

Do Societal Reactions Lead to Increased Experiences of Shame and Strain for Registered Female Sex Offenders?

Jennifer Klein, M.A.,¹ Joseph Rukus, M.R.P.,²
and Katheryne Zambrana, M.A.³



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¹ Jennifer L. Klein, M.A. is a Ph.D. student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL.

² Joseph A. Rukus, M.R.P. is currently at criminology PhD student at the University of Florida.

³ Katheryne Zambrana, M.A. is a graduate student of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of Florida..

Abstract

Currently, there is limited research on registered female sex offenders compared to males. However, research suggests differences do exist, making exclusively female sex offender research important. A mail-out survey collected 106 responses, addressing Reintegrative Shaming and General Strain Theories, experiences resulting from the participants' known sex offender statuses and their perceptions of the Florida registry. We hypothesize that as females encounter more collateral consequences from registration, the amount of shame and strain felt will increase. The results show as anticipated, the proposed relationship between collateral consequence experiences and increased shame and strain is indeed present. Policy implications and conclusions are discussed.

About the Authors

Jennifer L. Klein, M.A. is a Ph.D. student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL. Her research interests include sexual offenders, the sex offender registry and the effects the registry has on those registered. She is currently working on several research projects looking at community perceptions of the registry and the perceptions of those who are registered. Her email address is jklein87@ufl.edu.

Joseph A. Rukus, M.R.P. is currently at criminology PhD student at the University of Florida. He holds a Masters in Regional Planning from Cornell University as well as Bachelors Degrees in Urban Studies and Finance from San Francisco State University and Xavier University of Cincinnati, OH respectively. His research focus is community-based solutions crime and recidivism. His email address is kzambrana@ufl.edu.

Katheryne Zambrana, M.A. is a graduate student of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of Florida. She earned dual B.A.s in political science and criminology at the University of Florida. Her research interests include fear of crime, corrections (community and institutional), evaluation research, and juvenile justice & delinquency. Her email address is jrukus@ufl.edu.

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Introduction

According to the National Center for Exploited and Missing Children (2011), there are currently an estimated 750,000 sex offenders on state sex offender registries. While registries have been enthusiastically supported by both criminal justice agencies, politicians and the public-at-large, research regarding their efficacy is questionable. Recent sex offender registration laws have been created due to this overwhelming support for more stringent action after high profile child abductions have taken place. Laws such as the Jacob Wetterling Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-322), Megan's Law of 1996 (Public Law 104-145) and the Adam Walsh Act of 2006 (Public Law 104-145) were all established for their namesakes – victims of sexual based offenses. Contrary to the images portrayed in the media, sex offender recidivism rates have traditionally been lower in comparison to other offending populations (Berliner, 1995; Hanson and Bussiere, 1998; Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Langan, Schmitt and Durose, 1994; Maddan, 2008; Meloy, 2005) and evidence suggests registries have had minimal impact on these rates (Adkins, Huff and Stateberg, 2000; Avrahamian, 1998; Gonnerman, 2007; Maddan, 2008; Sandler, Freeman and Socia, 2007; Tewksbury and Jennings, 2010). This contradiction between the media representation of sexual offenders and what the literature says on the subject, presents researchers with an opportunity to study the effects that such laws have on the lives of registered sexual offenders.

Research has shown that the registry can lead to certain social and economic factors that may negatively impact sex offenders, increasing their likelihood of reoffending (Zevitz and Farakas, 2000a, 2000b). This paper focuses on two criminological frameworks, which may help

explain this dynamic – Reintegrative Shame and General Strain theories. Although other theoretical frameworks could certainly be applied to this specific population, these two theories will be used in the context of this paper. First, Braithwaite’s (1989) Reintegrative Shaming Theory argues that shaming plays a critical role in criminal justice sanction efficacy. Reintegrative shaming helps offenders by preparing them to return to their communities, whereas disintegrative shaming serves to stigmatize them and may actually promote further criminal activity. As applied to sex offender registries, if registrants perceive their placement on the registry to be unjust and punitive, they may respond by recidivating. Second, Agnew’s (1985) General Strain Theory asserts that deviance is a function of strain, which results largely from a combination of goal blockage, removal of positive stimuli, and the presence of negative stimuli. Examining the sex offender registry from this theoretical paradigm, it is possible that increased strain resulting from all three causes may lead to increases in offending among those individuals who experience such situations.

Generally, much of our knowledge of sex offender perceptions has been based on male populations. However, studies seem to indicate there are differences between male and female sex offenders in offense characteristics (Beech, Parrett, Ward, and Fisher, 2009; Fehrenbach and Monastersky, 1988; Mathews, Mathews and Speltz, 1988; Vandiver and Walker, 2002) and in the post-release collateral consequences associated with each gender (Tewksbury, 2004, 2005). As such, it is entirely possible that the attitudinal dynamics of being placed on the registry may also be different between genders. Most specifically, research suggests that there is a gender difference in the way females experience shame (Adler, 2000; Artz, 2004; Baines and Adler, 1996; Daly, 2002; Gaarder and Presser, 2006; Maxwell, Kingi, Robertson, Morris and Cunningham, 2004) and strain (Broidy, 2001; Broidy and Agnew, 1997; Campbell, 1994; De

Coster and Zito, 2010; Piquero and Sealock, 2004) in comparison to males. Exploring this gender difference adds to the main focus of this study. Using a sample made up exclusively of female sex offenders, we examine whether the collateral consequences of being on a registry lead to the higher levels of strain and shame. Although a female sample does not allow us to test for differences among female and male sex offenders, our study does present an important look at female sex offender's experiences, a group that is largely overlooked. Moreover, this will provide a foundation of information, which will help guide and inform those looking to test for such differences in future work. In so doing, we hope to add to the growing body of literature in a subject area where further research is needed (Beech et al., 2009).

Sex Offender Registries: High Popularity but Questionable Efficacy

Historically, sex offenses have been a grey area in American jurisprudence. The nature of such offenses left legal actors with the task of determining the appropriate response to sex crimes. This means that law enforcement may have frequently overlooked sex offenses (Jenkins, 1998). This all changed in the 1990s when several highly publicized sex crimes, predominately against children, spurred policy makers into action (Sample and Kadleck, 2008). Over the next three decades, legislators would pass a series of stringent sex offender registration requirements. These requirements began with the Jacob Wetterling Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-322) and Megan's Law of 1996 (Public Law 104-145), two laws that have laid the foundation for the current registry system. The Jacob Wetterling Act established the national registry system for sexual offenders and created guidelines for states to keep track of sex offenders. In addition, the act required that local law enforcement maintain verified residences for these sexual offenders for roughly ten years post-release back into the community (Public Law 103-322). Two years later, Congress passed Megan's Law, which made it mandatory that the personal information of

sex offenders be made available as public information. The public distribution of this information was provided as a way to protect the public from registered sexual offenders (Public Law 104-145). Since the creation of these two laws, the sex offender registration policies have expanded their definition of sexual offenses to include more sexual offenders and to make the personal information of such offenders more easily accessible by the general public. Additional laws have required the federal government to maintain a national database (The Pam Lychner Sex Offender Tracking and Identification Act of 1996; Public Law 104-236) and for states to maintain sex offender registration websites that are available to the public (Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today, PROTECT Act of 2003; Public Law 108-21). Furthermore, the Adam Walsh Act of 2006 widened the net even further so that sex offender registration requirements have become more punitive in nature. Under the Adam Walsh Act, juvenile sex offenders are now required to register with the state and many registrants are now required to register for time periods ranging anywhere from 15 years to life (Adam Walsh Act of 2006, Public Law 109-248).

These registries have proven popular with politicians and the general public (Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun and Kernsmith, 2009; Lieb and Nunlist, 2008; Petrunik and Deutschmann, 2008). Although studies have found that many community members choose not to reference the registries or are unfamiliar with their intricacies (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Proctor, Badzinski and Johnson, 2002), a recent study in Washington State found 78% of those surveyed felt safer because of them (Lieb and Nunlist, 2008) and a nationwide study found 43% of participants felt safer because of the registry (Kernsmith et al., 2009). However, many researchers do not share this same enthusiasm. While there have been a few studies documenting a limited deterrent effect related to registries (Levenson, D'Amora and Hern, 2007; Prescott and Rockoff, 2008;

Veysey, Zgoba and Dalessandro, 2005; Welchans, 2005), most show no such link (Adkins et al., 2000; Avrahamian, 1998; Gonnerman, 2007; Levenson and Cotter, 2005; Madden, 2008; Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2003; Petrosino and Petrosino, 1999; Sandler et al., 2007; Schram and Milloy, 1995). There is a significant body of research showing the stress and shame associated with being on a registry may actually increase the recidivism levels among sex offenders (Prescott and Rockoff, 2008; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Zevitz and Farakas, 2000a, 2000b). This sentiment is probably best summarized by Presser and Gunnison (1999, p. 308) who argue registries are “likely to be counterproductive. Censure may encourage retreat into denial and defensiveness.” Although the general public is unfamiliar with the registry laws, there seems to be a general consensus that sex offender laws are a supported course of legal action. From the evolution of the sex offender laws, it can be seen that the legal restrictions associated with the registry are ever increasing and are more punitive than the original Jacob Wetterling Act. From this perspective, one goal of this paper is to show how the restrictive nature of the registry makes it difficult for registered sex offenders to reintegrate themselves back into society and how it increases the amount of strain and shame felt by those registered, thus increases the likelihood of reoffending.

Role of Strain and Shame

With the seemingly incongruent relationship between policy makers and academics, understanding the experiences of released sex offenders, particularly in regard to registries, becomes all the more important. In this paper we look at two theoretical frameworks, which might be helpful in explaining these behaviors - shame and strain theories. First, Braithwaite's (1989) Reintegrative Shame Theory puts forth the notion that sanctioning individuals for deviant behavior brings about individual shame. This shame can take two forms, disintegrative or

reintegrative. Disintegrative shaming humiliates or villainizes an offender while reintegrative shaming condemns an offender's action but attempts to rehabilitate an offender (Braithwaite, 1989). According to Braithwaite, disintegrative shaming schemes can lead to backlashes, which can increase the likelihood of future delinquent activity. In contrast, reintegrative shaming can lead to community reintegration of the shamed individual, which decreases the likelihood of future delinquent activity. Applied to the registry, if registries serve only to demonize an offender without concern for finding a way to incorporate them back into the community fabric, they potentially increase, as opposed to decrease, the likelihood of recidivism. Studies have suggested this might be the case - rather than being reintegrative in nature, most research argues that registries stigmatize sex offenders, such that they become outsiders within their own communities. Tewksbury's (2004, p.32; 2005, p.77) studies of Kentucky sex offenders found most offenders in his sample strongly agreed with the statements "I feel ashamed I am on the Kentucky sex offender registry" and "I feel I am being unfairly punished for being on the Sex Offender registry." He concluded, "Registrants report a high level of shame about their registration and largely believe that registration is an unfair form of punishment (Tewksbury, 2004, p. 32). A subsequent qualitative study of sex offenders in Jefferson County, Kentucky found similar results (Tewksbury and Lees, 2007).

Second, Agnew's (1985) strain theory holds that criminal activity is the result of stresses and strains in the lives of offenders. According to the theory, these stresses and strains originate from three sources: failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positively valued stimuli, and confrontation with negative stimuli. Using this lens, if placement on a sex offender registry leads to increased strain from any of these three sources, it greatly increases the likelihood that the registrant will engage in future law-breaking behavior. Similar to shame

theory, studies have also shown there might be support for this hypothesis, with placement on the registry being associated with both difficulties achieving positive milestones and instigating negative confrontations with community members. Specifically, many sex offenders report challenges related to employment (Jenkins, 2001; Levenson, Zgoba and Tewksbury, 2007, Ost, 2002; Tewksbury, 2004; 2005; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000a) and housing (Levenson and Cotter, 2005; Levenson et al., 2007; Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2003; Tewksbury 2004, 2005; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2010; Zanbergen and Hart, 2006; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000a) as well as contentious, possibly volatile, relationships with neighbors (Matson and Leib, 2006; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2010; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000a) and being unable to live near family (Mercado et al., 2008).

Interestingly, much of this research has been based primarily on male populations. Our goal in this study is to explore whether females experience shame and strain differently than male sex offenders. While there is little research specifically addressing this gender difference, there is evidence that this hypothesis may be supported – that there is a gender difference in experiencing shame and strain respectively. First, the role of shaming is highlighted most prominently in the restorative justice literature. This is due the fact restorative justice relies heavily on the principles of reintegrative and disintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989). Research in this area has shown that differences exist among males and females and how they respond to shaming-based interventions. For example, studies have found female offenders tend to be less apologetic for their offenses than males (Daly, 2002), were less compliant about going through the restorative justice process (Maxwell, Kingi, Robertson, Morris and Cunningham, 2004) and were viewed as more troublesome and more difficult to work with (Alder, 2000; Artz, 2004; Baines & Alder, 1996; Gaarder and Presser, 2006). Feminist scholars suggest these results

might be attributable to gender differences in the criminal stigmatization process (Chesney-Lind and Pasco; 2004; Dodge and Pogrebin, 2001; Schur, 1984) - an issue of vital importance when discussing sex offender registries, which use stigma as their primary shaming mechanism. As such, further examination into this dynamic is needed.

Second, in terms of strain, research suggests that females react differently to strain (Broidy and Agnew, 1997; De Coster and Zito, 2010) and are more likely than males to experience anger when faced with stress in their lives (Broidy, 2001; Campbell, 1994; De Coster and Zito, 2010; Piquero and Sealock, 2004). These feelings are suggested to be the core of understanding the gender differences between males and females in terms of engaging in delinquency. On the surface, these findings would seem to infer that women have higher rates of maleficence compared to their male counterparts; which is not the case. An explanation for this incongruence is offered by Broidy and Agnew (1997) who suggest that when females experience anger it is accompanied by depression, which serves to dampen the impact of their anger and therefore the likelihood of delinquent behavior is lessened (Broidy and Agnew, 1997).

However, research testing this combination proposition has found that when both are experienced simultaneously delinquency can increase (Jang, 2007; Piquero and Sealock, 2004; Sigfusdottir, Farkas and Silver, 2004). Therefore, while the literature presents consistent findings on the gender difference present for strain, there are mixed results in terms of what this means for the delinquency rates between the genders. For the purposes of this article, the prior research showing a gender difference for strain is important to highlight as it supports the hypotheses that female sex offenders have different and unique experiences dealing with the sex offender registry. Since this gender difference exists, it is important to study the effects of the registry on females specifically.

Differences Between Male and Female Offending

While offending patterns among males and females have been suggested by the literature, in regards to sexual offenders, past research has primarily studied male samples. Taking a structural approach from the male perspective makes sense, as most sex offenders are male (Bunting, 2006; Fromuth and Conn, 1997; Johansson-Love and Fremouw, 2006). The importance of studying female populations is especially relevant as the number of females on registries is steadily increasing and research indicates female motivations and offending styles differ from than those of their male counterparts (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2000). Although they are estimated to make up less than 10% of the sex offender population, females are a critical population to study and it is important for researchers to get a better understanding of the dynamic involved with this group (Bunting, 2006; Center for Sex Offender Management, 2000; Cortoni and Hanson, 2005; Fazel, Sjostedt, Grann and Langstrom; 2010; Fromuth and Conn, 1997; Johansson-Love and Fremouw, 2006; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005).

Research done on female sex offender populations has concentrated on differences in male/female sex offending characteristics. Studies have found that while both female and male offenders are both likely to be in, and use, positions of authority to their advantage, women are less likely to use physical coercion, are more likely to be first-time offenders and to have a relationship with or be related to their victim (Fazel et al., 2010; Fromuth and Cann, 1997; Johansson-Love and Fremouw, 2009; Mathews, Hunter and Vuz, 1997; Mayer, 1992; Nathan and Ward, 2002; Sarrel and Masters, 1982; Syed and Williams, 1996; Vandiver and Kercher, 2004; Vandiver and Walker, 2002).

Additionally, research has shown differences in the collateral consequences experienced between males and females. Specifically, Tewksbury's (2004, 2005) study of Kentucky sex offenders where male and female data were presented in two different articles. In the first (Tewksbury, 2005), data were presented from a sample, which was 88% male whereas in the second article (Tewksbury, 2004), data were presented from a sample consisting exclusively of female respondents. While the duplication of female responses in the first sample precludes a statistical comparison of men vs. women, a comparison of the 88% male sample to 100% female sample shows significant differences in certain areas, such as denial of promotions or places to live, asked to leave a business, loss a friend, assaults, and receipt of harassing phone calls or email. As differences exist in terms of collateral consequences, there may also be attitudinal differences related to those consequences. It is in that vein that we present the current study, which focuses exclusively on attitudinal characteristics of female sex offenders framed in the contexts of Braithwaite's (1989) Reintegrative Shame Theory and Agnew's (1985) General Strain Theory.

Table 1. Tewksbury (2004, 2005) comparison of primarily male versus exclusively female samples

Negative Experiences	88% Male Sample (n = 121)	100% Female Sample (n = 40)
Loss of job	42.7%	42.1%
Denial of promotion	23.1%	10.5%
Loss/Denial of place to live	45.3%	31.6%
Treated rudely in public place	39.3%	31.6%
Asked to leave a business	11.0%	2.6%
Lost a friend who found out about registration	54.7%	39.5%
Harassed in person	47.0%	34.2%
Assaulted	16.2%	10.5%
Received harassing/threatening phone calls	28.2%	10.5%
Received harassing/threatening mail	24.8%	15.8%

Study Methodology

In an effort to better understand female sex offenders, the present study examines the effects of societal reactions of being on the registry. Specifically, this work focuses on how such reactions can lead female sex offenders to experience strain and shame as a result of being on the registry. Data for this paper were collected from a mail-out survey that was sent to all eligible registered female sex offenders in Florida. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement provided a detailed list that included 984 registered female sex offenders in the state – this list was the most current list as of March, 2010. From this list, researchers obtained detailed data, including: the female offenders' names, addresses, birthday, legal status (i.e. incarceration, deportation), offender status (predator v. offender¹), and county of residence. In order to be eligible for the study, the offenders on this list has to meet a set of criteria. The criteria used included: living in state, could not be deceased, incarcerated, deported or have absconded². All ineligible registrants were removed (415 were ineligible), leaving a sample of 569 possible participants. A letter of invitation, a consent form, and a survey were sent to the 569 eligible registrants. A week after the participant packets were sent out, a reminder letter was mailed to those who had not returned the survey. A total number of 106 surveys were returned by December 2010 (18.6% response rate). The response rate of 18.6% falls within the expected parameters of a mail-out study based on the literature. The literature on mail-out studies reports

¹ In Florida, sex offenders can be classified as either a sexual predator or a sexual offender. The most basic definition of a sexual predator is someone who has been convicted of a capital, life or first-degree felony sex offense on or after October 1, 1993. In addition, anyone who has any felony violations in addition to the original conviction will be deemed a sexual predator. The court can also deem someone to be a sexual predator. Also, regardless of meeting these previously mentioned conditions, anyone who has been civilly committed on or after July 1, 2004, must register as a sexual predator (FDLE, 2011). A sexual offender is defined as someone who has never been designated a sexual predator in Florida or in any other state and has committed a sexual offense that is not a capital, life or first-degree felony sex offense. Juveniles who have been adjudicated delinquent and who were 14 years of age or older at the time of the crime, can also be designated as sexual offenders (FDLE, 2011).

² Due to the fact that the registry list provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement included all female sex offenders to ever register, researchers needed to remove all participants who would not be able to participate in the study.

that a response rate of between 9% and 20% is to be expected (Collwell, Miller, Miller & Lyons, Jr., 2006). In addition, our sample size is consistent with the previous literature on female sex offenders (Butterfield and Mingus, 2008; Mathews et al., 1997; Rosencrans, 1997; Tewksbury, 2004; 2005; Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2009; Vandiver and Walker, 2002).

Sample

Of those returned, the demographics of the participants were analyzed (see Table 2) – the participants were predominately white (n = 98, 92.5%), had a minor for a victim³ (n = 92, 86.8%) and have their own children (n=89, 84.0%). Most participants were between the ages of 31-40 (n = 31, 29.3%) and 41-50 (n = 38, 35.8%). Marital status was a bit more spread out with most participants identifying themselves as being married (n = 36, 34.0%), unmarried but living with a partner (n = 19, 17.9%) and divorced (n = 22, 20.8%).

³ The state of Florida designates this most often as a juvenile under the age of 16 at the commission of the offense (FDLE, 2011).

Table 2. Sample Demographics of Participants (n = 106).

Variables (Coding in Parentheses)	Mean	St. Deviation	Frequency (n=106), Percentages in Parentheses	
<u>Status:</u>	0.95	0.213		
Predator (0)			n = 5	(4.7%)
Offender (1)			n = 101	(95.3%)
<u>Race:</u>	0.92	0.265		
Black (0)			n = 8	(7.5%)
White (1)			n = 98	(92.5%)
<u>Age:</u>	2.61	1.109		
20 - 30 (1)			n = 18	(17.0%)
31 - 40 (2)			n = 31	(29.3%)
41 - 50 (3)			n = 38	(35.8%)
51 - 60 (4)			n = 13	(12.3%)
61 - 70 (5)			n = 5	(4.7%)
71 - 80 (6)			n = 1	(0.9%)
<u>Minor Victim:</u>	0.87	0.340		
No (0)			n = 14	(13.2%)
Yes (1)			n = 92	(86.8%)
<u>Marital Status:</u>	3.24	4.646		
Married (1)			n = 36	(34.0%)
Single (2)			n = 14	(13.2%)
Living with partner (3)			n = 19	(17.9%)
Dating (4)			n = 5	(4.7%)
Divorced (5)			n = 22	(20.8%)
Widowed (6)			n = 3	(2.8%)
Other (7)			n = 5	(4.7%)
<u>Children:</u>	0.17	0.448		
No (1)			n = 16	(15.1%)
Yes (0)			n = 89	(84.0%)

Instrument

This study used a mail-out survey, which was in part a replication of another survey used by Richard Tewksbury in 2004. In addition to the items that were replicated, a large extension of the project was added in the survey instrument. The instrument was created to ask participants about their experiences while on the registry. Measures included questions regarding shame and strain, which were part of the items that extended the survey. While Tewksbury addresses the issue of shame to an extent, the main focus of the article was the experiences that sex offenders might have encountered (societal reactions in this study). The societal reaction measures asked

about participant experiences with job loss, being forced to move, harassment and alienation from friends and family. In addition, measures were included to study drug and alcohol use, feelings of anger and desire to hurt oneself or other people. Expanding the focus of the Tewksbury study, the societal reactions are used to predict the theories instead of using the theories to predict the societal reactions.

Variables

In the original Tewksbury study, regression analysis was not utilized to examine the data, only descriptive statistics were used to examine participant responses – this paper will use ordinary least squares regression to analyze the data and uses the societal reactions to an offender's registry status to predict shame and strain felt by the offender. The following sections address the independent and dependent variables used within the ordinary least squares regression analyses that were used. For the two analyses conducted, participant age, race and offender status (offender vs predator) were used as control variables.

Independent Variable

In the two regression models, the Societal Reactions are used as the primary independent variable. This scale is comprised of 10 items that ask how many times an individual experienced the following behaviors: job loss, denial of a work promotion, denial of a place to live, rude treatment in public, being asked to leave a business or restaurant, loss of friendship, being harassed in person, assault or attack, receiving harassing or threatening phone calls and receiving harassing or threatening mail, flyers or notes. These ten items had response options that ranged from 0 to 4 (on a Likert Scale) – responses were then scaled across to form the independent variable. Here, higher scores indicate more experiences of negative societal reaction to their registry status and lower scores indicate having fewer experiences of negative societal reactions.

Scaling the ten items into a single variable was necessary due to the high levels of collinearity. The basis of this variable was derived from the original Tewksbury study. Confirmatory principle components factor analysis was conducted (Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization) to ensure that all items loaded on to the same component, which factor analysis confirmed, did occur (all items loaded at 0.688 or higher). The scale has a high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.883. The following table shows the descriptive results of the ten items that comprise the Societal Reactions Scale⁴

⁴ In addition to the Societal Reactions being used as an independent variable, we tried to examine the relationship between the amount of time spent on the registry and shame and strain. Using time to predict shame and strain respectively, did not produce any significant results; meaning that time spent on the registry did not serve as a significant predictor variable. In addition, we also tried using the amount of time required to register as an additional predictor for shame and strain. The individual relationships between required time and shame and strain did not hold up either, showing that the time requirement was not a significant predictor variable either. From this reasoning, we did not include these additional models in the paper.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Societal Reactions Used as Independent Variable.

Questions	Mean	St. Dev.	Frequency N (%)
How many times have you lost a job?			
0 times	1.47	1.520	n = 38 (35.8%)
1 time			n = 22 (20.8%)
2 times			n = 19 (17.9%)
3 times			n = 4 (3.7%)
4 + times			n = 19 (17.9%)
How many times have you been denied a promotion at work?			
0 times	1.06	1.527	n = 61 (57.5%)
1 time			n = 11 (10.4%)
2 times			n = 10 (9.4%)
3 times			n = 3 (2.8%)
4 + times			n = 17 (16.0%)
How many times have you lost a place to live?			
0 times	1.84	1.760	n = 39 (36.8%)
1 time			n = 17 (16.0%)
2 times			n = 7 (6.6%)
3 times			n = 7 (6.6%)
4 + times			n = 35 (33.0%)
How many times have you been treated rudely in a public place?			
0 times	1.17	1.570	n = 59 (55.7%)
1 time			n = 14 (13.2%)
2 times			n = 8 (7.5%)
3 times			n = 6 (5.7%)
4 + times			n = 19 (17.9%)
How many times have you been asked to leave a business or restaurant?			
0 times	0.27	0.927	n = 94 (88.7%)
1 time			n = 3 (2.8%)
2 times			n = 1 (0.9%)
3 times			n = 1 (0.9%)
4 + times			n = 5 (4.7%)
How many times have you lost a friend because of your registration status?			
0 times	1.35	1.670	n = 56 (52.8%)
1 time			n = 9 (8.5%)
2 times			n = 11 (10.4%)
3 times			n = 5 (4.7%)
4 + times			n = 24 (22.6%)
How many times have you been harassed in person?			
0 times	1.23	1.571	n = 57 (53.8%)
1 time			n = 11 (10.4%)
2 times			n = 11 (10.4%)
3 times			n = 9 (8.5%)
4 + times			n = 18 (17.0%)
How many times have you been assaulted or attacked?			
0 times	0.37	1.012	n = 90 (84.9%)
1 time			n = 3 (2.8%)
2 times			n = 5 (4.7%)
3 times			n = 3 (2.8%)
4 + times			n = 5 (4.7%)

How many times have you received harassing / threatening telephone calls?				
0 times	0.83	1.497	n = 74	(69.8%)
1 time			n = 11	(10.4%)
2 times			n = 1	(0.9%)
3 times			n = 3	(2.8%)
4 + times			n = 17	(16.0%)
How many times have you received harassing / threatening mail / fliers / notes?				
0 times	0.96	1.593	n = 71	(67.0%)
1 time			n = 9	(8.5%)
2 times			n = 4	(3.7%)
3 times			n = 3	(2.8%)
4 + times			n = 19	(17.9%)

Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were used for the two models. The first dependent variable uses a shame scale of four items, asking: 1) I feel ashamed that I am on the Florida Sex Offender Registry, 2) I am ashamed that I have committed a sexual offense, 3) I am less likely to leave the house because I am afraid that someone might recognize me as a sex offender and 4) I avoid certain public places because I am afraid of being recognized as a sex offender. The first question was derived from the Tewksbury piece on the female only sample (2004) but the next three were created specifically for this study. Each question was originally measured on a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An index was created by collapsing the strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree responses into single components. Values of (1) for each disagree response, (2) for each undecided response, and (3) for each agree response were assigned and subsequently added together. The four questions were scaled before running the regression model, where higher scores indicate experiencing higher levels of shame and lower scores indicate lower levels of shame. Confirmatory factor analysis showed all items loading onto the same component (all items loaded at 0.669 or higher) and reliability test produced a Crohnbach's alpha of 0.667, indicating this scale is reliable.

The second dependent variable uses a strain scale of six items, asking the participant: 1) Do you feel that being on the Florida Sex Offender Registry has caused unnecessary stress in your life, 2) Because of this stress, do you feel that you act out in an unhealthy way, 3) Because of this stress, do you consume alcohol more than you did in the past, 4) Because of this stress, do you use illegal substances more than you did in the past, 5) Because of this stress, have you ever tried to hurt yourself and 6) Because of this stress, have you ever tried to hurt someone else? These six questions were created specifically for this study. All six questions were measured dichotomously using (0) No or (1) Yes answer options. The questions were then scaled together, where higher scores indicate higher experiences of strain and lower experiences of strain. Confirmatory factor analysis showed all items loading onto the same component (all items loaded above .650) and a reliability test produced a Cronbach's alpha of .706, indicating that this scale is reliable.

Analytic Plan

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was utilized in the following models to examine the relationship between societal reactions to sex offender's registry status and shame and strain felt by offenders. The first OLS regression model (Table 4) that was estimated used the societal reactions to predict if shame was present in the participants' lives due to the known registration status. The second OLS regression model (Table 5) used the societal reactions to predict if strain was present in the participants' lives due to their experiences that result from their sex offender status.

Results

Overall, the results of the study are supportive of the original project goals – to determine whether or not experiencing societal reactions would cause shame and strain for the registered

female sex offenders. Table 4 (Model Predicting Shame) shows that overall, the model is significant at the .001 alpha level as indicated by the F-statistic (11.637). The model shows that together societal reactions, and the offenders race, age, and status, can explain about 32.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .327$). For this model, the societal reactions variable (which was the only statistically significant predictor in the model) is significant at the .001 level in predicting shame, when controlling for age and race of the participant and the offender's status (predator v. offender). This relationship was in the expected direction. In essence, the more societal reactions offenders experience (including job loss, loss of residence and harassment in person), the greater shame they will feel and experience because of their registry status. This is consistent with the previous research findings (Tewksbury, 2004; 2005; Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; 2007). As there could be some concern with tautology, a collinearity diagnostic was conducted between the independent variable - societal reactions - and the dependent variable - shame. The diagnostic shows little correlation with a VIF of 1.023 and a tolerance of 0.978 between the independent and dependent variables. Thus we concluded no collinearity existed.

Table 4. OLS Regression: Societal Reaction Predicting Shame Among Female Sex Offenders.

Variable	B	SE	β
Societal Reactions	0.283***	0.045	0.544
Offender Race	0.228	0.182	0.108
Offender Age	-0.001	0.005	-0.013
Offender Status	0.298	0.210	0.121
Constant	1.478	0.327	
F-Statistic	11.637***		
R-Square	.327		

In the second model, an OLS regression model (model predicting strain) was also estimated. Here the societal reactions were used to predict if strain was present in the participants' lives due to the known registration status. Table 5 shows that the overall model is significant at the .001 level, as indicated by the F-statistic (6.273). Overall, the model can explain about 20.7% of the variance in strain experienced ($R^2 = .207$). As indicated in the model, only one variable was found to be a significant predictor of strain among female sex offenders. Here the societal reactions were found to have a positive relationship with strain. This was in the expected direction and is consistent with what the literature would predict (Tewksbury, 2004; 2005; Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; 2007; Tewksbury and Mustaine, 2007). These findings indicate that the more negative societal reactions sex offenders experience because of their registry status, the greater strain they may experience. As described with the previous model, a collinearity diagnostic was conducted between the independent variable - societal reactions - and the dependent variable – strain – to rule out issues of tautology. The diagnostic shows little correlation, with a VIF of 1.023 and a tolerance of 0.978 between the independent and dependent variables. Thus we concluded no collinearity existed.

Table 5. OLS Regression: Societal Reaction Predicting Strain Among Female Sex Offenders.

Variable	B	SE	β
Societal Reactions	0.283***	0.045	0.544
Offender Race	0.228	0.182	0.108
Offender Age	-0.001	0.005	-0.013
Offender Status	0.298	0.210	0.121
Constant	1.478	0.327	
F-Statistic	6.273***		
R-Square	.207		

Discussions and Conclusions

Based on the prior research conducted on sex offender registration, it has been shown that the offenders can have negative experiences on the registry (Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado, Alvarez and Levenson, 2008; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2010). The registry is creating a second sentence for those registered – the first being the court imposed sentence and the second being the stigma and hardships associated with being a registered sex offender. The results of this study support such assertions. Registered female sex offenders are experiencing both shame and strain in their lives as a result of the collateral consequences they have experienced. Specifically, with regard to shame, our findings suggest that the registrants tend to experience more shame when they experience an increase in negative societal reactions. So, if female sex offenders have experienced multiple negative reactions (i.e. are harassed, lose their job or other collateral consequences) due to their status as a sex offender, they will experience greater levels of shame. These findings both reinforce the support found in the original Tewksbury study (2004; 2005) and add to the literature on female sexual offenders.

Society views these women only as sex offenders – women who are never to be trusted – and as a result negatively react to this population, reinforcing the notion that they are people that must be exiled from the community. The amount of shame that follows this reaction makes it very difficult for sex offenders to reintegrate back into society, making sexual offense recidivism more likely according to Braithwaite's Reintegrative Shaming Theory (1989). In addition, offenders might be turning to other types of non-sexual offenses as a response to the shame and strain that they are encountering. This distinction between sexual offense recidivism and other types of offending may be something to be considered in future research. The registration laws may seem to be the correct solution to many (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Lieb and Nunlist, 2008),

but the way the laws are constructed may actually make it harder for sex offenders to have a life once they live return to the community (Prescott and Rockoff, 2008; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Zevitz and Farakas, 2000a, 2000b). In terms of strain specifically, our findings illustrate again that the more negative societal reactions that offenders perceive the greater amount of strain they will experience. If offenders are experiencing greater levels of strain (and shame) because of the reactions from being a sex offender (as identified by the registry) not only are female sex offenders facing several collateral consequences (that in turn lead to higher levels of strain and shame) they may even be in a position to reoffend.

While the prior literature on female sex offenders is limited, this study adds to the literature by showing the effects that the registration causes for these women. Findings from the present study show that when the female sex offenders experience these societal reactions (including job loss, loss of residence, harassment in person, receiving harassing phone calls and receiving harassing mail or notes), then they will reportedly feel more shame and strain. Previous literature reports similar findings for sexual offenders living on the registry (Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado, Alvarez and Levenson, 2008; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2010). This reinforces the notion that the registry is in fact creating notable consequences for female sex offenders in the form of shame and strain, which were not originally intended when the legislation was created. As stated earlier, previous research suggests that there is a gender difference present in the strain (Broidy, 2001; Broidy and Agnew, 1997; Campbell, 1994; De Coster and Zito, 2010; Piquero and Sealock, 2004) and shame literature (Adler, 2000; Artz, 2004; Baines and Adler, 1996; Daly, 2002; Gaarder and Presser, 2006; Maxwell, Kingi, Robertson, Morris and Cunningham, 2004). This gender difference highlights the importance of studying female sex offenders apart from their male counterparts.

The societal reaction to sex offenders is the reason why more research must be conducted on the side effects of the registration laws. Follow-up studies may allow us to generate further support to the reality that sex offender laws are causing more harm and are serving a minimal purpose in protecting society or offenders themselves.

Policy Implications

Based on these negative experiences, many are calling for reform to the registry (Jones, 2008; Rogers, Hirst and Davies, 2011; Tewksbury and Jennings, 2010; Willis, Levenson and Ward, 2010). It has been suggested that a more individualized form of registration based on offense and registrant characteristics may free up law enforcement resources and provide the community with a more realistic view of what sex offenders may pose an actual threat to them. In a recent article on sex offender trajectories being influenced by registration requirements, Tewksbury and Jennings (2010) have suggested that this individualized form of sex offender registration would lower fear levels among citizens because they are not being overloaded with excessive amounts of sex offenders living in their communities. This individualized registration might also benefit the offenders who have to deal with the unintended consequences that currently exist with the catchall registry.

Based on the results of this study, we suggest recommendations that policy makers may consider in exploring ways to reduce some of the shame and strain that results from public sex offender registration. As noted, recidivism rates are already quite low for sexual offenders, however the collateral consequences resulting from registration may make recidivism a real problem. In order to avoid creating a problem where currently one does not exist, we suggest two specific recommendations that we think can alleviate these burdens both in the short- and long-term. First, in an attempt to reduce some of the shame associated with the registry, the

removal of the offenders' photographs from their individual offender pages would help to provide the registrants with a certain level of anonymity while still keeping them identifiable within the community. Second, as a recommendation for the long-term in an attempt to aid offenders in their employment efforts, it would be beneficial for sex offenders to not be required to disclose the specific nature of their offense. Rather, by asking employers to hold them to the same regard as other offenders in only asking them to disclose the level of offense (felony or misdemeanor offense) rather than the specific nature of their offense. We recognize that this might not occur without some sort of legislative action, but it does provide an opportunity for offenders to gain employment within their communities. For example, some cities are in the very early stages of incorporating former offenders as a protected group that cannot be discriminated against (Henry, 2008), because of their offender status (similar to how race, gender and religion are protected groups). Eventually, this same protected group framework could extend to the problems that sex offenders face when seeking housing post-incarceration and the limits imposed by residency restrictions.

Study Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of the study includes the low sample size compared to traditional quantitative research. Based on the literature a sample size of 106 is very respectable for a study on female sex offenders. In addition, a 106 participant response rate (18.6%) is consistent with prior research using a mail-out survey. Research has suggested that surveys administered through the mail have between a 9% and a 20% response rate (Collwell, Miller, Miller, and Lyons, Jr., 2006). Ideally, the desired sample size would be larger but for a mail-out survey the amount of responses received is sufficient. A larger sample size may have yielded more significant or stronger findings.

Future research should work on expanding the sample size and incorporate male and female sex offenders so that a comparative analysis may be conducted and see if these effects are consistent across both genders. Also it would be interesting to see if certain types of sex offenders are experiencing shame and strain the same way. For example, are child molesters experiencing more shame and strain compared to a non-contact sex offender? Or are all sex offenders treated the same simply because of the harsh stigma that is associated with the registry? Due to the small numbers of females that are on the registry, perhaps a gender comparison should be conducted to see if shame and strain affect male offenders more than the females studied here. Future research could take many different avenues to determine the true effects of the registry on the lives of sex offenders. At this stage in the research, the reasons for these societal reactions cannot be postulated – the reasons as to why there may be an effect from registering on the sex offender registry. The importance of this research should not be restricted only to one gender over the other, or one offender over another, but rather should encompass all aspects of the registry to determine how detrimental the registry really could be to the lives of the registrants.

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