

THEORY AND SEXUAL OFFENSES: TESTING THE EXTENT TO WHICH SOCIAL
LEARNING THEORY CAN ACCOUNT FOR PARTICIPATION IN ILLEGAL SEXUAL
BEHAVIOR

By

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To the people in my life who have always believed in me

To my family, whose abundant love and support has been unconditional

To Matt, who continually inspires me to be the best that I can be- thank you for your help,
patience, reassurance, and love

To my parents, Ray and Heidie Youstin, whose selflessness and strength has made me the person
I am today. Thank you for showing me that with hard work and determination, anything is
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With the growing public concern over sexual offenses and offenders, in-depth research into the causes of these crimes is essential. Despite years of research from various academic areas, there has been little theoretical consensus to explain participation in sexually deviant behavior. The present study tests the ability of one prominent criminological theory, Social Learning Theory, to explain sexually deviant behavior. A sample of convicted sexual offenders from one county in Florida was obtained through mail surveys. Results indicate that offenders with higher self-reported levels of participation in sexually deviant behavior scored higher and in the expected direction when compared with offenders with lower reported participation. The analyses show partial support for this theory, and illustrate the need for more research into the relationship between sexually deviant behavior and social learning mechanisms. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction: Sexual Offenses and Offenders

In his 1994 book on sexual abuse, Adam Sampson begins by stating that three questions must be answered in order to form a theoretical background for the phenomenon of sexual offending. Those questions are: “What do we mean by sexual offending? What causes individuals to commit sexual offenses? And are such offenders amenable to treatment?” (Sampson, 1994: p. 1). While over a decade has passed since that statement was made, little cohesive work has been done to form a theoretical background for sexual offending. There is clearly no global definition of a sexual offense, and even in the United States, there is no national definition for the behavior. Individual jurisdictions decide which acts are deemed as sexual offenses, and which offenders are given a label of “sex offender.” Though some offenses are common throughout all jurisdictions in the US, variations in terminology make it difficult to form a national definition. For the purposes of this study, sexual offenses will refer to sexual behaviors made illegal through law and regularly prosecuted against, such as pedophilia, viewing child pornography, and rape. While some jurisdictions may still have laws against adultery, sodomy (such as oral or anal sex), premarital sex, and homosexuality, few cases arise every year that involve prosecutions for these behaviors, despite their prevalence. Because laws against these acts are not regularly enforced, these acts will be excluded when referring to sexual offenses. For theories as to why individuals commit these offenses, there are psychodynamic theories, biological theories, feminist theories, attachment theories, behavioral theories, and the list goes on and on. Terry (2006: p. 50) states, “despite years of research, theories on sexual offending are still inconclusive... it is now clear that no single explanation accurately encompasses the myriad factors associated with the onset of deviant behavior.” That opinion

will be tested through future research. Regarding the effect of treatment on sex offenders, there has been no conclusive answer to that question as well. While a recent, comprehensive meta-analysis of treatment programs found that cognitive-behavioral treatment programs could reduce sexual recidivism by up to 40%, previous reviews of programs have provided a wide variety of findings (Hanson *et al.*, 2002).

The lack of agreement from researchers, mixed with the public view of sexual offenders as monsters (Samson, 1994), has combined to create an atmosphere of hatred and fear. These feelings, guided by sensationalized media coverage of rare, horrible acts of violence against children, have helped to impose increasingly punitive legislation and policies on sex offenders. But while the fate of sex offenders continues to be a hot topic with politicians and news media, there is still a gross lack of understanding as to the factors that drive this crime. The purpose of the study at hand will be to determine the extent to which Social Learning Theory can account for an individual's participation in sexual deviance. Hopefully, this research can answer at least one of the critical questions necessary to creating a theoretical framework for understanding sexual offenses.

History

Activities viewed in this age as sexually deviant are not all new. In fact, there are accounts of sexually deviant acts in our earliest recorded history, from ancient Egyptian papyri to the Bible. Von Krafft-Ebing (1922), an influential psychologist in the early 20th century, believed that psychopathia sexualis (sexually deviant behavior) was a direct result of the over-stimulated sensuality of advanced culture. While his work on sexual deviance was groundbreaking, the idea of limiting sexual deviance to advanced culture was not accepted by all scholars. Dr. Iwan Bloch, another scholar of the time, countered von Krafft-Ebing by commenting, "the nature of the sex impulse and of its anomalies is simply independent of all

culture, and exhibits the same characteristics among primitive and civilized peoples” (Bloch, 1933: p. 9). While it is difficult to account for sexually deviant behavior because of its subjective nature, it is clear that there have always been sexual taboos throughout history, and despite its constant nature, sexually deviant behavior is still a shocking occurrence to people today.

A closer look into history reveals that sexually acceptable behavior has varied to incredible degrees. Pedophilia, polygamy and lewdness (such as public sex) are all acts which, at one time or another, were viewed as completely acceptable. Around 3200 BC, the Mesopotamians (accepted as a civilized culture) culminated their religious ceremonies with the Akita festival. During this festival, the high priest and priestess would celebrate the religious experience with sexual intercourse in front the congregation (Holmes, 1983). Jewish families illustrated in the Old Testament were structured around polygamy, a practiced that was not only accepted, but also morally legitimate. Pedophilia was a common practice among the ancient Greeks, who viewed the highest form of love as that between an adult male and a prepubescent boy (Holmes and Holmes, 2002). Yet, while homosexuality was institutionalized in Greek society, relationships between adult males and male adolescents who had reached puberty were taboo.

Just as acceptable sexual practices have varied throughout history, punishments for participation in sexually deviant acts have also varied. In some cultures, illegal sexual acts were viewed as egregious actions against society, calling for the death of the offender, as seen in ancient texts such as the old testament book of Deuteronomy. At one point in ancient Greek culture, the punishment for rape under Solon’s law was only a monetary fine (Cole, 1984). The punishments have seemed to reflect the general attitudes at the time towards sex within different cultures, and as views towards sexuality became increasingly strict or conservative, the gravity

of sex crimes increased. In the United States, definitions and punishments for sexual crimes have also changed with the shifting views on sexuality.

The U.S. has always maintained laws identifying sex crimes. The first official laws against sexual acts, seen in the colonial law codes, were justified as moral laws because the acts were considered grave sins (Jenkins, 1998). Morality laws, which found acts such as homosexuality, adultery, and oral sex to be illegal, regardless of consent, were enforced in some jurisdictions until 1961. It is difficult to identify the rate of occurrence for serious sexual crimes in America before the middle of the twentieth century for a few reasons. First, it is hard to distinguish between lesser or severe sex crimes in official records because most acts, including homosexuality, were simply identified as “crimes not to be named among Christians” (Jenkins, 1998: p. 22). In addition, age of consent for sexual activity has changed multiple times, with different states maintaining different ages of consent. At one point, the age of consent was 21 in Tennessee and 7 in Delaware. Another problem was the effect of a woman’s sexual history in determining the charge against her offender. In states such as North Carolina and West Virginia, the charge of rape could only be used if the victim was a virgin prior to the incident. Also, due to the social implications of being a victim of a sexual offense, it is believed that a majority of sexual crimes were unreported (Jenkins, 1998).

Over the past century, concepts of sexuality and perceptions of dealing with sexually deviant behavior have gone through three identifiable periods in the United States (Terry, 2006). The first, ranging from 1885 to 1935, saw what is considered the first wave of panic, as the public first took notice in mass to sexual deviants. This period was precipitated by the work of psychologists such as Freud and Krafft-Ebbing before the start of the 20th century, whose research on sexual deviant behavior opened the doors for the world to discuss and focus on these

offenders. Also adding to the concern over sexuality was the Women's Christian Temperance Movement, who called for the age of consent to be raised to 18 years old, due to a growing number of women in the work place who could be taken advantage of and "sexually corrupted." A string of cases given high media coverage between 1910 and 1915 led to the first panic over sexual killers and perverts. During this time, chemical castration was a common "treatment" for sexual offenders, and indeterminate sentences were frequently used. By the mid 1920s the panic against "stranger danger" cooled and the focus was put on child molestation and incest due to rising venereal diseases among children.

The second period extended from 1936 to 1976 and saw the emergence of what is termed the "sexual psychopath." The horrific story of Albert Fish, a renowned child killer, permeated through the minds of the public in the mid 1930s.¹ The renewed concern over sexual deviants led to a crackdown against sexual offenses, which saw increasing arrests for sexual offenses. While the increase in arrests seemed to suggest that sexual offenses were on the rise, the majority of the arrests were for homosexual activity, or minor sexual offenses such as frotteurism (rubbing ones genitals against another person, usual in public places). The focus at the time was on rare habitual sexual offenders, and led to the creation of the term "sexual psychopath" by researchers. Because criminal sanctions did not seem to be enough to deal with the problem of these offenders, sexual psychopath legislation was passed to allow sexual offenders to be committed to mental hospitals for indefinite amounts of time (Terry, 2006). This legislation had many flaws, including the fact that there was no uniform definition of sexual psychopath, and as

¹ Albert Fish, known as the Grey Man, was responsible for the abduction, torture and murder of numerous children in and around New York during the first part of the 20th century. Despite the unalarming looks of this frail old man, Fish committed some of the most gruesome acts imaginable, making a habit of sexually assaulting his victims, before murdering and dismembering them, and then participating in cannibalism.

such, varied from state to state. The panic over sexual offenses dissipated by the 1960s and 1970s as the “liberal era” brought about a social and sexual revolution. Sexual psychopath laws fell into disuse, and the public began to question what was sexually deviant.

Despite a short period free from panic over sexually deviant behavior, the third period, which ranged from 1977 to present day, saw the emergence of the sexually violent predator (Terry, 2006). Highly publicized child murders led to legislation which focused on harsher penalties for sexual offenders, and systems which try to alert the public to the presence of these offenders. This legislation also awakened the sexual psychopath legislation, which had been dormant for some time. Amendments were made to the previous sexual psychopath legislation to allow civil commitment to be used to supplement incarceration instead of replace it. These amendments made it so offenders deemed as sexually violent predators could be committed indefinitely, immediately following a jail sentence, without the possibility of being released into the public again. The next section discusses the current state of sex offender laws in more detail.

Contemporary Sex Offender Laws

In the 1990s, America saw an increased fear and awareness of sex offenders, as illustrated in various acts passed by legislation that targeted perpetrators of sex crimes. The first act in a wave of legislation was the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act, 1994. This act was named in honor of Jacob Wetterling, an 11-year-old boy who was abducted in 1989 by a masked man while Jacob was riding his bike home from the convenience store in Minnesota with his brother and a friend. He was never found. It was later discovered that local halfway houses in Minnesota housed sex offenders after their release from prison, and it is believed that one such resident was responsible for the abduction (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2007). The Wetterling Act required that 10% of a states funding from the Edward Bryne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance grant program be used to

create and maintain state-wide systems for registering and tracking convicted sex offenders (Sample and Bray, 2003). This was the first national requirement for state sex offender databases. The act also encouraged states to collect DNA samples from sex offenders for storage in databases. Although this act was originally created to focus on sex offenses against children, all 50 states have expanded their registries to include offenders of violent or nonviolent sex crimes against any person, regardless of age (Scholle, 2000).

The attention of millions of Americans was held in 1993 and 1994 by the media coverage of two young girls, Polly Klass and Megan Kanka. Polly Klass, in 1993, was abducted from her California home, sexually assaulted, and murdered. A year later, Megan Kanka was also taken from her New Jersey home, sexually assaulted, and murdered. Both girls were victimized by previously convicted sex offenders who were released from prison. These crimes led to the creation of Megan's Laws in 1996, an amendment to the Wetterling act, which requires sex offender registry information be made available to the public (Sample and Bray, 2003). Another act passed in 1996 was the Pam Lychner Sexual Offender Tracking and Identification Act. This act mandated the creation of a national database of all sex offender registries (Scholle, 2000). The Wetterling Act was again modified with the passage of the PROTECT amendment.² This amendment made it mandatory for states to create and maintain internet websites containing sex offender registration information (Levenson and Cotter, 2005).

Florida has had a variety of changes to sexual offender policies over the past decade. In 1997, Florida legislation enacted chapter 97-184 of Florida laws, allowing for the sentencing of sexual batterers to chemical castration. Sexual offenders who are sentenced to weekly injections of medroxyprogesterone acetate (MPA) can, however, choose physical castration instead, if they

² Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act, 2003.

so wish (Spalding, 1998). Florida's Jimmy Ryce Act became effective in 1999. This act was created after Jimmy Ryce, a 9-year-old boy from South Florida, was kidnapped at gunpoint, sexually assaulted, murdered, and dismembered. The act created a civil commitment process of sexually violent predators, like the Baker Act procedures to involuntarily commit and treat mentally ill persons (OPPAGA, 2000). The Act also allows for the posting of photographs of missing children who are thought to be kidnap victims in public places, such as rest stops, visitor information centers, toll booth plaza facilities, and toll plaza ticket windows on state run highways, as well as inserts in direct mail outs sent by state agencies (JRC, 2006).

The most recent amendment to Florida's Sexual Offender and Predator Registration Laws was the Jessica Lunsford Act in 2005 which required sex offenders and predators to report in person twice a year to the sheriff's office. Florida created the Florida Shared School Results System (FSSR) through this legislation, enabling schools to share criminal history information. The act also raised the penalties for violations of certain laws, and required offenders labeled sexual predators to wait a minimum of 30 years before petitioning for the removal of the designation (Jessica Lunsford Act, 2005). However, if the offender was designated a sexual offender and has been released from supervision for 20 years without rearrest, or if the offender was under 18 at the time of arrest and the victim was 12 or older, and the offender has been released from supervision for 10 years without rearrest, the offender can petition for the removal of the designation sexual offender and be removed from the sexual offender/predator database (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2006).

Sex Offenders in Florida

In the state of Florida, there are two designations for offenders of sexual crimes: sex offenders and sexual predators. Sexual offenders, as classified, present a lesser threat of harm to the community than that of sexual predators. To be classified as a sex offender, one only needs

to commit a single violation of a sexual law. Some examples of these violations are the commission of (or attempted) solicitation or conspiracy to commit kidnapping, false imprisonment, attempting to lure a child, sexual battery, procuring a minor for prostitution, lewd or lascivious offenses committed against or in the presence of persons under 16, the elderly or disabled, sexual performance by a child, selling or buying of minors for portrayal in a visual depiction engaging in sexually explicit conduct, and various computer crimes including pornography. (Fla Statute 775.21, Florida Sexual Predator Act)

An offender can be labeled by the court as a sexual predator if they are found guilty of a single violation (termed “one is enough”) of a capital, life, first degree felony violation, or any attempt of kidnapping, false imprisonment, sexual battery, lewd or lascivious offenses committed against or in the presence of persons under the age of 16, or selling or buying of minors for portrayal in a visual depiction engaging in sexually explicit conduct. Sexual offenders can also be classified as sexual predators by the courts (termed “second strike”) if they are convicted of any felony violation or attempt of kidnapping, false imprisonment, attempting to lure a child, sexual battery, procuring a minor for prostitution, lewd or lascivious offenses, sexual performance by a child, or selling or buying of minors for portrayal in a visual depiction engaging in sexually explicit conduct and have a previous conviction for any of the offenses listed for classification of a sex offender, or unlawful sexual activity with certain minors. (Fla Statute 775.21, Florida Sexual Predator Act)

Theories Dealing with Sexual Offenses

Many theories have been used to explain involvement in illegal sexual behavior. Biological, psychological, and sociological theories have provided many viable reasons as to why individuals commit sexual offenses. This myriad of theories has made difficult to create a consensus for treatment, and has made it seem as though there is no one theory that can

completely account for participation in deviant sexual behavior. While it is not unlikely that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to one's participation in illegal sexual behavior, it is also possible that more involved studies in the future may provide insight into sexual offending not currently available. Until recently, many of the theories used to explain deviant sexual behavior have lacked empirical support, and empirical studies in this area are still in their infancy (Terry, 2006). This is not unexpected, as it is generally accepted that sexual offenders are a difficult population to sample. But, it is clear that the studies to date have not been adequate enough to provide a sound theoretical background to make any assumptions about sexual offenders.

Despite this lack of empirical support, there are some common theories used to describe participation in sexual deviant behavior. Psychodynamic theories describe sexual deviance as a problem associated with developmental problems when dealing with the human psyche (id, ego, and superego). Sexual deviance occurs when the id is overactive. It is difficult to test this theory however, as the id is more of an ideal than something that is tangible, or for that matter, testable. Biological theories suggest that there are physiological reasons for the participation in deviant sexual behavior, such as increased hormone levels or chromosomal makeup. Feminist theories attribute rape as a tool of gaining power over women. While some rapists have shown that they hate or devalue women, these theories do not adequately account for participation in other sexually deviant behavior that does not have a male female dynamic. Attachment theories suggest that sexually deviant behavior due to the loneliness or isolation felt by loss or emotional distress that can occur in infancy, adolescence, or adulthood. According to this theory, individuals with poor self-esteem and low self-confidence are the most likely to participate in sexually deviant behavior. Cognitive behavior theories were developing beginning in the 1970s

and built upon prior behavior theories by taking into account the offender's thoughts as well as their actions. These theories attribute participation in sexually deviant behavior to classical conditioning, arguing that sexually deviant behavior is learning like any other behavior. Psychosocial theories combine psychological factors and sociological factors to explain sexually deviant behavior. Inappropriate socialization is the catalyst for this behavior according to these theories. Finally, integrated theories try to combine aspects of the individual theories mentioned above to fill in the gaps left by the individual theories alone. Integrated theories posit that a variety of preconditions lead to participation in sexually deviant behavior. These theories focus on the process by which one is motivated to offend and overcomes internal and external inhibitions to participate in the behavior (Terry, 2006).

Psychological Assessments

Most illegal sexual behaviors are found in the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), listed under paraphilias. The criteria for a paraphilia diagnosis are "recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors generally involving non-human objects, the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one's partner, or children or other non-consenting persons that occur over a period of at least 6 months" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000: p. 566). The disorders recognized in the DSM-IV-TR are exhibitionism (exposure of genitals), fetishism (use of non-living objects), frotteurism (touching and rubbing against a non-consenting person), pedophilia (focus on prepubescent children), sexual masochism (receiving humiliation or suffering), sexual sadism (inflicting humiliation or suffering on others), transvestic fetishism (cross-dressing), and voyeurism (observing sexual activity). Not all of these disorders are illegal, and not all require actual participation in the activity to be diagnosed. Some only require that impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning occur from the behavior, sexual urges, or

fantasies. While useful in choosing a course of treatment for those diagnosed with a paraphilia, the DSM-IV-TR is not predictive in any way.

Another assessment for sexual offenders is typologies developed from studies on the motivations behind sexual offenses. In some ways, these typologies are diagnostic, and are useful for deciding the best course of action with a given offender, but they have limited predictive power for the general public. There are typologies for rapists, such as sexually motivated and non-sexually motivated. Sexually motivated offenders can be exclusively sexual (they are motivated completely by sexual needs), or sadist (sexual gratification is achieved through the victim's pain and suffering). Non-sexually motivated offenders can be classified as power/control (offender desires power or dominance), opportunistic (adventure seeker who commits offense during another offense), or mass rape (seen in war situations where the offender has a need for power while using rape as a weapon) (Terry, 2006).

Child molesters can be categorized into two groups, situational and preferential, with numerous subgroups. Preferential offenders prefer children as the focus of their sexual activity, whereas situational offenders offend against children because of a lack of other options (Holmes and Holmes, 2002). Within situational offenders, there are regressed offenders (poor coping skills, victims are easily accessible), morally indiscriminate (offenders use children, or anyone available, for their sexual needs), sexually indiscriminate (abuse children out of boredom, sexually experimental), and inadequate (relationships with children are the only sexual outlet available due to social awkwardness caused by low self-esteem and insecurities). Preferential offenders can be categorized into seductive offenders (court children and try to have real relationships with them), fixated offenders (poor psychosexual development leads to a desire for

children that is compulsive) and sadistic offenders (aggressive, excited by violence, target strangers and are very dangerous) (Holmes and Holmes, 2002).

Other typologies for child molesters separate offenders into fixated and regressed offenders. Fixated offenders are more likely to reoffend, as they have a compulsive attraction to children. These offenders target extrafamilial female or males, with premeditated offenses which emerge in adolescence. Regressed offenders begin offending in adulthood, with offending brought on by stressors. These offenders target intrafamilial or acquaintances who they have easy access to, and the offending is a departure from the offenders normal attraction to adults. These offenders are at lower risk for reoffending and can feel remorse for their actions (Terry, 2006).

Criminological Theories

To date, there has been little research done in the field of Criminology to theoretically explain the occurrence of sexually deviant behavior. Two theories that have been explored thus far with samples of sex offenders are Gottfredson and Hirschi's A General Theory of Crime dealing with self control, and Cohen and Felson's Routine Activities Theory. Sasse (2005) focused on the motivation aspect of Routine Activities Theory. Suggesting that different motivations will lead to different types of offending, the study looked at differences in drug, alcohol, and physical abuse among a sample of sex offenders undergoing treatment. The findings suggested that abuse (prior physical or sexual) and drug use were predictive of in home sexual offenses, while alcohol use was predictive of community offending. In a test of Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime using sex offenders, Cleary (2004) found that sex offenders in treatment reported lower levels of self-control than non-sex offenders and sex offenders not in treatment, as well as higher levels of criminal behavior and deviant behavior as children. In addition, it was found that sex offenders did not specialize in their offending

patterns, supporting the idea in General Theory of Crime that most offenders are generalists. Clearly also examine sexual offenses in the context of Routine Activities Theory, in an effort to tie in the idea by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1993) that low self-control works in connection with opportunity and other factors to facilitate crime. Interviews with offenders gave support to a routine activities approach as participating sex offenders revealed themselves to be motivated offenders who selected suitable victims lacking capable guardianship. While these studies are useful in moving towards a theoretical framework for sex offenders that incorporates current criminological theories, it is obvious that more theories should be tested before any generalizations can be made.

Social learning theory: In 1966, Burgess and Akers reformulated Sutherland's Differential Association Theory in order to incorporate behaviorism into the learning model (Akers, 1985).³ This new theory integrated differential association with differential reinforcement. Known at the time as differential reinforcement-association, the theory is now referred to as Social Learning Theory and includes seven statements regarding deviant behavior.

- Deviant Behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning.
- Deviant behavior is learned both in nonsocial situations that are reinforcing or discriminating and through that social interaction in which the behavior of other persons is reinforcing or discriminating for such behavior.
- The principal part of the learning of deviant behavior occurs in those groups which comprise or control the individual's major source of reinforcements.
- The learning of deviant behavior, including specific techniques, attitudes, and avoidance procedures, is a function of the effective and available reinforcers and the existing reinforcement contingencies.

³ Behaviorism is an area in psychology that deals with learning and habit formation as opposed to instinct. Some key researchers in this area include Ivan Pavlov, B. F. Skinner, and Albert Bandura.

- The Specific class of behavior learned and its frequency of occurrence are a function of the effective and available reinforcers, and the deviant or nondeviant direction of the norms, rules, and definitions which in the past have accompanied the reinforcement.
- The probability that a person will commit deviant behavior is increased in the presence of normative statements, definitions, and verbalizations which, in the process of differential reinforcement of such behavior over conforming behavior, have acquired discriminative value.
- The strength of deviant behavior is a direct function of the amount, frequency, and probability of its reinforcement. The modalities of association with deviant patterns are important insofar as they affect the source, amount, and scheduling of reinforcement.

The basis for Social Learning Theory is the belief that all behavior, deviant or conforming, can be explained by general behavioral principles (Akers, 1985). The focus of the theory is on operant behavior, which can be influenced by stimulus events which follow the behavior. In early experiments with behavior modification, Ivan Pavlov looked at the influence of stimulus by showing that the introduction of conditioned stimuli could evoke an intended response.⁴ Decades later, B. F. Skinner (1953) showed that one could increase or decrease the frequency of a certain behavior through positive or negative reinforcement. This work with punishments and rewards laid the foundation for contemporary behaviorism, and is the origin for the reinforcement variable; one of four main concepts in Social Learning Theory. The remaining concepts are differential association, imitation and definitions.

Social Learning Theory posits that the learning mechanism of social behavior is operant conditioning, and behavior is shaped by direct conditioning and the imitation and modeling of others' behavior (Akers, 1985; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, and Radosevich, 1979). Behavior is then strengthened by positive reinforcement, or weakened by negative reinforcement. Through interactions with significant groups, individuals learn to define behavior as good or bad. If an individual has an excess of definitions favorable or neutralizing to a behavior, they are

⁴ Pavlov was able to condition a dog to salivate at the sound of a bell through the use of conditioned stimuli.

more likely to engage in that behavior. While there can be nonsocial reinforcers to behavior, Social Learning Theory holds that the most behavior effects come from “interaction in or under the influence of those groups which control individuals’ major sources of reinforcement and punishment and expose them to behavioral models and normative definitions” (Akers *et al.*, 1979). This differential association concept holds that close peer groups and one’s family are the most influential social groups for an individual.

Many tests have looked at the ability of Social Learning Theory to account for various types of deviance. The theory has been used to explain drug use cessation or continuation (Lanza-Kaduce *et al.*, 1984), alcohol use among the elderly (Akers *et al.*, 1989), binge drinking (Durkin, Wolfe and Clark, 2005), and smoking behavior (Krohn *et al.*, 1985), to name a few. While Social Learning Theory is used to explain general deviance, its ability to explain illegal sexual behavior has received little attention. Akers (1985) contends that sexual socialization of children can lead to sexual deviance in two ways: either the parents or other individuals who socialize children into sex role behavior provide direct reinforcement for deviant sexual behavior, or the heterosexual socialization occurs in a way that leaves the child ill prepared for normal sexual behavior. The way in which Social Learning Theory accounts for deviant sexual behavior is not clearly defined, but Akers suggests that individuals must redefine their behavior as justified and worth the risk they are taking if they initially feel they are doing something wrong. He continues to say that justifications are abundant in the general culture, but that learning these justifications “may involve” associations with others who are supportive or approving (Akers, 1985: pp. 187-190). Akers explains deviant sexual behavior such as homosexuality and prostitution, but does not give detail on illegal sexual behavior such as rape,

child molestation, or viewing child pornography. The current study will make an attempt to fill this gap in the Social Learning literature.

While to date there has not been a test of Social Learning Theory on a general population of sex offenders, various studies have shown support for each of the main concepts of the theory. Hanson, Gizzarelli and Scott (1994) performed a study on incest offenders aimed at identifying specific attitudes of these offenders that may be related to their offense. The study found that incest offenders, when compared with male batterers and a control group of non-offenders, were the most likely to perceive children as sexually attractive and sexually motivated. The incest offenders were also more likely to minimize the harm caused by the sexual abuse of children and agreed with attitudes supportive of male sexual entitlement. Another study, sampling male undergraduate students, found that self-reported likelihood of sexual aggression was related to conservative and rape supportive attitudes, as determined by the acceptance of interpersonal violence against women scale, and use of pornographic materials (Demaré, Briere and Lips, 1988). Both of these studies support the definitions concept of Social Learning Theory.

Support for the imitation concept of this theory can be found in the previous literature as well. The Demaré et al. study (1988) revealed that the use of sexually violent pornography was uniquely associated with the likelihood of using sexual force and likelihood of committing rape. In this study, the viewing of non-violent pornography and violent (but not sexually violent) pornography were unrelated to self-reported likelihood of rape. A study by Marshall (1988) found that rapists and child molesters reported higher usage of sexually explicit stimuli (hard core pornography) than incest or non-offenders. Also, the study showed that 53% of the sampled child molesters, as well as 33% of the sampled rapists reported the deliberate usage of sexually explicit stimuli in their preparation for an offense. Aside from the direct imitation that can occur

from viewing specific behaviors, research has shown that individuals can become desensitized to certain behaviors through observation. This desensitization can change definitions held by individuals in reference to the behavior. A classic study by Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod (1984) showed that participants with prolonged exposure to violent films perceived the films as less violent, had fewer negative reactions to films, and considered the films less degrading to women after the exposure. Two studies by Malamuth and Check (1980, 1985) showed that subjects exposed to positive rape portrayals felt less negatively towards subsequent rape portrayals and believed a higher percentage of women would derive pleasure from being sexually assaulted. While these studies show that pornography can have a significant effect on individual viewers, with some studies suggesting that certain types of pornography can contribute to illegal sexual behavior (Demaré *et al.*, 1988; Marshall, 1988), aggregate levels studies have shown mixed results. Analyses using state level data have found a positive relationship between pornography consumption and rape rates (Baron and Straus, 1987; Scott and Schwalm, 1988). Gentry (1991) performed an analysis using standard metropolitan statistical areas instead of states as the units of analyses and found no significant relationship between circulation of pornography in an area and rape rates.

The remaining two variables in Social Learning Theory, differential association and differential reinforcement, have also been supported through empirical research on sexual behavior. Benda and DiBlasio (1991), in their study of adolescent sexual exploration, found that perceived balance of rewards versus costs of sex accounted for 14% of the variance in adolescent sexual behavior. In line with differential association, peer pressure was also found to be a significant predictor. The same study found that the most influential factor affecting adolescent sexual behavior was differential peer association. Finally, a study on peer groups of sexual

offenders found that sexual offenders reported more association and identification with other sexual offenders than the non-offender community control group (Hanson and Scott, 1996). The study also found these associations to be offense specific, with child molesters associating with other child molesters and rapists knowing other rapists.

After a review of research on sexual offenses, there is evidence to suggest that Social Learning Theory will be predictive of sexual offenses, as there have been studies to support each of the main concepts of this theory with regards to sexually deviant behavior. A study by Boeringer, Shehan and Akers (1991) tested social learning theory in the context of coercive sexual behavior among male university students, with fraternity membership as a main variable. This study, which looked at very specific sexually deviant behavior, found partial support for the theory. Initial one way analysis of variance showed that fraternity members differed significantly from non members in self perceived likelihood of sexually coercive behavior. The significance of fraternity membership disappeared, however, once the four social learning variables were controlled for. Overall, two of the four concepts were significantly different in the fraternity group (versus the non-fraternity group). Fraternity members had higher levels of differential association and differential reinforcement. The impact of this study will be reinforced by the current study, which will test social learning theory against general illegal sexual behavior; child molestation, viewing child pornography, and rape.

CHAPTER 2 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Procedure

For the purposes of this study and subsequent studies, a questionnaire was created to test social learning theory in the context of illegal sexual behavior. This questionnaire included 118 questions regarding topics such as participation in illegal sexual behavior, the four mechanisms associated with Social Learning Theory (differential association, differential reinforcement, imitation, and definitions), demographic information, and questions about sex offender experiences aimed at exploration. Some questions measuring imitation were influenced by questions used in the previously mentioned study by Boeringer, Shehan and Akers (1991). In addition, some questions used to measure definitions favorable to rape were taken from a scale used by Burt (1980) in a study which measured cultural myths and support for rape. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the survey was administered in May of 2007. Participants did not receive any compensation for their involvement.

In order to test this theory, an offender sample was needed to answer specific questions relating to social learning variables, as well as individual involvement in illegal sexual behavior. Due to the personal and potentially incriminating nature of these questions, the data were collected through anonymous mail surveys. It is acknowledged that this procedure produces lower response rates than other possible surveying methods, but the chosen procedure was the most appropriate for this study as the anonymity offered was expected to encourage participation above other potential methods. While the extent to which the general public engages in illegal sexual behavior is unknown, the survey was administered to known sexual offenders (Group 1) to ensure a large enough sample of individuals shown to participate in this deviant behavior. To provide variation in responses and to allow for a more accurate test of Social Learning Theory, a

control population of felony convicted non-sexual offenders (Group 2) in Alachua County was also sampled.

The sampling frame for Group 1 was a listing of convicted sex offenders, who were not incarcerated, in Alachua County, Florida, as listed on the Florida Department of Law Enforcement website. Other studies using samples of convicted sexual offenders have taken samples of inmates or offenders while participating in treatment programs (Cleary, 2004; Levenson and Cotter, 2005). The concern with using treatment programs as a sampling frame is the potential selection effect for those in treatment programs who are there by choice, as well as the effect of filing out a survey during a group treatment session. Cleary (2004) found significant reporting differences between sex offenders in treatment programs and sex offenders not participating in treatment programs. As all convicted sex offenders in Florida are ordered to participate in some type of treatment, the results should not be compromised by these potential selection effects when using a sample of all registered sex offenders in a county. It should be noted, however, that in any voluntary survey, there is the potential for selection effects as motivated participants are more likely to respond. Despite this potential effect, a mail survey is still the most appropriate method of sampling for the reasons already listed. The sampling frame for Group 2 will be a listing of all felony convicted non-sexual offenders from January of 2002 through January of 2007 in Alachua County, attained from the Clerk of Courts in Alachua County.

An important factor to consider when sampling sex offenders is response rate. Tewksbury (2005) published his findings with only a 15.4% response rate. Of over 700 mail surveys, he was able to use only 121 in the final analysis. Tewksbury's study stratified Kentucky's sex offender registry into metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, giving two strata

of almost equal size. After stratifying, the researcher chose a systematic random sample of offenders from each stratum. Minor differences were found between participants from each stratum when asked about experiences as a convicted sex offender. Using this design would have little benefit for the current study looking at Social Learning Theory, though, because it is not suspected that sex offenders in one county are inherently different than sex offenders in another county. As such, in an effort to try to increase response rate, this study sampled only sexual offenders in Alachua County. This county was selected because it was anticipated that Alachua County residents would have a better understanding of scholastic research done by the University of Florida, as they live in close proximity to the campus.

In Alachua County, 250 registered sexual offenders/predators were mailed anonymous surveys. Of the mailed surveys, 12 were returned as undeliverable, yielding a final sample of 238. The response rate for this group was 8.4%, or 20 surveys. This number is a bit alarming, and is recognized as a limitation of this study, but due to the paucity of research in this area, even a limited sample reveals information about sexual offenders. Also, as mentioned earlier, it is accepted that is difficult to collect data on this population due to low response rate. The number of offenders who actually received the survey could be less than realized, as at any time offenders could have been rearrested for new offenses or probation violations. Also, the low number of returned surveys may be due to the implementation of sex offender residency restrictions, as studies have shown that law enforcement department are losing track of where sex offenders are living because limited housing is contributing to sex offenders moving underground (Perlman, 2006).

A random sample of 250 felony convicted non-sexual offenders living in Gainesville was obtained from a listing of all felony-convicted offenders in Gainesville who were convicted since

2002. While the control group includes higher rates of minorities and younger participants, these differences were not expected to affect results, as the mechanisms associated with Social Learning Theory should affect individuals the same, regardless of age or race. Unfortunately, only 1 survey was returned by mail, and as such, the control group of felony convicted non-sexual offender was left out of the final analysis.

Hypotheses

There were originally two hypotheses for this study. The first was that the reported level of participation in illegal sexual behavior by Group 1 (convicted sexual offenders) would be greater in frequency and severity than Group 2 (felony convicted non-sexual offenders). In addition, it was hypothesized that Group 1 would score on measures of social learning variables in the expected direction, and would score higher on those measures than Group 2, for illegal sexual behavior. Because of the lack of response from the control group, new hypotheses centered on the sexual offender group were developed in accordance with Social Learning Theory. The new hypotheses split the sexual offender group in two subgroups based on self-reported levels of sexual deviance. Some offenders reported never participating in sexual activities that would result in arrest if discovered. Those respondents were placed in Group 1, labeled *lower reported involvement*. The remaining participants were placed in Group 2, labeled *higher reported involvement*. It was hypothesized that participants in Group 2 would score higher on social learning variables, and in the expected direction compared with Group 1. The overall sample was also split into two subgroups based on the participants' involvement in specific illegal sexual behavior. Those who reported having sexual relationships with minors were placed into Group 4 (child molesters), while those who did not report having sexual relationships with minors were placed into Group 3 (non-child molesters). With this division, it

was hypothesized that those in Group 4 would have more approving definitions of child molestation than those in Group 3.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this analysis was participation in illegal sexual activity. This was measured in two ways. First, the participants were asked how many times as an adult they had willingly been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered. The participants were instructed that this measure did not include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults. The response choices were categories of 0, 1-5, 6-15, 16-30, 31-50, and 50+ times. The dependent variable was also measured with regards to more specific activity. Participants were asked: As an adult, how many times have you been involved in sexual behavior with a person 12 years old or younger; As an adult, how many times have you been involved in sexual behavior with a person between 13-15 years old; and As an adult, how many time have you been sexually intimate with an adult who did not consent, with the same category choices ranging from 0 to 50+ times. The participants were also asked how many times in an average month they view media or online material sexually depicting children 12 and under or teenagers 13-15 years old. The response options also ranged from 0 to 50+ times a month. These questions were also used to measure the dependent variable, since viewing child pornography is illegal, as well as to measure the imitation concept of Social Learning Theory. From the responses to these questions, the participants were divided into two groups. First, the participants were divided into an offender and non-offender group based on answers to the question As an adult (18+), how many times have you been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered? (Does NOT include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults). Those who responded 0 were placed into the non-offender group (Group 1).

All other participants were placed into the offender group (Group 2). For the analysis, a second division was made among the participants. Based on responses to the questions on more specific offending, participants were divided into two groups. Group 3 was participants who had not had sexual relationships with minors (under 16), and Group 4 included the participants who did report having physical sexual relationships with minors. The analysis is discussed using both group divisions.

Independent Variables

The independent variables of interest included measures of Social Learning Theory. Differential association was measured using questions which asked the respondent how often their friends or acquaintances, close friends, or family members had engaged in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered. The response categories were arranged into a 5-point scale listing none, less than half, half, more than half or All. According to the theory, individuals with higher levels of sexual deviance should report more friends who participate in the same behavior. While the differential association concept includes measures of frequency, intensity, priority, and duration for the effect of relationships on an individual, it was anticipated that traditional measures such as these would not give an accurate depiction of the overall effect of a relationship on the participant, due to the solitary behavioral patterns of sexual offenders. Because of this, the only way in which the survey tried to elicit responses regarding more important peer associations was through the use of questions which asked the respondent to report the behavior of the participant's "closest friends". The exclusion of the frequency, intensity, priority and duration of associations from this study does not indicate that sex offenders do not maintain relationships that vary in importance and influence. Rather, it must be acknowledged that those who participate in sexually deviant behavior may have important relationships that cannot be measured in this way. It is possible that sex offenders have what was

termed by Warr (2002) as “virtual peer groups,” where the relationship is cultivated online and does not need to include in person interaction.

Imitation was measured by asking the participant how many times in a month they viewed media or online material sexually depicting children 12 and under, teenagers 13-15 years old, or depicting sexually aggressive acts towards men or women. Also, participants were asked about their parents’ involvement in deviant sexual behavior. As children learn behavior from their parents, it is possible that knowing of a parent’s deviant sexual behavior can influence a child’s behavior as outlined through Social Learning Theory’s imitation component.

The reinforcement concept was measured for overall reinforcement and differential reinforcement. To measure overall reinforcement, participants were asked to weigh the positive and negative aspects of participating in a specific illegal sexual behavior. They were then asked, in the context of their life before their conviction, to rate their participation in that behavior on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from “mainly positive” to “mainly negative.” Participants were asked to rate how their friends would react if they knew about the participant’s involvement in the specified illegal sexual behavior. The choices for this question range from 1- Strongly Approve to 5- Strongly Disapprove. This set of questions measured differential reinforcement.

Finally, definitions were measured through responses to three scales. A rape myth scale, incorporating questions from a scale created by Burt (1980) was used to measure definitions favorable or neutralizing to rape. To measure definitions favorable or neutralizing to child molestation or viewing child pornography, scale were created for this study. According to Social Learning Theory, participant who report higher levels of illegal sexual behavior should score higher on the scales measuring favorable or neutralizing attitudes towards the behavior.

Demographic and Control Variables

Other variables measured in this study included general demographic information such as race, age, employment, and income, as well as overall illegal behavior (sexual and non sexual) and age of onset of illegal behavior. Participants were asked about their own sexual victimization as minors, as research has shown that sexual offenders are more likely to have been sexually victimized as children (Terry, 2006). Participants were also asked to complete a self-control scale which was created for and utilized in a study by Higgins and Tewksbury (2006).

Data Analysis

Upon receipt of complete surveys, responses were entered into SPSS for analysis. Because of the small sample size of this study, many tests that were intended to be utilized for this study could not be used. Instead, the analysis was limited to non-parametric tests and descriptive statistics such as frequencies. The Mann-Whitney U, or the equivalent of a two independent samples t-test was used for the analysis. The Mann-Whitney U is designed to find significant differences in reporting for each of the selected variables between the two identified groups. This analysis was used when splitting the groups into Group 1 and Group 2, based on reported participation in sexual activities that could result in arrest if discovered, as well as splitting the groups into those having sexual relationships with minors (Group 4), and those who did not have sexual relationships with minors (Group 3). Frequencies were used to discuss the overall trends in the data, not just differences between the groups.

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

Participant Demographics

Of the 20 participants in the final analysis and removing any responses that were system missing, 100% of the sample reported being male. Most of the sample (40%) fell in the age range of 56 to 64 years old, followed by 25% between 35 and 49 years old, 20% over age 65, and 15% between 25 and 34 years old.¹ The sample was 85% white, and 100% not Hispanic. Over half of the sample (53%) had continued their education past high school, although the highest level of school completed ranged from third grade to graduate school. Of the sample, 65% reported current income levels under \$30,000 a year, with 55% of the sample reporting regular full time work for their current work situation. Half of the sample (50%) reported currently owning their own home, and 30% of the sample reported renting the same place for at least two years. A majority of the sample (70%) reported only being arrested once, although 1 respondent reported being arrested over 10 times. The average age of first arrest for a sexual offense was 25+ years old, and this was also the most common age of first general arrest (whether for sexual or nonsexual activity).

Distribution for Independent and Dependent Variables

For the overall sample, the descriptive statistics show that most respondents reported participating in illegal sexual behavior (60%), and 45% of the respondents reported having sexual relationships with minors under 16 years old. For the two primary control variables (self-control and participant sexual victimization as a child), the analysis did not reveal the expected

¹ An age range had to be taken instead of an actual age in accordance with suggestions made by the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board. It was believed that due to the plethora of information made available to the public regarding each sex offender, it would be possible to accurately determine which offenders participated in the sample, violating the guarantee of anonymity, if too many specific demographic variables were required. As such, some questions were made less specific.

outcome. In line with research mentioned previously, it was expected that sexual offenders would score low on self-control scales, and have a history of prior sexual victimization as minors. Using a seven-question scale, with a total score of 7 referring to low self control, and a score of 28 referring to high self control, the mean score for this sample was 22.94. For prior sexual victimization as a minor, the mean score was .35 (with 0 = no prior victimization).

3-1. Descriptive statistics for select variables

<i>Dependent Variables</i>	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Q20.2: Been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered	0	5	.85	1.53
Q20.2: Dummy- illegal sexual behavior (n/y)	0	1	.60	.50
Q20.3: Been involved in sexual behavior with a minor 12 years old or younger	0	5	.58	1.22
Q20.4: Been involved in sexual behavior with a minor aged 13-15	0	5	.40	.60
Q20.3,4: Dummy- sexual relationship with minor (n/y)	0	1	.45	.51
<i>Independent and Control Variables</i>	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Q1: Sex (0=male)	0	1	0.00	0.00
Q3: Dummy- Race (0=nonwhite)	0	1	.85	.37
Q14: Self Control Total	7	28	22.94	3.80
Q17-19: Dummy- Differential Association (friend/family participate in sexual acts that would result in arrest if discovered) (n/y)	0	1	.35	.49
Q21: Dummy- Imitation (n/y)	0	1	.10	.31
Q22: Overall Reinforcement Total	3	15	4.55	2.96
Q23: Differential Reinforcement Total	3	15	3.50	1.40
Q24A: Child Pornography Definitions Total	6	30	12.16	4.41
Q24B: Child Molestation Definitions Total	8	40	13.94	5.54
Q24C: Rape Definitions Total	7	35	10.89	2.88
Q24D: Definitions Total	21	105	36.75	10.81
Q25: Participant sexually victimized as a minor (n/y) (n=0)	0	1	.35	.49

The descriptive statistics for the social learning variables did not show much support for the theory. Scores for all four social learning variables were low, with the mean for imitation at .100 and the mean for differential association at .35 (both on a scale from 0 to 1). Overall reinforcement and differential reinforcement were on a scale of 3 to 15, with overall

reinforcement maintaining a mean of 4.50, and differential reinforcement scoring a mean of 3.55. The mean for the sum of the definitions was 36.75, with a score of 21 being equivalent to definitions unfavorable to sexual offenses, and a score of 105 being equivalent to definitions favorable to sexual offenses. While these mechanisms were scaled together, due to the small sample size for the study, the reliability of these scales is unknown. See Table 3-1 for more descriptive statistics.

Hypothesis 1

To test hypothesis 1, which stated that Group 2 (higher reported involvement) would score higher and in the intended direction than Group 1 (lower reported involvement), the samples was divided into two subgroups. The division was made based upon the respondents self reported levels of participation in illegal sexual behavior. Group 1 had 8 participants. Group 2 had 12 participants. These groups did not vary significantly on any of the demographic variables, as shown through the Mann-Whitney U test used to perform this part of the analysis.

From Table 3-2, it is seen that of the variables tested (there were over 70 in the actual analysis), only 10 were significantly different between the two groups. Definitions favorable to illegal sexual behavior was the only social learning factor that was significantly different between the two groups, with a significance level of .011. Another variable with significant differences between the two groups is sexual victimization of the participant as a minor. Though not apparent when looking at the descriptive statistics for the entire sample, the analysis shows that members of Group 2 (higher reported involvement) were more likely to be sexually victimized as minors, compared with Group 1 (lower reported involvement). This finding is consistent with prior research (Cleary, 2004), and could be interpreted as an “imitation” effect, even though the original imitation variable was not significant at .236. While it is difficult to find significant differences in small samples such as this, it should be noted that the relationships

between the groups and their scores on the various factors are in the expected direction, consistent with Social Learning Theory. It is shown that Group 2 scores higher more often on the various social learning mechanisms than Group 1. Group 1 also scored higher on the control variable for self-control than Group 2. These findings give partial support for hypothesis 1.

3-2. Non-parametric 2-independent samples t-test (Mann-Whitney U) Groups 1&2

<i>Variables</i>	Mean Rank Group 1 Lower Reported Involvement	Mean Rank Group 2 Higher Reported Involvement	Sig.
Age	10.31	10.63	.904
Last grade completed	9.69	10.23	.834
Self control total	9.57	07.67	.421
Differential association (n/y)	9.50	11.17	.456
Imitation (n/y)	9.50	11.17	.236
Overall reinforcement total	10.00	10.83	.703
Differential reinforcement total	10.13	10.75	.710
Definitions total	4.58	10.85	.011**
Rape definitions total	9.21	10.46	.638
Child pornography definitions total	7.63	11.73	.115
Child molestation definitions total	5.86	11.82	.020**
Respondent sexual victimization as a minor	8.25	12.00	.093*
<i>Specific Variables of Significance</i>	Mean Rank Group 1 Lower Reported Involvement	Mean Rank Group 2 Higher Reported Involvement	Sig.
Family members involved in sexually deviant behavior	8.50	11.83	.075*
Family members been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered	8.50	11.83	.075*
Child Pornography Definition 1 ¹	8.00	12.17	.080*
Child Pornography Definition 6 ¹	8.06	12.13	.099*
Child Molestation Definition 1 ¹	7.50	12.50	.022**
Child Molestation Definition 2 ¹	5.88	13.58	.003**
Child Molestation Definition 4 ¹	7.75	12.33	.062*

* = $p \leq .10$; ** = $p \leq .05$, ¹Actual questions can be found in appendix

Hypothesis 2

Testing hypothesis 2 involved separating the sample into two new groups based on the participants' responses to questions about their involvement in specific forms of illegal sexual behavior. Two questions asked respondents whether they had participated in sexual relationships with minors. The first question asked specifically about relationships with children 12 years old and younger, and the second question asked about relationships with minors between 13 and 15 years old. If participants indicated that they had participated in relationships with either children 12 and under, or minors aged 13-15 years old, they were placed in Group 4 (child molesters). All other participants were placed in Group 3 (non-child molesters). It was hypothesized that members of Group 4 would score higher on definitions favorable to child molestation than members of Group 3. The non-parametric test Mann-Whitney U was used once again for the analysis. Although Group 4 did have a higher mean rank than Group 3 for definitions favorable to child molestation, the difference was not significant (.228). The mean ranking for each of the total definition variables (child molestation definitions total, child pornography definitions total, and rape definitions total) was consistently higher for Group 4 than Group 3, but all of the differences were insignificant. Table 3-3 shows the mean rank and significance levels for selected variables.

Like the results from the analysis for hypothesis 1, Group 4 scored consistently higher on the individual child molestation definitions, though the differences overall were not significant. Group 4 scored significantly higher on child molestation definition 1, which asked if the participant agreed or disagreed with the statement that children have a sexual identity and deserve to explore it with anyone they want, as well as child molestation definition 2, which asked if the participant agreed or disagreed with the statement that some children may seek out and be willing participants in sexual activities with adults. Child molestation definition 3 was

the only child molestation definition in which Group 3 scored higher than Group 4. This difference was minor though, with the mean rank for Group 4 measuring 10.00, and the mean rank for Group 3 measuring 10.91. While not significantly different, the differences between the two groups for the child molestation definitions are in the expected direction, again showing partial support for the hypothesis. Also, as with hypothesis 1, a significant difference was found between the two groups with regards to the participant's self reported sexual victimization as a child.

Table 3-3. Non-parametric 2-independent samples t-test (Mann-Whitney U) Groups 3&4

<i>Variables</i>	Mean Rank		Sig.
	Non-Child Molester Group 3	Mean Rank Child Molester Group 4	
Child molestation definitions total	8.15	11.19	.228
Child pornography definitions total	9.50	10.69	.648
Rape definitions total	8.45	11.72	.201
Definitions total	7.17	10.21	.203
Child molestation definition 3 ¹	10.91	10.00	.582
Child molestation definition 4 ¹	9.59	11.61	.404
Child molestation definition 5 ¹	9.00	11.38	.202
Child molestation definition 6 ¹	8.95	12.39	.143
Child molestation definition 7 ¹	8.80	11.33	.274
Child molestation definition 8 ¹	9.32	11.94	.157

<i>Significant Variables</i>	Mean Rank		Sig.
	Non-Child Molester Group 3	Mean Rank Child Molester Group 4	
Respondent sexual victimization as a minor	7.91	13.67	.009**
Respondent required to participate in treatment	11.73	9.00	.098*
Self control 3: I lose my temper easily	11.77	7.56	.071*
Differential Association 5 ¹	12.45	8.11	.048**
Differential Association 6 ¹	11.73	9.00	.099*
Child pornography definition 3 ¹	13.23	7.17	.015**
Child pornography definition 5 ¹	7.73	13.13	.026**
Child molestation definition 1 ¹	8.50	12.94	.039**
Child molestation definition 2 ¹	8.27	13.22	.052*

* = $p \leq .10$; ** = $p \leq .05$, ¹Actual questions can be found in appendix

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the extent to which Social Learning Theory can account for participation in illegal sexual behavior. The steps taken in this study were important for the field of Criminology, as well as research into sexual offenses because until now, there had not been any work looking directly at the connection between Social Learning Theory and sexual offenses. This study had two hypotheses: That those in the higher reported participation group (Group 2) would score higher and in the expected direction on social learning variables than those in the lower reported participation group (Group 1), and that self reported child molesters would score higher on definitions favorable to child molestation than non-child molesters. Of the four social learning mechanisms, the definitions measure was the only variable that was shown to be significant. This finding supported findings by previous studies that individuals with definitions favorable or neutralizing to a specific behavior are more likely to participate in that behavior (Hanson, Gizzarelli and Scott, 1994). While the other social learning mechanisms did not show significant differences between the group with higher reported participation and the group with lower reported participation, the trends were in the expected direction, with Group 2 (higher reported participation) scoring consistently higher than Group 1 (lower reported involvement). It is possible that questions regarding virtual peer groups (Warr, 2002) would help add to the significance of the differential association measure, as well as the imitation measure.

Overall, the analysis showed partial support for hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2. While there were few significant differences between the groups, the general trends in the data were in the expected directions as predicted in Social Learning Theory. Due to the small sample size

associated with the analysis, generalizations from this study to the overall population are strongly cautioned against. That aside, the findings of this study show that further exploration into the relationship between social learning mechanisms and participation in illegal sexual behavior is essential for future research on sexual offenses and offenders.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study which need to be addressed. First, the sample size created many limitations for analysis and generalization. Not only was the response rate less than expected for the sex offender group, but there was an unusable response from the control group of felony-convicted non-sexual offenders. The final sample was too small for a more sophisticated analysis because the basic assumptions made by more complex tests originally intended for the analysis could not be met. In addition, while non-parametric tests are designed for small sample sizes which do not meet the basic assumptions of other tests, it proved difficult to find significant differences between groups without a large sample. The difficulty in finding significant differences between the two groups may also be due to the limited variation found when using only a sample of convicted sexual offenders, who for the purposes of this study may be more alike than different.

A more serious limitation is found in questioning the truthfulness of the answers provided by the participants. While the sexual offender sample was taken from a listing of convicted sexual offenders, almost half of the sample reported never participating in sexual behavior that could result in arrest if discovered. While it is not uncommon for offenders to maintain their innocence, it is difficult to accept these responses as being accurate. Still, the data were analyzed as they were received because it was believed that the underreporting seen in the data occurred at equal intervals for all participants. If the minimization of participation in illegal sexual behavior is found among all participants, the results should not be compromised. Though this explanation

is only a theory, the results showed support for this idea, as the trends among the divided groups were in the expected directions, according to Social Learning Theory.

Although variation was found in responses for the definitions component of Social Learning Theory, the means showed very limited agreement for definitions favorable to sexual offending. This may be do to treatment effects, as most of the sample was required to participate in counseling after their conviction. It is also possible that what offenders know is a wrong behavior may not be felt as a wrong behavior to them. For example, an alcoholic may know that drinking is wrong, and may report that on a survey, but at the same time they may feel as though drinking is the right thing to do because they desire it. In any event, this limitation may be avoided in the future by convincing participants of the confidentiality associated with surveys of this nature.

Another limitation to the study is the selection of sexual offenders from the same general area as participants. Although there is no research to suggest that sexual offenders from one area of the United States are inherently different from sexual offenders from another area, a larger sample using participant from around the country would be ideal to control for any possible variation due to location. The decision to use sexual offenders from Alachua County, Florida was justified given the monetary restraints, timeline, and exploratory nature of the study. But, the uniform location of the offenders may have contributed to the results in way not realized.

Future Research

Future research with sexual offenders should continue to explore the ways in which Criminological theories can account for participation in illegal sexual behavior. These theories may be able to offer predictive power that has been missing in current theories on sexual offenders. A larger version of this study, administered to sexual offenders from around the nation, as well as a non-offender population, would be ideal for further testing the relationship

between sexual offenses and Social Learning Theory. It will be important to find ways to increase participation from both the offender and the control populations. One way to do this may be to offer monetary incentives for participation in the study. While this study could not make that offer to participants because of the anonymity promised by the researchers, perhaps future research could focus on confidentiality instead of anonymity. For this study, the appropriate method for data collection based on time and money available was a mail survey. It may be a better choice for future research to include in person interviews with offenders. This may encourage more honest responses, and may allow researchers to ask questions pertinent to the research not currently used on the questionnaires. These interviews may allow better ways of capturing definitions favorable to sexual deviance. Although general definitions were chosen for this study, it is possible that offenders maintain unique definitions favorable or neutralizing to illegal sexual behavior that are related to their specific offenses. For example, one behavior neutralizing definition not used in this study is being drunk or under the influence of another drug while committing the offense. In depth, personal interviews would allow researchers to look into the specific circumstances of each participant's offense.

Another potential direction for research in this area may be to focus on qualitative data. As it has been shown that sexual offenders are a group of offenders that are difficult to collect data on, qualitative studies using smaller samples may provide meaningful analyses that can add to the current body of literature that has many deficits.

The biggest hurdle to climb for researchers in this area will be convincing sex offenders that they should participate in studies. As the political focus on sexual offenders has been concerned with increasing punishments, and stigmas, for sexual offenders, this population has not shown themselves to be eager to participate in research. Without a willing body of

participants to take part in studies, it will be difficult to fill in any of the current gaps in sex offender research.

Ultimately, it is clear that researchers need to find better ways to examine this isolated population of offenders, and explore sexual deviant behavior in the context of criminological theories. Increasing sample sizes for studies will allow more indepth analyses utilizing complex tests that can create models to accurately test Social Learning Theory, as well as other theories, with this population. It is important for Criminologists to focus on this population and behavior from a research standpoint, so educated suggestions can be made for punishment and/or treatment.

APPENDIX
SEXUAL OFFENDER SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(Demographic Variables).

- | | | | | | |
|--|-------|--------|-------|-------|-----|
| 1. What is your sex? | Male | Female | | | |
| 2. How old are you? | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ |
| 3. What is your race? | White | Black | Asian | Other | |
| 4. Do you consider yourself Hispanic? | Yes | No | | | |
- 5. What is the highest grade level of school that you have completed?**

6. What is your current annual income level?

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| None (\$0) | \$45,001-60,000 |
| \$1-15,000 | \$60,001-75,000 |
| \$15,001-30,000 | \$75,001-\$90,000 |
| \$30,001-45,000 | \$90,001 and over |

7. Which of the following best describes your work situation now?

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Regular full time work | Regular part time work |
| Occasional or temporary work | Unemployed |
| Retired | Other _____ |

8. Which of the following best describes your housing situation now?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Own home | Rented same place for 2+ years |
| Live with family (no rent payment) | Rented same place for under 2 years |
| Live with friend (no rent) | Other _____ |

9. How old were you when you were first arrested (sexual or non sexual offense)?

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Less than 10 years old | 18-20 years old |
| 10-14 years old | 21-25 years old |
| 15-17 years old | 25+ years old |

10. How many times have you been arrested? (includes both sexual and non sexual offenses)

- Once
- 2-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 10+ times

11. Which of the following best describes your work situation before your conviction for a sexual offense?

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Regular full time work | Regular part time work |
| Occasional or temporary work | Unemployed |
| Retired | Other _____ |

12. Which of the following best describes your housing situation before your conviction for a sexual offense?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Owned home | Rented same place for 2+ years |
| Lived with family (no rent payment) | Rented same place for under 2 years |
| Lived with friend (no rent) | Other _____ |

13. Which of the following best describes your annual income level before your conviction for a sexual offense?

- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| None (\$0) | \$45,001-60,000 |
| \$1-15,000 | \$60,001-75,000 |

\$15,001-30,000
\$30,001-45,000

\$75,001-\$90,000
\$90,001 and over

(Self control scale) Next, please mark the appropriate space for whether you 1- strongly agree, 2- agree, 3- disagree, or 4- strongly disagree with the following statements.

14. I am usually pretty cautious. (reverse- recoded for analysis)
15. Whatever I do, I try hard. (reverse- recoded for analysis)
16. I lose my temper easily.
17. I don't devote much thought and effort to preparing for the future.
18. Sometimes I take a risk just for the fun of it.
19. I try to get things I want, even when I know it's causing problems for other people.
20. Most things people call delinquent don't really hurt anyone.

21. Before your conviction, about how many people did you personally know who were arrested for a sex offense? (please give number) _____

22. Where did you meet most of your current friends? (Circle one)

School

At another club or organization

Through family members

At Church

Online

Other (please describe) _____

(Differential Association 1) To the best of your knowledge, how many of your friends or acquaintances have... (0- none, 1- less than half, 2- half, 3- more than half, 4- all)

23. Been involved in sexual behavior that would be unacceptable to most in society?
24. Been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered? (Does NOT include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults)
25. Been arrested for their sexual activity?
26. Been arrested for a non-sexual offense, or committed non sexual acts for which they could have been arrested?

(Differential Association 2) Of the friends or acquaintances with whom you have the most interaction, whether in person or by email/internet or by phone or otherwise, about how many have...(0- none, 1- less than half, 2- half, 3- more than half, 4- all)

27. Been involved in sexual behavior that would be unacceptable to most in society?
28. Been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered? (Does NOT include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults)
29. Been arrested for their sexual activity?
30. Been arrested for a non-sexual offense, or committed non sexual acts for which they could have been arrested?

(Differential Association 3) To the best of your knowledge, how many of your family members have... (0- none, 1- less than half, 2- half, 3- more than half, 4- all)

- 31. Been involved in sexual behavior that would be unacceptable to most in society?
- 32. Been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered? (Does NOT include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults)
- 33. Been arrested for their sexual activity?
- 34. Been arrested for a non-sexual offense, or committed non sexual acts for which they could have been arrested?

(Dependent Variables) As an adult (18+), how many times have you ... (0: 0, 1: 1-5, 2: 6-15, 3: 16-30, 4:31-50, 5: 50+)

- 35. Been involved in sexual behavior that would be unacceptable to most in society?
- 36. Been involved in sexual behavior that would result in arrest if discovered? (Does NOT include consensual adult homosexual activity, adultery, premarital sex, or oral/anal sex between consenting adults)
- 37. Been involved in sexual behavior (can include non physical activity) with a person(s) 12 years old or younger?
- 38. Been involved in sexual behavior (can include non physical activity) with a person(s) between 13-15 years old?
- 39. Been sexually intimate with an adult (male or female) who did not consent?
- 40. Been arrested for a non-sexual offense, or committed non sexual acts for which they could have been arrested?

(Imitation) Next, please list the number of times in an average MONTH you view these kinds of materials. (0: 0, 1: 1-5, 2: 6-15, 3: 16-30, 4:31-50, 5: 50+)

- 41. Media (magazines, photos, videos, books, etc.) sexually depicting children age 12 and under (either through poses or actual sexual acts)
- 42. Media (magazines, photos, videos, books, etc.) displaying teenagers (13-15) sexually
- 43. Media (magazines, photos, videos, books, etc.) displaying sexually aggressive acts towards men or women (bondage, forceful sexual encounters, violence, etc.)
- 44. Internet chat rooms or live online videos displaying or describing children (12 and under) sexually
- 45. Internet chat rooms or live online videos displaying teenagers (13-15) sexually
- 46. Internet chat rooms or live online videos displaying or describing sexually aggressive acts towards men or women (bondage, forceful sexual encounters, violence, etc.)

(Overall Reinforcement) As an adult, considering both the positive (i.e. sexual or physical satisfaction) and the negative (i.e. disapproval of others, arrest, etc.) factors, how would you have viewed the following acts **BEFORE** your conviction?(1- Mainly negative, 2- Negative, 3- About as positive as negative, 4- Somewhat positive, 5- Positive)

- 47. Being sexually intimate with someone under 12 years old.
- 48. Being sexually intimate with someone between 13-15 years old.
- 49. Being sexually intimate with an adult (male or female) who did not want to.
- 50. Viewing sexually explicit material involving minors (including magazine, photos, videos, books, etc.).
- 51. Viewing material involving sexually aggressive acts towards adult men or women.

(Differential Reinforcement) Thinking about your closest friends, or those you interact with most, how approving do you think they would be of you in the following situations?(1- Mainly negative, 2- Negative, 3- About as positive as negative, 4- Somewhat positive, 5- Positive)

- 52. If you were to be sexually intimate with someone under 12 years old.
- 53. If you were to be sexually intimate with someone 13-15 years old.
- 54. If you were to have sex with an adult (male or female) who did not want to.
- 55. If you were to view sexually explicit material of minors.
- 56. If you were to view material involving sexually aggressive acts towards adult men or women

(Definitions) Please mark the appropriate space for whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree or with the following statements. (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree nor disagree, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly agree)

(Child Pornography)

- 57. cp def1: The human body is beautiful and sexually attractive, so there is nothing wrong with admiring someone sexually, even if they aren't an adult.
- 58. cp def2: Looking at material involving naked children is okay because no one gets hurt.
- 59. cp def3: It is not natural for adults to find sexual fiction involving children erotic. (reverse- recoded for analysis)
- 60. cp def4: Only people who produce child porn, not the viewers, should be subject to legal action.
- 61. cp def5: Consumption of child pornography may prevent people from more serious types of offending.
- 62. cp def6: Child pornography should not be illegal because it is not the role of the government to police people's private thoughts and fantasies.

(Child Molestation)

- 63. cm def1: Children have sexual identity, and deserve to explore it with anyone they want.
- 64. cm def2: Some children may seek out and be willing participants in sexual activity with adults.
- 65. cm def3: Sexual relationships with children are immoral, even though it has been done throughout history in many cultures. (reverse- recoded for analysis)

- 66. cm def4: Even though a minor under 16 says they aren't ready for sex, they might be mistaken because they don't understand their body's reactions.
- 67. cm def5: Incest can often be a positive family building situation.
- 68. cm def6: Age is completely arbitrary and two people who consent to sex should be allowed to pursue a relationship regardless of age.
- 69. cm def7: In the future society will realize that relationships btw children and adults are not as dangerous as they are currently portrayed.
- 70. cm def8: It is all right for adults to have intimate sexual contact with a child if it is not forced and the child is willing.

(Rape)

- 71. rape def1: Most women have no desire to be forced into sexual activities. (reverse-recorded for analysis)
- 72. rape def2: A woman who is stuck up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson.
- 73. rape def3: If a woman gets drunk at a party and sleeps with someone there that she just met, she should be consider fair game for other men, whether she consents or not.
- 74. rape def4: If someone doesn't want to get raped, they shouldn't make themselves such an easy target.
- 75. rape def5: Many women have a desire to be forced into sexual activity, and may set up a situation to be attacked.
- 76. rape def6: If a girl engages in necking or petting and lets things get out of hand, it's her fault if her partner forces her to have sex.
- 77. rape def7: Anyone can resist being raped if they really want to.

78. As a minor (under 18), were you ever involved in sexual behavior when you did not want to participate?

YES NO

79. If yes, how often did this occur?

Once Sometimes Often Very often

80. Have you been required to participate in any treatment programs for your sex offense?

YES NO

81. Have you voluntarily participated in any treatment programs for your sex offense?

YES NO

82. Please circle any of these with whom you have had sexual contact for which you could have been arrested or would likely be arrested if discovered. (circle all)

Males aged 0-12	Females aged 0-12
Males aged 13-15	Females aged 13-15
Males aged 16-17	Females aged 16-17
Adult Males	Adult Females
Male family members	Female family members

83. How old were you at your first such encounter? (may not have resulted in arrest)

Less than 10 years old	18-20 years old
10-14 years old	21-25 years old
15-17 years old	25+ years old

84. How long has it been since your last such encounter?

- 1 day - 1 week
- 1 week - 1 month
- 1 month - 6 months
- 6 months - 1 year
- over 1 year

85. What was the age of your first ARREST for a sexual offense?

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Less than 10 years old | 18-20 years old |
| 10-14 years old | 21-25 years old |
| 15-17 years old | 25+ years old |

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tasha J. Youstin graduated with honors from Florida Atlantic University with her Bachelor of Arts degree in criminology and criminal justice in 2004. She entered the criminology, law and society master's program at the University of Florida in August of 2005. Upon completion of her M.A., Tasha made the transition to New York City in order to pursue her Ph.D. at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

In her spare time, Tasha enjoys singing and has played the guitar for the past 13 years. She also enjoys SCUBA diving, playing with her dog (a puggle named Odin), and is an avid Gator sports fan.