VOLUME 16, ISSUE 3, PAGES 41–60 (2015)

Criminology, Criminal Justice Law, & Society

E-ISSN 2332-886X
Available online at
https://scholasticahq.com/criminology-criminal-justice-law-society/

Vilifying the Pedophiles and Perverts: A Nationwide Test of the Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale

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ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Sex offenders are often reviled and have difficulties reentering society post-incarceration—due in part to the negativity directed toward them by community members. This study uses the Community Member Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale (Church et al., 2008) to test perceptions of a national sample of participants regarding sex offenders, their crimes, and the official responses to their abuses. Using legal and stereotypical knowledge as the main variables predicting the elements of the CATSO Scale, the results suggest an inverse relationship between the level of accurate knowledge and negative attitudes toward sex offenders. Parental status and race also play key roles in predicting the elements of the CATSO scale. Additional research findings, policy implications, and limitations will be discussed.

Article History:

Received 04 February 2015
Received in revised form 26 August 2015
Accepted 27 August 2015

Keywords:
community members, perceptions, sex offenders, sex offender registry, internet survey, national sample

Since the late 1980s, there has been an increase in the amount of media attention paid to sexual crimes and the feared offenders who commit these offenses (Conley, Hill, Church, Stoeckel, & Allen, 2011). Increased punitive sanctions against sex offenders and the developed and continuously expanding sex offender registry are both evidence of the negative legal climate directed toward sex offenders. For example, in 2014, Florida doubled the mandatory minimum sentences for child rapists and expanded civil commitment laws to include more registered sex offenders than ever before ("Involuntary Civil Committment of Sexually Violent Predators," 2014). Local reporters called the new expansions "the most comprehensive overhaul of sex-offender legislation in more than a decade" (Alanez, 2014) as it strengthened the already existing Jimmy Ryce Act ("Jimmy Ryce Involuntary Civil Committment for Sexually Violent Predators' Treatment and Care Act," 1998). Prior research also suggests that community members (Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003) and politicians (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2015) are in favor of harsh punishments and punitive actions taken against sex offenders.

Although prior literature has suggested that sex offenders do not have high rates of official recidivism compared to other types of offenders (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Levenson & Shields, 2012), many individuals refuse to believe this notion, further feeding into the idea that these individuals should be a feared group capable of chronic and predatory offenses (Lam, Mitchell, & Seto, 2010; Sundt, Cullen, Applegate, & Turner, 1998). Using the Church, Wakeman, Miller, Clements, and Sun (2008) Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) scale, this study will examine how a nationwide sample of community members perceives sex offenders and offenses, legal knowledge about the registry systems, and the stigmas surrounding this group of offenders.

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Furthermore, this study tests to see if there are significant differences between how participants with and without children view these issues.

Literature Review

Community Members Perceptions of Sex Offenders

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of high-profile child abductions (e.g. Jacob Wetterling, Megan Kanka, and Adam Walsh) left a nation of parents startled by these extreme cases of sexual crimes against children and fearful that their child might be the next one victimized. As a result, legislation by state and federal governments established a national sex offender registry system (Jacob Wetterling Act, 1994), allowed for community notification regarding sex offenders living in nearby neighborhoods (Megan's Law, 1996), and increased prison sentences for sex offenders while eliminating the statute of limitations for registration (Adam Walsh Act, 2006). Many of the newly created laws were memorial laws (Surette, 2011), which used the aforementioned child victims as figureheads for legislative progress.

Legislative successes were due in part to a nation of fearful parents lending emotional support for the legal efforts to stop additional sex crimes from occurring (Lees & Tewksbury, 2006; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Sample & Kadleck, 2008). The emotional response derived from the sexual victimization of a child is often overwhelming and can cause citizens to push for a more punitive stance toward sex offenders, which can then result in calls for increased prison sentences (Church et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2003). The political response towards these crimes is often swift, but politicians themselves recognize that these laws are not a cure-all for the level of panic and fear that people experience regarding sex crimes (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2015). Others feel as though they have to no choice but to increase the strength of the sanctions aimed toward sex offenses, and that it would be "politically dangerous to question a sex offender policy" (Leon, 2011, p. 421). The support for harsher penalties against sex offenders is only further reinforced by the stereotypes promoted by the media, specifically the "predator" type of offender that many have grown to fear (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2015).

Only a small amount of research has focused on just how supportive community members are for legislation against specific offender types (e.g. child pornography users versus those with physical child victims versus statutory rapists), rather than for sex offenders as a whole (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009). Other researchers have addressed whether or not community members even use the registry to learn if sex offenders live in their neighborhoods and pose a threat as they are perceived to. Researchers found that not many community members access the tools that they vocally support (Burchfield, 2012; Craun, 2010; Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009; Kernsmith, Craun, et al., 2009). After surveying community members in New Jersey, Boyle, Ragusa-Salerno, Marcus, Passannante, and Furrer (2013) estimate that only 17% of their sample ever accessed the registry website in their state. In addition to the harsher sentences imposed on sex offenders, there has been evidence of community demand for increased use of the sex offender registry and for community notification of sex offenders living in neighborhoods (Bates & Metcalf, 2007; Lam et al., 2010; Mears, Mancini, Gertz, & Bratton, 2008; Seto & Ekem, 2005) despite research that suggests that community members rarely access the online registry websites or even know if there are sex offenders present in their neighborhoods (Burchfield, 2012; Craun, 2010; Kernsmith, Comartin, et al., 2009).

Prior research conducted on community member perceptions of sex offenders supports the notion that the desire for harsh punishments results from the belief that sex offenders are committing some of the most heinous crimes possible (Lam et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is evidence that community members believe that sex offenders are incapable of controlling themselves, that recidivism is almost a guaranteed event (Mancini & Mears, 2010), and that rehabilitative treatment does not work for these individuals (Sundt et al., 1998). It is possible that some groups of community members are more emotionally driven in their responses to sex crimes—specifically parents—which drives their support for the registry system rather driving their arguments from a knowledgeable and empirical point of view. This study addresses the differences between community members to see if parents are less knowledgeable and more emotionally driven in their response to the sex offender registry. This study also seeks to test some of the misconceptions about sex offenders—such as the previously mentioned sexual incorrigibility—through the use of the CATSO Scale.

Common Misperceptions and Inaccurate Community Member Knowledge

Inaccurate information regarding sex offenders is being presented to community members via a variety of sources (Proctor, Badzinski, & Johnson, 2002). For instance, the media often exaggerate or present

incomplete information to make a dramatic story grab the attention of the viewer. If it is a story about an alleged sex offense, the reporter might call that person a sex offender without that person being convicted of any prior sex offenses—meaning that this individual is a first time offender. However, once that label is placed on the person in question, the term sex offender is the only thing that is focused on, and the potential threat is renewed (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). With the increasing amount of media coverage being presented, it may seem as though the rate of sex crimes is also increasing (Proctor et al., 2002). Research has disproved this misconception through analysis of official data from the Uniform Crime Report, which suggests that the number of forcible rapes has steadily decreased since the 1980s (Lonsway & Archambault, 2012; Mancini, 2013). Furthermore, research has suggested that the majority of sexual offenses are committed by first time sexual offenders rather than repeat offenders (Sandler, Freeman, & Socia, 2008). There are limitations in using official data (primarily concerned with the underreporting of sex crimes to the police), but other researchers have examined unofficial data in conjunction with official data sources (Finkelhor & Jones, 2012) and have come to similar conclusions regarding the decrease in sex crimes across all types of abuse. This reduction in the rate of sexual offenses may be due, in-part, to the large number of first time sex offenders committing the majority of the crimes (Sandler et al., 2008) and also due to a general trend of low recidivism levels among sex repeat offenders. Nevertheless, the contradictory information presented by the media and by researchers may be difficult for some community members to differentiate.

This misconception about the frequency of sex crimes ties into the misconception regarding the recidivism rates of sex offenders. A national study of community members reported that more than 93-percent of Americans believe that sex offender recidivism levels are very high (Mancini & Mears, 2010). However, researchers have suggested that the recidivism level for sex offenders is rather low in comparison to other types of offenders (Sample & Bray, 2003), a finding that was reaffirmed in a comparison study of recidivism rates for sex offenders and non-sex offenders (Tewksbury, Jennings, & Zgoba, 2011). Over a five-year time period, it is estimated that only 6.5% of sex offenders will be arrested for a new sex crime (Sample & Bray, 2003), and after ten years, the recidivism rate for high-risk offenders decreases to 4.2% (Harris, Harris, Helmus, & Thornton, 2014). Levenson and Zgoba (2015) have further reiterated that the sex offender registry laws have not contributed to a decrease in recidivism rates for registered sex offenders, thus suggesting that they may be ineffective. In their earlier work, Sample and Bray (2003) concluded that, "sex offenders do not appear to be more dangerous than other criminal categories" (p. 79)—a statement that seems to have reaffirmed by more current research (Tewksbury et al., 2011). Not only is this a well-accepted misconception among the general public but it was even promoted by the United States Supreme Court in their ruling for Smith v Doe (2003). In that ruling, the court stated that the Alaskan registry "was not retributive since the law was reasonably attributed to sex offenders having unusually high rates of recidivism," but no empirical data were cited to support this claim (as quoted in Durling, 2006, p. 343).

With a large amount of inaccurate information being circulated regarding sex offenders, it begs the question—How misinformed is the general public about this group of allegedly chronic recidivistic offenders who are unable to control themselves or change their behavior? Prior research leans toward an inverse relationship between high levels of community member support for the registry but limited or inaccurate knowledge concerning what the registry actually entails (Redlich, 2001; Shiavone & Jeglic, 2009). This study examines community member knowledge of general sex offender registry laws as a way to predict exactly how negative their attitudes toward sex offenders really are. Furthermore, it is necessary to measure whether or not negative is synonymous with punitive. The Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale has worked to measure punitive and negative feelings toward sex offenders.

Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale

Although the literature surrounding sex offenders and the registry is limited, there have been advancements in how to accurately measure perceptions of these groups. In one of the earliest studies to systematically measure perceptions of sexual offenders, Hogue (1993) used the Attitudes Toward Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS), an adaptation of the Attitudes Toward Prisoners Scale (ATP; Melvin, Gramling, & Gardner, 1985). Hogue's (1993) study determined that the police hold the most negative attitudes, but those practitioners who have frequent interactions with sex offenders tend to have more positive attitudes towards sex offenders. In replication research, women tended to view sex offenders less negatively than men (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). Men also perceived sex offenders with minor victims more negatively then those who

committed rape against an adult. Female participants did not make the same distinctions that the male participants did (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006).

Additional research has focused on civilian, practitioner, and law enforcement perceptions of sexual offenders. While the studies have added to the currently growing body of literature, researchers have lacked a systematic sex offender specific measure. The previous scales were originally geared toward prisoners or those with mental illness issues (see Hogue, 1993). To solve this limitation, Church and colleagues (2008) developed a set of measures which specifically addressed attitudes toward sexual offenders. Part of the reasoning behind this specific measure comes from the idea that sex offenders are a very stigmatized and targeted group of offenders, but often citizens are not as knowledgeable about sex offenses as they think they are. They stated that "if attitudes are based, at least in part, on myths or misinformation, subsequent legislative policies and judicial decisions may not accurately reflect societal needs" (Church et al., 2008, p. 251). Despite the limited knowledge base, there is a still a strong emotional response present (Church et al., 2008; Griffin & West, 2006).

Church and colleagues (2008) developed the finalized version of the Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale after conducting two pilot studies, which served to concentrate the total number of measures and to verify the reliability of the scale. The final version of the scale includes 18-items which measure four constructs related to the examination of community member perceptions of sex offenders. The 18-items ask participants how much they agree, or disagree, with statements regarding the likelihood that sex offenders can change their behavior, whether or not sex offenders should ever be released from prison, and what their adult relationships are like. These 18-items then loaded into four constructs, which Church et al. have titled "Social Isolation," "Capacity to Change," "Severity/Dangerousness," and "Deviancy" (Church et al., 2008) These constructs collectively measure "how dangerous they are, how deviant they are, how likely they can be rehabilitated, and how socially isolated they are" (Mustaine, Tewksbury, Connor, & Payne, 2014, p. 4). The Capacity to Change and Severity/Dangerousness constructs include the most punitive measures since they address issues such as lifetime imprisonment, loss of civil rights, increases in other punishment, and the use of tracking devices.

The Church and colleagues (2008) CATSO Scale was developed as a specific systematic way to measure community attitudes regarding sex offenders. Specifically, the measures are trying to predict negative attitudes or how punitive community members feel in regard to sex offenders and their crimes. The authors advocate its use in many arenas, such as collecting data from mental health practitioners, correctional officials, and law enforcement. The CATSO Scale has been tested on probation and parole officers (Conley et al., 2011), prison wardens (Connor, 2012), law enforcement officers (Mustaine et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013), and parole board members (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2012). Thus far, the CATSO Scale has been primarily tested on practitioner samples.

It must be acknowledged that although Church et al. (2008) had success with their scale, other researchers have criticized the CATSO scale due to issues of reliability. In their work applying the CATSO Scale to law enforcement officers, Tewksbury and Mustaine were only able to replicate the factor analysis for 15 of the 18 items that comprise the CATSO Scale. More specifically, Tewksbury and Mustaine (2013) reported issues with the third and fourth components of the scale—Severity/Dangerousness and Deviancy—and that two of the items loaded onto the wrong factor. Additionally, Shelton, Stone, and Winder (2013) tested the CATSO scale on three different samples to determine whether or not the scale was viable or if revisions needed to be made to its structure. They determined that eight of the 18 factors loaded below the acceptable 0.60 factor loadings and that two of the four constructs (Severity/Dangerousness and Deviancy) lacked internal consistency altogether (Shelton et al., 2013)—the same constructs that Tewksbury and Mustaine reported to be problematic.

In later work, Mustaine, Tewksbury, Connor, and Payne (2015) chose to not use a factor analysis approach and instead used an additive version of the CATSO Scale in which they only created a cohesive construct of all 18-items. By using this additive approach, Mustaine et al. (2015) found statistically significant results in predicting "negative/cynical views" toward sex offenders among a mixed sample of criminal justice officials. Although the authors did not discuss it, this alternative approach may have been used in an attempt to eliminate the potential reliability issues discussed in earlier work. Despite others' concerns, in the current study, the scale will be used in gathering information from the general public. Due to the difference in the sample (community member versus the previous use of practitioner samples), this study will take the traditional approach that Church et al. recommended.

Current Study

The current study uses a convenience sample of community members from across the country to examine their attitudes toward sex offenders by using the CATSO Scale. Because it is not representative, this convenience sample cannot draw conclusions regarding the items found in the CATSO Scale. However, this sample does provide a cross-section view of attitudes towards sex offenders, which could later be tested on a more representative scale. Although a complete sample is being utilized, there is specific interest in examining the differences between parents and those participants who do not have children (non-parents). This interest was derived from the protective nature embedded into having children and the sensitivity to the dangers posed to children. Furthermore, parental fear of crime may end up causing parents to restrict their children's activities, their movement, and with whom they associate (Carver, Timperio, Hesketh, & Crawford, 2010; Foster, Giles-Corti, & Knuiman, 2010).

Hypotheses

Because of this special interest, the project methodology is centered round two main hypotheses: 1) More generally, participants will have negative attitudes regarding sex offenders, and 2) More specifically, parents will have less favorable attitudes toward sex offenders compared to their non-parent counterparts. In order to test these hypotheses, frequency analyses, independent sample *t*-tests, and OLS Regressions will be completed.

Methodology

Sample

For this study, community members were recruited nationwide to complete a survey regarding their attitudes toward sex offenders. Participants were recruited from an online participant pool called Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is administered through Amazon.com. MTurk is described as an online marketplace where employers (researchers) can hire employees (participants) to complete a variety of work, including surveys. Participants were provided a $1 incentive for their participation. An advertisement was posted on the MTurk website inviting participants to take part in a criminological survey pertaining to perceptions of sexual offenders. Participants were told about the $1 incentive and that the survey would take them between 15 and 30 minutes to complete. A link to the external survey was listed in the invitation directing the participants to a secure Qualtrics website where the survey was administered.

MTurk requires the researcher to prepay their account in order for the participants to be compensated via Amazon.com. Using Amazon.com as a third-party provides for anonymity. Eight hundred seventy-seven individuals responded to the invitation posting asking for study participants.[1] The survey was administered in October 2013 and was open for one month. Before any analyses occurred, the data were cleaned, and any missing data were median-replaced. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the participants who took part in the survey. Although at times some of the demographic statistics were close in terms of percentages, participants more frequently identified as being male (53.0%), White (59.4%), between the ages of 30-34 (median age group), non-Hispanic (89.1%), non-parents (56.0%) who did not have a school age child (69.7%). Participants at minimum held a Bachelor's degree (59.3%), were not married (collectively 52.6%), and earned $50,000 or less (58.4%) but still identified as middle class (67.6%). The largest number of participants identified as having lived in the South (36.0%), compared to other areas of the country (collectively 72.0%), and came from areas with populations larger than 50,000 residents (collectively 72.9%).

Dependent Variables

This study sought to test community member perceptions of sexual offenders by using the CATSO scale as a way to assess those perceptions. The original 18-item CATSO scale, as developed by Church and colleagues (2008), was used just as they proposed it.[2] The reverse coding structure also stayed intact. This means that even when participants are agreeing with statements, their agreement still might indicate negative feelings about sex offenders. For the most part, participants do not show very strong responses for the 18-items. Many of the statements either have participant responses clustered together around the probably agree/probably disagree benchmark. In other words, participants do not seem to be taking a hard stance on items such as "people who commit sex offenses want to have sex more than the average person," "sex offenders have difficult making friends even though they try real hard," and so on. For others, there is a stronger collective feeling about the statements regarding dangerousness and whether or not sex offenders should be released from prison. The univariate analysis of all 18-items of the CATSO Scale is available upon request.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (*N* = 877)

Variable		Percentages
Gender	Male	*n* = 465 (53.0%)
	Female	*n* = 412 (47.0%)
Race	Non-White	*n* = 356 (41.6%)
	White	*n* = 521 (59.4%)
Age	Median Age Group	30-34 years old
Ethnicity	Not Hispanic	*n* = 781 (89.1%)
	Hispanic	*n* = 96 (10.9%)
Parental Status	Non-Parent	*n* = 491 (56.0%)
	Parent	*n* = 386 (44.0%)
Number of School Age Children	0 School Age Children	*n* = 611 (69.7%)
	1 or more School Age Children	*n* = 266 (30.3%)
Highest Level of Education	No College Degree	*n* = 357 (40.7%)
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	*n* = 520 (59.3%)
Marital Status	Legally Single	*n* = 386 (44.0%)
	Married	*n* = 416 (47.4%)
	Divorced	*n* = 64 (7.3%)
	Widowed	*n* = 11 (1.2%)
Income Level	$0 - $50,000	*n* = 512 (58.4%)
	$50,001 - $100,000	*n* = 275 (31.4%)
	$100,001 - $150,000	*n* = 66 (7.5%)
	$150,001 - $200,000	*n* = 19 (2.2%)
	$200,001 and above	*n* = 5 (0.6%)
Socio-Economic Status	Lower Class	*n* = 171 (19.5%)
	Middle Class	*n* = 593 (67.6%)
	Upper Middle Class	*n* = 110 (12.5%)
	Upper Class	*n* = 3 (0.3%)
Geographic Region	Northeast	*n* = 144 (16.4%)
	Midwest	*n* = 223 (25.4%)
	South	*n* = 316 (36.0%)
	West	*n* = 194 (22.1%)
Population Size	Less than 50,000 people	*n* = 238 (27.1%)
	50,000 – 99,999	*n* = 245 (27.9%)
	100,000 – 249,999	*n* = 210 (23.9%)
	250,000 – 999,999	*n* = 100 (11.4%)
	1,000,000 or more	*n* = 84 (9.6%)

The 18-items break into four constructs, "Social Isolation," "Capacity to Change," "Severity/Dangerousness," and "Deviancy," with multiple factors loading onto each component. Factor analysis was completed to confirm that the original four constructs were still intact and that the Church et al. scales were accurate. The 18-items loaded onto the four proposed constructs as intended. The measures are reported within the four constructs developed from the different factor loadings. Collinearity diagnostics were completed and there were no concerns about multicollinearity within the 18-items. Table 2 shows the factor analysis for the 18-items. All items registered at a factor loading of .60 or higher, which is considered appropriate (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). Once the confirmatory factor analysis was completed, the measures were combined into the four scales representing the four constructs derived from the factor analysis. The items were summed and then

divided based on the number of measures in each scale.

Once the scales were created, they were analyzed for reliability. The "Social Isolation" scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .809, the "Capacity to Change" scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .784, the "Severity/Dangerousness" scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .742, and the "Deviancy" scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .703. These reliability statistics are similar to those reported in the original CATSO study (Church et al., 2008). However, these results are different comparative to prior research, which suggested that the CATSO measures lacked internal consistency (Mustaine et al., 2015; Shelton et al., 2013; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). These four scales serve as the first four dependent variables for the OLS Regression models to be tested. Finally, as per Church et al. (2008), the four scales were then recombined into an additive index—the Total Index of Negative Attitudes variable—which tests the entire 18-item scale in one index. This index was also analyzed for reliability and reported a Cronbach's alpha of .836. The Total Index of Negative Attitudes variable will serve as the fifth and final dependent variable for OLS Regression analysis.

Table 2: Factor Analysis for the 18-items of the CATSO Scale

	Component			
Social Isolation	1	2	3	4
Sex offenders prefer to stay home alone rather than be around lots of people.	**.615**	-.143	.113	.065
Most sex offenders do not have close friends.	**.671**	-.109	.226	-.180
Sex offenders have difficulty making friends even if they try real hard.	**.699**	-1.25	.027	-.130
Most sex offenders are unmarried men.	**.619**	-.238	.279	-.121
Most sex offenders keep to themselves.	**.623**	-.319	.270	-.058
Capacity to Change				
With support and therapy, someone who committed a sexual offense can learn to change their behavior. (RC)	-.126	**.649**	-.007	-.321
People who commit sex offenses should lose their civil rights (e.g. voting and privacy).	.272	**.626**	-.099	.019
Trying to rehabilitate a sex offender is a waste of time.	.182	**.676**	-.214	-.356
Sex offenders should wear tracking devices so their location can be pinpointed at any time.	-.096	**.703**	.069	.094
Convicted sex offenders should never be released from prison.	.190	**.615**	-.136	-.146
Severity/Dangerousness				
Male sex offenders should be punished more severely than female sex offenders. (RC)	-.112	-.057	**.738**	-.046
The prison sentences sex offenders receive are much too long when compared to the sentence lengths for other crimes. (RC)	-.275	-.183	**.606**	-.107
Only a few sex offenders are dangerousness. (RC)	-.203	.139	**.693**	.100
Someone who uses emotional control when committing a sex offense is not as bad as someone who uses physical control when committing a sex offense. (RC)	-.144	-.035	**.634**	-.159
A sex offense committed against someone the perpetrator knows is less serious than a sex offense committed against a stranger. (RC)	-.371	-.273	**.701**	-.147
Sexual Deviancy				
People who commit sex offenses want to have sex more often than the average person.	.160	.097	-.223	**.653**
A lot of sex offenders use their victims to create pornography.	.366	.342	.113	**.701**
Sex offenders have high rates of sexual activity.	.062	.204	-.149	**.667**

Independent Variables

For this study, two independent variables were used to predict the five OLS Regression models of the CATSO Scale. The first focused on the participants' general knowledge of laws surrounding the sex offender registry. At times, participants are asked to think specifically of their state. In other statements, participants were asked more general questions pertaining to the wide scope of the registry. Ten items were used to measure registry knowledge, using a five-point Likert Scale. As shown in Table 3, participants do not have very accurate knowledge regarding common laws associated with the sex offender registry. Instead, the results suggest that participants' are largely unsure about many of these testing measures. Only a few measures, such as the Amber Alert measure, seem to show a majority correct response.

Table 3: Registry Knowledge Measures (*n* = 877).

Measure	Very True (1)	Somewhat True (2)	Unsure (3)	Somewhat False (4)	Very False (5)
1) In my state, all sex offenders are classified the same, no matter their crime.* (False)	*n* = 87 (9.9%)	*n* = 215 (24.5%)	*n* = 370 (42.2%)	*n* = 135 (15.4%)	*n* = 70 (8.0%)
2) In some states, registered sex offenders are required to live at least 1,000 feet from a school zone, park or bus stop. (True)	*n* = 196 (22.3%)	*n* = 259 (29.5%)	*n* = 330 (37.6%)	*n* = 60 (6.8%)	*n* = 32 (3.6%)
3) Some sex offenders are required to register for life. (True)	*n* = 369 (42.1%)	*n* = 222 (25.3%)	*n* = 218 (24.9%)	*n* = 48 (5.5%)	*n* = 20 (2.3%)
4) In some states, juvenile offenders who are at least 14 years old at the time of the offense, can be placed on the registry if convicted. (True)	*n* = 120 (13.7%)	*n* = 189 (21.6%)	*n* = 473 (53.9%)	*n* = 73 (8.3%)	*n* = 22 (2.5%)
5) All sex offenders are required to be on some sort of electronic monitoring/GPS tracking device at all times.* (False)	*n* = 64 (7.3%)	*n* = 93 (10.6%)	*n* = 261 (29.8%)	*n* = 221 (25.2%)	*n* = 238 (27.1%)
6) Sex offenders have very high rates of reoffending.* (False)	*n* = 213 (24.3%)	*n* = 325 (37.1%)	*n* = 230 (26.2%)	*n* = 68 (7.8%)	*n* = 41 (4.7%)
7) The Amber Alert system is named after a child named Amber; it has nothing to do with the color amber. (True)	*n* = 436 (49.7%)	*n* = 135 (15.4%)	*n* = 229 (26.1%)	*n* = 43 (4.9%)	*n* = 34 (3.9%)
8) There are more male sex offenders registered than female sex offenders. (True)	*n* = 416 (47.4%)	*n* = 236 (26.9%)	*n* = 164 (18.7%)	*n* = 49 (5.6%)	*n* = 12 (1.4%)
9) Individuals convicted of their very first sexual crime can be classified as sexual predators or can be placed in a Tier III classification. (True)	*n* = 140 (16.0%)	*n* = 223 (25.4%)	*n* = 451 (51.4%)	*n* = 47 (5.4%)	*n* = 16 (1.8%)
10) After serving their prison sentences, some states allow sex offenders to be incarcerated indefinitely though a process called Civil Commitment. (True)	*n* = 87 (9.9%)	*n* = 143 (16.3%)	*n* = 524 (59.7%)	*n* = 91 (10.4%)	*n* = 32 (3.6%)

* Indicates that the measure was reverse coded.

A simple True/False response option was not provided to participants in order to promote variability in the responses and to eliminate the possibility of forcing participants into one response or the other. Each of the response options were dichotomized after the initial univariate analyses were conducted. For the true statement measures, the response options "Very True" and "Somewhat True" were collapsed and coded as being correct. The remaining three categories ("Unsure," "Somewhat False," and "Very False") were coded as being incorrect. The reverse action was conducted if the measure was a false statement. Once dichotomized, the measures were then transformed into a count variable. The count variable produced a series of scores ranging from 0 (no registry knowledge measures were answered correctly) to 10 (all ten registry knowledge measures were answered correctly). The mean score for the Registry Knowledge count variable was 4.50; this indicates that many participants do not have a very accurate knowledge base and answered more than half of the

measures incorrectly. Although the setup of the registry knowledge variable provides for a positive relationship to exist between itself and dependent variables, a negative relationship is predicted to occur (as registry knowledge decreases, the intensity of the participants' negative attitudes toward sex offenders will increase).

The second independent variable used in the regressions was formed from the participants' ability to correctly identify the most common demographic characteristics of the sex offenders currently on the registry. Participants were asked to identify the common demographic features of sex offenders,[3] including the gender, age group, race, and ethnicity of the offender, along with the most frequent offender/victim relationship, victim type, and type of victimization or crime. Based on prior research findings, the most frequent type of registered sex offender is a White, non-Hispanic male, with a mean age of 44.3 years of age. The most common offense committed was a physical, non-consensual sex act against a female minor between the ages of 6-14 (Ackerman, Harris, Levenson, & Zgoba, 2011). This profile comes from a review of all state sex offender registries and those registered on it. Although this may vary slightly dependent on location, the Ackerman et al. (2011) profile is thorough in its content and depiction of sexual offenders currently registered across the country.

Table 4: Frequency Statistics for Stereotypical Sex Offender Measures (*n* = 877).

Measure	Response Options	Frequencies	
Gender	Male	*n* = 834	(95.1%)
	Female	*n* = 43	(4.9%)
Age Group	14-25 years old	*n* = 54	6.2%
	26-35 years old	*n* = 406	46.3%
	36-45 years old	*n* = 303	34.5%
	46-55 years old	*n* = 101	11.5%
	56-65 years old	*n* = 11	1.3%
	66 years old and older	*n* = 2	0.2%
Race	Native American/Alaskan	*n* = 45	5.1%
	Asian	*n* = 76	8.7%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*n* = 21	2.4%
	Black/African American	*n* = 81	9.2%
	White	*n* = 627	71.5%
	Other	*n* = 27	3.1%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	*n* = 163	18.6%
	Not-Hispanic	*n* = 714	81.4%
Offender/Victim Relationship	Offender is a stranger	*n* = 285	32.5%
	Offender is a close friend	*n* = 257	29.3%
	Offender is a distant relative	*n* = 245	27.9%
	Offender is an immediate relative	*n* = 90	10.3%
Most Frequent Victim	Pre-pubescent female minor	*n* = 361	41.2%
	Pre-pubescent male minor	*n* = 163	18.6%
	Post-pubescent female minor	*n* = 203	23.1%
	Post-pubescent male minor	*n* = 19	2.2%
	Adult female	*n* = 95	10.8%
	Adult male	*n* = 36	4.1%
Most Frequent Victimization	Physical non-consensual sex act	*n* = 560	63.9%
	Physical consensual sex act with a minor	*n* = 228	26.0%
	Non-physical sex act	*n* = 89	10.1%

Table 4 shows the frequency statistics for these seven measures as identified by the participants. The majority of participants correctly identified the gender, race, and ethnicity of the offender. Only 34.5% of participants identified the offenders' age group as 36-45 years old, but more than 80% of participants identified sex offenders as belonging to younger age groups. Additionally, 67.5% of participants identified that the average sex offender has a relationship with his victim, compared to only 32.5% of participants who identified a stranger perpetrator. Finally, 41.2% of participants identified pre-pubescent females as the most frequent victim and a physical, non-consensual sex act (63.9%) as the most frequent type of victimization.

The seven measures associated with the stereotypical sex offender variable were then added together to create a total count variable. Each of the seven measures was dichotomized into "correct" and "incorrect" response options based on the profile derived from prior literature. Indexing the seven variables then created a new measure with participant scores ranging from 0 (no correct responses were identified) to 7 (all seven correct responses were identified). The mean score for the Stereotypical Sex Offender count variable was 4.55; this indicates that participants have a semi-accurate knowledge base regarding the most frequent demographic features of sex offenders and answered more than half of the measures correctly. Again, even though the setup of the stereotypical sex offender variable provides for a positive relationship to exist between itself and dependent variables, a negative relationship is predicted to occur (as the accuracy of the predicted stereotypical sex offender decreases, the intensity of the participants' negative attitudes toward sex offenders will increase).

Control Variables

All of the previously mentioned participant demographic variables will serve as control variables within the regression models.

Results

Before the full model OLS Regressions were run, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to see if there were any significant differences present between parents and non-parents regarding the different constructs of the CATSO scale. Table 5 shows that Social Isolation is the only construct to not show a significant difference between parents and non-parents in how they view sex offenders. There is also a significant difference between parents and non-parents for the other three constructs: Capacity to Change, Severity/Dangerousness, and Deviancy.

Table 5: Independent Sample T-Tests for Parental Status and the Constructs of the CATSO Scale.

	Social Isolation					
	Mean	*SD*	*N*	*df*	*t*	Sig.
Parents	3.37	.96	479	875	-.854	.224
Non-Parents	3.32	.92	398	875	-.854	
	Capacity to Change					
Parents	3.71	.83	479	875	-5.280	.000***
Non-Parents	3.40	.88	398	875	-5.280	
	Severity/Dangerousness					
Parents	2.97	.84	479	875	-2.367	.018*
Non-Parents	2.83	.81	398	875	-2.267	
	Deviancy					
Parents	3.66	.96	479	875	-3.145	.002**
Non-Parents	3.45	.97	398	875	-3.145	
	Total Index of Negative Attitudes					
Parents	13.71	2.77	479	875	-3.715	.000***
Non-Parents	13.01	2.77	398	875	-3.715	

***p < .001; **p < .01; p < .05

Table 6: OLS Regression Models for Four Individual Constructs of the CATSO Scale.

	Social Isolation			Capacity to Change			Severity/Dangerousness			Deviancy		
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta	Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta	Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta	Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta
Registry Knowledge	-.024	.014	-.055	-.009	.006	-.023	-.036***	.005	-.093	-.008	.007	-.017
Stereotypical Offender	-.071***	.022	-.116	-.024	.020	-.043	-.160***	.017	-.296	-.088***	.023	-.139
Parental Status	.088	.078	.047	.212**	.071	.112	.148*	.061	.089	.064	.080	.033
Num. School Age Children	-.052	.041	-.047	.034	.037	.033	-.001	.032	.000	.075	.042	.065
Gender	.001	.009	.005	-.017**	.008	-.066	-.011	.007	-.047	-.001	.009	-.005
Age	-.038*	.015	-.089	.018	.013	.049	-.029*	.011	-.083	.011	.015	.027
Race	-.339***	.070	-.177	-.446**	.064	-.253	-.425***	.054	-.251	-.489***	.071	-.248
Ethnicity	-.008	.006	-.039	-.001	.006	-.005	.002	.005	.011	.011	.006	.004
Education Level	.070	.065	.037	.042	.060	.024	.105*	.051	.062	.032	.067	.016
Marital Status	.134*	.065	.071	.110	.060	.063	.033	.051	.020	.045	.067	.023
Income Level	-.049	.044	-.040	-.014	.040	-013	-.055	.034	-.051	-.014	.045	-.011
SES Status	.009	.060	.006	.022	.055	.015	.038	.047	.026	-.012	.061	-.007
Geographic Region	.102	.063	.052	.046	.057	.026	-.020	.049	-.012	.055	.064	.027
Population Size	.002	.024	.003	-.034	.022	-.050	.003	.019	.004	-.026	.025	-.034
Constant	4.033	.171		3.070	.230		3.000	.196		4.234	.176	
F-Statistic	8.550***			9.065***			26.927***			8.713***		
R Square	.122			.129			.305			.124		

***p < .001; **p < .01; p < .05

This indicates that parents are exhibiting higher mean responses—indicating that they are more likely to agree with the measures provided in the survey for these constructs. For example, parents are more likely to believe that sex offenders are incapable of change compared to non-parents. Finally, there is a significant difference between parents and non-parents for the total index of negative attitudes, which, as previously stated, is a combined count variable comprised of the four independent constructs. Because four out of five of the *t*-tests show a significant difference between participants groups, these results provide initial support for the second hypothesis, which stated that parents will have less favorable attitudes toward sex offenders compared to their non-parent counterparts.

To build on the initial results of the independent sample *t*-tests, five OLS Regressions were completed to test the CATSO scale constructs and the total index of negative attitudes. Table 6 shows the results of the first four regression models associated with the individual constructs of the CATSO scale. All four models are strongly significant and are able to explain 12% of the variance or higher. The Severity/Dangerousness model is the strongest of the four regressions by being able to explain 30.5% of the variance. The registry knowledge variable only showed significance (significant at the .001 alpha level) within the Severity/Dangerousness model and presented a negative relationship with the dependent variable. The stereotypical sex offender variable was strongly significant and was a suitable predictor variable for the models. The only exception rests in the Capacity to Change model, where the stereotypical sex offender variable failed to be significant. It too presented a negative relationship with the four dependent variables.

Table 7: OLS Regression Model for Total Index of Negative Attitudes

Variable		Total Index of Negative Attitudes		
		Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta
Registry Knowledge		-.077*	.019	-.059
Stereotypical Offender		-.349***	.060	-.192
Parental Status		.550*	.213	.084
Num. School Age Children		.047	.111	.017
Gender		-.028	.024	-.035
Age		-.031	.040	-.027
Race		-1.783***	.191	-.313
Ethnicity		-.006	.017	-.010
Education Level		.248	.179	.044
Marital Status		.322	.178	.058
Income Level		-.131	.120	-.036
SES Status		.058	.164	.012
Geographic Region		.184	.172	.032
Population Size		-.055	.066	-.025
Constant		16.087	.474	
F Statistic	19.251***			
R Square	.239			
***p < .001; **p < .01; p < .05				

The negative relationships shown between the two independent variables and the four dependent variables suggest that as the two different types of knowledge decrease, the intensity of the participants' negative attitudes toward sex offenders increases. These results are consistent with the development of the two count variables. Furthermore, parental status is only significant in two of the four models (Capacity to Change and Severity/Dangerousness). The lack of overall significance does not suggest that there is a strong difference between the two groups for prediction purposes and only lends partial support

for the second study hypothesis. Race was the only other consistently significant variable (significant at a .01 alpha level or higher) in all of the models. A negative relationship is presented in all four models, indicating that minority, or non-White, participants have more strongly negative attitudes toward sex offenders comparative to White participants.

Table 7 shows the results of the final OLS Regression model associated with the total index of negative attitudes. The results of the regression show a significant model, which is able to explain 23.9% of the variance. Since the total index of negative attitudes is a compilation of the four constructs of the CATSO scale, it makes sense for the model to be nested in within the results of the other four regression models, in terms of explained variance and significant variables. The registry knowledge and stereotypical sex offender variables are both significant (at the .05 and .001 alpha levels respectively) and show negative relationships with the total index. Parental status is once again significant within the model (at the .05 alpha level), suggesting that parents have overall more negative attitudes toward sex offenders than non-parents. This once again supports the study's second hypothesis, which specifically addresses the difference between the two participant groups. Finally, race is still significant within the model (at the .001 alpha level) and still shows a negative relationship between it and the total index of negative attitudes. This once more suggests that minority, or non-White participants, have more negative attitudes toward sex offenders than do White participants.

Discussion

The results of the study suggest that community members still have negative attitudes toward sex offenders, as evidenced by the statistical strength of the regression models. However, some interesting findings developed from the inclusion of the control variables in the models. First, parental status was only significant in three of the five of the regressions and therefore can only provide partial support for the second hypothesis, which states that parents will have less favorable attitudes toward sex offenders compared to their non-parent counterparts. The variable is significant for the Capacity to Change, Severity/Dangerousness, and the Total Index of Negative Attitudes. Parents may be tapping into their fears regarding the potential threat that sex offenders pose to themselves and more specifically, to their children. These elements examined more of the misconceptions (e.g., increased rates of sexual assault and high rates of recidivism) discussed earlier in the literature review. Based on the participants' beliefs about this misinformation, it may play a role in the strong negative attitudes captured in the regression models. These specific models provide further support for the idea that there is a "knowledge gap" between the information being produced by researchers (e.g., experts) and community-members (e.g., non-experts; Robinson, 2003). Community-members tend to rely on the media as their informational source, which can lead to the distortion of the facts regarding sexual offenders and the potential threat that they pose. These results are particularly important now as we find ourselves in an era where politicians constantly call for increased legislation against sex offenders and are successful at passing nearly 50 new sex offender related laws a year (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2015; Zilney & Zilney, 2009). These new laws often have major impacts on the reentry efforts of sex offenders and often lead to increased frequency of collateral consequences such as unemployment (Levenson et al., 2007; Shelton et al., 2013), homelessness (Levenson & Hern, 2007; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005), and harassment from the community (Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Levenson & Hern, 2007; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000).

Second, the participants' race was significant in all five-regression models, presenting a negative relationship between race and the negative attitudes toward sex offenders. While the negative relationship for this variable was not anticipated, it does indicate that minority participants hold more strongly negative attitudes toward sex offenders than do white participants. As seen from the stereotypical sex offender variable, most sex offenders are White males, and that variable is supported by the findings of Ackerman and colleagues (2011). Research also suggests that most victimizations tend to be interracial in nature rather than intra-racial (Rader, Cossman, & Porter, 2012). But the relationship found between the race variable and the attitudes toward sex offenders suggest that an intra-racial effect may be occurring. This study did not specifically set out to examine the racial differences in the perception of sexual offenders. However, prior research on the perceptions of juvenile sex offenders suggests that "participants were marginally more supportive of registration when the defendant and the victim were different races," implying that a racial bias might be taking place "not just at the offender, but at interracial relationships" (Salerno et al., 2013, p. 73). Prior researcher has suggested that White community members are typically more in favor of harsh laws against sex offenders compared to Blacks (Mancini, Shields, Mears, & Beaver, 2010; Mears et al., 2008). However, given the direction of these results, this may be a new area of research to explore

further as minimal research has been completed examining the race of the offender or the race of the victim in regards to perceptions sexual offending, and these findings seem to contradict those of Mancini and colleagues (2010) and Mears and colleagues (2008). Additionally, it begs the question as to just toward whom minority participants hold negative attitudes. Does an interracial relationship exist, or is it intra-racial in nature?

Finally, the use of the CATSO Scale in the predictive models provided a different look at negative perceptions of sex offenders. Predominately, researchers have focused on applying the CATSO Scale to practitioner samples (Conley et al., 2011; Connor, 2012; Mustaine et al., 2015; Shelton et al., 2013; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2012, 2013); however, Church et al. (2008) did state that it should be applied to community member samples as well—something that has been done in this study. In addition to the sample, this paper has shown support for a scale that has been criticized for reliability and validity issues in the past. There were no issues with reliability or internal validity in this analysis. Due to the inconsistencies between this study and previous studies regarding this issue, it is still necessary to find the most consistent version of the CATSO Scale possible, which would require future adjustments of the items and the constructs.

Limitations

Although there are numerous strengths present in this article, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the use of the online participant pool MTurk has several disadvantages. MTurk is a voluntary, nation-wide participant pool, but because it is voluntary, there may be some selection bias occurring. Furthermore, this bias might be increased because there was a $1 monetary incentive. This is a larger incentive when compared to the other MTurk surveys that were being administered around the same time. Most of the other MTurk research opportunities were only providing $.25 or $.50 to participants as an incentive. Since the participants tended to be younger in age, this might imply that there might be a generational bias in participation as well. Younger participants are more reliant on the Internet and might be using MTurk as a way to supplement their income.

Additionally, it must be acknowledged that although this study did use a nationwide sample of participants, that sample was not representative of the country as a whole. Several states stood out with higher rates of participants, and a concentration of southern states was more strongly represented than other parts of the country. The South has historically had more punitive laws and more punitive views toward the punishment of all types of offenders (Cohen, 1998), which may have biased the results of the survey somewhat. Since the sample is not representative of the country overall, this has implications for future research. However, this study was able to provide support for community members exhibiting negative attitudes toward sex offenders based on cross-sectional data.

Furthermore, this study is testing participants' perceptions of sexual offenders based on general knowledge questions. Using federal law as a basis for the questions was an option, but it has not been adopted by all states. Although several federal sex offender laws have been implemented in nearly all states, only 17 states are in full compliance with the most current federal law—the Adam Walsh Act of 2006 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). Furthermore, states are allowed to adapt additional laws that are not imbedded in the federal laws (e.g., residency restrictions). Since there is no uniform set of laws to base the knowledge questions off of, they had to be more general in tone. Additionally, participants might be more familiar with their own state laws rather than the federal laws that were discussed previously. It is impractical that participants should receive individual surveys based on their own state laws if the purpose of the study was to test the collective knowledge of all participants. For these reasons, and the inconsistent results of the registry knowledge variable, which was significant throughout all five models, a possible reconceptualization of the variable may be needed. Future research could focus on formulating a better, more consistent knowledge variable.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

There are a variety of policy implications that can be derived from this study. The first, and most important, is that the nation does not know enough about the laws of which they are highly supportive. Through the Stereotypical Sex Offender variable, the study shows that participants are more aware of who sex offenders look like and the types of offenses they are committing. But their legal knowledge is still limited. Registry knowledge was only significant for the Severity/Dangerousness and the Total Index of Negative Attitudes regression models. Although the registry knowledge variable was not significant for all the models, the significant results for the Total Index of Negative Attitudes regression were very telling. These results indicate that participants' legal knowledge was strongly predictive of how they feel about sex offenders overall—the index included the four individual scales and provides the most information about just how negative their attitudes

are toward this group of offenders. These inconsistencies may require a stronger development of the registry knowledge variable, or the development of state specific variables.

The registry knowledge variable is arguably the more important when compared to the stereotypical sex offender variable. The demographic characteristics of the offender are consistent when looking at the total number of registered sex offenders across the country (Ackerman et al., 2011), but the law is always evolving. If legal knowledge is already limited, it is possible it will decrease in accuracy as the laws surrounding the registry evolve and expand. This puts researchers at a greater disadvantage in terms of policy implications. If community-members are already showing inaccuracies in terms of legal knowledge, and the law continues to evolve in a more punitive fashion, then what might that mean for the experiences of registered sex offenders? The political response to sex crimes is consistently increasing in terms of sanctioning sex offenders (Leon, 2011; Meloy, Curtis, & Boarwright, 2013; Robinson, 2003), and many community-members believe these sanctions to be a positive improvement of the law. Prior research has also suggested that community members do not access their state's registry website very frequently (Boyle et al., 2013; Burchfield, 2012; Craun, 2010; Kernsmith, Comartin, et al., 2009; Kernsmith, Craun, et al., 2009), and many community members do not even know when sex offenders are living in their neighborhoods (Burchfield, 2012; Craun, 2010; Kernsmith, Comartin, et al., 2009). Despite the inconsistent significance within the models, simple frequency statistics reveal that the many participants either were unsure or completely wrong about the information presented to them. However, their support for the registry, and even harsher penalties against sex offenders, was as strong as prior literature suggested it would be.

If community members were unknowledgeable about the legal circumstances surrounding the sex offender registry, then they would be applying all of their inaccurate perceptions to the totality of individuals registered. The sex offender registry requires registration for a variety of different offenses ranging from public urination through serious sexual assaults. These crimes are vastly different, yet the registrants are labeled the same way—sex offender. Most states only use a binary classification structure (sexual offender or sexual predator), or they use the three tier system established in the Adam Walsh Act (2006). If community members were not knowledgeable about the basic characteristics of sex offenders (race, gender, age, etc.), why would we assume that they would be able to differentiate between these legal classifications? A lack of knowledge and a high level of support for punitive increases to the registry can cause further harm to those low-risk offenders who are equated with the high-risk predators of whom the community members are more fearful.

Future Research

Future research efforts should focus on several issues. As previously discussed, there is a need to refine the knowledge variables to find a better fit with the CATSO measures. Though the CATSO Scale tested well, it has not had consistent results with all researchers and all samples. Therefore, further testing must occur in order to find a more consistent set of measures to examine community member perceptions and knowledge regarding the sex offender registry. Revising the CATSO Scale will also provide a more consistent set of measures regarding community member support for punitive sanctions against sex offenders—something that researchers called for in 2013 (Mancini, 2013).

Revising the CATSO Scale will also allow for researchers to collect more national samples that can test the public opinion of sex offenders. The CATSO Scale can be applied to perceptions of all sex offenders across the country, but the majority of sex offender research either uses convenience samples (Shiavone & Jeglic, 2009) or focuses participants coming from one state (Levenson & Shields, 2012; Levenson & Zgoba, 2015; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005). This study admittedly uses a convenience sample, but it still uses a national sample of participants. Other researchers should be encouraged to focus on national attitudes toward sex offenders as well.

Sex offender demographics also have to be taken into account when addressing public perceptions research. The inverse relationship of the race variable to the CATSO measures was an unforeseen result. Future research should survey participants about the social demographics—including race—of the offender to see if there is a racial bias effect occurring as Salerno et al. (2013) discuss in their research and whether or not that bias is geared toward inter- or intra-racial sex offenses.

In addition to facing criticism and social isolation from unwelcoming community members, increasingly punitive laws may further exacerbate the problems that sex offenders face during their reentry efforts. It is well documented that registered sex offenders face issues with unemployment (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010), finding suitable housing that does not violate any residency restrictions (Klein, Rukus, & Zambrana, 2012; Levenson &

Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005), and stigmatization due to the nature of their offenses (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000). It does not defy logic that these issues could become more pervasive among registered sex offenders should the legal atmosphere become more stringent regarding the registry restrictions placed upon them.

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Endnotes

[1] The MTurk platform employs roughly 500,000 workers at a time. Although this survey did not have any limitations on who was eligible to take the survey providing a response rate would not be truly representative of who was issued the invitation. There is no way to tell who saw the survey invitation and decided not to take it or to determine the number of people who did not even view it to begin with. More information about MTurk can be found here: www.mturk.com.

[2] All 18-items of the CATSO Scale, please see Church et al. (2008).

[3] For example, when asked about the offenders' gender, participants were asked to respond to the statement: "Most sex offenders are (male/female)."