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THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND
INFORMATION ON PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS
OF SEX OFFENDERS

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Clinical Psychology

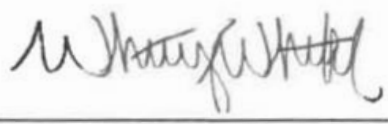
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Abstract

Many studies have examined the public's perception of crime in the United State of America. As a whole, the public tends to favor harsh punishments and longer sentences for most crimes. In addition, the public tends to feel even more negatively toward sex offenders, often supporting punitive measures and restrictions when sex offenders are released, such as lifetime registration on the national sex offender registry. Although perceptions of crime, and sex offenses in general, appear to be negative among the general public, more recent research indicates that these perceptions can be influenced if information about the crime and offender is received. Thus, the main focus of this study was to examine how perceptions of a sex offender may vary based on demographic and background information provided about the offender, such as the offender's biological sex, race, and childhood upbringing. We also sought to assess if this background and demographic information would influence participants' decisions about what should happen to an offender (e.g., be part of the sex offender registry). A total of 366 participants completed a survey through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The survey included a vignette that detailed a hypothetical sexual assault crime with an offender as well as the *Attitudes toward Sex Offenders* (ATS-21) scale which was used to measure participants' perceptions of the offender. There were 12 possible vignettes; each vignette contained varying combinations of the factors mentioned above (i.e., biological sex, race, and childhood upbringing), which provided the participant with information about the sex offender to determine how this information would influence their perceptions. In addition, perceptions about the placement of the offender on the sex offender registry were also measured. We hypothesized that there would be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's overall perception of the sex offender. Based on prior literature, we anticipated that

perceptions would be more negative when participants received information that the offender was male, the offender identified with a minoritized racial group, and when the offender experienced a rough upbringing. Furthermore, we hypothesized that there would *not* be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's thoughts towards requiring the sex offender to be placed on the sex offender registry. A series of between-subjects ANOVA were conducted. Findings suggest that only one of our hypotheses was supported. There was no significant difference between the vignette conditions when assessing perceptions toward the sex offender, meaning that participants had more negative views of the offender regardless of the background information provided (not supporting hypothesis one). This finding can be seen as support for rational choice theory as influencing the public's perceptions of sex offenders. Additionally, participants overwhelmingly supported the requirement of sex offenders to be placed on the national sex offender registry regardless of the background information provided (supporting hypothesis two). This finding supported previous research regarding the sex offender registry. Limitations as well as future research and the implications of the current findings are discussed.

Keywords: attitudes towards sex offenders; public perceptions; sex offender; sex offender registry; upbringing;

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INTRODUCTION

Public Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Many studies have examined the public's perception of crime (Roberts & Stalans, 1997; Tonry, 2004; Cullen et al., 2000; Costelloe et al., 2009). As a whole, the public tends to favor harsh punishments and longer sentences for most crimes. In addition, the public tends to feel even more negatively toward sex offenders, often supporting punitive measures and restrictions when sex offenders are released (Oliver & Barlow, 2010). One main focus of such support is requiring individuals to register as a sex offender on the national sex offender registry, which places restrictions on where the sex offender can live and work post-release (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). One theory that might explain the negative view of sex offenders is rational choice theory. This theory holds that people, in this case, criminals or sex offenders, are rational beings who weigh the pros and cons before engaging in some kind of action, in this case, a sex offense (Ray et al., 2020).

As a result, the public at large may simply view sex offenders as people who made their choice, knowing that the cons would be a harsh punishment and placement on the sex offender registry. However, others may argue that the main theory at play regarding sex offenders is labeling theory. Labeling theory holds that sanctions such as prison time or the requirement to register as a sex offender can actually increase the likelihood of recidivism (Kavish, 2017). In other words, sex offenders are more likely to continue engaging in sexual offenses and criminal activity as a result of being labeled a "sex offender" and a "criminal." However, this theory might not explain the public's perceptions of sex offenders and would more so influence the actions of the sex offenders.

The study aims to examine public perceptions of sex offenders using the rational choice model as a theoretical guide. A contribution of the study includes the empirical investigation of demographic (e.g., biological sex, race, etc.) and environmental (e.g., childhood upbringing) factors, that may differentially impact overall perceptions. In the sections that follow, a justification for the need to conduct this work as well as a review of previous literature relevant to the study will be provided.

Review of Relevant Literature and Theory

The context surrounding overall crime can cause public perceptions to differ; however, research has shown that most people agree regarding their demographic perceptions of sex offenders and how they feel about the offense (Logan, 2017; Rose, 2020; Vandiver et al., 2017). The purpose of this research is to examine if receiving background information (i.e., prior experiences of childhood abuse) and demographic information about a person convicted of a sexual offense against a minor will influence overall perceptions of the offender. Prior research has shown that each individual's view on crime differs depending on the context and situations regarding that crime (King & Roberts, 2017). In addition, several studies have found that people typically experience fear and outrage regarding child sex offenders (King & Roberts, 2017; Sims & Johnston, 2004; Warr, 1995). Overall, research tends to show that perceptions of crimes based on demographic information regarding a defendant can impact an individual's perception of that defendant.

Furthermore, the sex offender registry has an interesting existence as it has been shown to be ineffective but is widely popular among most people. Many people support the registry despite having very little knowledge of it and despite few people using it (Vandiver et al., 2017). Therefore, more research surrounding the sex offender registry and its popularity despite its

ineffectiveness may provide more information that can add to the existing literature. In all, these results can pose a problem within the justice system, as individuals who are standing trial may not be judged equally because the public is basing their opinions on the defendant's background and demographic information rather than on the crime that was committed.

Relevant Laws

According to Kansas state law, the rape of a child under the age of 14 is considered a level one-person felony (21 K.S.A. § 5503, 2017). A level one-person felony is one of the most severe types of non-drug offenses, which means it carries a hefty sentence for child sexual abusers. The recommended sentence for the rape of a child is 253 months or approximately 21 years in prison. Sentencing for more mitigated or aggravated cases can range anywhere from 240 to 267 months. Recommended sentencing ranges increase with more cases and an increased history of child sexual abuse (Kansas Sentencing Commission, 2015). In addition to a lengthy prison sentence, child sexual abusers are required to register as sex offenders in the state of Kansas. Rape of any kind requires a lifetime registration as a sex offender, and offenders must register within a three-day time period after being sentenced and confined to a correctional facility. Upon release, child sexual abusers will be required to update their registration depending on where they reside within three days and must continue reporting four times a year in person to law enforcement in the area where they reside (Kansas Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). Therefore, these crimes are viewed very seriously in the criminal justice system and, thus, are also seen more seriously by the public.

The sex offender registry was created after a string of high-profile child abduction, molestation, and murder cases brought sex offenses to the forefront of the public's attention in the early 1990s and early 2000s. These laws became known as sex offender registration and

notification (SORN) laws. The main goal of SORN laws is to notify the public of sex offenders living in their area with access to the national sex offender registry (Klein & Cooper, 2019; Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). With access to sex offenders in their area, it is believed that people would use this knowledge to take precautions and ensure they and their children do not fall prey to such predators.

However, SORN laws have been shown to be very flawed and do not serve their intended purpose for a few reasons. For one, most people do not use the sex offender registry to look up sex offenders in their area, even if they support the requirement for sex offenders to be on the registry. In fact, one study found that over half of the participants admitted to having never accessed the sex offender registry. In addition, the sex offender registry and the restrictions that come with it often cause stress to the sex offender, which is more likely to cause them to re-offend (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Klein & Cooper, 2019; Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). Thus, these laws are not reducing recidivism in sex offenders as intended and, in fact, do more harm than good.

Additionally, researchers have found that more information a person has regarding a case and the offender can cause their perceptions to be more positive or can cause them to be more negative toward sex offenders, depending on what the information is. In their article, Rosselli and Jeglic (2017) found that individuals with a more conservative ideology and very little information about sex offenders and SORN laws tend to favor harsh prison sentences and the sex offender registry. On the other hand, individuals who know more about sex offenders and how ineffective the SORN laws are, tend to view sex offenders more positively and support treatment for sex offenders rather than harsh punishments and the restrictions that come with the sex registry. Klein and Cooper (2019) attribute the negative attitude of the public towards sex

offenders to a “moral panic.” In other words, the unfavorable view or even fear of sex offenders has shaped how the public views them and thus how the public feels sex offenders should be punished despite evidence to the contrary of those beliefs. However, when an individual's perceptions are compared to that of the whole, there can be a difference, especially depending on the information the individual knows about the offender, the victim, and the specific crime (King & Roberts, 2017).

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory is a framework that has been discussed for decades and has some empirical support. The concept of the rational choice theory emerged from the works of Cesare Beccaria (1764) and Jeremy Bentham (1789). Modern interpretations of each of their work have shaped how crime is viewed. Paternoster (2010) explored Beccaria's ideas in relation to deterrence theory, which stems from the idea that the severity of a punishment should match the severity of the crime so as to deter the commission of the crime. Rational choice theory, as it is known today, stems from Bentham's idea that people are rational beings who work towards their own self-interests and seek pleasure rather than pain. This theory is a fairly simple theory to understand, thus, making it an excellent fit for explaining public perceptions of criminals in general and of sex offenders.

The theory holds that individuals are rational beings who consider the costs and benefits of an action before acting upon it (McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014). For example, a criminal would consider the costs of committing a crime, such as possible prison time, as well as the benefits, such as having more money. Ultimately, the individual would decide whether or not to engage in criminal behavior depending on if the benefits outweighed the costs or vice versa. RCT includes the concept of bounded rationality which is the assumption that people have

complete information. This means that when someone decides to commit a crime, they know the true penalties and the exact rewards for committing the crime. On that same note, it also holds that people have the same ability to process information, meaning people would come to the same conclusions given the same information regardless of each individual's personal history, mental capacity, or biases. For the purposes of this study, it is understood that not all people have access to every bit of information or have the same ability to process information as others. Instead, it is understood that regardless of info, people will still come to their own conclusions and make decisions based on those conclusions.

RCT does have its limitations as it has been shown to be “more of a ‘mid-range’ theory, as opposed to one that seeks to explain offending generally” (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 384). In other words, while the theory does have its merits, it cannot be assumed to explain all crimes. It is recognized that even though people do not have all the information a majority of individuals may struggle to see themselves turning to crime as they may be too wary of the consequences. As a result, it would be easy for those individuals to see how a criminal may turn to crime if the criminal had determined the pros outweighed the cons, consequently leading them to offend. Therefore, this theory is plausible in explaining why the public may support harsh punishments and the sex offender registry for sex offenders, as they believed it to deter sex offenders from re-offending.

For example, a study found that 29% of participants agreed with the item “people have the choice whether they have a dominant sexual interest in children or not,” as compared with 56% who agreed with another statement (Jahnke et al., 2014, p. 25). In other words, 29% and 44% of people agreed that people diagnosed with pedophilia had a choice in having a sexual attraction to children, which could also translate to people agreeing that individuals with

pedophilia have a choice on whether they offend. One study also found that some individuals viewed child sexual abuse as a choice for offenders in posts online. In the posts that were examined, “child sexual abusers are conceptualized as calculating and rational, as making a deliberate decision, rather than being driven by a perceived innate or internal force such as a sexual orientation or mental illness” (Richards, 2018, p. 843). These findings directly link back to how people’s perceptions of sexual offenses can be explained by rational choice theory.

Pilot Study on Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Before designing this study, I completed a pilot study about the impacts of background information (e.g., good upbringing, bad upbringing, and no information about upbringing) regarding a sex offender on participants’ likelihood of sentencing the offender to prison or to a mental health facility. This study also looked at how this background information would impact the participants’ decision to place the offender on the sex offender registry. The first research question from this study was, “does background information about a defendant’s upbringing influence decisions to recommend a prison or mental health facility sentence?” The second research question was, “will background information on upbringing influence what participants think should happen to the defendant after being released?”

This study included 119 participants, with 85 identifying as female and 34 identifying as male. The participants were first asked to fill out basic demographic questions and were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes. These vignettes detailed information about a person (Taylor) who was found guilty of a sex offense against a minor. The vignettes differed based on the information presented about upbringing. For example, vignette one described Taylor having a rough upbringing (i.e., Taylor was abused as a child). After reading one of the three vignettes, the participants were asked to complete a comprehension check to ensure that the

information from the vignette was understood and read. Lastly, participants were then asked to respond to questions about punishment (i.e., a prison sentence or mental health rehabilitation) and future consequences following release (i.e., join sex offender registry; enforced residence restrictions; neighborhood notification of previous record; GPS tracking; attend therapy).

Furthermore, the results of this pilot study provided some insight into how the upbringing of a sex offender can impact an individual's perception of that offender. In general, despite the condition, participants strongly agreed that Taylor should join the sex offender registry, only be allowed to live in certain areas, and should notify neighbors of their previous record. Participants also agreed that Taylor should be required to participate in therapy. Additionally, participants with the rough upbringing vignette were more likely to recommend Taylor go to a mental health facility rather than prison compared to the other vignettes (good upbringing and control). However, they also thought that Taylor should still follow the standards put in place for the sex offender registry.

Overall, the information provided did not have an impact on standards that need to be followed after release from prison. Based on these results, the study is aimed at furthering research on public perceptions of sex offenders based on the offender's demographic and background information.

Demographic Factors That May Influence Public Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Race. While the general public tends to have a negative attitude towards sex offenders, there are other factors that can further negatively influence this perception. One factor that is present in nearly all crimes is the race of the offender. When reviewing United States (of America) Sentencing Commission data for all federal criminal cases between 2010 and 2012, researchers found that, overall, people of color, such as African Americans, are more likely to be

arrested and face harsher punishments for similar crimes than their Caucasian counterparts (Franklin & Henry, 2020). More specifically, Hartley et al. (2021) found that in cases of child pornography and sexual abuse, African American and Hispanic individuals received stricter sentences when controlling for other factors. Furthermore, Gross and colleagues (2017) found that while African Americans account for just over 10% of the population in America, they, unfortunately, account for a majority of wrongful convictions. That is to say that African Americans are more likely to be charged and convicted of a crime even when they are innocent.

Researchers have even studied how juvenile offenders are affected when charged with sex crimes. In Alabama, it was found that African American juvenile sex offenders were overrepresented in the criminal justice system compared to Caucasian juvenile sex offenders (Fix et al., 2015). One interesting study found that African Americans seemed to receive more lenient sentences for sex crimes compared to other violent offenses. However, the disparity between sentences for African Americans and Caucasians in regard to sexual offenses still remained. The “leniency” between sex offenses and other violent crimes in African Americans is mainly attributed to how sexual assault and rape have historically been seen as the victim’s fault and not taken as seriously as other crimes (Maxwell et al., 2003). The difference between sentences of African Americans and Caucasians remains consistent with other research. Therefore, there seems to be a disparity in how people of color are treated in the criminal justice system, which leads to these harsher punishments.

According to Franklin and Henry (2020), Indigenous Americans or American Indians, unfortunately, face the harshest of punishments out of other sample groups that they measured (African American, Latino/Hispanic, Caucasian). These racial disparities are likely present in perceptions as well, meaning that people of color who engage in sex offenses are going to be

perceived as more dangerous and, thus, more deserving of harsh punishment. The term Indigenous American and American Indian are used in this paper because they are now the more accepted terms rather than Native American. The term American Indian will be used in the study rather than Indigenous American, as this term is not very well known.

Biological Sex. Offender gender and sex can also play a role in how people perceive a sex offender. Most often, the generic idea of a sex offender is a man, so people tend to ignore the fact that women can be sex offenders as well. In fact, some people feel that women who engage in similar sex crimes to their male counterparts are not as dangerous and should not be taken as seriously. These opinions tend to come from people over 50 years of age and from men who live in rural areas (Cain et al., 2017). These attitudes do not stop with older people or people in rural areas, however. In several news stories surrounding female teachers who had sexual relations with a student, thus committing a sex offense, there was a presence of comments in support of the teacher, and even some stated the student should be grateful and fortunate to have been abused by the teacher (Zack et al., 2018).

However, most of the comments condemned the teacher, meaning the commenters understood the inequalities in the treatment and sentencing of sex offenders. However, the authors did note that very few comments explicitly described the teacher as a sex offender, which still lends to the disparate way men and women are viewed regarding sex offenses (Zack et al., 2018). In addition, many studies have also measured the gender gap in sentencing for sex offenders. As Shields and Cochran (2020) confirmed in their study, women do often receive lighter sentences for similar crimes than their male counterparts.

While sex plays a role in sentencing, sexual orientation and gender also play a similar role. Researchers have found that cases of same-sex statutory rape were more likely to lead to an

arrest, with the most likely being cases of a female victim and a female offender. In other words, statutory rape cases with a male offender and female victim or vice versa were not treated as harshly as cases of male-on-male cases and female-on-female cases. In fact, when considering if there was a romantic relationship between the offender and the victim, cases of male offender and female victim were even less likely to lead to an arrest, whereas if a romantic relationship existed between a same-sex couple, it amplifies the chances of an arrest. Researchers attributed this phenomenon to the view that same-sex relationships are more “deviant” and thus are more deserving of punishment (Chaffin et al., 2016). Therefore, perceptions of gay or lesbian offenders may be more negative than those of cisgender male and female offenders. While the gender of the sex offender is an important factor to consider and was worth at least mentioning, this study will focus on the sex (male or female) of the offender in order to narrow down which factors are being measured.

Environmental Factors that may Influence Public Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Upbringing. While race and sex can influence public perceptions of sex offenders, there is another factor that has not seen much research: upbringing. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature previously discussed by examining how the upbringing of a sex offender can influence whether the public demands harsh punishment or treatment. There are two different versions of “upbringing” that will be mixed with the other factors discussed, that include a “good” upbringing and a “rough” upbringing. The “good” upbringing will consist of what most people would consider normal, where the offender did not endure any kind of physical or sexual abuse as a child. The “rough” upbringing, therefore, will consist of the sex offender having experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child. By introducing these two conditions, it could provide information on whether the sex offender had been abused as a child, might make

people see them as a victim as well, and influence whether they might recommend treatment instead of a prison sentence.

Although there is not a lot of research on how upbringing can influence public perceptions, some research has shown that the public does believe that someone who commits a sex crime has been sexually abused themselves. Many child sexual abusers do fall into the abused-abuser category. Research has shown that when examining child sexual abusers, most had been sexually abused when they were children (Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Gerwinn et al., 2018). However, not all who have experienced sexual abuse as children grow to abuse as adults. Studies that focused on a more general population have found that a large proportion of individuals who had been sexually abused as a child did not become abusers themselves, as there are other factors that can contribute to someone becoming a sexual abuser. Based on past research, there is not just one factor that causes sex offending. For example, parental attachment and childhood neglect or non-sexual abuse can also influence a person's proclivity towards perpetrating sex crimes on children (Glasser et al., 2001). In other words, the causes of the actions of a sex offender are not black and white.

Additional environmental factors. Most people imagine child sexual abusers as strangers who must have something seriously wrong with them in order for them to target children. The public also believes that these offenders must be pedophiles. An individual is diagnosed with pedophilic disorder if the individual is at least 16 years of age and has experienced intense sexual fantasies about or sexual attraction towards children who are 13 years of age or younger and have had those urges for at least six months. Additionally, the individual has to have acted on those urges or the urges and fantasies must cause distress on the person's life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Unfortunately, child sexual abusers are, more

often than not, members of the family or close friends with the family of the child that they choose to target (Vandiver et al., 2017). It is important to note that there is a difference between an offender who has sexually abused a child and an individual who is diagnosed with pedophilia, as there has been a major misconception between the two. Many people tend to believe that child sexual abuse and pedophilia are one and the same (Jahnke et al., 2015; McCartan, 2010).

However, most individuals who have been diagnosed with pedophilia do not act on their sexual urges and will never sexually abuse a child (Cantor & Ian, 2016; Goode, 2010). On the other hand, most child sexual abusers are not diagnosed with pedophilia and most often act out of opportunity rather than on their sexual attraction toward children (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). In other words, individuals who sexually abuse children are not always physically attracted to those children and may choose to abuse them as a means of control or because children are easily accessible.

Additionally, child sexual abusers are not very different from their non-abuser counterparts and mirror non-abusers in a few different aspects. For example, a majority of child sexual abusers tend to be married or have been married before, are religious and attend church, are employed, and close to half of child sexual abusers have attended higher education (Abel & Harlowe, 2001). That is to say, that child sexual abusers are not always the “creepy” transient who is continuously on the prowl for victims. Child sexual abusers are actually able to put themselves into positions that allow them easy access to children, even in the comfort of the homes of those children. In order to accomplish this feat, child sexual abusers use manipulation to gain the trust of not only the child victim but the victim's family members as well. (Vandiver et al., 2017). Another characteristic of most child sexual abusers is they tend to be middle-aged. One study found that the age of child sexual abusers averaged around 40 years old (Gerwinn et

al., 2018). While there are some commonalities between abusers and non-abusers, there are factors that could lead to an individual offending or re-offending.

Some of the empirically supported risk factors include sexual preoccupation, general self-regulation problems, and employment instability, to name a few (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). Along with these empirically supported factors, some research has shown some other commonly believed factors from public opinion. For example, Richards (2018) collected data from Facebook comments as well as comments from an online petition regarding the Circles of Support and Accountability program in Australia, which was fertile ground for debate about child sex offenders. In all, 768 comments were analyzed, resulting in four common factors believed by the public to be the cause of child sexual abuse. These factors included “sexual orientation; mental illness; choice; and the cycle of abuse” (Richards, 2018, p. 841). While utilizing social media to measure public perceptions is a rather new concept, there have been other ways of measuring perceptions with more evidence-based instruments.

Measuring Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Many instruments have been developed like the *Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders* (CATSO) scale, the *Attitudes to Sexual Offenders* (ATS) scale, and the *Perceptions of Sex Offenders* (PSO) Scale (Church et al., 2008; Hogue, 1993, Harper & Hogue, 2015). Until recently, the CATSO scale had been used as the ATS was seen as too long and difficult to score. However, many flaws with the CATSO have been recently discussed. For example, the CATSO is comprised of a four-factor structure that includes Social Isolation, Capacity to Change, Dangerousness, and Deviancy. However, few researchers have been able to replicate the findings of church et al. (2008) as some have only identified two factors, with some even identifying four different factors than the original researchers found when proposing the CATSO. As a result,

many have called for major changes to the CATSO due to its structural inconsistency. Additionally, since the PSO was developed based on the CATSO, it has similar limitations.

Instead, Hogue and Harper (2019) proposed a revised version of the ATS that is significantly shorter, consisting of only 21 items as opposed to 36, thus resolving one of the major concerns of the original ATS. The 21-item short form of the ATS puts it closer in line with the 18-item CATSO while also being more structurally sound. In addition, the construct validity for the ATS-21 has a high-to-moderate correlation with the Harper and Hogue (2015) PSO scale. There were higher correlations with intent (.67) and social distance (.59) compared with the PSO. This can indicate that the ATS-21 is more valid than the PSO and CATSO and is able to better measure public perceptions of sex offenders.

Additionally, the ATS scale shows high test-retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks and across the three conditions. The reliability was .87, .98, and .82 for conditions one, two, and three, respectively. This scale, as compared to the original ATS, “represents a clearer and more theoretically valid approach to studying attitudes” (Hogue & Harper, 2019, p.23). In other words, the 21-item short form of the ATS will be a valuable tool in measuring public perceptions of sex offenders for the purpose of this study in examining how factors such as race, sex, and the previously unexplored “upbringing” may influence those perceptions.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STUDY

Given the literature and information described above, the main purpose of the study will be to examine the impact of demographic and background/environmental information at influencing public perceptions of sex offenders. The operational definitions and hypotheses below were developed with prior research (including the pilot study conducted prior to this work) in mind.

Operational Definitions

There will be one main independent variable studied, which will be a manipulation of background and demographic information about a sex offender. The manipulation will include the following: 1) varying details about the sex offender's biological sex (either male or female); 2) varying information about the offender's race (either American Indian, African American, or Caucasian); and 3) varying information about the sex offender's upbringing (either "rough upbringing" categorized by the offender experiencing abuse or "good upbringing" categorized by the offender not being abused).

In addition, there are two dependent variables, which are the participant's perceptions of the sex offender and the participants' thoughts on the sex offender registry. These perceptions will be measured and defined by the 21-item short form of the ATS, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions. Thoughts on the sex offender registry will be measured based on responses from the participant to five questions rated on a one to six Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stricter standards that the convicted offender must follow after being released from prison (e.g., being placed on the sex offender registry).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis one. There will be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's overall perception of the sex offender. Based on prior literature, we anticipate that perceptions will be more negative when participants receive information that the offender is male, the offender identifies with a minoritized racial group, and when the offender experienced a rough upbringing.

Hypothesis two. There will *not* be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's thoughts towards requiring the sex offender to be placed on the

sex offender registry. Based on the findings of prior research and our pilot study, we anticipate that participants will be in favor of the sex offender registry regardless of the background and demographic information provided about the offender.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were recruited to complete the study using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is a system created and hosted by Amazon that allows employers or researchers to gain participation by offering a small incentive for those who choose to participate. For this study, participants were awarded \$0.75 for their involvement in completing the survey. A power analysis was conducted a priori using G*Power to determine the appropriate sample size for this study. For the ANOVAs conducted on the variables of interest, using a small effect size and a p -value set at .05 (~95% statistical power), the target sample size was approximately 300 participants; thus, to account for any attrition or missing data/responses, we aimed to recruit approximately 350 total participants. Our total sample size was 366 participants. We designed the survey to ensure an almost equal number of participants were assigned to each vignette condition (12 conditions total). Overall, the number of participants in each condition ranged between ~26-35. For a complete list of sample size information per condition, please see *Table 1*.

In order to avoid sampling from a vulnerable population, our designated (and IRB approved) age range for this study was 18-65. However, out of the 366 participants who completed the survey, two individuals were excluded from the data analyses described below

because of their age (i.e., one participant reported being 15 and the other participant reported being 67).¹

Thus, in total, we included 364 participants in our data analyses. Demographic information was collected and revealed that 232 participants identified as biological male (63.7%), 131 identified as biological female (36%), and one participant identified as a transgender female (.3%). In response to a question asking for their ethnicity, 329 participants identified as Caucasian (90.4%), 10 as African American (2.7%), 11 as American Indian or Alaska Native (3%), six as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1.6%), and six as biracial (1.6%). The mean age of the participants was 34.34 (age range was between 19-65 years).

Regarding participants' education level, the majority indicated that they had earned a MBA/MA/MS Degree (42.3%) and a B.A./B.S. degree (31.9%). We also asked a question about annual income. Findings suggest that the majority of participants (31.9%) were in the \$50,000 to \$74,999 annual income range. As for political ideology, the majority of participants were either liberal (25%) or conservative (23.4%). Most participants (27.5%) were located in the southeast region. Lastly, in response to the question, "have you or someone you are close to experienced sexual assault" the majority of the participants (84.1%) indicated *yes*.

Materials

Vignettes (Manipulated Independent Variable)

Participants read one of 12 vignettes with varying information provided on the offender's sex, race, and upbringing. An example of one of the vignettes is as follows (bolded information shows what was manipulated with each vignette):

¹ Because the survey responses were anonymous, we were unable to contact the two people who completed the survey who were outside of the acceptable age range. However, we did compensate these individuals for participating and notified the FHSU IRB of this discrepancy.

You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **African American female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime. Now, it is up to you to decide if the defendant should be convicted to a prison sentence or placed into a mental health facility for treatment (see *Appendix A* for the full list of vignettes).

Manipulation Checks

To measure if the participants read and understood the assigned vignette, they completed a series of manipulation check questions (e.g., “what was the sex of the defendant;” see *Appendix B* for a complete list of questions).

Sex Offender Registry (Dependent Variable)

In addition to completing the ATS scale, participants also responded to questions about their views on what should happen to the offender upon release. While we asked a variety of questions to assess thoughts on the release of the offender, for this study we were primarily interested in how participants would respond to a question about the sex offender registry. Participants were asked to rate on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert scale if “the defendant (in the vignette) should be listed as a convicted sex offender on the National Sex Offender Registry.” For a complete list of questions, please see *Appendix C*.

Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders Scale (Dependent Variable)

After reading the assigned vignette, participants completed the 21-item short form of the ATS to measure their perceptions of the sex offender as presented in their assigned vignette (see *Appendix D* for the ATS scale). Using this ATS scale, participants were asked to indicate their

level of agreement with 21 different statements, such as “sex offenders are different from other people” and “most sex offenders are victims of circumstances and deserve help.” The 21 items were rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale. Items were scored such that a high score on the scale indicated an overall positive perception, whereas a low score indicated a more negative perception. A composite score was calculated by averaging responses to the 21 items. The ATS has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure; in previous research, this scale demonstrates good psychometric properties (Hogue & Harper, 2019). Cronbach’s alpha for the current study was .93.

Procedure

After securing IRB approval, we set up the survey on MTurk to recruit participants. The first page of the online survey was an informed consent statement that participants read and agreed to before starting the survey; by continuing with the study, the participants agreed to the terms of the study and, therefore, provided their electronic consent. Participants were able to stop the study and withdraw at any time should they have chosen to do so.

After filling out the demographic information, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the 12 vignette conditions. We setup random assignment via Qualtrics. Specifically, for each condition/vignette, we setup a block function in Qualtrics that randomly assigned approximately 30 people to each condition. The participants were asked to read the vignette and then filled out manipulation check questions about the vignette (see Appendix B). This ensured that the participants read and understood the information in the vignettes. After the manipulation check, participants were asked questions regarding what should happen to the offender after being released (e.g., should the offender be placed on the sex offender registry; see Appendix C). Lastly, participants were then asked to fill out the ATS scale (see Appendix D).

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Perceptions of Sex Offenders

We hypothesized that there would be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's overall perception of the sex offender. Specifically, we expected that perceptions would be more negative when participants received information that the offender was male, the offender identified with a minoritized racial group, and the offender experienced a good upbringing. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a one-way between subjects ANOVA. Homogeneity of variance was assessed by Levene's test, which indicated that the assumption of equal variance was met prior to running the ANOVA ($F = 1.64, p = .10$). However, results of the omnibus F test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the vignettes with respect to perceptions about the sex offender, $F(11, 352) = 1.51, p = .13$. Overall, our partial eta squared used to measure effect size was equal to .05, suggesting a very small (and non-significant) difference between the conditions on perceptions of offender.

These findings do not support the tested hypothesis, such that there was no significant difference between the vignette conditions when assessing perceptions toward the sex offender. It is important to note that while we did not find a significant difference between the groups regarding their perceptions, the mean values across the conditions similarly indicated that our participants appear to hold a negative view of sex offenders regardless of the background and demographic information provided. Mean scores (on a 1-5 Likert scale) were clustered around the mid-point of the scale (i.e., a mean of ~ 2.5 ; see *Table 2* for a complete list of mean scores). This suggests that participants rated sex offenders more negatively regardless of the information that was provided, or that the provided information did not seem to significantly influence their perceptions as all participants across conditions reported negative perceptions of sex offenders.

While not what we expected to occur, this finding does align with previous research on the overall perceptions of sex offenders and is discussed more in the Discussion section below.

Hypothesis Two: Sex Offender Registry

Based on our prior research, we anticipated that there would not be a significant effect of background and demographic information on the participant's thoughts toward requiring the sex offender to be placed on the sex offender registry. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a one-way between subjects ANOVA. A similar pattern of results found for hypothesis 1 also occurred when testing this hypothesis. The assumption of homogeneity of variance indicated no violation ($F = 1.96, p = .30$). However, results of the omnibus F test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the vignettes and participants recommendation to place the sex offender on the sex offender registry, $F(11, 351) = .64, p = .79$. Partial eta squared was equal to .02, again suggesting a very small (and non-significant) effect size. Similar to hypothesis 1, the mean values for this dependent variable across all conditions were high, thus indicating that our participants favor the registry regardless of the background and demographic information provided (see *Table 3* for a complete list of means for each condition). This finding supports our hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The primary importance of this study is that it examines how upbringing, a previously unexplored factor, may influence public perceptions of sex offenders. This provides a needed contribution to existing literature and may have an impact on future legislative action regarding sex offenders along with general future research. Based on past literature, general public perceptions of crime tend to favor harsher punishments for the offender (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). However, based on the aforementioned pilot study research and past literature,

perceptions of crimes can be more complex. The results of the current study showed that the information given to participants about the sex offender (e.g., sex, race, and upbringing) did not influence their perceptions, as all participants had an overall negative perception of the sex offender. Regardless of the condition that the participants were assigned, the mean values across the conditions similarly indicated that our participants appear to hold a negative view of sex offenders. This finding does not support our hypothesis and is contradictory to previous research testing how the presence of additional information about an offender may change general perceptions (King & Roberts, 2017). However, the findings do provide more support for the idea that rational choice theory could explain how the participants view sex offenders. That is to say, the participants may view sex offenders as rational actors who have chosen to do bad things, and thus, deserve stricter punishment and more negative perceptions.

One additional possible explanation for the findings associated with hypothesis one is that the participants relied on their overall attitudes toward sex offenders to inform their responses to the ATS-21 scale, and either did not internalize or absorb the provided information on the offender. Importantly, and discussed more below in the limitations section, several participants who completed the survey failed one of the manipulation check questions, namely the open-ended response question. For example, when asked to describe the type of crime that the offender was found guilty of, some participants described crimes other than a sex crime, such as stealing. However, when completing our multiple-choice manipulation check questions, participants were able to accurately identify the sex, race, and upbringing of the defendant in the vignette. Because some participants were not able to accurately identify the type of crime perpetrated in the vignette (a recall question and not multiple guess question), it may be the case that they were overloaded with too much information and/or did not read or pay as close

attention to the vignettes as we envisioned. This may have resulted in the participants basing their responses about the sex offender off of general knowledge or prior perceptions as opposed to the individual sex offender (and the background information about that person) portrayed in the vignettes. Future research might consider a more streamlined approach to the vignettes in which each variable of interest (e.g., sex, race, and upbringing) is presented separately. In doing so, future research may be able to better discern which information, if any at all, differentially influences perceptions.

Furthermore, the results supported hypothesis two in that there was not a significant difference between the conditions and favorability of the sex offender registry. Findings illustrate that participants were in favor of placing the sex offender on the registry regardless of demographic and background information. It is important to consider that while most people support the sex offender registry in general, very few actually use the registry (Vandiver et al., 2017). In other words, people seem to agree with the concept of the sex offender registry but very few use the registry to stay informed of sex offender in their areas. However, current literature also indicates that the sex offender registry is not effective in reducing recidivism rates. The registry may cause increased stress on the offender in regard to relationships, job placement, and living, which may make them more likely to re-offend (Klein & Cooper, 2019; Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). This supports the concept of labeling theory.

Labeling theory posits that punishing people for their offenses, and labeling them based on the offense, can cause more harm than good. This also may reinforce a person's image as a "criminal" leading to higher chances of recidivism. The sex offender registry requires individuals convicted of sex crimes to go on record as an offender; thus, giving them a label and imposing strict limitations on housing and employment opportunities as well as stigma and negative

perceptions from others. It is argued that removing housing and educational restrictions from labeled individuals can positively impact the life of the individual and reduce recidivism (Kavish, 2017). Despite the unintended consequences of the sex offender registry, a majority of Americans still support it. In fact, many people report feeling safer knowing they have access to the registry, even if they do not regularly access the registry (Vandiver et al., 2017). Once again, this seems to provide support that the general public may be viewing sex offenders through the lens of rational choice theory as well as labeling theory, thus not taking into consideration other factors that may lead to a person committing a sexual offense.

Limitations and Additional Considerations

Despite the contributions of this study, there are limitations that should be discussed. One limitation is that this study did not account for the participants' own background information and how that might influence their perceptions. In other words, previous research has indicated that some populations may have certain biases ingrained in them. As Cain et al. (2017) found, gender, location, and generational context can shape the opinions of participants, which may influence how they perceive sex offenders. An additional limitation is that many of the participants answered incorrectly for the manipulation check questions. Some of the participants answered the questions very similarly. This does raise some suspicion that some of the participants took the survey more than once at different locations.

In order to remedy these limitations, future researchers could attempt to separate the variables of interest in the vignettes and ask less open-ended questions so the participants can rely less on recall and can choose responses from multiple choice answer questions. In addition, it may be beneficial to be more specific in the vignettes about the type of offense presented so

that it is more memorable to the participants. The offense in the vignettes was kept rather vague in the current study which could have also led to the results not supporting the hypothesis.

Implications and Future Directions

The results of this study indicate that future research may need to focus on the specific offender rather than sex offenders in general to see if different results occur. For example, the ATS-21 scale asks questions with language focused on sex offenders overall even though the vignettes were meant to highlight a specific person with certain information that might influence the participants' perceptions. While the vignettes focused on one person, the ATS-21 scale did not which means it is possible that the participants generalized their answers regarding all sex offenders rather than the one presented in the vignette they were assigned. As a result, future research may need to consider finding a different way to measure sex offender perceptions that can account for an individual offender better than the ATS-21 scale can.

In addition, it is possible that the information presented in the vignettes may have been overwhelming to the participants leading to them not reading it correctly or understanding everything presented. This may have caused their responses to reflect an overly negative perception of sex offenders despite having information that has previously been shown to influence perceptions of criminals. If this is the case, it may be beneficial to find a way to present the background information of the sex offender in the vignettes in a way that does not overwhelm the participants. It may be possible to break up the information or spread it out so that it is more manageable and easier to digest for the participants which may provide results better in line with the hypothesis.

Another point of consideration for future research could be focusing on how the perceptions of the participants may be influenced by the background of the participant. Rosselli

and Jeglic (2017) did find in their research that participants who hold a more conservative ideology were more likely to support harsher punishments for sex offenders while individuals on the other end of the political spectrum were more likely to support treatment. It may be constructive to focus on how other characteristics of individuals may influence their perceptions of sex offenders.

Despite the limitations and additional considerations above, the current study and associated findings contribute beneficial information to existing literature by exploring a factor that has not yet previously received much attention. Many studies have been conducted regarding perceptions of sex offenders and other criminals but not with the focus on how the background information and upbringing of the offender may or may not influence perceptions (Costelloe et al., 2009; Cullen et al., 2000; Roberts & Stalans, 1997; Tonry, 2004). While the findings of the current study did not support the first hypothesis, support was found for the second hypothesis. Additionally, the study could be used as a starting point for future research into the topic. By considering the positive aspects and addressing the limitations of this study, future researchers may be able to expand upon this area of research. Additionally, future such studies can also be used to inform public policy regarding sex offenders, the sex registry, and treatment for offenders.

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Table 1*Sample Size for the Assigned Vignette Condition*

Assigned Vignette Information	<i>N</i> (Participants in each condition)
V1: Female, African American, Rough Upbringing	27
V2: Female, African American, Good Upbringing	32
V3: Male, African American, Rough Upbringing	31
V4: Male, African American, Good Upbringing	31
V5: Female, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	34
V6: Female, American Indian, Good Upbringing	26
V7: Male, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	28
V8: Male, American Indian, Good Upbringing	30
V9: Female, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	35
V10: Female, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	27
V11: Male, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	32
V12: Male, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	31

Note: Total sample size was 364 participants.

Table 2*Hypothesis 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Perceptions across Assigned Vignette*

Assigned Vignette	Mean (<i>M</i>)	Standard Deviation (<i>SD</i>)
V1: Female, African American, Rough Upbringing	2.94	.18
V2: Female, African American, Good Upbringing	3.00	.21
V3: Male, African American, Rough Upbringing	2.86	.21
V4: Male, African American, Good Upbringing	2.96	.16
V5: Female, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	2.98	.19
V6: Female, American Indian, Good Upbringing	2.84	.29
V7: Male, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	2.93	.23
V8: Male, American Indian, Good Upbringing	2.88	.24
V9: Female, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	2.88	.28
V10: Female, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	2.92	.24
V11: Male, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	2.98	.24
V12: Male, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	2.90	.27

Note: Hypothesis 1 tested the effect of condition on perceptions of sex offenders. We expected that the type of background and demographic information provided would influence perceptions; however, this hypothesis was not found to be statistically significant. Perceptions were rated on a Likert scale of 1-5 (lower scores indicate more negative perceptions of sex offenders). The total average score for perceptions was 2.92. The mean values above suggest that perceptions of the sex offender were rated as more negative despite the information provided in the vignette.

Table 3

Hypothesis 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Sex Registry across Assigned Vignette

Assigned Vignette	Mean (<i>M</i>)	Standard Deviation (<i>SD</i>)
V1: Female, African American, Rough Upbringing	4.81	1.21
V2: Female, African American, Good Upbringing	4.84	.88
V3: Male, African American, Rough Upbringing	4.55	1.23
V4: Male, African American, Good Upbringing	4.61	1.54
V5: Female, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	4.50	1.21
V6: Female, American Indian, Good Upbringing	4.77	1.34
V7: Male, American Indian, Rough Upbringing	4.46	1.45
V8: Male, American Indian, Good Upbringing	4.73	1.26
V9: Female, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	4.86	1.12
V10: Female, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	4.81	1.18
V11: Male, Caucasian, Rough Upbringing	4.94	.80
V12: Male, Caucasian, Good Upbringing	4.40	1.45

Note: Hypothesis 2 tested the effect of condition on attitudes toward having the offender in the vignette be part of the sex offender registry. We expected that the type of background and demographic information provided would not influence attitudes about the sex registry; this hypothesis was supported as the findings were not statistically significant. Participants appear to want the offender on the registry regardless of the information provided. This question was rated on a Likert scale of 1-6 (higher scores indicate more agreement with the offender being placed on the registry). The total average score was 4.70. The mean values above suggest that participants are in favor of the sex registry regardless of the information provided in the vignette.

Appendix A

Vignette Examples

Vignette 1. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **African American female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 2. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **African American female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 3. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **African American male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 4. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **African American male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 5. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **American Indian female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 6. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **American Indian female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 7. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **American Indian male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 8. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, an **American Indian male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 9. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, a **Caucasian American female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent.

During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 10. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, a **Caucasian American female**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 11. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, a **Caucasian American male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **rough upbringing**. The defendant was often physically and sexually abused while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Vignette 12. You are a judge for a criminal case involving the molestation of a minor. The defendant, a **Caucasian American male**, has been accused of sexually abusing an adolescent. During the trial, it was announced that the defendant had a **good upbringing**. The defendant had an ideal home life as a child with loving parents and had never experienced physical or sexual abuse while growing up. The jury finds the defendant guilty of this crime.

Appendix B

Vignette Comprehension/Manipulation Check Questions

1. What crime is the defendant found *guilty* of? _____
2. What was the defendant's race?
 - a. African American
 - b. American Indian
 - c. Caucasian American
3. What was the defendant's sex?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
4. What was the defendant's upbringing/childhood like?
 - a. The defendant was abused as a child
 - b. The defendant was NOT abused as a child

Appendix C

Questions about the Vignette

1. Please respond to the following questions regarding the defendant's release. After the defendant is released, what should happen:
 - a. The defendant should be listed as a convicted sex offender on the National Sex Offender Registry.
 - 1 = Strongly disagree
 - 2 = Disagree
 - 3 = Probably disagree
 - 4 = Probably agree
 - 5 = Agree
 - 6 = Strongly agree
 - b. Residence restrictions should be enforced, such that the defendant can only live in certain areas deemed appropriate by the local county.
 - 1 = Strongly disagree
 - 2 = Disagree
 - 3 = Probably disagree
 - 4 = Probably agree
 - 5 = Agree
 - 6 = Strongly agree
 - c. The defendant should be required to wear a GPS monitoring device so that movements and interactions with others can be tracked.
 - 1 = Strongly disagree
 - 2 = Disagree
 - 3 = Probably disagree
 - 4 = Probably agree
 - 5 = Agree
 - 6 = Strongly agree
 - d. The defendant should be required to notify neighbors about being a convicted sex offender.
 - 1 = Strongly disagree
 - 2 = Disagree
 - 3 = Probably disagree
 - 4 = Probably agree
 - 5 = Agree
 - 6 = Strongly agree

- e. The defendant should be required to attend special programming and therapy for convicted sex offenders.
 - 1 = Strongly disagree
 - 2 = Disagree
 - 3 = Probably disagree
 - 4 = Probably agree
 - 5 = Agree
 - 6 = Strongly agree
- 2. Based on the information provided about the defendant, please describe below what information influenced you to make your decision about the defendant's release. What information did you use to decide what the defendant should be required to do after being released? _____
- 3. How important was the information about the defendant's background in influencing your decisions about what should happen after the defendant is released?
 - a. Not important
 - b. Slightly important
 - c. Fairly important
 - d. Important
 - e. Very important

Appendix D

Attitudes to Sexual Offenders (ATS) Scale

1. Sex offenders are different from other people. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
2. Most sex offenders are victims of circumstances and deserve help. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
3. Sex offenders have feelings like the rest of us. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
4. It is not wise to trust a sex offender too far. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
5. I think I would like a lot of sex offenders. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
6. Give a sex offender an inch, and they take a mile. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

7. Sex offenders need affection and praise just like anybody else. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
8. Trying to rehabilitate sex offenders is a waste of time and money. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
9. Sex offenders are no better or worse than other people. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
10. You have to be constantly on your guard with sex offenders. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
11. If you give a sex offender your respect, he'll give you the same. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
12. Sex Offenders only think about themselves. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree
13. There are some sex offenders I would trust with my life. ____
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided

4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

14. Most sex offenders are too lazy to earn an honest living. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

15. I wouldn't mind living next door to a treated sex offender. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

16. Sex offenders are just plain mean at heart. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

17. Sex offenders are always trying to get something out of somebody. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

18. Sex offenders are immoral. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

19. I would like associating with some sex offenders. _____

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

20. Sex offenders respect only brute force. _____

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Undecided
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

21. If sex offenders do well in prison/hospital, they should be let out on parole. ____

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Undecided
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

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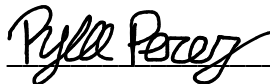
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