



E-ISSN 2332-886X

Available online at

<https://scholasticahq.com/criminology-criminal-justice-law-society/>

Desistance from Sexual Offending or Not Reoffending? A Taxonomy of Contact Sex Offenders

Brooke N. Cooley

Ball State University

ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

This paper explored why contact sex offenders lack reoffending, and a taxonomy was developed to better understand the desistance process, or more commonly, the non-reoffending process. Through qualitative conversational interviews with 29 contact sex offenders, it was found that contact sex offenders can be categorized into two broad groups. First, the criminal career sex offender who had persistent habitual offending. This category was comprised of a relatively small number of the sample (20.7%). This category can then be further broken down into two smaller categories, the desisters and the non-reoffenders. The desisters lacked reoffending due to cognitive transformations, while non-reoffenders were able to manage their sexual deviant behaviors due to strategies such as therapy, religious practices, and avoidance. Only two participants could be considered desisters, while the other participants were non-reoffenders. This is a noteworthy finding, demonstrating how rare it is to desist from contact sex offending based on scholars' definitions of desistance as a process. Conversely, contact sex offenders who are not habitual persistent offenders lack reoffending because they never came to see themselves as "sex offenders" nor do they feel they have problems to address as their crimes were temporary and situational. This group contained the majority of the sample (79.3%) and was further divided into taxonomic subgroups. This study established the need to differentiate between career criminal sex offenders and those who are situational and temporary. Persistent offenders and situational offenders need different treatment practices, and they have different non-reoffending pathways.

Article History:

Received September 18, 2021

Received in revised form January 13, 2022

Accepted January 15, 2022

Keywords:

contact sex offender, desistance, taxonomy

<https://doi.org/10.54555/ccjls.4234.34105>

© 2022 *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society* and The Western Society of Criminology

Hosting by Scholastica. All rights reserved.

Professionals, as well as everyday citizens, have difficulty with the concept of desistance, particularly as it applies to offenders widely believed to be habitual and incurable, such as sex offenders. However, Maruna (2001) determined that the idea of the incorrigible offender does not fit the age-crime curve, one of the most well-established empirical findings in criminology. The age-crime curve ascertains that almost every individual engaging in serious criminal activity gives it up and desists. This is not a new finding, and it has been observed and found to apply to offenders of all types (Glueck & Glueck, 1968; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993) including sex offenders (Fazel et al., 2006; Hanson, 2002; Thornton, 2006).

This study examined why contact sex offenders do not reoffend. A contact sex offender includes those individuals who have been arrested for some type of contact offense such as sexual assault in any degree, molestation, or incest. A contact sex offender also includes those individuals who attempted to meet up with minors they met via online. There must be some persistence in offending over time in order to desist (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987; DeLisi, 2016), which is contrary to sex offending recidivism rates suggesting that most sex offenders do not reoffend (Blokland & van der Geest, 2015; Hanson et al., 2014; Helmus et al., 2012). For example, Hanson and colleagues (2018) found that in a sample of over 7,000 sex offenders, the sexual recidivism rate was 9.1% at 5 years, 13.3% at 10 years, 16.2% at 15 years, 18.2% at 20 years, and 18.5% at 25 years. While contact sex offenders generally have lower reoffending rates compared to other types of offenders (Hanson, 2002; Sample & Bray, 2003), it raises the question of if they can desist from a criminal behavior that is not persistent over time, but rather is episodic or situational. Sexual desistance includes taking on the sex offender identity, seeking assistance and maintaining desistance, completing a process of cognitive and affective transformation, and acknowledging the harm done to their victim (Cooley & Sample, 2018; Farmer et al., 2015; Harris, 2014, 2017). The purpose of this study was to assess why contact sex offenders do not reoffend, and a dual taxonomy was developed to explicate desistance and non-reoffending.

There are marked individual differences in the stability of criminal sexual behavior (Lussier & Cale, 2013; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990), and there are many different types of sex offenders, as they are not a homogenous group (Sample & Bray, 2006). For many, criminal sexual behavior is temporary and situational. For individuals who commit temporary sexual crimes, these acts are driven by situational characteristics that do not persist over long periods of

time. In contrast, the criminal sexual behavior of other individuals is very stable and persistent. Temporary criminal sexual behavior is common in sex offenders, while persistent, stable criminal sexual behavior is found among a relatively small number of individuals (Farmer et al., 2015; Lussier & Cale, 2013; Lussier et al., 2010).

The primary tenet of this paper is that temporary or situational versus persistent or habitual sexual offending constitute two qualitatively discrete categories of sex offenders, each in need of its own distinct theoretical explanation. If accurate, the taxonomy proposed by this study can serve as an effective organizing function, with important implications for theory and research on desistance within contact sexual offending. For sex offenders whose criminal activity is confined to a limited timeframe (those who are situational), the causal factors may be proximal, specific to the period of criminal activity. Theory must account for intermittent sexual crimes in their lives and why these behaviors are not persistent. Conversely, for persons whose sexual offending is continuous throughout the life course, a theory of sexual behavior must explain its causal factors early in their criminal career and must explain the continuity in their lives. Understanding how sex offenders desist or not reoffend led to the development of a taxonomy with taxonomic subgroups. This taxonomy can help categorize theoretically what led to sex offenders' crimes and what consequently helped them quit such criminal activities.

It is important to differentiate between contact sex offenders with persistence in offending and those with situational crimes to implement effective treatment strategies. Individuals with persistent offending need intensive treatment aimed at identity shifts, behavioral changes, affective states, and coping strategies to desist (Cooley & Sample, 2018; Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), or at a minimum, to not reoffend. Situational sex offenders need treatment focused on management of dynamic risk factors such as relationship and financial stress (Ward & Hudson, 2000). Persistent and situational offenders both need treatment, but their treatment needs may be vastly different (Blokland & van der Geest, 2015). This exploratory study attempts to classify and categorize contact sex offenders to better understand why they stop offending, which will enhance our understanding of the desistance process and guide treatment practices. This study built on previous literature categorizing desistance in sex offenders (Farmer et al., 2012) but expanded the dual taxonomy to include taxonomic subgroups for situational offenders. While Farmer and colleagues' (2012) work was insightful, it only examined desisters

and non-desisters in a sample of sex offenders convicted of child molestation. This study assesses not only desistance, but identifies other possible categories to help explain situational crimes in a sample of contact sex offenders. For the current study, qualitative informal conversational interviews with 29 contact offenders in a Midwestern state were utilized to better understand why they desisted from sexual offending. A hybrid grounded theory strategy was employed to obtain the most comprehensive analysis possible for the development of the taxonomy.

Literature Review

Theories of Desistance

The concept of desistance has many definitions within the discipline of criminology. Desistance has been described as a self-reported complete termination of criminal behavior; an ending of official citations for criminal behavior; a gradual slowing down of criminal behavior; and a marked decrease in the frequency, intensity, and seriousness of criminal behavior (Kazemian, 2007; Ward & Laws, 2010). The most advantageous definition of desistance asserts that it is a process complete with lapses, relapses, and recovery, rather than a single event (Marlatt & Gordon, 1985). Desistance research seeks to understand the change processes that are associated with persons turning away from criminal activity and becoming productive members of society (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Desistance from criminal behavior is more than simply stopping a specific behavior. As individuals progress through the desistance process, there may be fragmentation, pauses, and uncertainty, all of which may eventually lead to extinction of a specific behavior. Desistance is often defined as a termination point: “the last officially recorded or self-reported offense” (Kazemian, 2007, p. 7). However, it is more accurately seen as a dynamic, ongoing process. Desistance is the state of stopping and staying stopped (Maruna, 2001).

A variety of theories of desistance have been developed under the umbrella of developmental and life-course criminology perspectives (Kazemian, 2007). These theories include but are not limited to Moffitt’s (1993) dual taxonomy, Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control, and the criminal career perspective (Blumstein et al., 1988). This body of literature assumes a sociological viewpoint and largely centers on general, nonsexual desistance. There are numerous theories of desistance that exist in the literature. However, Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory (1993, 2003) and Maruna’s narrative theory of desistance (2001) are prominent

theories that focus primarily on the concepts of social control and agency, respectively.

Some scholars suggest that Sampson and Laub (1993) rely too heavily on exogenous influences such as marriage or employment and do not give enough consideration to human agency in the process of desistance. Maruna’s narrative theory of desistance (2001) offers a more comprehensive supplement age-graded theory by incorporating and detailing cognitive transformation to the desistance process. In Maruna’s Liverpool Desistance Study (2001), he encouraged participants to discuss their lives as if they were writing an autobiography. Maruna (2001) had two goals in mind. First, he wanted to construct a single, amalgamated portrait of the desisting self. Second, he wanted to determine why some individuals found it impracticable to give up a life of crime (Maruna, 2001). The study revealed that persisters viewed themselves as helpless, dependent, and victims of society. Desisters were found to be optimistic, had control over one’s life, and viewed themselves as productive members of society (Maruna, 2001). Maruna (2001) acknowledged the importance of informal social controls such as marriage and stable employment considered in the age-graded theory, yet argued that human agency is the key factor in understanding the process of desistance. The transformation of oneself with a new self-identity is the elucidation to desistance.

Further, Giordano and colleagues (2002) posit that desistance depends on cognitive transformations before offenders can cease criminal activity. These scholars suggest that cognitive transformations may include a change in identity, which enables individuals to seek a more conventional lifestyle (Giordano et al., 2002). Similarly, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) argue that identity change is necessary in the desistance process. Individuals must first have a cognitive transformation of seeing themselves as a non-offender or else structural supports such as a job or social relationships will most likely not occur, and ultimately, desistance will not be an outcome (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

Theories of Desistance from Contact Sexual Offending

Criminality is a pattern of behavior in which a majority of all people eventually desist. For non-sexual offenders this is exemplified by the age-crime curve (Sampson & Laub, 2003), which generally reveals that crime is committed by people in their teens and twenties, after which, offending rates decline with age. While empirical research supports these assertions for nonsexual and nonviolent offenders (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993), the degree to which these perspectives

apply to individuals convicted of sexual violence remains ambiguous.

Although there is a prevalent belief that sex offenders are persistent, a similar phenomenon appears in which the age-crime curve is still applicable (Farmer et al., 2015). The 'age-sex crime curve,' peaks later and tails off less considerably than the age-crime curve for non-sexual crime (Lussier et al., 2010). Sexual offending also decreases with age, challenging the notion that sex offenders' risk levels are high, stable, and linear (Lussier et al., 2010). Research that has considered the issue of desistance within the area of sex offending has generally relied on sexual recidivism indicators to determine desistance. Within this context, various studies illustrate that recidivism rates among sexual offenders are low (Harris & Hanson, 2004; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Thornton, 2006) and are actually lower than other forms of non-sexual crimes. This demonstrates that most individuals who commit sexual offenses appear to desist from further sexual offending (Farmer et al., 2015).

Despite consistent recidivism findings in the literature, scholars have yet to steadily research how and why people desist from sexual crimes. In 2000, Kruttschnitt and colleagues performed a retrospective study of 556 sexual offenders in an attempt to assess if informal social controls, specifically employment and marriage, predicted desistance and whether such bonds are stipulated by formal social controls such as probation and treatment. The study found that job stability significantly reduced the probability of sexually re-offending, but marital status had no significant effect (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000). Kruttschnitt and colleagues' (2000) study was limited to testing Sampson and Laub's (1993) earlier work pertinent to factors such as employment and marital status, but did not explore any cognitive factors. More recently, Harris (2014, 2017) completed a qualitative investigation into desistance among convicted sex offenders and found a continuum of cognitive transformations. This continuum ranged from simple recognition that the offender had caused harm through a full conception of a new non-offending identity (Harris, 2014, 2017). Harris (2014) found that the first step in the desistance process was acknowledging what one did was wrong and that they caused harm to others. Next, she found treatment to help aid in cognitive and behavioral transformations was necessary. Finally, the last stage (and required the longest amount of time) was forming new non-criminal identities (Harris, 2014). Further, Cooley and Sample (2018) compared two persistent sex offenders who had been out in the community and who had not reoffended. Although both shared a non-reoffending status, one was labeled as a desister and the other as a non-reoffender. Cooley and Sample (2018)

demonstrated through a comparative case analysis that desistance is a process that involved more than simply not reoffending but also included identity shifts, behavioral changes, affective states, and coping strategies.

Criminal Careers and Sexual Offending

The criminal career is defined as an individual's trajectory of offending from their first to last offense (Blumstein et al., 1982). An individual's trajectory includes several components that measure age of onset of offending, persistence, escalation, frequency, and desistance (Blumstein et al., 1986). The criminal career approach is often associated with developmental criminology to emphasize that there are qualitatively different types of offenders linked with different offending trajectories. For instance, Moffitt (1993) ascertained that risk factor profiles could explain different patterns of offending between adolescent limited (AL) and life course persistent individuals (LCP). Moffitt (1993) created a dual taxonomy that distinguishes between the AL offenders and LCP offenders and their desisting pathways. She noted that the majority of offenders are AL offenders. AL offenders participate in crime and other antisocial behaviors while growing up, but later desist from criminal activity once they reach adulthood (Moffitt, 1993). Conversely, LCP offenders are categorized as having high levels of antisocial behavior and criminality in adolescence and throughout the life-course. Moffitt (1993) estimates that LCP offenders make up approximately 5% of the population and display generalized criminality that occurs regardless of time or place.

Further, LeBlanc (2005) postulates that there are three main trajectories of offending: (1) the persistent offender trajectory, (2) the transitory or temporary offending trajectory, and (3) the common offending trajectory. Scholars suggest that antisocial behavior varies by individuals (Blumstein et al., 1986; Piquero et al., 2003) with most individuals (approximately 65% of a population) not engaging in crime, about 30% engaging in crime intermittently and infrequently, and about 5% participating in crime pathologically and throughout life (DeLisi, 2016). This small group of persistent offenders has been classified as career criminals and has captured the attention of researchers and policy-makers because early identification of this type of criminal provides a target for prevention and may protect society from criminal acts (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987; DeLisi, 2005; DeLisi & Piquero, 2011).

The criminal career has been well-established for general offending (Blokland et al., 2005; Nagin et al., 1995; Nagin & Land, 1993), but it remains in its infancy in regards to the study of sexual offenders

(Lussier & Blokland, 2014). The nature of a sex offender's criminal career has only recently attracted research interest. Further, we know relatively little about the mechanisms of desistance from sexual offending (Ward & Laws, 2010). Desistance is not a new phenomenon, and research germane to sexual offending consistently reveals that risk declines with age and that recidivism is lowered when treatment and social support is accessible (Scoones et al., 2012). What is new is the recent reframing of sexual offending within the language of desistance (Farmer et al., 2012; Göbbels et al., 2012; Laws & Ward, 2011; Willis et al., 2010). Not uncommonly, researchers who have considered the subject of desistance in the context of sex offending have generally relied on sexual recidivism indicators to determine desistance. This implies that desistance is simply the absence of a new charge or conviction during a given follow-up period. This methodology is misleading because with longer follow-up periods, offenders considered to be desisters may become sexual recidivists (Lussier & Cale, 2013). More importantly, desistance and recidivism are inherently two distinct separate measures, which would imply that studies are solely capturing and measuring recidivism, not desistance (Cooley & Sample, 2018). Without classifying it as so, the empirical reality of low sexual recidivism is essentially evidence of desistance. However, recidivism is only concerned with criminal activity, while desistance involves not only behavioral transformations but cognitive ones as well. The desistance process includes lapses, relapses, and recoveries similar to addiction prevention models (Willis et al., 2010). Consequently, scholars have yet to establish viable measures to effectively evaluate desistance within sexual offending because it is a process rather than a single event.

The purpose of this study was to explore why contact sex offenders do not reoffend and to create a taxonomy to better understand the desistance process from a sample of registrants who have been in the community ample amount of time to reoffend and have not. Temporary or situational versus persistent or habitual sexual offending constitute two qualitatively discrete categories of sex offenders, each in need of its own distinct theoretical explanation. The taxonomy proposed by this study can contribute as an organizing function, with important implications for theory and research on desistance. The majority of contact sex offenders engage in episodic or situational offending, while there are a small number of individuals who are habitual persistent sex offenders (Beaudry-Cyr et al., 2017; McCuish et al., 2016). It is important to differentiate between contact sex offenders with persistence in offending and those with situational sex crimes for both theoretical purposes and treatment

strategies. It is assumed that the majority of the sample participated in situational sexual offending, as opposed to habitual offending. What is unknown is why these individuals began engaging in such crimes and why they have not reoffended. It is within this context that the current study set out to explore why contact sex offenders stop offending and what aided them in their non-reoffending status.

Method

Data Collection and Sample

The current study was approved by the researcher's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and developed from a larger study that began in 2009 and is still ongoing. This larger study utilized a snowball sampling technique common to exploratory qualitative research (Jacobs, 2006). This sampling strategy is often used to study difficult to reach populations (Anderson, 2000; Jacobs & Wright, 2008; Wright & Decker, 2011), such as sex offenders who may be reluctant to communicate with others due to fear of, or previous experience of, harassment or stigma. In 2009, a sex offender advocacy organization in a Midwestern state posted on their website that researchers were interested in talking to registered sex offenders about experiences living under sex offender registration and notification laws and how these laws influenced their desistance from offending. Ultimately, the request for interviews resulted with 112 registrants and 38 family members of registrants with whom researchers had some form of communication via face-to-face, telephone, or email contact for a range of two to eight years. Of the 112 registrants who participated in the larger study, there were 64 contact sex offenders with which this study is concerned.

The current study utilized 29 contact registered sex offender interviews from the original 64 because inferences about desistance, due to lack of information, could not be garnered from 35 subjects' comments and narratives. Follow-up interviews and consistent contact with participants were critical for both this study and the larger study on desistance. However, researchers were unable to conduct follow-up interviews for a variety of reasons, such as registrants' phone numbers were no longer in service and they could not be reached or participants did not return researchers' calls. Regardless, the current research utilized 29 contact registered sex offenders for the purpose of this study. Participants in this study were all in the community with sufficient opportunities to reoffend. None of them were in treatment or self-reported sexual reoffending at the time of initial interviews or follow-up interviews. It should be noted that some participants have had

treatment while incarcerated or in the community before interviews began. Not all participants received prison sentences, and at the time of their interviews, no participants were under any correctional supervision. The lack of reoffending reported by the sample was triangulated with arrest data and information from registrants' family members when possible. The range of time these subjects have been in the community post-conviction ranges from 1-18 years, with an average time of 7.8 years across registrants.

The primary data collection used was informal conversational interviewing in which researchers are explorers (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) in participants' lived experiences both before and after their sex offending conviction. These interviews began by asking, "would you like to tell me about your experiences with sex offender laws?" The lack of structure in these interviews allowed participants to discuss anything they wished, which permitted researchers to determine what registrants found most important to share. Researchers asked follow-up questions about why they committed their crimes and their lack of reoffending such as "do you mind explaining how it was that you came to be on the registry?" and "how have you managed to not reoffend?" Initial interviews were face-to-face, lasted on average 2.5 hours, and follow-up interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or email correspondence. The average number of contacts with subjects is 2.3 times per year between 2009 and 2020 and has created over 6000 pages of transcription, observational notes, and email contacts. All interviews were recorded for accuracy, even those conducted on the phone. Further, all participants were given pseudonyms regardless of interview format to ensure confidentiality and the privacy of the subjects.

Table 1 illustrates that the sample was overwhelmingly male with one registered contact sex offender who was female. All registrants were White and ranged from 21 to 82 years-old with an average age of 43.9. When applicable, researchers interviewed family members for triangulation purposes only. Family members were recruited to this study by their registered loved ones. For the current study, all family members were female and White, ranged in age from 22 to 71 years-old, and the majority of the women were spouses/cohabitants of registrants. Also, two mothers of registrants were interviewed.

Analytical Techniques

A hybrid approach to thematic narrative analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008) was used on the transcribed pages of narratives gathered during interviews. This strategy involved the development of both inductively and deductively derived codes to obtain the most comprehensive analysis possible. A grounded theory approach was employed (Charmaz, 2006), which used a purely inductive strategy in narrative analysis in which the researcher allows codes to develop from the data themselves rather than apply a pre-formulated coding system. This process allowed for themes to emerge, which led to the development of the taxonomy. Grounded theory yields rich, data-driven coding systems but lacks theoretical and empirical support from previous research. Conversely, deductive coding encompasses the use of preconceived, theory-driven codes to the data, a process that may yield more hypothesis-testing data but lacks the ability to generate codes that were not previously derived (Bailey, 2015). The hybrid approach to thematic analyses of data helped minimize the limitations of solely a grounded theory or deductive analytic approach.

Table 1: Characteristics of Contact Sex Offenders

Characteristics	N=29	%	Min	Max	M
Age			21	82	43.9
Race					
Caucasian/White	29	100			
Gender					
Male	28	96.6			
Female	1	3.4			
Contact Offense					
Contact Against a Child	20	69.0			
Contact Against an Adult	2	6.9			
Computer Assisted/Enticement of a Child	7	24.1			

Deductive analysis of narrative data was driven by literature on desistance. Specifically, micro, macro, and situational level concepts were used and what we currently know about sex offending desistance. For example, it was assessed if participants acknowledged the sex offender identity and their motive for committing a sexual crime. Inductively, indicators for lack of reoffending were permitted to emerge from the data.

While the data were collected by multiple researchers, for the purpose of this study, only one researcher coded and analyzed the data. Data were analyzed through a three-phase coding system for the grounded theory technique including open, axial, and selective coding as described by Corbin and Strauss (2015) to ensure accuracy during the coding process. During the open coding phase, each interview was read holistically line-by-line and an initial coding matrix was developed. The interviews were open-ended in nature, so each one was read through to gain a broad understanding of the individual's narrative. The analytic process began by initially coding several themes such as what led each offender to their sexual crime and what helped them quit. In addition, focus was given to factors such as cognitive and identity changes. After the initial coding matrix was developed and as each narrative was coded, offender narratives were compared for similarities and differences.

Second, axial coding was conducted to corroborate the accuracy of the categories. The process involved a constant comparison of narratives. During axial coding, memos were also used to help develop and organize codes. Charmaz (2006) suggests memos because they "catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue" (p. 72).

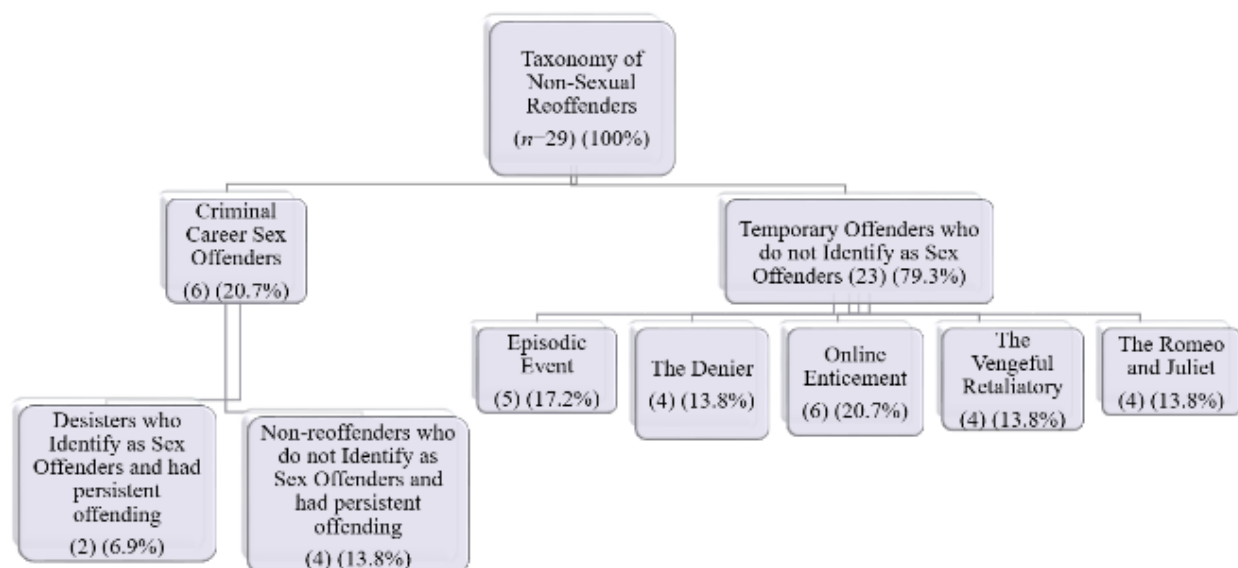
During this phase, narratives were re-read to ensure the categories and subcategories were accurately presented. This process involved the data being compared against each other, across participants, and across various times (Charmaz, 2006). Further, this phase allowed the researcher to examine how themes were related and what impacted these categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Further, in the third stage, selective coding was performed, and the categories were developed into a central phenomenon, and the coding matrix was finalized. Grounded theory enabled themes to emerge from the participants' narratives to examine influences and situations that led to sexual offending and subsequently led them to discontinue sexual offending. This permitted the researcher to develop taxonomic categories. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of why contact sex offenders do not reoffend over time, given their ample opportunities to do so. The limitations of the sampling technique and analytics frameworks are many, but the results provide insights into why contact sex offenders do not reoffend and helped to create a preliminary taxonomy for classification purposes.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore why contact sex offenders do not reoffend and to create a taxonomy to better understand the desistance process from a sample of registrants who have been in the community with an ample amount of time to reoffend and have not. It was found that participants fell into two broad categories: Criminal Career Sex Offenders and Temporary Sex Offenders.

Figure 1: Taxonomy of Contact Sex Offenders



The major difference between these two categories is persistence of sexual offending over time. Criminal Career Sex Offenders had at least two incidences of contact sexual offending and exhibited thoughts and behaviors of persistent habitual offenders, while behavior of individuals in the other category was situational or episodic in nature and did not persist throughout the life-course.

Criminal Career Sex Offenders

Much like general offending (DeLisi, 2016), persistent, stable sexual offending behavior was found among a relatively small number of individuals (Farmer et al., 2015; Lussier & Cale, 2013; Lussier et al., 2010). Specifically, out of the sample of 29 contact sex offenders, six individuals were identified as criminal career sex offenders. These sex offenders had at least two occurrences of contact sex offending; although they may have only been convicted of one incident, they openly admitted to committing multiple contact offenses throughout the life course. Additionally, these individuals displayed thought patterns aligned with criminal career offenders (Blokland et al., 2005; Nagin et al., 1995; Nagin & Land, 1993). For instance, individuals may not actively be committing sexual crimes against others, but they have inappropriate fantasies and are thinking of ways to fulfill such fantasies and desires. Corwin notes, "It's a daily battle. It never goes away. I'll always be sexually deviant all my life. I will never lose that addiction." The criminal career contact sex offenders can then be further divided into two sub categories, desisters and non-reoffenders (Refer to Figure 1).

Desisters

Of the six criminal career sex offenders, two participants could be classified as desisters from contact sex offending. To desist from sexual offending, individuals had to be persistent habitual offenders and had to go through cognitive transformations. For instance, Jack developed a sex offender identity by the age of 13 after being kicked out from his first foster home for inappropriately touching another young male teenager. Jack was convicted of two first-degree sexual assaults. He met his victims, two boys ages seven and ten, after moving in with his uncle in a trailer park. To facilitate his crimes, he began a romantic relationship with their mother to gain access to them and sexually groomed them. Jack came to realize that although he loved the boys, he was causing them physical pain. He recalled,

"When we finally had sex [intercourse] their faces would get all scrunched up. They looked like

they were hurting which made me feel like shit.... I knew it was time to change."

While incarcerated, Jack acknowledged his sex offender identity and was amenable to treatment. During his time in prison, he learned his behavioral triggers, the sexual assault cycle, and how to identify his feelings. Ultimately, he had cognitive and affective changes as he transitioned his thoughts about sex with boys as not only criminal, but wrong and harmful to others. As a desister, Jack accepted his sex offender identity, acknowledged that his behavior was not only criminal, but harmful to others, and found people willing to help him change from a sex offender to a productive member of society. Similarly, Paul, who was convicted of sexually assaulting his step-children, realized that what he was doing was wrong and that he needed to get help. Paul would use his military status to get women to trust him so they would go out with him and then he preceded on two occasions to sexually assault their children. Like Jack, Paul recognized his sex offender identity and worked hard to surround himself with people who were willing to help him, such as his current wife.

Non-Reoffenders

While Jack and Paul were desisters, the other four criminal career sex offenders were labeled as non-reoffenders, as illustrated by Figure 1. These four participants, like Jack and Paul, were habitual persistent offenders, but they cannot be considered desisters because they never identified with the sex offender label, nor did they make cognitive, affective, and identity transformations. Furthermore, non-reoffenders believed what they did was criminal but did not acknowledge the harm they did to their victims. For instance, Scott explained,

"What I did was inappropriate, but I never attacked or forced her to do anything. I just led her in a direction I shouldn't have led her. I did something stupid. It's something I shouldn't have done, but that's not who I am. I'm not a sex offender."

While these criminal career non-reoffenders were not desisters, they still learned strategies to not reoffend. For example, Kevin discussed his attraction to pubescent girls and admitted to crimes against his daughter and other girls. However, he never accepted the label of sex offender and asserted that he suffers from sexual addictions that can be treated. He stated,

“Even though I reoffended one time, or two times, actually, I didn’t get caught the first time, the second time I got caught but no one called the police, the third time I went to prison, but through both religious training and belief in God and through good reading today, I think the brain is malleable and can be retrained and mine has been.”

Kevin acknowledged his behavior as criminal, but never spoke about the harm he had caused to his victims. Further, Kevin believes his crimes were due to inappropriate sexual fantasies. While in prison, he learned in therapy to “retrain” his mind to not have these attractions to pubescent girls. He also attends a religious group for men with sexual addictions who pray their addictions will end. Scott also attributed his lack of reoffending to religious efforts. Like Kevin and Scott, Artie does not identify as a sex offender, and he disclosed his crime of sexually assaulting his thirteen-year-old step-daughter and other pubescent girls. He attests he was cured through therapy and training his mind.

Whereas Kevin, Scott, and Artie credited therapy or religious endeavors for their lack of reoffending, Corwin practiced avoidance. Corwin recalled,

“The girls I felt a special attraction to are nine-year-old girls for some reason. When my daughter was nine-years-old, I was very uncomfortable around her. I made it a point, if I walked down the hall, went past her bedroom, I didn’t look in her bedroom. I just felt real uncomfortableness. It’s just like every addiction has the addictive cycle. If you’re an alcoholic and you’re recovering, then you stay out of bars and you don’t drink. If you’re a drug addict and you’re recovering, you don’t take drugs, you don’t hang out with drug people. If you’re sexually addicted, you don’t go where you’re not supposed to go.”

Corwin, a music teacher, attributed his crime to allowing himself to give private lessons in his home to a nine-year-old girl. He recognized he had sexual deviancies and put himself in a situation in which he knew he would be tempted.

Kevin, Artie, Scott, and Corwin were all habitual persistent offenders who admitted what they

did was criminal but never acknowledged harm done to their victims nor offered remorseful thoughts about victims. When Scott discussed one of his victims, he conveyed,

“I never forced myself on her. She never screamed stop and if she did, I would have, told her, if you don’t want to do this, you don’t have to. She was actually a willing participant, but the fact is, that me as an adult should have known better to not put her in that position to be a willing participant.”

The non-reoffenders claim they are not sex offenders but rather sexual addicts. Desistance from contact sexual offending is impossible to achieve if one does not acknowledge they are a sex offender and complete a process of cognitive and affective transformations. Although these individuals are not desisters, the non-reoffenders were able to manage their sexual behaviors due to strategies such as therapy, religious practices, and avoidance.

Temporary Sex Offenders

In contrast to the criminal career sex offenders, the majority of the sample (79.3%) were categorized as individuals who do not identify as sex offenders and are not persistent habitual offenders. These contact sex offenders only had one sexual crime, and it was situational or temporary in nature. They did not have sexual behaviors that persisted throughout the life-course. This broad category, which contained 23 participants, was broken down into five smaller categories primarily based on why they committed their crime and consequently stopped. As Figure 1 displays, these five categories describing participants’ motives to engage in sexual crimes include the episodic event, the denier, online enticement, the vengeful retaliatory, and the Romeo and Juliet.

The Episodic Event

Five participants in the study were convicted of sex crimes based on a single episodic event. For instance, David, who molested his step child, noted,

“I understand it was wrong. I don’t know why it was happening. That’s the fact, that it happened, it stopped and it’s never happened after. I have no desire for it to happen again. I don’t know what happened in that

time period, but I'll pay for it for the rest of my life, I guess."

Similarly, Darrin, who molested his biological child, also recalled not knowing why he sexually offended but just knew it would never happen again. Both David and Darrin discussed how they were struggling with their lives and how they felt overwhelmed at work, and life just became too much to deal with.

Jerry explicated that when he was twenty, he went on a dating website, dated and had sexual intercourse with a girl he believed to be nineteen. He later found out she was a fifteen-year-old runaway. Billy had a similar incident where he had sex with a fourteen-year-old girl he thought was older. Billy related,

"I met a girl at two o'clock in the morning, on a school night even. Why was a fourteen-year-old even out at that time? I would love to sue her parents. To this day, I would still like to be like, "This is all because you're not parenting your kid, and she ended up in the back seat of my car, when she should have been home."

Finally, Jackson explained how he was not a sex offender, but rather engaged in an inappropriate activity due to lapse of judgement and impulses.

These five participants all realized what they did was wrong, but do not identify with the sex offender label, nor do they have persistent offending over time. As Jackson admitted, "Should it be something that lands me on this website [the sex offender registry and notification] for the rest of my life? No. Was it wrong? Yes." These individuals engaged in contact sexual offending, but did so only temporarily and not over the life course. Their crimes were episodic and were committed for various reasons. Darrin, David, and Jackson discussed that the time period before their crimes was filled with depression, stress, and financial burden, while Jerry and Billy were lied to when they tried to participate in normal dating behavior.

The Denier

Four participants were categorized as deniers. These participants felt they did not have a problem and deny what they did was wrong. Like the episodic, their crimes were temporary and did not continue over an extended period of time. For example, Austin, who was convicted of sexual assault of a child, explained how he had no victims because there was no penetration due to his age and medical

reasons. He blamed the neighborhood kids [his victims] for wanting to come over and play and wanting to take a bath. Austin believed there was no inappropriate touching and what he did was not wrong and not a crime.

Like Austin, Walker, who convicted of sexual assault of an off-duty police officer and public indecency in a park, denied what he did as wrong because he was approached first, and it was consensual. Walker described how he touched the man on the shoulder, which is not a crime: "Basically, I have this exchange where I think this is some kind of consensual hook up in a park." Walker, believing that his actions were invited by the other man, did nothing inappropriate or erroneous and denies his status as a sex offender.

While Austin and Walker believe that nothing inappropriate happened, Cameron discussed how an incident occurred, but since that was not his intention and it was an accident, he should not be held accountable. Cameron, a single dad of two young children, hired a thirteen-year-old babysitter so he could attend a company party. He recalled,

"She came in my room the next morning, was trying to wake me up to get paid to go home, whatever, but I didn't wake up; I stuck my arm out and pushed her on the chest, and told her to go back to bed or whatever, still drunk, and she left. Her parents had called me and said, you had touched my daughter, and you're going to go to jail and you're going to pay for it. I said, "No I didn't." I said, "I told her to go back to bed." Well not really knowing I did push her on the chest, but it wasn't in a sexual manner or nothing like that. I'm sorry I scared the poor girl, but I did not do this, you know intentionally."

Finally, Bert detailed his sexual assault of a minor as a misunderstanding. He assumed he would be charged with solicitation but instead relayed the following: "When I got downtown to the jail, I was informed I was being charged with sexual assault of a child under sixteen. I was shocked, and denied it, emphatically!" Bert explained how he discovered the escort ads on Craigslist and contacted multiple escorts over the five months. He explained how he was particularly fond of one escort and met with her eight or nine times, but assumed she was of age. Bert admitted he should not have engaged in these acts but

does not believe he has a victim as she “was willing and got paid.”

The deniers, essentially, deny what they did was wrong or a crime and do not believe they have victims. These participants do not acknowledge their sex offender status and believed their experiences were a misunderstanding. Further, these participants feel that they were wronged by their “victims” and the criminal justice system.

Online Enticement

Six participants were categorized as online enticement. These individuals used computers and the internet to facilitate their crimes. Most of these participants shared similar narratives in which they turned to online companionship. They were feeling depressed and stressed in their current life and all believe they have no victim because they never touched them and simply attempted to meet them in person or because it was consensual. Mitch noted,

“It all started out because I was married and my marriage was falling apart. I started meeting women in chatrooms and this girl pm [private messaged] me said she was sixteen or fifteen, I don't remember and I thought it was a joke because she was talking like an adult so I thought it was a woman I knew playing a joke; so I went to go see who it was and it turned out that the woman was a cop playing the girl. But get this, there was no victim!”

Harry shared a similar experience in which he was chatting online with an underage girl, and when they made plans to meet in person, he was arrested. Harry further noted, “To me if there was no contact, it's different than if there was contact.” Connor recalled never having trouble with law enforcement before and is adamant about not being attracted to young kids, “I was attracted toward males, but not to small kids or young kids.” Connor does not believe he has a victim because he physically did not do anything, which should mitigate his crime.

Preston believed his relationship to be consensual and felt little remorse towards his fourteen-year-old victim. He explained,

“He was a willing participant. I didn't have to force him to anything, and throughout the whole time I knew him, the only type of sexual interaction we had was oral sex, and

that was as far as it ever went. I knew I could get in trouble, but I didn't feel like what I was doing was wrong.”

Though Mitch, Harry, Connor, and Preston acknowledged they were talking to minors, Doug and Dylan were unaware of their victims' ages. Doug thought he was talking to a girl who was twenty but in reality, was only fifteen. Although they made plans to meet in person via chatrooms, they never did. Dylan thought he was talking to a twenty-two-year-old woman, and like Doug, made plans to meet but never actually did. Dylan asserted, “I would never have had sex with a fourteen-year-old. I think it was a setup or trap online and I was stupid enough to step in it.” These participants all utilized the Internet to facilitate their crimes and do not accept that they have victims because they never physically touched them, the interaction was consensual, or they were lied to in regard to age. Further, these participants also do not comport with the sex offender label.

The Vengeful Retaliatory

Four participants fell into this category, and it is important to note because their motives were vastly different from the rest of the sample. The vengeful retaliatory perpetrated their crimes to punish someone else in their lives. Their victims simply gave them an opportunity to get back at someone else. For instance, Brad was depressed because he was having relationship problems with his girlfriend and relayed the following:

“I was severely depressed and wanted to make my girlfriend or at the time, ex-girlfriend, jealous. I went online and chatted with any female I could. I knew talking to younger women was a problem, but I thought it was only an issue when sex was involved. Talking dirty isn't a crime, even if they are underage. I just wanted to make my girlfriend mad and I knew this would.”

Similar to Brad, Larry was having relationship problems and was going through a divorce with his wife. Larry sexually assaulted his two sons, ages seven and nine, because he knew that this act would hurt his ex-wife the most. Larry explained,

“I knew what I did was wrong. But I would never do it again, I mean they are my kids. Basically, I lost sight of reality because I was depressed and

angry at my ex-wife. I knew what I did would hurt her, but I didn't consider how it would [hurt] them [the kids]. I actually repressed the whole thing."

Much like Larry, Daniel was going through a divorce and proceeded to sexually abuse his four-year-old daughter in hopes of her manifesting behavioral problems for his ex-wife. Finally, Gus admitted to raping his wife because she was cheating on him. Gus stated, "She was giving it to everyone else and not giving it to me, so I raped her." These participants disclosed that their crimes were committed because they were trying to hurt their romantic partners.

The Romeo and Juliet

Finally, the last category is the Romeo and Juliet scenario. These four participants engaged in consensual romantic relationships with a minor. Sally, the only female in the sample, detailed her experience,

"I was eighteen and the guy was fifteen. I was young, and alone and I was like look he was there and he was the first guy I was with. Teenagers are dumb and I just didn't want to be alone. It only became a problem when I became pregnant and his parents called the cops."

Ryan explained when he was twenty how he had a consensual on again off again sexual relationship with an underage (eighteen-year-old) co-worker. The state in which Ryan was living in considers the age of majority to be nineteen. Further, his co-worker was still in high school during the incident when she spoke to a school guidance counselor. Ryan stated,

"She found out she was pregnant later and got scared and told her parents it was rape. The school guidance counselor found out about it because she was a senior at the time and so they called in an investigator and they called me in and I explained the situation to him and how it was consensual not rape. At first, she was hesitant to press charges and after hearing in court what I was being charged with she ran out of the courtroom to the police station to have them drop the charges, but they did not."

Ryan fought for visitation rights to see his daughter. He currently is allowed unsupervised visitation rights and is asking for more visitation rights.

Ted was nineteen when he met a girl at a party. He recalled, "I had gone to her house and we engaged in consensual sexual activity. Her parents found out and pushed the subject to file charges because she was underage and they had an image to uphold." Ted further suggested he could not have done anything "too bad" because he went to court and only received probation.

Finally, Jim discussed how when he was seventeen and in high school, he had a normal relationship with a fourteen-year-old. He described how they went on dates and he would go over to her house and watch movies with her family, but her parents did not like him because he was kind of a troublemaker in school. When Jim turned nineteen her parents reported him. Jim explained that they were only two and a half years apart and that he did not even know he could get in trouble for this.

All four subjects believed what they were doing was not wrong because they were participating in a consensual relationship, and it only became a problem when their significant others' parents became involved. These participants discussed how they were engaged in normal dating behaviors and did not see what they were doing as a crime necessarily. Some of the participants, Sally and Ryan, explained their difficult upbringing and how they were just looking for companionship and did not want to be alone. Sally and Ryan further suggested that their young age and immaturity led to their inappropriate behavior, but they were still not criminals. Individuals who are categorized as the Romeo and Juliet do not adhere to their sex offender status and do not feel as if they have victims because they were in a consensual relationship.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore why contact sex offenders do not reoffend and to create a taxonomy to better understand the desistance process from a sample of registrants who have been in the community ample amount of time to reoffend and have not. Through qualitative conversational interviews, it was found that contact sex offenders can be categorized into two broad groups. First, the criminal career sex offender who had persistent habitual offending. Similar to sex offending (Farmer et al., 2015; Lussier et al., 2010; Lussier & Cale, 2013) and general offending (DeLisi, 2016; Wolfgang et al., 1972) literature, this category was comprised of a relatively small number of the overall sample (20.7%). This broad category can then be further broken down

into two smaller categories: the desisters and the non-reoffenders.

In the sample, only two participants could be considered desisters, while the other four participants were non-reoffenders. This is a noteworthy finding because from a sample of 29 contact sex offenders, only six individuals had the capacity to be desisters, and of those six, only two individuals meet the criteria of a desister. This demonstrates how rare it is to desist from contact sex offending based on scholars' definitions of desistance as a process. This definition includes cognitive transformations from first recognizing the harm they have caused and identifying oneself as a sex offender; then, they have to develop a new non-offending identity (Harris, 2014, 2017). Moreover, desistance is defined as a process that involves more than simply not reoffending but also includes identity shifts, behavioral changes, affective states, and coping strategies (Cooley & Sample, 2018; Giordano et al., 2002). As desisters, Jack and Paul accepted their sex offender identity, acknowledged their behavior was not only criminal but harmful to others, and found people willing to help them change from sex offenders to productive members of society.

While there were only two desisters in the study, four of the six criminal career sex offenders were categorized as non-reoffenders. These participants managed to not reoffend but did so by different strategies than that of the desister. Non-reoffenders were able to manage their sexual deviant behaviors due to strategies such as therapy, religious practices, and avoidance. Additionally, non-reoffenders believed that what they did was criminal but did not acknowledge the harm they did to their victims.

While desisters lack sexual reoffending because they identify as sex offenders with psychological problems to address, non-reoffenders only acknowledged their psychological problems and not a sex offender identity. In contrast, contact sex offenders who are not habitual persistent offenders (criminal careers) lack reoffending because they never came to see themselves as sex offenders. They also do not feel they have problems to address, as their crimes were temporary and situational. This broad group contained the majority of the sample (79.3%) and was further divided into five categories: the episodic event, the denier, online enticement, the vengeful retaliatory, and the Romeo and Juliet.

It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. For example, Brad was labeled as a vengeful retaliatory because he committed his crime in an attempt to punish his girlfriend. However, he facilitated his crime by finding underage girls in online chatrooms and could also fit in the online enticement group. In addition, Preston,

who was labeled as online enticement, could be categorized as a Romeo and Juliet. He believed he had a consensual relationship with an underage boy. He considered them to be dating at times even though they were on again off again. Finally, by no means are these categories exhaustive as the sample was limited and exploratory. The taxonomy is preliminary and was developed to guide future research.

Additionally, this study established the need to differentiate between career criminal sex offenders who are persistent and those who are situational and temporary. Persistent offenders and situational offenders may need different treatment practices and they have different non-reoffending pathways. Prior history can serve as a proxy, but information germane to sexual history disclosure packets would be a better measure. Such packets could include information on deviant fantasies and attractions to children. For treatment purposes, pertinent to both career criminals and those who are temporary, it is important to provide an environment where offenders are comfortable to change and to surround them with individuals who will support such change. Career criminals and those with temporary situational crimes discussed issues with romantic relationships, employment, family, feelings of isolation, and other stresses as antecedents to their crimes. Early detection of these stressors is critical to apply effective coping strategies before individuals resort to sexual offending.

As with all research, the current study has limitations that should be discussed. A main concern of this study is external validity, because a non-probability sampling strategy was used. A non-probability sampling strategy prevents the findings from being generalized to a larger population along with the small sample size being utilized. Data were based on self-reporting, so caution about reoffending information gathered from participants was necessary. Triangulation from official reports and family members was used whenever possible to corroborate participants' narratives and self-disclosed behaviors. Besides sample bias, the nature of recall also inhibited generalization of these findings to all those criminally labeled as sex offenders in this Midwestern state or other states. Despite these limitations, the current study was exploratory and provides insight into contact sex offenders and the desistance process.

Overall, this study explored why contact sex offenders do not reoffend and created a taxonomy to better understand the desistance process. Similar to previous research (Farmer et al., 2012), this study found contact sex offenders can be categorized into two broad groups: first, the persistent offenders and second, the situational offenders. The persistent category can then be further separated into desisters and non-desisters. However, this study expanded on

previous studies by identifying taxonomic subgroups for situational offenders. These taxonomic subgroups corroborate literature that sex offenders are not homogenous (Sample & Bray, 2006). The taxonomic subgroups can help professionals understand how certain theoretical concepts, such as turning points and social control, may serve as protective or as risk factors. For instance, some participants in this study noted that familial stress and employment opportunity led to their sexual offending. This is contrary to Sampson and Laub's (1993, 2003, 2005) work positing marriage and employment as positive influences and protective institutions against criminal behavior. Nevertheless, treatment and prosocial bonds also helped some participants to not reoffend. It is within this context that desistance and non-reoffending are distinct for sex offenders in comparison to general offenders. Thus, the taxonomic subgroups should be further explored to assess why some contact sex offenders begin offending and why they subsequently quit.

Finally, for future research, it is important to consider desistance and its applicability to contact sex offenders. As discussed, desistance within sexual offending is rare, which raises the question of whether this should be the ultimate goal or is it enough to suffice that as long as contact sex offenders are not reoffending, it does not matter if they identify as sex offenders and address their psychological issues. This question is beyond the scope of the current study but is something to be considered. This study provided much needed insight into why contact sex offenders lack reoffending and developed a preliminary taxonomy to help direct future research.

References

- Anderson, E. (2000). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. WW Norton & Company.
- Bailey, D. J. (2015). *Diffusion of shame experiences of sex offender family support networks* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska at Omaha].
- Beaudry-Cyr, M., Jennings, W. G., Zgoba, K. M., & Tewksbury, R. (2017). Examining the continuity of juvenile sex offending into adulthood and subsequent patterns of sex and general recidivism. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 61(3), 251–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X15594442>
- Blokland, A. J., Nagin, D., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2005). Life span offending trajectories of a Dutch conviction cohort. *Criminology*, 43(4), 919–954. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2005.00029.x>
- Blokland, A., & van der Geest, V. (2015). Life-course transitions and desistance in sex offenders: An event history analysis. In A. Blokland & P. Lussier (Eds.), *Sex offenders: A criminal career approach* (pp. 257–288). Wiley.
- Blumstein, A., & Cohen, J. (1987). Characterizing criminal careers. *Science*, 237(4818), 985–991. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.237.4818.985>
- Blumstein, A., Cohen, J., & Farrington, D. P. (1988). Criminal career research: Its value for criminology. *Criminology*, 26(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1988.tb00829.x>
- Blumstein, A., Cohen, J., & Hsieh, P. (1982). *The duration of adult criminal careers*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/duration-adult-criminal-careers-final-report>
- Blumstein, A., Cohen, J., Roth, J. A., & Visher, C. A. (Eds.). (1986). *Criminal careers and "career criminals"*. National Academy Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative research*. Sage.
- Cooley, B. N., & Sample, L. L. (2018). The difference between desistance from sexual offending and not reoffending. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 41(5), 483–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2018.1479286>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Sage.
- DeLisi, M. (2005). *Career criminals in society*. Sage.
- DeLisi, M. (2016). Career criminals and the antisocial life course. *Child Development Perspectives*, 10(1), 53–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12161>

- DeLisi, M., & Piquero, A. R. (2011). New frontiers in criminal careers research, 2000–2011: A state-of-the-art review. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 39(4), 289–301.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2011.05.001
- Farmer, M., Beech, A. R., & Ward, T. (2012). Assessing desistance in child molesters: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(5), 930–950.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511423255
- Farmer, M., McAlinden, A. M., & Maruna, S. (2015). Understanding desistance from sexual offending: A thematic review of research findings. *Probation Journal*, 62(4), 320–335.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550515600545
- Fazel, S., Sjöstedt, G., Långström, N., & Grann, M. (2006). Risk factors for criminal recidivism in older sexual offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 18(2), 159–167.
https://doi.org/10.1177/107906320601800204
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2008). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 80–92.
https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107
- Giordano, P. C., Cernkovich, S. A., & Rudolph, J. L. (2002). Gender, crime, and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(4), 990–1064.
https://doi.org/10.1086/343191
- Glueck, S., & Glueck, E. (1968). *Delinquents and nondelinquents in perspective*. Harvard University Press.
- Göbbels, S., Ward, T., & Willis, G. M. (2012). An integrative theory of desistance from sex offending. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17(5), 453–462.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.06.003
- Hanson, R. K. (2002). Recidivism and age: Follow-up data from 4,673 sexual offenders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17(10), 1046–1062.
https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605-0201710-02
- Hanson, R. K., Harris, A. J., Helmus, L., & Thornton, D. (2014). High-risk sex offenders may not be high risk forever. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(15), 2792–2813.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514526062
- Hanson, R. K., Harris, A. J., Letourneau, E., Helmus, L. M., & Thornton, D. (2018). Reductions in risk based on time offense-free in the community: Once a sexual offender, not always a sexual offender. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(1), 48–63.
https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000135
- Harris, A., & Hanson, R. K. (2004). *Sex offender recidivism: A simple question* (Corrections User Report No. 2004-03). Public Safety Canada.
- Harris, D. A. (2014). Desistance from sexual offending: Findings from 21 life history narratives. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(9), 1554–1578.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513511532
- Harris, D. A. (2017). Desistance from sexual offending: Behavioral change without cognitive transformation. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(20), 3049–3070.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515596537
- Helmus, L., Hanson, R. K., Thornton, D., Babchishin, K. M., & Harris, A. J. (2012). Absolute recidivism rates predicted by Static-99R and Static-2002R sex offender risk assessment tools vary across samples: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39(9), 1148–1171.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854812443648
- Jacobs, B. A. (2006). The case for dangerous fieldwork. In D. Hobbs & R. Wright (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of fieldwork* (pp. 157–168). Sage.
- Jacobs, B. A., & Wright, R. (2008). Moralistic street robbery. *Crime & Delinquency*, 54(4), 511–531.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128707307220
- Kazemian, L. (2007). Desistance from crime: Theoretical, empirical, methodological, and policy considerations. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 23(1), 5–27.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986206298940
- Kruttschnitt, C., Uggen, C., & Shelton, K. (2000). Predictors of desistance among sex offenders: The interaction of formal and informal social controls. *Justice Quarterly*, 17(1), 61–87.
https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820000094481
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage.
- Laub J. H., & Sampson, R. J. (2001). Understanding desistance from crime. In M. Tonry (Ed.), *Crime and justice: An annual review of research* (Vol. 28, pp. 1–69). University of Chicago Press.

- Laub, J. H., & Sampson, R. J. (2003). *Shared beginnings, divergent lives: Delinquent boys to age 70*. Harvard University Press.
- Laws, D. R., & Ward, T. (2011). *Desistance and sexual offending: Alternatives to throwing away the keys*. Guilford.
- LeBlanc, M. (2005). An integrative personal control theory of deviant behavior: Answers to contemporary empirical and theoretical developmental criminology issues. In D. P. Farrington (Ed.), *Integrated developmental & life-course theories of offending* (pp. 125–164). Transaction.
- Lussier, P., & Blokland, A. (2014). The adolescence-adulthood transition and Robins's continuity paradox: Criminal career patterns of juvenile and adult sex offenders in a prospective longitudinal birth cohort study. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(2), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2013.07.004>
- Lussier, P., & Cale, J. (2013). Beyond sexual recidivism: A review of the sexual criminal career parameters of adult sex offenders. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18(5), 445–457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2013.06.005>
- Lussier, P., Tzoumakis, S., Cale, J., & Amirault, J. (2010). Criminal trajectories of adult sex offenders and the age effect: Examining the dynamic aspect of offending in adulthood. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 20(2), 147–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567710368360>
- Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (1985). *Relapse prevention: A self-control strategy for the maintenance of behavior change*. Guilford Press.
- Marshall, W. L., & Barbaree, H. E. (1990). An integrated theory of the etiology of sexual offending. In W. L. Marshall, R. D. Laws, & H. E. Barbaree (Eds.), *Handbook of sexual assault: Issues, theories, and treatment of the offender, Applied clinical psychology* (pp. 257–275). Plenum Press.
- Maruna, S. (2001). *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*. American Psychological Association.
- McCuish, E., Lussier, P., & Corrado, R. (2016). Criminal careers of juvenile sex and nonsex offenders: Evidence from a prospective longitudinal study. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 14(3), 199–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204014567541>
- Moffitt, T. E. (1993). Life-course-persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100(4), 674–701. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.100.4.674>
- Nagin, D. S., Farrington, D. P., & Moffitt, T. E. (1995). Life course trajectories of different types of offenders. *Criminology*, 33(1), 111–139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1995.tb01173.x>
- Nagin, D. S., & Land, K. C. (1993). Age, criminal careers, and population heterogeneity: Specification, and estimation of a nonparametric, mixed Poisson model. *Criminology*, 31(3), 327–362. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1993.tb01133.x>
- Paternoster, R., & Bushway, S. (2009). Desistance and the “feared self”: Toward an identity theory of criminal desistance. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 1103–1156. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20685067>
- Piquero, A. R., Farrington, D. P., & Blumstein, A. (2003). The criminal career paradigm: Background and recent developments. In M. Tonry (Ed.), *Crime and justice: A review of research* (Vol. 30, pp. 359–506). University of Chicago Press.
- Sample, L. L., & Bray, T. M. (2003). Are sex offenders dangerous? *Criminology & Public Policy*, 3(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2003.tb00024.x>
- Sample, L. L., & Bray, T. M. (2006). Are sex offenders different? An examination of rearrest patterns. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17(1), 83–102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403405282916>
- Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Harvard University Press.
- Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (2003). Life-course desisters? Trajectories of crime among delinquent boys followed to age 70. *Criminology*, 41(3), 555–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2003.tb00997.x>
- Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (2005). A life-course view of the development of crime. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 602(1), 12–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716205280075>

- Scoones, C. D., Willis, G. M., & Grace, R. C. (2012). Beyond static and dynamic risk factors: The incremental validity of release planning for predicting sex offender recidivism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(2), 222–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511416472>
- Thornton, D. (2006). Age and sexual recidivism: A variable connection. *Sexual Abuse*, 18(2), 123–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11194-006-9007-2>
- Ward, T., & Hudson, S. M. (2000). A self-regulation model of relapse prevention. In D. R. Laws, S. M. Hudson, & T. Ward (Eds.), *Remaking relapse prevention with sex offenders: A sourcebook* (pp. 79 – 101). Sage.
- Ward, T., & Laws, D. R. (2010). Desistance from sex offending: Motivating change, enriching practice. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 9(1), 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14999011003791598>
- Willis, G. M., Levenson, J. S., & Ward, T. (2010). Desistance and attitudes towards sex offenders: Facilitation or hindrance? *Journal of Family Violence*, 25(6), 545–556. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-010-9314-8>
- Wolfgang, M. E., Figlio, R. M., & Sellin, T. (1972). *Delinquency in a birth cohort*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, R. T., & Decker, S. H. (2011). *Armed robbers in action: Stickups and street culture*. University Press of New England.

About the Author

Brooke N. Cooley, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Ball State University. Her research interests include corrections, institutional management, special populations within correctional facilities, and sex offender behavior and policies. She has published in *Criminal Justice Studies*, *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*, *Journal of Crime and Justice*, *Corrections: Policy, Practice and Research*, *Criminal Justice Review*, and *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*.