*.72*	.20
Most sex offenders' partners are probably psychologically damaged	*.47*	*.77*	-.09
Most sex offenders' partners are delusional	*.47*	*.76*	-.03
Most sex offenders' partners probably want to leave, but are financially dependent on their sex-offending partner	.13	*.56*	.07
Most sex offenders' partners are naïve and gullible	*.38*	*.84*	-.05
Most sex offenders' partners probably want to leave, but are too afraid	.22	*.58*	.09
Most sex offenders' partners have been brainwashed	*.45*	*.69*	-.09

Most sex offenders' partners desperate for love	.34	*.82*	-.07
Most sex offenders' partners tend to be submissive	.28	*.76*	.13
Most sex offenders' partners are supportive of their partner's recovery	-.21	-.03	**.38**
Most sex offenders' partners are naturally forgiving	-.02	.03	*.62*
Most sex offenders' partners are very loyal to their sex-offending partner	-.06	.24	*.76*
Most sex offenders' partners probably genuinely care for their sex-offending partner, despite their past	*-.44*	-.09	*.69*
Most sex offenders' partners are faithful and devoted to their partner	-.29	-.03	*.72*
Most sex offenders' partners probably full-heartedly believe in their sex-offending partner's innocence	.12	.29	**.39**
Most sex offenders' partners are probably very non-judgmental and open-minded people	-.17	-.34	*.50*

Note. Factor loadings equal to or greater than .35 appear in boldface. Factor loadings equal to or greater than .40 appear in boldface and italics.

Table 2. *Correlation matrix illustrating relations between attitudes toward sex offenders' partners and support for registration laws, public notification laws, specific notification techniques, residence restriction laws, and hiring sex offenders' partners for a variety of positions.*

	Sex offenders' partners are "loyal"	Sex offenders' partners are "fearful and vulnerable"	Sex offenders' partners are "deviant and predatory"
Support for registration laws	.10	.34**	.28**
Support for public notification laws	-.01	.43**	.38**
Residents should be notified via posted fliers	.06	.37**	.39**
Residents should be notified door-to-door	.02	.33**	.23**
Residents should be notified via automated telephone calls	-.11	.38**	.27**
Notification letters should be sent home with school children	.02	.34**	.37**
Residents should be notified via public meetings	.13	.39**	.31**
Residents should be notified via the newspaper	-.07	.42**	.43**
Support for residence restriction laws	.01	.34**	.28**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners for childcare positions	.12	-.48**	-.42**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners for factory positions	.24**	-.35**	-.56**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners as school bus drivers	.08	-.51**	-.45**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners for healthcare positions	.19*	-.50**	-.54**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners as librarians	.18*	-.43**	-.53**

Support for hiring sex offenders' partners as school coaches	.05	-.46**	-.38**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners for non-elected government positions	.24**	-.40**	-.57**
Support for hiring sex offenders' partners for food service positions	.18*	-.46**	-.51**

Note: Greater values indicated greater support and greater agreement.
* $p < .05.$ ** $p < .01.$

Table 3. *Correlation matrix illustrating relations between participant sex, age, religiosity, political orientation, education level, and attitudes toward sex offenders' partners.*

	Sex	Age	Religiosity	Political orientation	Education level
Sex offenders' partners are "loyal"	-.01	-.05	-.09	.01	-.08
Sex offenders' partners are "fearful and vulnerable"	.07	.03	.02	-.23[**]	-.14
Sex offenders' partners are "deviant and predatory"	-.05	-.12	.12	-.24[**]	-.14

Note: Males were coded as 1and females as 0. Greater values indicated greater age, religiosity, politically liberal scores, and higher education levels.
[**] $p < .01$.

Appendix A

Stereotype Content Items

1. We are interested in people's knowledge of characteristics of different social groups. Specifically, we are interested in your beliefs about PARTNERS (i.e., spouses, girlfriends) of registered sex offenders (i.e., convicted sex offenders). Please write everything you think about PARTNERS of registered sex offenders. Your thoughts may include traits, behaviors, or beliefs of such PARTNERS. Please list all the thoughts that occur to you. You may take as much time as you need to complete listing your thoughts.

2. Regardless of your personal beliefs, what do you think the general public believes about PARTNERS (i.e., spouses, girlfriends) of registered sex offenders? In other words, what do you think is the public's stereotype about PARTNERS of registered sex offenders? Your response should reflect what people, in general, believe about PARTNERS of registered sex offenders, regardless of your personal beliefs. Please write everything that comes to mind, including traits, behaviors, or beliefs.

3. Regardless of your own personal beliefs, please write everything that comes to mind when you think about a "deviant and predatory" PARTNER of a sex offender. Your thoughts may include traits, behaviors, or beliefs of "deviant and predatory" partners of sex offenders. Please list all the thoughts that occur to you. You may take as much time as you need to complete listing your thoughts.

4. Regardless of your own personal beliefs, please write everything that comes to mind when you think about a "vulnerable and fearful" PARTNER of a sex offender. Your thoughts may include

traits, behaviors, or beliefs of "vulnerable and fearful" partners of sex offenders. Please list all

the thoughts that occur to you. You may take as much time as you need to complete listing your

thoughts.

Appendix B

Codebook

The following is a description of all codes that will apply to participants' statements regarding

the traits, behaviors, and beliefs of registered sex offenders' partners.

General Coding Rules:

1. The coder must read each question, before coding associated statements.

2. Before coding a participant's statements, the participant's entire response must be read, in

    order to understand the context in which the individual statements are being made. The

    coder must read each participant's response very carefully, in order to determine the true

    meaning of individual statements. For example, if the participant states that partners are

    "crazy" or "insane" and then, several sentences later, states "again, there has to be

    something wrong with them," then the statement should receive the "mental illness"

    code. In contrast, if a participant states "there has to be something wrong with them,"

    and the rest of the response contains no specific mention of mental illness, then the

    statement cannot be coded at all, because specifically what "has to be wrong with them"

    cannot be determined.

3. If the coder suspects that a statement might be about a non-relevant topic, the statement

    cannot be coded. That is, if a statement can be interpreted as having two meanings, and

    one of the possible meanings is irrelevant, then the statement must be treated

    conservatively and cannot be coded. For example, if a participant responds by listing a

    series of adjectives, and it is unclear whether or how the adjectives relate to the partners

    of registered sex offenders, the statements cannot be coded.

4. Within a given participant's response, the individual statements that should receive codes may be entire sentences, portions of sentences or thoughts, and even individual words or adjectives. In a given sentence, multiple codes may apply. If something seems important or relevant to the essence of a code, highlight it in the appropriate color for the relevant code, as described below.

5. If a participant asks questions in his or her response, as a way of expressing ideas, they cannot be coded. Do not search for or attempt to uncover the underlying meaning of a statement. If a statement does not clearly refer to the traits, behaviors, or beliefs held by partners of registered sex offenders, then the statement is likely useless for the purposes of this research.

6. If a participant states that they "feel" a certain way toward partners of registered sex offenders, or if they state that the partners of registered sex offenders make them feel a particular emotion, the statement cannot be coded. Such statements are tangential and do not relate to the core questions of this research.

7. When coding, ask yourself, "is this statement about the partners of registered sex offenders, or registered sex offenders?" If a statement is about registered sex offenders, or if it is unclear to whom a statement refers, the statement cannot be coded. However, the following statement represents an example of an exception to this rule. "Registered sex offenders are vile and predatory, and I think the same about their partners." In this instance, the description of registered sex offenders can be coded, because it has been clearly applied to their partners, as well.

8. Some participants' responses address their beliefs regarding the partners of different subgroups of registered sex offenders, such as pedophiles or those who are registered for

statutory offenses. These statements should still be coded and should be treated like all other acceptable statements. This study seeks to examine perceptions of the partners of registered sex offenders as a group, and the sex offender population is broad and diverse. It is to be expected that answers will be similarly diverse.

9. Statements may or may not receive more than one code, with the exception of statements that refer to the partners of registered sex offenders as "sociopaths" or "psychopaths." These terms should be always double-coded as both "deviant and predatory" and "mentally ill," because sociopaths and psychopaths are mentally ill, but exhibit behavior that is strongly associated with the "deviant and predatory" code.

10. If the coder does not understand the definition of a word, he or she must look up the word before coding the statement.

Codes

1. **Deviant and Predatory**: This code should be applied to any statement in which partners of registered sex offenders are portrayed as deviant, predatory, bad, evil, or dangerous. For example, participants may state that the partners of registered sex offenders are also sex offenders, or they may state that the partners of registered sex offenders contribute to or assist in the sexually deviant acts of their partners. Almost all statements that can be coded as deviant and predatory are negatively valenced and heavily judgmental. Statements such as "they are irresponsible, vile, and immoral" fit in this coding category, as do statements that suggest that partners of registered sex offenders masochistic or sexually deviant.

2. **Fearful and Vulnerable:** This code should be applied to any statement in which partners of registered sex offenders are portrayed as weak, vulnerable, gullible, naïve, or stupid.

This code should also be applied when partners of registered sex offenders are described as having been the victims of childhood abuse of any kind. Similarly, statements regarding the continued victimization of partners, by their sex offending partners, should receive this code. This code should also be utilized when the partners of registered sex offenders are described as being oblivious, in a negative way, to their partner's sex offender status, or when the partner is described as being in denial, ignoring the truth, or controlled, because these statements suggest that the partners have unhealthy needs to be loved, regardless of the quality of the relationship.

3. **Mentally Ill:** This code should be applied to any statement in which partners of registered sex offenders are explicitly described as delusional, insane, crazy, or mentally ill. Similarly, descriptions such as "they are psychopaths" should receive this code. More generally, references to partners of registered sex offenders that clearly indicate the belief that they are mentally ill should also receive this code. Statements such as "they should have their head examined" indicate such a belief. However, statements such as "there is something wrong with them" should not receive this code, because such statements are too vague. That is, such statements do not clearly implicate mental illness as the source of whatever is "wrong with them." Rather, such vague statements cannot be coded at all, as described in the "General Coding Rules."

4. **Loyal**: This code should be applied to any statement in which partners of registered sex offenders are portrayed in a positive light. For example, statements that describe the partners of registered sex offenders as strong, brave, or loyal for staying with their sex offender partners should receive this code. Similarly, this code should be applied to statements that describe traditional values, to the extent that the female partner does not

view divorce as a valid option. Sometimes, partners might also be described as self-

sacrificing, in the sense that they believe in their partner's innocence, or that their partner

can be rehabilitated, and they see it as their duty to support their partner during the

rehabilitation process.

Appendix C

"Deviant and Predatory" Subscale Items

1. Most sex offenders' partners are probably sexually deviant.
2. Most sex offenders' partners are probably crazy.
3. Most sex offenders' partners are probably evil.
4. Most sex offenders' partners are kind.
5. Most sex offenders' partners probably lack empathy for others.
6. Most sex offenders' partners are dangerous.
7. I feel that most sex offenders' partners are the scum of the Earth.
8. Most sex offenders' partners are predatory and tend to prey on the weak.
9. Most sex offenders' partners are probably psychopaths or sociopaths.
10. Most sex offenders' partners probably help their partners commit sexual crimes.
11. Most sex offenders' partners are probably also sex offenders themselves.
12. Most sex offenders' partners tend to prey on the weak.
13. Most sex offenders' partners are empathic and emotionally understanding.
14. Most sex offenders' partners are probably manipulative.
15. Most sex offenders' partners are immoral.

Note. Items 4 and 13 were reverse-scored.

Appendix D

"Fearful and Vulnerable" Subscale Items

1. Most sex offenders' partners are vulnerable.
2. Most sex offenders' partners have dependent personalities.
3. Most sex offenders' partners are easily manipulated.
4. Most sex offenders' partners lack self-respect.
5. Most sex offenders' partners are weak-willed.
6. Most sex offenders' partners are resilient and strong natured.
7. Most sex offenders' partners need psychiatric help.
8. Most sex offenders' partners have low self-esteem.
9. Most sex offenders' partners are too trusting.
10. Most sex offenders' partners are probably psychologically disabled.
11. Most sex offenders' partners are delusional.
12. Most sex offenders' partners probably want to leave, but are financially dependent on their sex-offending partner.
13. Most sex offenders' partners are naïve and gullible.
14. Most sex offenders' partners probably want to leave, but are too afraid.
15. Most sex offenders' partners have been brainwashed.
16. Most sex offenders' partners are probably desperate for love.
17. Most sex offenders' partners tend to be submissive.