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Sex Registries and Juvenile Offenders: An Examination of College Student Perception

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Sex Registries and Juvenile Offenders:
An Examination of College Student Perception

A Criminal Justice Research Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Criminal Justice
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Kennesaw State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Science in Criminal Justice

By
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Abstract

Juvenile sex offenders are included in sex offender registration laws based on the assumption that they pose a high risk for future reoffending. Without doubt sex offender laws are quite controversial. Given the recent support in applying sex offender registry laws to juveniles, laws originally designed to protect children of these same ages, this study addresses the following: 1. How do the disciplines of psychology and criminal justice impact student perception of juvenile sex offender registration? 2. How do major of study, race, and gender impact student perception of juvenile sex offender registration? 3. To what extent do social science students believe that registration of juvenile sex offenders contribute to improving public safety? Data from this study resulted from an N=461 convenience sample survey of social science students attending Kennesaw State University. The study found that participants (66%) endorsed the full application of registration requirements for juvenile sex offenders. While criminal justice majors were more prone to advocate for legislation to remain the same for both juveniles and adult sex offenders, psychology majors displayed degrees of hopeful outlooks on juvenile sex offenders despite that of non-psychology majors. Further, the results suggested no significant statistical relationship between the demographic variables of race to only include only Whites' and African Americans as well as, gender on attitudes held towards juvenile sex offender registration.

Keywords: juveniles, sex offenders, registration, registry laws, social science

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my family and many friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving mother, Kim Bryant whose words of encouragement, wisdom, and perseverance guided me in pursuit of accomplishing my goals. She has provided me with the determination to aspire for excellence. To my sister, Ashley Bryant, thank you for being my greatest motivator and my reason for sanity.

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Lastly, I dedicate this work to Brittani Boyd for helping me master the dots of success throughout the entire graduate program, as she has been my biggest cheerleader.

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CHAPTER 1

It should be of no surprise that survey research has often highlighted an essential value in sex offender legislation as it relates to public perception of sex offender policies (Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2010). The range of crimes committed by sex offenders often invokes an extreme repulsion from what is to be considered acceptable behavior regardless of the nature of the offense (Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004). It is difficult to imagine a more punishable crime than a sexual offense committed upon a child. Visibly, sex offenders tend to be a particularly reviled group, stirring the highest level of emotional reactions, such as disgust and moral outrage (Olver & Barlow, 2010). Though once being considered a hidden phenomenon, sexual assault today, with the help of media attention, has created a new awareness specifically aimed toward sexual victimization (Freeman & Sandler, 2010).

Sahlstrom and Jeglic (2008) found that both policy and legal approaches to the governing of sex offenders have developed solely from public reactions to high-profile media reports. Societal responses have also emerged from the need to be: publicly safe, create and form clear legislation, sensationalize media coverage, as well as, demonstrate the belief that “predators” and “strangers” are today’s sex offenders. With increased awareness, sex offender policies have not only created the collateral effect of de-stigmatizing sexual victimization, but also increased reporting rates, and assisted in the overall identification of sexual assaults (Freeman & Sandler, 2010). In an effort to further increase public awareness, media coverage depicting sex offenders as “predators” beyond rehabilitation with the likelihood of reoffending have only exacerbated controversies in response to high-profile sex crimes. Phrases such as *forcible rape* in cases of a child under ten years of age have seemed to inflame punitive reactions to both adult and juvenile sex offenders alike. In return, reactions have proliferated a perceived idea that high-profile

sexual assaults though rare, have become widespread. It perhaps comes not unforeseen that with moral perception oftentimes-stereotypical views will foster amongst sex offenders (Olver & Barlow, 2010). “Moral panic” without doubt has inspired the escalation of legislative responses. Unfortunately, like many researchers in the field of criminology, Meloy, Curtis, and Boatwright (2013) have identified that sex offender laws are structurally created based on public fear and misunderstanding of the types of offenses committed by sex offenders. Yet, despite significant strides in research developments regarding both the treatment and management of sex offenders and the declining frequency of violent sex crimes, public opinion has illustrated a continuous punitive approach in the dealings of convicted sexual offenders (Olver & Barlow, 2010).

Granting all this, there are countless reasons to examine further into student perception of sex offender registries and the overlap of unintended consequences they place on convicted juvenile offenders. First, research in the literature should employ multiple methods and settings that represent various situations in which students are influenced by social and criminal policy. Second, Chaffin (2008) has argued that public policy for juveniles have been fundamentally driven by well intentioned but ultimately flawed policies that have done little to improve outcomes and reduce recidivism amongst juveniles. Areas of public policy worth focusing on include but are not limited to: treatment approaches and standards, institutional placement, community management, and registration and notification policies as they relate to convicted offenders (Chaffin, 2008). Further, the deterrence of youth sexual offending, in particular, has relatively shifted legal policy, subjecting adolescents and children to be held legally to the same standards of responsibilities as adults. As alarming as this may sound, juvenile sexual offenders in comparison to their adult counterparts have been largely under researched and over looked in the literature. Sexually related crimes committed by juveniles pose a social problem in the

United States. While once traditionally being defined as a low-risk population during the early years of the 1990's, there is now a belief that there is an epidemic of juvenile offending and juvenile sexual offending (Letourneau & Miner, 2005). As highlighted by Ackerman, Harris, Levenson, and Zgoba (2011) "sex offender registration and notification policies" have developed over time due to increased public appeal for the management of sex offenders in order to identify future risk and or harm (p.149). Stated by Letourneau and Miner (2005) as expected, legal interventions are predicated upon a series of false assumptions, which includes but not limited to the fact that juvenile sex offenders have exceptionally high recidivism rates. Coupled with limited opportunity of removal from public registries with the possibility of serving a lifetime of registration, the intentions of registries, though somewhat valid on its face, have continuously posed unintended consequences for juvenile sex offenders and low-risk juvenile offenders. Despite the fact that registration laws were originally designed to protect children from sex offenders, there has been little empirical data to suggest that registration actually works in its design. At best, Stevenson, Smith, Sekely, and Farnum (2013b) have found that registration laws in design have yet to reduce recidivism of convicted juvenile sex offenders. To date, criminological research has been limited in the publication of researched evidence in which an examination has been conducted regarding the effects both positive and negative Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) has had on juvenile sexual offenders (Letourneau, Bandyopadhyay, Armstrong, & Sinha, 2010). Additionally, no research whatsoever has been conducted on whether SORN is associated with an overall general deterrent effect for juvenile sex crimes (Letourneau et al., 2010). The imposed sanctions and goals appear to have fostered a direct opposition of the overall intended goal of the juvenile justice system, which aims at rehabilitation rather than punishment. According to Letourneau et al. (2010) applying SORN

requirements on juvenile sexual offenders can create a situation in which potential ramifications can be indicative of both intended positive effects (e.g., reduced first-time and subsequent sex crimes) and unintended negative effects (e.g., increased verbal and physical harassment).

Theoretically, the decision to further mandate juveniles to registration policies suggest that sex offender registration will not become less inclusive.

Interestingly, public attitudes regarding appropriate sanctions for juvenile sex offenders have shown little to no uniformity. In spite of, juvenile offenders have considerably shown a far less understanding of the legal system. In return, this has seemingly generated a vast array of emotional responses toward this particular group of offenders that can be linked to a variance in demographics amongst citizens (e.g. education, race, age, political orientation, income, and gender). Stevenson et al. (2013b) found several key variables that have aided as indicators of an individual's likeliness to least support juvenile registration policies such as attitudinal, experiential, and demographic predictors. Case in point, one indicative demographic characteristic that has contributed towards public attitudes regarding appropriate sanctions for overall sex offenders can be linked to education. This is made apparent, as when an individual's educational level rises, a reduction may occur in the support for registering juvenile sex offenders (Stevenson et al., 2013b). Particularly, this could be the result based merely on the conclusion that higher levels of perceived education facilitates the idea of having more knowledge on the psych of a child compared to those less educated. Not to mention, gained knowledge has presented an awareness of the negative consequences of registration requirements and community notification. It is possible that education alone has fostered a mere sensitive approach to the developmental needs of juveniles in relation to get-tough policies (*registration*) that have not yielded the same response. After all, the onset of the early 90's proliferated

research efforts in examining the perceptions of college students toward criminal justice issues both in the context of punishment and various crimes (Wolfe & Higgins, 2008). Perhaps even more important, major, class rank, sex, race, and political ideology have all been exhibited to affect college student perceptions on criminal justice related issues (Wolfe & Higgins, 2008).

In order to examine factors affecting student attitudes toward juvenile sex offender registration, the current study aims to use a public perception survey of college students to address three primary research questions: (a) How do the disciplines of psychology and criminal justice impact student perception of juvenile sex offender registration? (b) How do major of study, race, and gender impact student perception of juvenile sex offender registration? and (c) To what extent do social science students believe that registration of juvenile sex offenders contribute to improving public safety? The significance of this research will help address a gap in the literature. This gap lacks an overall examination into the perspectives of college students across multiple social science perspectives, faced with the decision on whether juveniles convicted of a sexual offense(s) should be required to register as a sex offender. Overall knowledge gained will further uncover the need to expand awareness of the effects registration laws have on convicted juvenile sex offenders. An additional examination into the roles specific variables play in determining college student perceptions, coupled with results, will add onto an already contradictory literature.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Overview of Sex Offender Registration

Sex crime legislation is ongoing and policies in themselves are risky. The beginning of the 1990's marked as a milestone as sex crime policy grew rapidly in unprecedented measures at the hands of legislators (Sample & Kadleck, 2008). When originally adopted, federal legislation although requiring the registration of adult offenders neither required nor implemented the inclusion of juveniles convicted of committing sexual offenses. Recent trends in crime control, especially in recent years, have subjected juvenile sex offenders to particularly severe sentencing laws and harsh treatment. More so, within the past decade, society has witnessed the development, and rapid expansion of new criminal sanctions to include: Sex offender registries, community notification, electronic monitoring, and residential restrictions. As an outcome, the disapproval for sex offenders has materialized in a series of different laws commonly used for sex offenders, but infrequently used for other types of offenders and offenses (Payne & DeMichele, 2011). Ironically, Sample and Kadleck (2008) found that the overall combination of public officials' own perceptions about sex offenders, perceptions of the public's desire for action, and the influence of the media, has all led to the formation of various sex offender laws, such as sex offender registration.

While sex offenders have always fundamentally been subjected to unique sentencing policies, the heightened awareness sparked by the Wetterling Act (*Jacobs Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act of 1994*) mandated that all 50 states require the registration of convicted sex offenders with their local law enforcement agencies. Subsequently, by the enactment of Megan's Law, passed in 1996, in the response to the brutal rape and murder of Megan Kanka, sex offender registries were made publicly accessible

via the Internet and community notification with the release of offender information provided by local law enforcement agencies. As stated by the law, states must have procedures in place to inform the public regarding the whereabouts of sex offenders who reside in one's community (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). In contrast, however, juvenile sex offenders were not subjected to the extension of either of the two policies. Both policies have been marked as the most influential federal legislative attempts to date in increasing public safety surrounding heinous sexual crimes at the hands of convicted sex offenders (Freeman & Sandler, 2010).

Megan's Law The Effect on Sex Offender Registration

Notably, Levenson and Cotter (2005) contributed to one of the largest studies in literature seeking to investigate the overall effect of Megan's Law on sex offenders. First proposed as a response to violent crimes (*murder*) motivated by sex, community notification was originally conceived as a strategy to combat predatory child sexual abuse (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). Levenson and Cotter's (2005) study found the following: As legislation evolved, notification became inclusive of all sexual perpetrators to include incestuous offenders, rapists of adults, noncontact offenders such as exhibitionist, and child pornographers (e.g. Levenson & Cotter, 2005, Sample & Kadleck, 2008). In reviewing an understanding of both positive and negative, intended and unintended, consequences of community notification on sex offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration, surveyed participants (*183 convicted adult sex offenders located in Florida*) in Levenson and Cotter's (2005) study noted that few sex offenders believed that communities are safer because of Megan's Law. Due to the appeal of these statutes to increase the public's ability to protect itself by warning potential victims if a convicted sex offender lives nearby, it is essential to better understand offenders' experience and perceptions of the effect of Megan's Law (Levenson & Cotter, 2005).

Existing research (e.g. Levenson & Cotter, 2005) also suggests that future research should explore the therapeutic jurisprudence that community notification might increase offenders' awareness of their risk and treatment management. As one would expect, the majority of participants reported experiencing stress, isolation, hopelessness, embarrassment, feelings of fear, and shame. However, many participants for instance about one-third reported that Megan's Law increased their willingness to manage their behaviors (*prevention of reoffending*) by reducing their access to potential victims because of neighborhood vigilance, registration, and community notification. Unusually, only 5% reported being assaulted or injured. Despite a few offenders willingness to positively identify with Megan's Law, only 19% believed that the Internet registry helps to protect the vast public from sex offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). An overwhelming response as pointed out in prior research alluded that a vast majority of victims are family members and or acquaintances. Again, these statutes continuously aid in the general belief "myth" that strangers are today's sexual predators which, according to the convicted sex offenders in the study is greatly exaggerated by the media (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). In addition, surveyed convicted sex offenders also suggested further need for education to help families become more aware of the dangers posed on individuals by people they are familiar with (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). Studying the ability of community notification and mandated registration to protect the public is challenging, but as stated by Levenson and Cotter (2005) the overall effectiveness must be measured. Although it is important for the public to be protected from sex offenders both adults and juveniles alike, legislators should not overlook the psychological effect of Megan's Law. The public's "right to know" must coincide with lawmaker's responsibility in reducing the unintended consequences of social policies on both citizens and offenders alike (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). Granting all of this, once only reserved

for adults who commit sexually motivated crimes, sex offender registration laws today have been extended recently to apply to juveniles who commit sex offenses under SORNA (Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, 2006). Though recently applied, these laws have been known to at times require mandatory and/or lifetime registration and community notification. Regardless of the unique developmental characteristics of juvenile offenders, punishment and automatic application of registration policies conceivably may have created more harm than good.

SORNA Desires To Extend Registries

Undeterred by the perception that registration of sex offenders can have negative consequences, and despite the fact the juvenile's recidivate at lower rates than adults (e.g. Caldwell & Dickinson, 2009), research suggests that the public is largely supportive of registration of both juveniles and adult sex offenders (Salerno et al., 2010). It is important to consider exactly what the laws require in relation to sexual misconducts committed by juvenile offenders and registration requirements. Currently, with the passage of the SORNA (*Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act of 2006*) Title 1 of the Walsh Child Protection Act, which governs all federal minimum standards for sex offender registration and notification systems, all states are required to register juvenile sex offenders 14 years of age or older to the same registration requirements as convicted adult sex offenders. Juvenile offenders who were adjudicated delinquent for a crime when the juvenile was at least 14 years of age, thus having committed an offense sexual in nature by force, threat of serious violence, will be classified as "convicted" under SORNA 42 U.S.C. §16911(8)) and be included in the registry (Office of Justice Programs). Crimes may consists of committing, attempting, or conspiring to commit a sexual act with another by force, threat of serious bodily injury, or by rendering and individual unconscious (Office of Justice Programs). Enhanced as one of latest enactments in a series of

state and federal laws that will place adjudicated sex offenders on a public registry, SORNA has abandoned previous federal legislation in several respects (Caldwell, Ziemke, & Vitacco, 2008).

Essentially, SORNA in design is intended to create a uniform registration and notification system across all 50 states. Not only does the policy intend to create uniformity, SORNA sets to establish a national registry database that is to be made publicly available through the Internet. The act in design provides new comprehensive minimum standards for sex offender registration and notification throughout the United States. Signed into legislation by President Bush in 2006, the law was passed as an effort to amend The Wetterling Act and Megan's Law fundamentally to further protect the public from both adult sex offenders, as well as, juvenile sex offenders. In its most basic character, SORNA simply tracks sex offenders following their release back into the community. In return, information gathered pertaining to each individual offender is broadly accessible through notification to the public. While SORNA simply requires the registration of juvenile's ages 14 or older, most states still have considerable freedom in designing and addressing their own registration requirements and notification policies. In order to fully comply with both federal and state laws encompassing SORNA, many states' passed legislation mandating the registration of juvenile sex offenders. For example, according to The U.S Department of Justice (2012): Some jurisdictions for instance Georgia do not register convicted juvenile sex offenders to the same degree as convicted adult sex offenders, while others simply limit the scope in which information is provided and the timeframe at which the juvenile shall remain registered.

By allowing an array of discrepancies each jurisdiction is able to make its own determinations regarding for example: Who will be required to register, what information those offenders must provide, and which offenders will be posted on the jurisdiction's public registry

website (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). While jurisdictions are free to adopt rigorous requirements regarding the registration of juveniles adjudicated of sex offenses, jurisdictions must refer to the National Guidelines for guidance (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).

In addition to its registration requirements SORNA also establishes Tiers of offenses. Because of the grimness of the crimes, *all* juvenile sexual offenders, 14 years of age at the time of the offense, and adjudicated delinquent of aggravated assault, would be designated as a level Tier III offender (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Tier III offenses include: Aggravating sexual abuse, kidnapping, and sexual contact. All Tier III offenders are required to register for life. However, registration sentences can be shortened up to at least twenty-five years only if proper requirements were met through SORNA (e.g. no convictions for sexual misconduct “crimes”) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Under *42 U.S.C § 16916(3) (2016)* Tier III offenders must appear in person to re-register every three months (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). To date, thirty-eight states permit or require adjudicated juveniles to register as sex offenders, with four states mandating the registration of all juveniles convicted in adult criminal court (Szymanski, 2009). Currently, at least eighteen states permit public notifications of registered juvenile sex offenders (Pittman & Nguyen, 2011). Twelve states allow for juveniles to petition for modification or removal of their registrations, whereas twenty-one states exclude minimum age (Pittman & Nguyen, 2011). As of 2009, eight states do not require the registration of juvenile sex offenders (Szymanski, 2009). In January 2011, The Department of Justice published the Supplemental Guidelines for Sex Offender Registration and Notification in order administer standards for all sex offender registration and notification programs. The Supplemental Guidelines specifically granted each jurisdiction discretion in electing whether or not to post individuals adjudicated delinquent of a sex offense under SORNA, registration

requirements on the jurisdiction's public sex offender registry website (U.S Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, and Juvenile Registration). The Supplemental Guidelines for Sex Offender Registration and Notification also granted a multitude of jurisdictional discretion in allowing states to mediate whether juveniles should be subjected to the full range of general community notification requirements as suggested by SORNA. In conjunction, jurisdictions can also determine provisions in the distribution of registration information concerning sex offenders. Of individuals registered, this type of information is certainly most common amongst schools, social service entities, or any other organization and or member of the general public who request notification (U.S Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Juvenile Registration).

Conceivably, what can be drawn from the abundance of legislation imposing the registering of juvenile sex offenders is the anticipated belief that registries alone will create a reduction of future sexual offenses. Above all, the risk that juvenile sex offenders pose in continuing a life of committing sex crimes is unclear despite continuous applications in imposing a plethora of sanctions (Caldwell et al., 2008). There are many rationalisms as to what has contributed to the driving force behind SORNA's inclusion of adjudicated juvenile sexual offenders, which can be accompanied to: Fear, anger, and misunderstanding rather than rational, logical, and intellectual discussions (Pittman & Nguyen, 2011). Indeed, there are some implications that further elude to the idea that perhaps juvenile sex offenders may not pose a distinctly greater risk for future sexual recidivism than delinquents who essentially are not subject to registration laws (Caldwell et al., 2008).

Surprisingly, in a recent longitudinal study of juvenile sex offenders, Letourneau and Armstrong (2008) found no significant differences in rates of new conviction between a group of

111 registered juvenile sex offenders and a matched group of 111 non-registered delinquents. Youth in the study were matched on year of index offenses, which included: Age at index offense, race, prior offenses, prior nonperson offenses, and type of sexual offenses. Reconviction rates were measured at less than 1%. Nonsexual violent offenses where offenders were adjudicated, in comparison to both registered and non-registered delinquents did not differ (Letourneau & Armstrong, 2008).

During the same year, Sample and Kadleck (2008) while examining the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of policy makers, revealed the least amount of confidence among legislators regarding recently enacted laws. Nearly all legislators identified with the public in regards to calling immediate attention in the decrease of sexually violent offenses. For the most part, while popular, the emerging body of research literature has suggested inconsistencies in the true efficacy of the registration of juvenile sex offenders while pointing to unforeseen problems in the usage of registries. One of which is the inaccurate assumption that all juveniles classified as “registered sex offenders,” are dangerous regardless if the offense committed was relatively minor. In addition, policies are likely to increase heightened public fear, which in turn, will further fuel “get tough” sentencing approaches to juveniles who commit relatively non-violent sexual offenses. Public registries create the impression that neighborhoods are overwhelmingly populated with sexual offenders who are likely to recidivate, thus making it impossible for residents, including parents; to differentiate whom actually poses a threat (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Long-term registration based on a youth’s adjudication offense fails to identify several major components regarding the identification of high-risk youth: The reduction of sexual as well as violent recidivism rates, the deterrence of juveniles whom legislators would identify as

first-time sexual offenders, and the overall standards of judicial case processing one in which could impair community safety (Pittman & Nguyen, 2011).

As previously mentioned, legislation has fostered a belief that many individuals included in sex offender registries have committed sexually violent offenses most specifically rape and molestation. However, in a review conducted by the Human Rights Watch (2013) public registries now included a high proportion of relatively minor offenses such as public urination, indecent exposure, and many other non-serious and or violent offenses. In reality, federal and state laws have yet to distinguish or include differences between juvenile and adults in their legislation requiring the registration of sexual offenders. The lack of distinction continuously subjects harsher punishments to juvenile offenders. In a detailed report consisting of nearly 300 interviews (*inquiring of individuals affected by juvenile registration*) Humans Rights Watch (2013) listed consequences of registration to include: Stigmatization, isolation, depression, physical violence and harassment, and oftentimes suicide. Families have reported being shot, assaulted, and threatened with violence. Equally important to note, parents were simply unable to navigate overly complicated registration requirements, which resulted in the juvenile receiving additional felony charges such as “failure to register.” While it may be safe to assume that the number of registered youth offenders has expanded alongside adult registrants, there have been no known separation or divide regarding the national statistics on youth sex offenders (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

The Sponsoring of Sex Offender Legislation

To further evaluate, in an unprecedented investigation, a national sample of U.S. state-level policy makers were interviewed regarding individual perceptions of the sexual offenders in their state, their state’s sex offender laws, and the direct collateral consequences sex offender

laws place on violators (Meloy et al., 2013). In the study Meloy et al. (2013) selected a total of 61 state senators and representatives who participated voluntarily composing at least one respondent from each of the 50 states. Respondents included all policy makers who sponsored at least one state-level sex offender bill in their state of residence. As the investigation wanted to better understand the views politicians have about sex offenders “criminals” (Meloy et al., 2013) ensured all respondents were guaranteed anonymity, having further identifying information redacted from each individual responses. Not only did results indicate that lawmakers were familiar with the sex offender’s laws in their state (78%), victims played a central role in the creation of sex offender laws (Meloy et al., 2013).

Expanding on victimization, 65% of state senators and state representatives linked their state’s needs for sex offender laws to high-profile national-level crimes. As cited in Meloy et al, (2013) one widely accepted response from a Midwestern state politician alluded to the idea that,

“Laws tend to happen because there is a high-profile crime that occurs, either with a child or an adult, that gets a lot of news and then there is resulting legal action or resulting statutory production. You make a law based on what happened to a high-profile person or to a kid. We do have occasions where something happens in another state and therefore we then try to prevent it.” (p. 443)

It is imperative to highlight that Meloy and colleagues in their findings have suggested that in the long-term policy makers will craft laws with specific goals and purposes in mind. In doing so, policy makers ultimately believe that legislation will and has functioned as intended. Noticeably, only two in ten policy makers stated that the goal of sex offender legislation aimed to increase public safety was not meeting its objective in their states. As a result, negative outcomes were declared as a common problem with sex offender policies. Forty-four percent of

state policy makers in the study frequently acknowledged legislation as being overly broad in the context of sex offender laws (Meloy et al., 2013). One policy maker from a southwestern state interviewed in Meloy et al. (2013) pointed to the fact that,

“You can have sex abductors who rape and they are very serious and then you can have teenagers who are only a few year apart in age and you can have an 18- year old getting a class two Felony for having sex with a 14-year-old and he is treated the same as if he went out and raped someone.”(p. 445)

In brief, the investigation has marked significant strides in research in the ability to examine the drawbacks and difficulties often associated with sex offender legislation and policy. In response to the rapid development of new policy, the study highlighted a clear and particular understanding in the management of sex offender laws (*e.g. applying harsh penalties to non-serious offenders more often than they should*) (Meloy et al., 2013). Despite 55% optimism from lawmakers that sex offender legislation enhances public safety; tracking of offenders (10%), unfunded mandates of the laws (5%), and the dilemma of sex offender laws created a false security (3%) fostered serious concerns for some legislators (Meloy et al., 2013). Based on the findings it's safe to say that developing best practices for the overseeing of sex offenders must be accompanied by substantial scientific findings (e.g. Caldwell & Dickinson, 2009), not just grounded in retribution (e.g. Salerno et al., 2010) (Meloy et al., 2013). In essence, the perception of “today's” sex offenders and the managing of their behavior, as literature has pointed out, is rarely based on scientific finding and more so crafted through public opinion.

Unsurprisingly, the Center for Sex Offender Management held by the U.S Department of Justice in (2010) emphasized the effects of the media as being the most detrimental factor in the development of public perceptions of convicted sex offenders. In their findings, media attention

covering offenses related specifically to sex crimes provided the “primary vehicle” for distribution of knowledge of sexual victimization to both lawmakers and residential community members (U.S Department of Justice, 2010) Nearly 74% of survey respondents indicated that televised news media was the primary source from which they obtained relative knowledge pertaining to convicted sexual offenders. When respondents were asked about other sources of knowledge from which they obtained information related to sexual offenders; general Internet searches, registries, academic references, and community notification were the least likely tools respondents used. It is to no avail that a media portrayal of heinous sex crimes has yet to be well accepted into current statistical data and research. The high demand to publicize perpetrators who sexually victimize children has surpassed the need to provide the public with well-informed information thus generating many of today’s sex offender-specific laws. It is paramount that policy makers and the public further their knowledge on the science of sexual violence and sexual offending behavior (Meloy et al., 2013). In doing, legislative reforms nationally can be developed based on current statistical research and less on specific crimes (e.g. child abduction, murder of children committed by repeat sex offenders not known to victims) that represent only a small portion of today’s sex crime and or violent crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Academics, applied professionals, and news media outlooks according to Meloy et al., (2013) should employ systematic procedures in reinforcing the division between “feel-good” polices and “do-good” policies” (p. 449).

Awareness of Juvenile Sex Offender Registration Policies

The scope of the problem may just rely on the fact that today’s registries are simply no longer limited to adult sex offenders. Again, the significant goal behind the creation of sexual offender legislation is to guide the general public with necessary tools and information in the

prevention of sexual victimization (Boyle, Ragusa-Salerno, Fleisch-Marcus, Passannante, & Furrer, 2014). However, unlike other forms of notification, Internet registries simply place all responsibility on the individual wanting to obtain information pertaining to sexual offenders whom reside in their communities (Boyle et al., 2014). Due to the relatively newness of registration laws as applied to juvenile offenders, Stevenson, Najdowski, & Wiley (2013a) took a first step toward filling a gap in the literature by conducting an exploratory study to examine knowledge of juvenile sex offender registration policies among young adults. Using a small convenience sample of undergraduates from a Liberal Arts University in Indiana (N=53, ages 18-23), it was predicted that most young adults would in fact be unfamiliar in knowing that juveniles can be registered as sex offenders; particularly in cases that involved adolescent sexual offending (Boyle et al., 2014). This would essentially be equivocal to the same types of behaviors (e.g. consensual underage sex between minors) most young adults engage in that could have possibly warranted and or warrant past and/or present registration requirements. Though the public has already become familiarized (e.g. media, legislators, policies, notifications) on registration laws as they pertain to convicted adults offenders, it was almost a necessity to uncover the extent of awareness amongst young adults surrounding policies and literature on sexual offending (Stevenson et al., 2013a).

On average 42% of participants in the sample revealed that they were unaware that youth under the age of 18 can be registered as sex offenders. The preliminary data also concluded that after being informed, participants were unaware of the extent of activities that could warrant being registered as a convicted sexual offender (Stevenson et al., 2013a). Shockingly, participants who were unaware of juvenile registration policies, compared to those who were aware, were somewhat more likely to have had sex prior to consenting age (Stevenson et al.,

2013a). In addition, 44% of young adults surveyed indicated that they were relatively confident in their misconception that registration laws do not apply to juveniles (Stevenson et al., 2013a). Acts such as sexting, requesting sex, and engaging in consensual sex with another minor, all produced a substantial increase in the number of participants whom less likely believed that such specific behaviors could in fact result in the registration as a convicted sexual offender (Stevenson et al., 2013a). Bearing concern, among the sexually active youth, 70% of the study sample reported engaging in behaviors that could likely contribute to sex offender registration for both the individual and their sexual partner(s) (Stevenson et al., 2013a).

Statistically, it is essential to illustrate the correlation between knowledge of registration policies and the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that could potentially warrant registration requirements. As one would expect, young adults who are simply out of touch with the realities of registration policies that apply to youth under the age of 18 (compared to youth who are aware) are simply more likely to have engaged in sexual activities under the legal age of consent. (Stevenson et al., 2013a). What does this suggest regarding the registration of juveniles offenders who commit sexually offensive behaviors? Perhaps, juvenile registration does little to deter actual sexual misconduct and/or sexual offenses among youth (e.g. Letourneau et al, 2008, Letourneau et al, 2010, Meloy et al, 2013). One study sums up this argument in addressing knowledge of crime and punishment by concluding that formal communication is nonexistent for educating the general public on legal changes (Ahn-Redding, Allison, Semon, & Jung, 2013). Sentencing laws, especially relating to the juvenile sex offender population have substantially changed since the implementation of Jacobs Wetterling Crimes against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act of 1994. Despite the recent implementation of new laws along with the revision of sentencing structures without the aid of media coverage during times of

controversy, the probability for legal change to become widely noticed is quite uncommon (Ahn-Redding et al., 2013). Ahn-Redding's et al. (2013) study found the following:

“To assume the public at large (e.g. students) is educated in regards to the legal code and corresponding punishments is to suggest that the average citizen has stayed abreast of changes in sentencing practices, knows how to access accurate information about current laws, is informed of legal changes when they occur, has a working knowledge of the legal language in the criminal code, and can comprehend how such changes might impact, arrest, conviction, and sentencing (p. 407).”

Public Support for Registering Juvenile Sex Offenders

To a certain extent, the public has been shown to exhibit limited awareness regarding sex offender registries as they apply to juvenile sex offenders. While this may be a predictor in the widespread use of punitive sanctions, whether or not the public supports such laws as applied to juvenile sex offenders should be addressed in the literature. Salerno et al. (2010) is one of the few studies to examine this question by asking respondents using multi-questionnaire assessments whether they believe that juvenile sex offenders should (a) never be registered; (b) be registered, but their information should never be posted online; (c) be registered, but their information should not be posted online until the age of 18; or (d) be registered, with information posted online. An overwhelming number of respondents (93%) indicated public support for the full application of registration requirements as applied to juvenile sex offenders. Out of the 93% of respondents who supported the registering of juvenile sex offenders, most believed that juveniles should be required to register online. Only 23% of respondents believed that juveniles who are required to register online should never have their information publicly available and accessed (Salerno et al., 2010). Contrary, when participants were asked to consider overall

specific types of offenses, support for registration varied as a function of severity of crime.

In fact, the preliminary analyses revealed that participants were significantly more supportive of registry laws when the juvenile was described as having committed a more severe offense compared with when the juvenile was described as committing a non-serious offense (e.g. harassment, child pornography, statutory rape) (Salerno et al., 2010). What has been consistently shown reveals the notion that the effect of offense severity on support for registry laws is mediated by the perceived threat to public safety. Forced rape alone marked the only specific variable as applied to juvenile sex offenses that elicited the same level of public support as compared to participants (95%) who responded that generally speaking, sex offenders should be required to register. Furthermore, the results have implied that policies are not entirely consistent with public sentiment either, which should help alleviate policy-makers' fear of constructing disapproval of their constituents by questioning the appropriateness of these mandatory policies (Salerno et al., 2010). In considering the results of the study and in terms of juvenile sex offenders, only those juveniles who commit violent offenses (e.g. rape) should be labeled as sex offenders, and required to register on online databases.

Student Attitudes Towards Juvenile Sex Offenders

How reasonable would one consider the idea that educated individuals more so than non-educated individuals understand that many juveniles offend due psychological developments to include immaturity, and in turn are less likely to continue in sexual offending behaviors than their adult counterparts (Stevenson et al., 2013b)? Likewise, there are certainly many logical reasons that help explain why registration policies fail to prevent sex crimes. In considering such reasons, educated individuals might be more inclined to identify with (Stevenson et al., 2013b). Given the most recent popularity of juvenile sex offenders, numerous studies have investigated

the influence of educational programs on attitudes towards the registration of juvenile sex offenders. Distinctively since the 1990s, research has expanded in efforts to evaluate perceptions of college students towards criminal justice issues and criminal justice policies. In doing so, investigators have systematically worked together across multiple social science disciplines to analyze public perception relating to both treatment of crime and criminal offenders (Rodgers & Ferguson, 2011). For example, within the last decade, research has focused exclusively on issues pertaining to rape, online solicitation, sexting, community notification, and online registration of sexual offenders in relationship to punishment perceptions. Specifically evaluating criminal punishment, findings have yielded ambiguous results regarding whether criminal justice majors are more punitive than non-criminal justice majors (Wolfe & Higgins, 2008). More importantly, individual beliefs regarding capacity to change, deviancy, recidivism, and severity of crime have all impacted punitive attitudes of professionals and students towards juvenile sex offenders. It could be quite conceivable that such beliefs are precise indicators of how certain individuals view sex offenders. However, while the public appears to support punitive legislation designed to identify and punish adult sex offenders “student” support on the application of registry laws applied to juvenile sex offenders is relatively infrequent in the literature.

In spite of, there is considerably more research investigating the general attitudes of professionals and undergraduates alike towards the juvenile sex offender overall. Salerno et al., (2010) argues that students might support registration for juveniles who engage in both non-serious sexual offenses with minors, and sexual offenses that are predator in nature. Yet, there still exists limited research investigating the perceptions of students and how those attitudes differ from existing research literature examining overall public support of the registration of youth offenders. Furthermore, there is even less research examining what factors may affect

those attitudes (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008). Understanding the attitudes of college students towards registration of juvenile sex offenders is important for theoretical as well as practical reasons.

For the first time, Salerno's et al. (2010) survey (investigating support for applying sex offender registry laws to juveniles) revealed support of 104 undergraduates from the University of Illinois and Chicago for registry laws when offense severity and perceived threat were immense amongst juvenile sex offenders. It is perhaps of interest that undergraduates perceived juvenile sex offenders who commit more (versus less) severe offenses as significantly more threatening, which in turn led to an increased likelihood of supporting registry laws (Salerno et al., 2010). Simply, by analyzing the findings, it can be concluded that instinctively once an individual perceives that a juvenile poses a significant threat to public safety, their support for registries will rise. Moreover, this type of analogy is consistent with legislator's rationale for developing laws to protect the community from repeat sexual offenders (Salerno et al., 2010). Interestingly, undergraduates frankly did not distinguish between juveniles and adults in their overall support for registry laws, even though they perceived juvenile sex offenders as less threatening to public safety. Nearly 80% of the surveyed undergraduates attending the University of Illinois and Chicago responded that juveniles should register online, with only 14% of undergraduates particularly indicating that juvenile sex offenders should register but "not online." Unexpectedly, only 6% of undergraduates expressed that juvenile sex offenders should never be required to register. At best, it appears that in general student perception is based on non-case-specific-support for registry laws despite the offender's age, suggesting that sex offenders (of all ages) commit sexually violent offenses (Salerno et al., 2010). Above all, the results show that support for registry laws is unaffected by offender age.

Rodgers and Ferguson (2011) contributed to progression in this research by evaluating through survey research punishment and rehabilitation attitudes toward two types of offenders: Those who commit sexual offenses, and offenders who are nonsexual in their crimes. The participants (355 undergraduates from an introductory of psychology course, Midwestern U.S Public University) supported their hypothesis that punitive attitudes towards sexual offenders are more extreme than those towards nonsexual offenders. In the same token rehabilitation attitudes were lower towards both adolescent and adult sex offenders compared to nonsexual violent offenders. Yet, results proved inconsistent when presented for child offenders. Rodgers and Ferguson (2011) observed significantly that offender age was a strong determinant of higher punishment across the offender age range, regardless of offense or offender type. In fact, the offenders' age aided in the construction of variables relating to each individualized punitive and rehabilitative attitude(s) (Rodgers & Ferguson, 2011). Complementary to prior sources (e.g. Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008) the results add evidence that attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders are not rationally driven, but rather partially driven, by emotion and/or moral panic. Particularly, in Sahlstrom and Jeglic's (2008) study, participants were more inclined to endorse the "get tough on crime" approach alternatively over the attitude that the behavior is merely childhood development. In the event that the offender and perpetrator were of the same age, participants still believed that all sexual offenses should be taken with forethought (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008).

Variance of Perceptions Across Disciplines

As the public has continuously impacted sex offender legislation, scholars have advocated for additional educational efforts in hopes to address issues regarding: Faulty assumptions, an understanding of sex offenders, victims, and appropriate punishments suited for

sex offenders (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008). In regards to higher education, relevant social science disciplines (psychology, criminal justice, sociology, political science, etc.) have provided multi-disciplinary understandings surrounding juvenile sexual offending and the impact it has on student perception of registries. There has been a renewed interest in the discipline of social science as professional and student's alike (undergraduates/graduates) seek to find ways of addressing juveniles who commit sexual offenses and recent policies mandating registration requirements.

Harper (2012) captures potential differences between 98 psychology and 80 non-psychology students in terms of their attitude towards sex offenders. Welcoming attitudes held by psychology students suggested rather a rehabilitation approach to the management of sex offenders over differing views held by other disciplinary majors (Harper, 2012). More specifically, juveniles who committed sexual offences were more likely to receive hopeful outlooks by psychology students even more so than the non-psychology sample. The most legitimate result comparing both juveniles to adults suggested that adult offenders were viewed less positively than juvenile offenders. In terms of disciplinary majors, clinical psychology students held the most positive attitudes towards sex offenders, followed by forensic, single-honors psychology and child studies students respectively (Harper, 2012). As described previously, policy makers should educate society as a whole with regards to sexual offending. When examining "degree course" quite shockingly students enrolled in child studies courses held the most punitive views towards sex offenders. These findings are vastly indicative of the subsequent pursue of career work that encompasses child studies majors. In many instances stereotypical views entailing social work would foster the belief that individuals in this field are

more likely to jump to conclusions, and wrongly label a child as “at-risk” thus creating unintended consequences for juvenile sex offenders (Harper, 2012).

In a contrasting study, Gakhil and Brown (2011) revealed that forensic professionals held significantly more positive attitudes towards sex offenders than both “students” and the general public. However, it was unclear to the study why these attitudes existed. Even so, students held attitudes that were indicative of a broadly “undecided” opinion about sex offenders specifically relating to the “female” sub-population. The success in the comparison of attitudes between Ghkhal and Brown (2011) and Harper (2012) may suggest that extended research is needed in addressing the attitudes of students and professionals across multiple social science disciplines. Even with available evidence, both studies were limited extremely in their usage of psychology undergraduates while having non-psychology majors as a secondary sample. Perhaps the most striking aspect rests in the views of students who chose to study psychology that may not be representative of the broader undergraduate population and are unlikely to represent the full population of students in other disciplinary studies (Ghkhal & Brown, 2011).

The Influence of Demographic Characteristics

Throughout the accumulation of scientific research, criminologists have considered the many reasons offenders are punished by society (Payne, Gainey, Triplett, & Danner, 2004). This desire to examine individual attitudes towards the punishment of juvenile sex offenders has significantly aided criminologist in understanding society as whole. In revisiting Rogers and Ferguson’s (2011) study it was proposed that participant’s age, ethnicity, and gender were unrelated to punishment attitudes of juvenile sex offenders, in light of past research showing inconsistent effects for these demographic factors. Not to mention that punitive public attitudes have been found to vary considerably in regards to demographics.

Generally speaking, age as a predictor for punitiveness clearly varies from participant to participant with some studies demonstrating punitive attitudes amongst older respondents than younger. However, Pickett and Chiricos (2012) illustrated that in contrast, attitudes towards get-tough approaches aimed at juvenile offenders were lower amongst older respondents, and specifically respondents who have attained higher levels of education. Yet, regardless of age it is extremely important to analyze how racial identification alone has fostered a clear association with general punitiveness towards juvenile offender legislation. History has considerably shown that minorities are often found to endorse less punitive responses to social deviance than Whites. This can be drawn from the post-Civil Rights era to most recent issues surrounding police brutality and racial profiling. Now there are many beliefs as to the reasoning behind Whites' approach to severely sanctioning juvenile offenders however, most have been linked to relatively racial views of youth crime. The correlation between White's and recent punitive policies aimed at juvenile offenders has predominantly been measured by the overrepresentation of young black males in the juvenile criminal justice system, as well as, racially motivated perceptions relating to black male assailants and non minority victims (Pickett & Chiricos, 2012). Pickett and Chiricos (2012) revealed precisely that Whites' on average support punitive approaches to the managing of juvenile offenders.

Other research (e.g. Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008) has alluded to the idea that perceptions of juvenile sex offenders are also consistent across the board in relation to respondent's gender as well as between those with or without a victimization history. Research in the literature has been known to present a complex set of possibilities regarding the influence of gender (Stevenson et al., 2013b). Undoubtedly, adult rape combined with sex crimes committed amongst children has predominantly been an issue amongst women and the feminist movement (Bottoms, 1993). Thus,

women have been perceived to cultivate more negative attitudes toward perpetrators of sex crimes than men (Bottoms, 1993). On average, women generally possess stronger responses of empathy and positivity towards youth than men (Bottoms, 1993). In return, women are interpreted as being “pro-victim” and less favorable of defendants in their judgments and evaluations more so than men in cases surrounding sexual assault. Interestingly enough, Redlich (2001) additionally found women to significantly be more inclined to support legislation targeted towards sex offenders (e.g. Megan’s Law) than men. Not only were women less likely to favor rehabilitation over sentencing of sex offenders, men were less likely than women to believe that sex offender legislation (e.g. community notification) prevented future sexual victimization (Redlich, 2001). The U.S. Department of Justice’s (2010) study when analyzing for assumption about reoffending among sex offenders, found that women are more likely than men to believe that convicted sex offenders recidivate. Furthering already existing literature, women were also more likely than men to advocate stricter sanctioning and monitoring by means of community supervision for all violators of sexually related crimes.

The available evidence has demonstrated the importance of studying punishment (sex offender registries) and sentencing attitudes. Simply by enabling researchers to evaluate whether students are properly educated about various criminal justice responses to offenders will generate an understanding specifically surrounding ones most basic values and beliefs. Not only has, age, sex, and race contributed to the desires of individuals to punish juvenile sex offenders, these variables have also forecasted support for the registering of juvenile offenders.

Use of Sex Offender Registries

As it stands, while the substantial support for sex offender registration and notification policies overall have maintained public support, prior research (e.g. Levenson & Cotter, 2005)

has demonstrated belief that public access of sex offender information, particularly via the Internet are generally not utilized (Boyle et al., 2013). Analyses have consistently shown that while ethnicity, education, and Internet access are associated with residents knowledge of online sex offender registration; sex, race, education, having children and access to the Internet are associated with ones willingness to visit registry websites (Boyle et al., 2013). Several sets of analyses were employed to address questions that were raised. As an example, by investigating respondents over more diverse demographic measures, Boyle and colleagues approximately estimated that African Americans and “Other” for race, also including males, and persons who do not have a high school degree were least likely to access registries. The study sample included respondents living in New Jersey, estimating that although 51% of respondents reported knowledge of the New Jersey Sex Offender Internet Registry (NJSOIR) only 17% actually accessed the site.

The Present Study

One general assumption can be made from prior literature; the examination of college student reaction to juvenile sex offenders and sex offender registration is far and in-between. The proposed study sets out to achieve a seemingly straightforward goal. One of understanding the viewpoints of college students surrounding the registration of juvenile sex offenders, factoring a variance in social science disciplines, while highlighting whether such perceptions vary across demographic backgrounds. In order to achieve this goal, the study investigated several hypotheses to contribute to empirical research existing in the literature. It was hypothesized that (a) psychology majors compared to non-psychology majors (e.g. criminal justice) are less likely to support the registration of juvenile sex offenders, (b) White respondents are more likely than African American respondents to support the registration requirements of juvenile sex offenders

and (c) male respondents would be more supportive of juvenile sex offender registration than female respondents. The possibility that psychology majors would be least supportive of punitive sanctions towards juvenile sex offenders in the context of several decades of increasing punitiveness towards offenders, is one reason for investigating how major of study affects student perception of sex offender registration. The phenomenon of endorsing harsher punishments towards juvenile sex offenders to the same degree as their adult counterparts clearly undermines the potential for juvenile sex offenders to be rehabilitated. Although the present study didn't specifically focus on rehabilitation attitudes overall, it was desirable to assess the effect of how ones academic discipline reported either a clear positive and/or negative correlation to offender registration. It is important to understand the perspectives of students across a varying range of social science discipline as research can better understand ways their perceptions might influence policy decisions.

It perhaps comes as little surprise that the present study opted to analyze demographic characteristics in terms of the hypothesis surrounding both race and gender. Research has continuously demonstrated that survey participants frequently endorse differing opinions demonstrating positive or negative viewpoints towards crimes, punishment, and sentencing. Typically, these types of responses frequently vary depending on the subject matter presented and the desired response. In light of extant findings in past survey research and literature, it is anticipated that student demographics specifically related to females and Whites, will correlate simultaneously with the hypotheses. Alternatively, this research will help guide public perception on sex offender registration in order to craft a more thoughtful and comprehensive approach to the punishment of juvenile sex offenders. In hindsight, by providing useful research about the practice of imposing registration laws on juvenile sex offenders, including the overlap

of unintended consequences (if any), college students will be aided in the ability to determine whether registries in their design improve public safety.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

For the purposes of obtaining data regarding student perception of juvenile sex offender registration, I targeted a quota sample of students to participate in a voluntary questionnaire approved by the Institutional Review Board located at Kennesaw State University. The sample of students was chosen based upon their location at the research study site and their inclusion in the types of classes based on major of study in which were selected for the research data. Kennesaw State University with a total enrollment of 32,500 students (Fall 2014) is just located north of Atlanta and dynamically placed in a suburban setting. This academic institution offers a broad range of social science disciplines to both undergraduates and graduate students, with having the College of Humanities and Social Science as the largest College at Kennesaw State University. Seven thousand students are currently enrolled in at least 30 programs under the College of Humanities and Social Science.

In total, 461 students both undergraduates and graduates alike located at the University's Social Science Building participated voluntarily in this study. Participants included 453 undergraduate students and only 8 students as graduates. Among the participants a significant portion were sophomores (30.4%) with freshman contributing to (22.6%), seniors (23%), juniors (22.3%), and graduates (1.7%) The students identified themselves as coming from a vast array of disciplines, and most commonly selected "Other" (49.3%) as major of study, followed by sociology (17%), criminal justice (13.9%), psychology (12.8%) communications (5.2%), and political science (1.7%). The majority (65.7 %) of participants were female. Most (59.9%) of the sample population identified as White as Black or African American respondents only accounted for 22.4% of the research sample. Not surprisingly, the majority of the sample (92.4%) classified

as single. The percentage of students who earned a household income of less than \$10,000 accumulated to 35.1% of the surveyed respondents, with 23.4% of the students indicated having a total household income of more than \$60,000. The differences in political orientation between the respondents were significant while both liberals and conservatives averaged (28.7%) of the participants, 42.5% of students claimed moderate as their current political orientation. The demographic characteristics of the study sample are detailed in Table 1.

Research Procedures

This study obtained Institutional Review Board approval prior to the collection of data obtained as instructed by Federal guidelines for human subject research. More specifically, the researcher administered the study instrument “questionnaire” to the student body population to be sampled at the study site, Social Science Building, Kennesaw State University. The investigator provided informed consent through a cover letter to inform all participants of the anonymity of the study to include their written permission. The cover letter entailed overall issue(s) relating to juvenile sex offenders with regards to recently enacted legislation requiring their registration. The cover letter also included a detailed statement providing: Basic instructions, the length of the questionnaire (5-10 minutes), future risk (no known risk) and, the protection each participant will receive from the potentially harmful future use of the quantitative data collected. All participants were informed directly that participation of the study would be voluntary.

Preceding the collection of the research data, I selected a total of five social science departments (Criminal Justice, Communications, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology) located in the College of Science and Humanities to be contacted for voluntary participation of my research questionnaire. Amongst the five departments chosen, I specifically selected a total

of fifteen classes in which the survey questionnaires were administered. These fifteen classes consisted of six sociology courses, one political science course, two psychology courses, and six criminal justice courses. Each individual class was selected based upon the University's College of Science and Humanities fall schedule listed on the University's banner, which allowed the researcher to select the study's sample size based on the number of "max seats" each section and course offered during the 2014 fall semester. I specifically selected those courses that offered a substantial number of available students to be surveyed in order to enhance the response rate of the survey questionnaire. For example, by surveying courses that indicated an enrollment of 50 or more students (e.g. Introductory of Criminal Justice CRJU 1101/01), there was a strong possibility of obtaining the research data needed as well as utilizing less time for data collection. Also, the direct courses elected for participation weighed heavily on the response and approval of each professor contacted regarding my research study.

In addition, contact with instructors of each of the selected courses was made by a standardized email in order to obtain permission, date, and time for the survey instrument to be provided to volunteered participants. It took approximately two months (September and October, 2014) to contact each professor and to collect the responses from the participants. To further ensure confidentiality and/or anonymity of the research questionnaire, the investigator collected all completed questionnaires. In the event of future concerns respondents were given the option of keeping the consent cover letter. After completion, each participant placed the survey in a designated folder designed for survey return. Individual concerns pertaining to the survey were answered amongst the volunteers in order to eliminate confusion or misunderstanding. Participants were not given incentives or course credits for their participation. Students from other university campuses were not recruited to be participants for this study. The age of

requirement for participation included all adults age 18 or older. There were a total of 600 hard-copied survey materials that were printed by the researcher and distributed amongst the final selected courses. A total of 461 useable and completed questionnaires were returned, making the response rate for this study equal 76%. All materials was destroyed in compliance with research confidentiality guidelines and regulations. The Kennesaw State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this project.

Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire was developed and modified by using some questions drawn from two reported studies in the research literature (Salerno et al., 2010 and U.S Department of Justice, 2010). Both studies analyzed sex offender registration in regards to public perception. Participants were asked a variety of questions designed to elicit and assess their overall attitudes about the registration laws imposed of juvenile sex offenders. The investigator developed and collected demographic information in the research questionnaire in order to create a description sample of the study. All demographic questions were elicited using forced-choice responses to further promote anonymity. Factors affecting student perception to include a variance across multiple social science disciplines were also assessed.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Comparisons of Survey Respondents (N=461)

	Frequency	Percent
Variables of Interest		
Have children		
Yes	18	3.9
No	439	96.1
How concerned are you about sex crime in you neighborhood		
Not Concerned	171	37.5
Concerned	285	62.5

Control Variables

Gender		
Female	302	65.7
Male	158	34.3
Race		
White	275	59.9
Black or African American	103	22.4
Hispanic or Latino	32	7.0
Native American or Indian	5	1.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	27	5.9
Other	17	3.7
Major of Study		
Criminal Justice	64	13.9
Communications	24	5.2
Political Science	8	1.7
Psychology	59	12.8
Sociology	78	17.0
Other	227	49.3
Household Income		
Less than \$10,000	153	35.1
\$20,000 to \$29,000	73	16.7
\$30,000 to \$39,000	45	10.3
\$40,000 to \$49,000	38	8.7
\$50,000 to 59,000	25	5.7
Greater than \$60,000	102	23.4
Political Orientation		
Liberal	125	28.7
Moderate	185	42.5
Conservative	125	28.7
Marital Status		
Single, never married	426	92.4
Married or domestic partnership	31	6.7
Divorced	3	.7
Separated	1	.2

Note. Valid n varies with missing data. Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.
The questionnaire instructed participants as follows.

The following questions pertain to all juveniles currently living in the United States. For this project, the term “juvenile,” is defined as all persons, between the ages 6 to 17. A juvenile sex offender is, defined as a juvenile found to have committed any violation of law or delinquent act involving any type of sexual behavior that occurs without consent. Please answer the following questions.

Research Measures

Dependent Variables

For each prompted question participants were asked to select responses that best represented their attitudes using Likert-type scales and preset-choice options. The analysis includes five dependent variables. The questionnaire included each of the following dependent measures described below in the order list.

Source of Knowledge. was the first measure of respondent’s perception for juvenile sex offender registration. It is composed of one response in which participants were asked, “News media is the source from which you obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders. “All participants were given a Likert-type scale ranging from 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*). This item was constructed after (U.S Department of Justice, 2010) national public opinion poll exploring public awareness and attitudes about sex offender management. The item specifically evaluates the extent of student knowledge about juvenile sex offenders in relation to the influential role the media plays in shaping public opinion specifically relating to the management of juvenile sex offenders.

The second dependent variable *Perceived Legislation* was modified using a single variable from (U.S Department of Justice, 2010). The five-point response scale ranging from 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*) assessed the extent to which participants were questioned on whether they agree and/or disagree “legislation should be similar for juveniles and adults despite the differences between both juveniles and adults for sexual offenses.

Perceived Threat Scale. This scale analyzed only one item modeled from Salerno’s et al., (2010) survey study analyzing the psychological mechanisms underlying support for juvenile

sex offender registry laws accounting for: prototype, moral outrage, and “perceived threat.” The question is nearly identical to what was used in the study by Salerno et al, (2010). It is particularly relevant to research on public support for stricter sanctioning on individual’s convicted of sex crimes. The question essentially gauges respondent’s attitudes towards potential threat of future injury or loss due to perceived victimization. Participants were asked to answer the following statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*). This item assessed the extent to which “juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities.”

Recidivism. Participants were also gauged in their perceptions towards recidivism in order to examine perceptions to the likeliness that juvenile sex offenders are capable of committing future sexual offenses. The five-point response scale again ranging from 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*) assessed the extent to which respondents agree and/or disagree that “juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk of reoffending.” This single variable measure was modified from again, (U.S Department of Justice, 2010) which explored public awareness and attitudes about sex offender management from a national public opinion poll.

Lastly, *Registries* as a measure is the remaining portion of the questionnaire. Each participant was elicited to an analysis of their overall general attitude of the registration of juvenile sex offenders. Using (Salerno et al., 2010) I measured responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*) regarding perceptions of juvenile sex offender registration. Participants were asked whether “juvenile sex offenders should be required to register.”

Several demographic questions as well as questions concerning household income, and self-reported political orientation were also asked. The variable *gender* was coded female = 1 and male = 2. Respondents were also asked, on nominal scales, about their *major of study* (a six-point scale ranging from 1 = criminal justice, 2 = communications, 3 = political science 4 = psychology, 5 = sociology, and 6 = other) *race* (a six-point scale ranging from 1 = White, 2 = Hispanic or Latino, 3 = Black or African American, 4 = Native American or Indian, 5 = Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6 = Other). For statistical purposes the category of race was later combined by to only consist of respondents who were White or Black and or African American by completely eliminating all other categories of race from the SPSS statistical data sets. *Marital status* (a five-point scale ranging from 1 = single/never married, 2 = married or domestic partnership, 3 = widowed, 4 = divorced, and 5 = separated. Respondents using the same ordinal scales also reported *total household income* (on a six-point scale ranging from 1 = less than \$10,000 to 6 = greater than \$60,000), as well as *political orientation* (ranging on a three-point scale 1= liberal, 2 = moderate, and 3 = conservative). Finally, respondents were asked whether they have *children under the age of ten* (coded yes = 1, no = 2), and *how concerned they were of sex crimes in their neighborhood* (coded not concerned = 1, somewhat concerned = 2, and very concerned = 3).

Demographics

The study sample consisted of approximately 461 students. As Table 1 indicates, survey respondents were predominantly White (59.9%) and black and/or African American (22.4%). Of the same respondents 65.7% were female. Age was not a mediating factor for any of the variables in the hypothesis however, more than half of the respondents 65.7% were between the ages of 17 to 24. Roughly 90% of respondents being the single largest group in the research

study indicated a current relationship status as single and/or never married. Although an overwhelming response (49.9%) of participants indicated that they were relatively studying under other disciplines non-related to the field of social science, Sociology majors accounted for (17%) of respondents, followed by Psychology majors (12.8%), Criminal Justice majors (13.9%), and Political Science majors (1.7%) Though household income was not, along with age, a paramount factor in the overall study (35%) of respondents did not exceed a reported household income of US\$10,000 or more. Nearly all respondents (96%) implied that they did not have any children less than 10 years of age, 42.5% were of moderate political orientation, and a significant portion 62.5% were considerably concerned about sex crime in their neighborhood

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSES

To test the theoretical hypothesis the data was analyzed using two statistical techniques, descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Distinctively, several sets of analyses were employed to address the questions that were raised in the previous sections encompassing both the dependent variables as well as the independent variables. To better understand the factors that will affect student attitudes towards the registration of juvenile sex offenders, descriptive statistics were run to determine whether there were differences in measure of the responses selected in each fixed category by frequency and valid percentage. The descriptive statistics also aided in interpreting the total findings of the survey questionnaire. To ensure validity in the results, which examined the respondents' perception of juvenile sex offender registration, the present study specifically selected 3-key variables *major of study*, *race*, and *gender* to represent as the independent measures. Using five-key dependent variables preferred from the original set of fifteen fixed-responses elicited by the survey research questionnaire, areas of interest were weighted against: Ones *source of knowledge*, *perceived legislation*, *perceived threat scale*, *recidivism outlook*, and *registration perceptions*. These five-key variables were known to the researcher to have correlated in great measure with past literature on the subject matter.

As shown, Table 1 provides all descriptive demographical characteristics of the study. Table 2 shows the necessary frequency and percentages of student attitudes on juvenile sex offender registration. Particular interest was placed on examining the overall major of study for each respondent in the survey questionnaire. The remaining later of analyses in the study consisting of tables 3-5 have been provided to illustrate a mixed model analysis of variance ANOVA of all independent and dependent variables. The mean scores on the dependent

measures were calculated again using ones *source of knowledge, perceived legislation, perceived threat scale, recidivism outlook, and registration perceptions* in relationship to the independent variables *major of study, race, and gender* derived by the hypothesis. The study designed the mixed model analysis of variance ANOVA using SPSS version 20. The overall focus of this research will be the factors that affect overall perception of the usage of registries amongst juvenile sex offenders.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Student Attitudes On Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (N=461)

Dependent Variable	Strongly Agree and Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	Mean
1. News media as a source	309 (67%)	74 (16.1%)	78 (16.9%)	3.68
2. Same legislation	194 (42.2)	112 (24.3)	154 (33.5)	3.13
3. Pose a danger to society	359 (78%)	77 (16.7%)	24 (5.2%)	4.01
4. High risk of reoffending	339 (73.5)	99 (21.5)	23 (5)	3.95
5. Required to register	302 (66.1)	106 (23.2)	49 (10.8)	3.85

Note: The above variables are ranged on a five-point Likert scale with 5 = (*Strongly Agree*) to 1 = (*Strongly Disagree*)

Descriptive Analyses

Before revealing the formal tests of this study's hypotheses, it is important to analyze the distribution of measures between the dependent variables. The results of the descriptive analysis can be viewed in Table 2, interpreting frequency and percentage of student attitudes on juvenile sex offender registration. The Likert scale measuring respondent's perceptions of juvenile sex offenders in Table 2 has been combined to consist of both strongly agree and agree in one category, neutral, and strongly disagree and disagree in the remainder category. Several dependent variables had statistically significant links with respondents general attitudes to signal positive correlations to juvenile sex offender registration. The descriptive analysis indicate that majority of respondents 78% strongly agree that juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities. When questioned on factors relating to recidivism, 73.5 % ($M=3.95$) of respondents agreed that juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk for reoffending.

Overall, 66% ($M=3.85$) of participants somewhat rationalized that juvenile sex offenders should be required to register on national databases, while also neutrally agreeing that legislation 42% ($M=3.13$) should be similar for juveniles and adults despite the differences in each group for sexual offenses. The student respondents concluded somewhat with an agreement that overall news media 67% ($M=3.68$) is the source from which they obtain their current knowledge of juvenile sex offenders.

Table 3

ANOVA Results Comparing Means of Participants' Major of Study to the Dependent Variables (N=460)

Source		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Same legislation	Between (Combined) Groups	13.55	5.00	2.71	2.23	0.05
	Within Groups	550.61	453.00	1.22		
	Total	564.16	458.00	1.68		
Required to register	Between Groups	8.38	5.00	1.88	1.61	0.15
	Within Groups	4.67.48	450.00	1.04		
	Total	475.86	455.00			
High Risk of Reoffending	Between Groups	6.32	5.00	1.26	1.80	.111
	Within Groups	318.83	454.00	0.70		
	Total	324.95	459.00			
Pose a danger to society	Between Groups	2.91	5.00	0.58	0.79	.554
	Within Groups	331.98	453.00	0.73		
	Total	334.89	458.00			
News media as a source	Between Groups	8.21	5.00	1.64	1.46	0.20
	Within Groups	511.45	454.00	1.13		
	Total	519.66	459.00			

Note: All variables were measured using a Likert scale ranging from "5 = (Strongly Agree) to 1 = (Strongly Disagree). Same legislation was worded "Legislation should be similar for juvenile and adults alike despite the differences in each group for sexual offenses." Required to register was worded "Juvenile sex offenders should be required to register." High risk of reoffending was worded "Juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk of reoffending." Pose a danger to society was worded "Juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities." News media as a source was worded "News media is the source from which you obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders."

The Impact of Major of Study on Attitudes Towards Juvenile Sex Offender Registration

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to understand the differences between major of study distinctively of criminal justice and psychology participants' and their attitudes towards juvenile sex offender registration. Table 3 details the results. Results of the study indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA for the dependent variable *same legislation* ($p < 0.05$). More specifically, criminal justice students agreed as opposed to psychology majors that legislation should be the same for juveniles and adults despite the differences in each group. Regarding *required to register*, results showed a slight difference across groups ($F = 1.16$) ($p < 0.15$). In the statistical report of the one-way ANOVA analysis, participants who indicated having a major of criminal justice strongly agreed that juvenile sex offenders should be required to register more so than psychology majors who somewhat agreed.

However, by the results it is clear that between the groups, and regardless of the slight difference, both agree in their perception that juvenile sex offenders should in fact register. For the *high risk of reoffending* factor, results showed no statistically significant difference between our groups of means ($F = 1.80$) ($p < .111$). Scores on *pose a danger to society* variable showed no statistically significant difference across the groups, ($F = 0.79$) ($p < .554$). It is clear by the results that in comparing both major of studies, respondents in their perception of juvenile sex offenders, agreeably perceive them as posing an imminent danger to society and their surrounding communities. Lastly, the attitude results for participants on the ANOVA in regards to *news media, as a source* displayed no statistically significant difference ($F = 1.46$) ($p < 0.20$) between the groups. In spite of the results, on average psychology majors obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders from news media outlets slightly more than criminal justice students.

Table 4

ANOVA Results Comparing Means of Participants' Race to the Dependent Variables (N=460)

Source		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Same legislation	Between (Combined) Groups	3.04	2.00	0.61	0.49	.781
	Within Groups	557.61	452.00	1.23		
	Total	560.66	457.00			
Required to register	Between Groups	0.55	5.00	0.11	0.10	.991
	Within Groups	473.99	449.00	1.06		
	Total	474.54	454.00			
High Risk of Reoffending	Between Groups	2.74	5.00	0.55	0.77	.569
	Within Groups	321.11	453.00	0.71		
	Total	323.85	458.00			
Pose a danger to society	Between Groups	0.49	5.00	0.10	0.13	.985
	Within Groups	333.44	452.00	0.74		
	Total	323.85	458.00			
News media as a source	Between Groups	23.61	5.00	4.72	4.38	.001
	Within Groups	488.84	453.00	1.08		
	Total	512.45	458.00			

Note: All variables were measured using a Likert scale ranging from "5 = (Strongly Agree) to 1 = (Strongly Disagree). Same legislation was worded "Legislation should be similar for juvenile and adults alike despite the differences in each group for sexual offenses." Required to register was worded "Juvenile sex offenders should be required to register." High risk of reoffending was worded "Juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk of reoffending." Pose a danger to society was worded "Juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities." News media as a source was worded "News media is the source from which you obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders."

Understanding the Relationship Between Participants' Race and Attitudes Toward Juvenile Sex Offender Registration

Table 4 presents outcome findings related to comparing means of participants' race to the dependent variables in the study (N = 460). As shown in Table 4, detailed results illustrate a statistically significant difference on *news media as a source* between both White respondents and Black or African American respondents (F = 4.38) (p < .001). According to a "descriptive" analysis of the one-way ANOVA, respondents who classified as Black or African American

obtained knowledge of juvenile sex offenders from news media notably more than White respondents. With regard to *same legislation*, the results showed no statistically significant correlation between the groups ($F = 0.49$) ($p < .781$). Whites and Black or African American respondents when measuring for attitudes related to whether juvenile sex offenders should be *required to register* also did not illustrate a statistically significant difference ($F = 0.10$) ($p < .991$). However, though both groups strongly agreed that juvenile sex offenders are at a *high risk of reoffending*, showing no statistically significant difference ($F = 0.77$) ($p = .569$), Whites appear to be slightly more agreeable than Blacks in their perception. Finally, regarding whether or not juvenile sex offenders *pose a danger to society*, the results revealed no statistically significant difference between the participants ($F = 0.13$) ($p < .985$). White respondents obtained a mean score of 4.03 whereas Blacks collectively obtained a mean score of 4.00 for the desired variable of interest.

Comparing Gender and Attitudes on Juvenile Sex Offender Registration

We next consider the factors associated with gender and general attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. Table 5, reported ANOVA results comparing the mean score of participants' gender to the dependent variables ($N = 460$). Surprisingly, when it comes to Table 5, none of the data show any statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between group means in both the independent and dependent variables on perceptions of juvenile sex offender registration. Contrary to my hypothesis, male respondents were not more supportive of juvenile sex offender registration than female respondents. Theoretically, the values presented in the analysis of variance (ANOVA) show that gender has no impact of respondents actions, suggesting that both males and females think the same when it comes to multiple perceptions of juvenile sex offenders and offender registration. More specifically, when respondents where

asked whether juvenile sex offenders should be required to register, the main effect of required to register yielded ($F = 1.21$) ($p < .272$) between both groups. Same legislation ($F = 2.25$) ($p < .134$); high risk for reoffending ($F = 2.98$) ($p < 0.85$); pose a danger to society ($F = 2.49$) ($p < .115$); and news media as a source ($F = .40$) ($p < .528$) did not conform to the assumptions of the hypothesis and showed the least statistically significant associations of perceptions between gender.

Table 5

ANOVA Results Comparing Means of Participants' Gender to the Dependent Variables (N=460)

Source		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Same legislation	Between (Combined) Groups	2.79	2.00	2.79	2.25	.134
	Within Groups	564.10	457.00	1.23		
	Total	566.89	458.00			
Required to register	Between Groups	1.27	1.00	1.27	1.21	.272
	Within Groups	475.89	454.00	1.05		
	Total	477.16	455.00			
High Risk of Reoffending	Between Groups	2.11	1.00	2.11	2.98	0.85
	Within Groups	323.93	458.00	0.71		
	Total	326.04	459.00			
Pose a danger to society	Between Groups	1.83	1.00	1.83	2.49	.115
	Within Groups	334.03	457.00	0.73		
	Total	335.86	458.00			
News media as a source	Between Groups	.45	1.00	.45	.40	.528
	Within Groups	519.21	458.00	1.13		
	Total	519.66	459.00			

Note: All variables were measured using a Likert scale ranging from "5 = (Strongly Agree) to 1 = (Strongly Disagree). Same legislation was worded "Legislation should be similar for juvenile and adults alike despite the differences in each group for sexual offenses." Required to register was worded "Juvenile sex offenders should be required to register." High risk of reoffending was worded "Juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk of reoffending." Pose a danger to society was worded "Juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities." News media as a source was worded "News media is the source from which you obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders."

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

The attitudes maintained by the present sample of students attending Kennesaw State University both undergraduate and graduate seemed to be fairly inconsistent with extant findings. As illustrated in the results, support was found for some of the theoretically competing hypotheses regarding possible effects of major of study, race, and gender on perceptions of juvenile sex offender registration. Similar to past research findings (e.g. Pittman & Nguyen, 2011; Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008; Mullen-Quinn, 2004), attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders were negative. Regardless of the presentation of any of the independent variables in the study, a significant portion of the research study respondents as a collective whole were in agreement that registration requirements should apply to juvenile sex offenders. With all of the students in the present study possessing almost identical perceptions, it is reasonable to assume that regardless of a variance of academic education across multiple social science disciplines, coupled with demographics, there is a consensus that legislation must be punitive.

Not surprisingly, the results were homogenous with Salerno et al. (2010), which again was one of the first few studies to directly ask respondents if they believed that juvenile sex offenders should be required to register. Respondents similarly (66.1%) as compared to an overwhelming number (93%) in Salerno et al., (2010) indicated public support for the full application of registration requirements for juvenile sex offenders. On the one hand, participants who identified as having a major of study in criminal justice were more prone to advocate for legislation to remain the same for both juveniles and adults alike despite the differences in each group. Taking into account Harper (2012) capturing the differences between psychology students and non-psychology students, perhaps the psychology students presented contributed to the degree of hopeful outlook on juvenile sex offenders despite that of criminal justice majors. This

can be easily explained by the notion that most psychology graduates once having obtained a degree in the field would be most likely move into offender rehabilitation as perspective career choices. It has been argued that by encouraging positive attitudes amongst psychology majors, stigmatized populations to include juvenile sex offenders have received more confidence in the ability to be treated. Regardless of the study not presenting any statistically significant findings (*major of study*) in relation to a juvenile's ability to reoffend, or pose a danger to society, responses from the survey convey a collective view that sexual offending was a serious event in which future sexual victimization could result. Perhaps the responses may portray many realistic approaches in viewpoints of survey respondents however, research has been clear that fundamentally policies have done little to improve outcomes and reduce recidivism amongst juvenile sex offenders (Chaffin, 2008).

Although there is a tendency for history to considerably show minorities as endorsing less punitive behaviors (e.g. Pickett & Chiricos 2012) and women to endorse stricter sentencing (e.g. Redlich, 2001) the study sample contributed to the vast array of possibilities regarding the influence of demographic characteristics. First, there was generally no significant statistical relationship between most of the demographic variables compared to the attitudes held toward juvenile sex offender registration. One of the main hypotheses was that White respondents are more likely than African American respondents to support the registration requirements of juvenile sex offenders. Yet, this was not the case, nor was there any differences in responses pertaining to *same legislation, high risk reoffending, and posing a threat to society*. This does not run counter to the findings of Pickett and Chiricos (2012) who found that Whites' on average support punitive approaches to the managing of juvenile offenders. More specifically, the results further allude to the idea that despite history's account for post-Civil Rights attitudes and today's

recent issues surrounding police brutality on minorities, all races to some degree agree to the management of juvenile's sex offenders. However, it is possible that despite a slight increase in Whites' more so than African Americans' perceptions that juveniles sex offenders are at a higher risk for reoffending, the location of the research site, dynamically placed in a suburban setting, is not a true and accurate representation of societies racial viewpoints.

The present study in design had a high ratio makeup of 302 female participants (65.7%) as compared to males who only accounted for (34.3%) of the sample size. It was hypothesized that male respondents would be more supportive of juvenile sex offender registration than female respondents. Overall, this study found no statistically significant difference in gender having impact on respondent's perceptions of juvenile sex offenders and offender registration. Even when presented with the present studies five dependent variables *same legislation, required to register, high risk of reoffending, pose a danger to society, and news media as a source*, contrary to the hypothesis both males and females were alike in their convictions. These results are in contrast to previous research findings (e.g. Bottoms, 1993) that women were more empathetic towards youthful offenders than men. Not only were female respondents just as likely to strongly agree that juvenile sex offenders should be required to register, they were just as inclined to agree that juvenile who commit sexual offenses pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities. While it has always been suggested that traditional gender roles play an overwhelming factor in the way survey respondents perceive crime and justice, the idea of nurturing roles as perceived by most women was not portrayed in the study results. For this study, in revisiting Rogers and Ferguson (2011) the results have further alluded to the theory that participant's ethnicity and gender were unrelated to punishment attitudes of juvenile sex

offenders. The present study results have further showed inconsistent effects for these demographic factors.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

The current research provides further insight into a better understanding of the factors that drive student support for the registration of juvenile sex offenders. By understanding the support for policies that have been considered emotionally driven and ineffective in its goals, provides implications for the continuous usage of registration on youthful offenders. The overwhelming amount of sex offender legislation that has been enacted over the past decade suggests that public demand for offender-specific policies overshadows the foundation of the juvenile justice system. This system originally in its design aims to rehabilitate youthful offenders rather than increase punitiveness sanctioning in get-tough approaches.

Overall, the results indicate that, social science students, regardless of demographics backgrounds, hold some belief that juvenile sex offenders should be required to register. The identified results have clearly coincided with prior research that suggests that the support for stricter sanctioning is a direct result of fear of future victimization, as juveniles who commit sexual offenses pose a danger to society. In addition, the results have further confirmed that most respondents have obtained their knowledge of juvenile sex offenders from news media outlets. At least 67% of the student respondents identified news media source as their number one information obtaining tool specifically Blacks and psychology majors. This confirmation of continuous media appeal in reporting a vast array of heinous sex crimes only indicates the need for future public education, awareness, and advocacy for well-informed legislation.

In reality, although juvenile offenders perpetrate a significant portion of sexual violence, there continues to be many misconceptions regarding juveniles who commit sexual offenses. One of the many misconceptions is the belief that juvenile sex offenders will once become adult sex offenders. Future policies in the approach to the management of juvenile sex offenders

should be drafted to balance the interest of policy-making and increasing public safety. Reforms should reconsider sentencing guidelines, community notification and registration, and juvenile waivers to the adult court. Legislative approaches should also render supervised treatment through mental health practitioners as an alternative to criminal punishment. Sure, members of the public should be safe from injury or loss due to sexual victimization; however, scientific-based research in its findings has yet to support the relationship between registration and increased public safety.

As with any study there are limitations. One of the most substantive shortcomings of the present study is the limited generalizability of the research findings and the interpretation of the results. The study selected only students to be surveyed, which produced a considerable amount of missing data in relation to demographic variables. The survey research was also fairly limited in sample size, which may have resulted in a production of false and/or positive results, risk factors, or other associations. Moreover, considering this is a University based sample derived of only students located in a specific on campus building, the results of the findings will not accurately represent the greater population (e.g. 65.7% females). However, most of the demographics controlled in the study (e.g. age, race, income, political orientation) may be a representative of young adults located in Kennesaw, Georgia. Despite all limitations of the present study, the findings yielded valuable results relevant to research literature pertaining to the perception of college students (e.g. undergraduates and graduates. Using students particularly from Kennesaw State University allowed the research to be conducted quickly with regard to the convenience of completing survey questionnaires. Future research will be guided to use more generalizable samples, larger sample and other areas of academic disciplines (*e.g. Education, Business, and Arts*) in the exploratory nature of their studies of attitudes on offender registration.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Statement

Survey on the Use of Sex Offender Registries on Juvenile Sex Offenders

Dear Student:

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Ebony Bryant of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this letter and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Juvenile sex offenders are increasingly included in sex offender registration laws based on the assumption that they pose an overall distinctly high risk for future reoffending. Without doubt sex offender laws are quite controversial. Given the recent support in applying sex offender registry laws to juveniles, “laws originally designed to protect children of these same ages”, a further look into this phenomenon will address limitations found in prior research and broaden the knowledge regarding offender registration and juvenile offenders.

The proposed study sets out to achieve a seemingly straightforward goal. One of understanding the viewpoints of college students surrounding the registration of juvenile sex offenders, factoring a variance in social science disciplines, while highlighting whether such perceptions vary across demographic backgrounds. Your instructor at the discretion of the investigator will give you as a participant the opportunity to take part in the study by providing you with a self-administered survey.

Please be assured that your participation in this study is voluntary and will be strictly anonymous. Only the investigator will have access to the data collected. After each individual data has been recorded, the surveys will be destroyed. **Intended participants in the study must be 18 years of age and over as well as enrolled as a student at Kennesaw State University.** The survey study should be completed between 5-10 minutes however; at any point in time you are free to stop participation without penalty. **There are no known risks anticipated by taking part in this study.** You can return the completed survey (3 pages total) directly to your instructor or to me.

By participating in this study, your responses can aid the investigator in providing students at Kennesaw State University with useful research about the practice of imposing registration laws on juvenile offenders and the unintended consequences (if any) that they pose on this specific offender population. The study, will aid students overall in the ability to determine whether registration is actually capable in preventing future sexual offenses amongst juvenile offenders.

Please accept my sincere appreciation for participating in this survey.

Sincerely,

Ebony Bryant
Graduate Student of Criminal Justice
Department of Sociology, Geography & Anthropology
Kennesaw State University
1000 Chastain Road
Kennesaw, GA 30144

Telephone: (254) 548-1553
Email: Ebryan10@students.kennesaw.edu

Statement of Understanding

The purpose of this research has been explained and my participation is voluntary. I have the right to stop participation at any time without penalty. I understand that the research has no known risks, and I will not be identified. By completing this survey, I am agreeing to participate in this research project.

THIS PAGE MAY BE REMOVED AND KEPT BY EACH PARTICIPANT

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, #0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.

Appendix B

Juvenile Sex Offender Questionnaire

The following questions pertain to all juveniles currently living in the United States For this project the term “juvenile,” is, to be defined as all persons between the of ages 6 to 17. A juvenile sex offender is to be defined as a juvenile found to have committed any violation of law or delinquent act involving any type of sexual behavior that occurs without consent.

Please answer the following questions

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. News media is the source from which you obtain knowledge of juvenile sex offenders					
2. Legislation should be similar for juveniles and adults despite the differences in each group for sexual offenses					
3. Juvenile sex offenders pose a danger to society and their surrounding communities					
4. Juvenile sex offenders are at a high risk of reoffending					
5. Juvenile sex offenders should be required to register					

Please select your answer below regarding your demographic information

6. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

7. What is your age?

- 17-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

8. What is your major of study?

- Criminal Justice
- Communications
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Other

9. What is your ethnicity origin (or Race)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander

Other

10. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Divorced
- Separated

11. What is your total household income?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$20,000 to \$29,000
- \$30,000 to \$39,000
- \$40,000 to \$49,000
- \$50,000 to \$59,000
- Greater than \$60,000

12. What is your political orientation?

- Conservative
- Liberal
- Moderate

13. Do you have children under the age of 10?

- Yes
- No

14. How concerned are you about sex crime in your neighborhood?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Not concerned

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