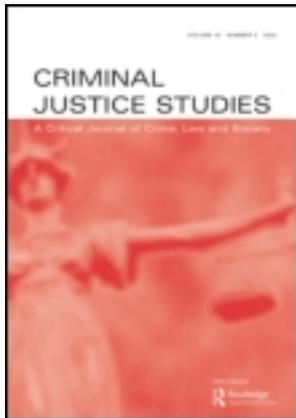


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From prison to integration: applying modified labeling theory to sex offenders

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From prison to integration: applying modified labeling theory to sex offenders

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This research examines social–psychological consequences associated with being stigmatized as a sex offender. Surveys administered to 150 sex offenders were analyzed using modified labeling theory to examine the effect of a sex offender’s perception of devaluation and/or discrimination on his ability to successfully rejoin society following conviction of a sex offense. Findings indicate that the more an offender fears being devalued and/or discriminated against, the more likely he is to avoid activities that could facilitate social reintegration, suggesting that the stigmatizing label placed on sex offenders may lead to unintended consequences.

Keywords: sex offender; labeling; stigma; unintended consequences

Introduction

There’s nothing more vile than sex offenders.¹

These words, spoken by the then Governor of Illinois in 2005, reflect an attitude towards sex offenders that is as pervasive as it is visceral within society today. It is, in fact, this attitude which makes ‘sex offender’ among the most highly stigmatized labels that exist in modern societies. And while stigma is largely dependent on the socially constructed meaning behind the deviant behavior (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963; Rodgers, 2003), for those labeled as sex offenders, the stigma embodies strong social taboos surrounding sexuality combined with a fierce collective belief in the sanctity of childhood innocence that has developed over the past century (Jenkins, 1998).

Researchers have begun examining the effects of sex offender legislation on the offenders themselves. As a result of sex offender regulations, the identity of most sex offenders can be readily ascertained by anyone with access to the Internet, making it nearly impossible for convicted sex offenders to return to society with any hope of anonymity (Levenson, D’Amora, & Hern, 2007; Thomas & Mingus, 2007). Unfettered access to information about sex offenders has collateral, and often unanticipated, consequences for both the offender and society as a whole (Farkas & Stichman, 2002; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury, 2005; Tofte,

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2007). Recent studies have concluded that increasingly restrictive legislation limits the social opportunities of sex offenders who are attempting to reestablish a role in society (see Burchfield & Mingus, 2008). Opportunities such as finding employment, locating housing, and establishing a strong social support network have long been considered essential to reintegration and to reducing recidivism for released offenders (Hepburn & Griffin, 2004; Levenson et al., 2007; Petersilia, 1999). However, it is these very opportunities that sex offenders are deliberately denied as a result of federally mandated sex offender registration and community notification laws. Loss of social opportunities could have the effect of exacerbating the very issues, such as rejection, isolation, and inadequate social support networks, that led to a sexual offense in the first place (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson et al., 2007; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004; Tofte, 2007).

The majority of studies to date have focused on how sex offender legislation impacts offenders by limiting their opportunities for reintegration. Consistent with theories on the effects of labeling, the focus of these studies has been on the external forces that constrain convicted sex offenders. The present study, however, utilizes a modified labeling theory (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989) to examine the ways in which an offender might limit his own opportunities as a result of being labeled a sex offender.² The emphasis, then, will be on the internal constraints an offender imposes on himself and the ways in which this limits his opportunities for successful reintegration. Modified labeling theory has been used to explain similar behavior in former mental patients (Link et al., 1989), individuals with HIV/AIDS (Fife & Wright, 2000), smokers (Houle & Siegel, 2009), and families of children with disabilities (Green, 2003). This paper will further extend the application of modified labeling theory to examine how convicted sex offenders react to perceived stigma.

Stigma and labeling theory

Our understanding of stigma and its consequences for sex offenders can be greatly informed by looking at the concepts proffered by labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Scheff, 1999). This theory states that the label of 'deviant', and the stigma that comes with such a label, is more a product of society than it is of the individual committing the deviant act. What is considered deviant in one society, or at one point in history, may not be considered deviant in another (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1969; Goffman, 1963; Jenkins, 1998). Thus, Becker (1963, p. 9) concludes that 'deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather the consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender"'. Labeling theory also suggests that once a person is labeled a deviant, he will be denied essential life opportunities because of this stigma, and thus will have a greater propensity to repeat his deviant behaviors (Goffman, 1963; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Pittam & Gallois, 2000). Finally, labeling theory holds that those fettered with an obdurate, stigmatizing label often find it easier to act in accordance with that label than to shed the deviant label. The effects of being labeled, then, are external, with constraints being imposed on the deviant by society.

These effects are exacerbated when the offense for which one was convicted is considered particularly heinous, such as in the case of sexually based offenses. As a social pariah, the sex offender faces a more difficult time in reestablishing any sort

of positive self-identity within society (Manza, Brooks, & Uggen, 2004; Presser & Gunnison, 1999). For him, his status as a sex offender takes on a master status, subsuming any other identity a person may claim for himself (Falk, 2001; Goffman, 1963; Harding, 2003). His status as father, or citizen, or even human being, while perhaps paramount from his personal perspective, may not be relevant, or even noticed by others, because of his status as a sex offender.

Modified labeling theory

Link et al. (1989) offer a variation of labeling theory they call a modified labeling theory which suggests that whether or not an individual experiences direct discrimination based on an assigned label, his life opportunities can still be negatively impacted by stigma. Stigmatized individuals form conceptions of what it means to have a particular stigma. These conceptions include two important components. The first is the degree to which a stigmatized individual perceives he will be devalued by society, and the second is the level to which he perceives he will be discriminated against. Thus, Link et al. (1989, pp. 402–403) state, ‘our interest in devaluation–discrimination is in the extent to which individuals believe that “most people” (the community at large) will devalue and discriminate against [the stigmatized individual]’. Because a labeled individual perceives the potential for being devalued and discriminated against, he may avoid participating in positive opportunities that could aid in successful reintegration into society. Thus, unlike labeling theory, modified labeling theory postulates that the constraints resulting from being labeled will be at least partially internal, coming from the offenders themselves.

In the Link et al. study, the authors outlined their modified labeling theory in a five-step process. In the first step, societal conceptions of what it means to be a member of a stigmatized group, such as a mental patient or a sex offender, develop. This often occurs as a result of media or political attention to high-profile cases. Once societal concepts of a stigmatized group have been institutionalized, the second step involves the stigmatized individual being officially labeled and becoming aware of societal conceptions. Conviction of a sexual offense results in a person being placed on the sex offender registry, thereby permanently establishing his stigmatized identity. The stigmatized individual then becomes acutely aware of how others perceive someone with that label. Most commonly, this happens when the individual experiences direct negative consequences as a result of his label. However, he may also become aware of how he is viewed by society through other sources, such as family or friends, media attention, or other stigmatized individuals.

Having realized that he has been labeled, and that there are negative consequences associated with that label, step three involves his response to the stigmatizing label. Link et al. (1989) identified three possible responses. The first is secrecy, in which an individual chooses not to disclose his stigma, but rather to conceal it from potential employers, friends, and perhaps even family members. The second response is withdrawal, by which the stigmatized individual chooses to limit his contact to those who know about his offense and accept him already. The third possible response is education. This occurs when an individual attempts to educate those who might find out about his situation in an attempt to ward off a negative reaction.

The fourth step involves the consequences of the stigmatizing process on the individual. These may occur as a result of the individual’s beliefs about societal attitudes, or they may occur as a result of the individual’s attempt to avoid the

potential consequences by withdrawing. Either reason can have a detrimental impact on an individual's efforts to rejoin society. While labeling theory would suggest that the label itself causes external forces to converge in such a way as to limit one's life opportunities, modified labeling theory suggests that an individual may, in fact, limit his own life opportunities in order to avoid the potential consequences of being negatively labeled.

The fifth and final step in the modified labeling theory postulates a vulnerability to further problems as a result of the occurrence of events in steps one through four. Individuals will have trouble establishing healthy social ties, including gaining legitimate employment or establishing a healthy support network. Being isolated and stigmatized, essentially shunned by society, creates the potential for exacerbating the very issues that may have led one to sexually offend in the first place, and some have suggested this could have the effect of triggering a relapse (Edwards & Hensley, 2001; Freeman-Longo, 1996; Hanson & Harris, 2000; Hudson, 2005; Massey & Lundy, 2001; Tofte, 2007).

Using the ideas proffered by modified labeling theory, the current study examines the level to which convicted sex offenders believe they will be devalued and/or discriminated against by society, and the ways in which this perception affects their decision to employ any of the three coping strategies identified by Link et al. (1989). Understanding this will contribute to a growing body of knowledge regarding the potential collateral consequences of contemporary sex offender legislation, as well as further advance the general application of modified labeling theory.

Data and methods

Data for this study were gathered through a standardized survey instrument administered to a larger number of sex offenders through various sex offender treatment groups. Using a list provided by the Sex Offender Management Board in Illinois, treatment providers were contacted and asked if they would be willing to allow a member of the research team to attend various treatment sessions for the purpose of administering the survey to their treatment groups. Alternatively, treatment providers were given the option of administering the surveys themselves in their treatment sessions. Although this method resulted in a greater number of completed surveys ($N=164$), it also presents a number of identifiable drawbacks. First, nearly all of the surveys were completed by individuals who were currently on parole or probation ($n=150$ or 92%), since relatively few offenders continue treatment when it is no longer court mandated. Because they are likely to have qualitatively different experiences directly related to postrelease supervision, those who were not currently on parole or probation were not included in the analysis. Second, treatment providers who represented multiple groups or larger groups were targeted in particular, since this allowed for the greatest number of surveys to be given within a shorter time frame. Third, although participants were informed that the survey would be completely anonymous, it is possible that some offenders may have assumed that their counselors would have access to the results, and this could have affected the way in which they responded. Finally, because the sample was not obtained through a random design, the results presented here may not be generalizable beyond those who completed the surveys.

The demographics of the 150 survey respondents were very similar to a snapshot taken from the Illinois Sex Offender Registry prior to conducting the study. The one notable exception is the number of individuals on parole or probation, as

discussed above. Demographic characteristics for the surveys and the registry snapshot are presented in Table 1.

The survey consisted of a range of questions, including questions adapted from Link et al.'s (1989) study of modified labeling theory. Detailed demographic questions were also included. The survey was designed to protect the anonymity of the respondents, and as such, no information was requested that could positively identify the person completing the survey. The completed surveys were coded and analyzed using a statistical software package. Questions were recoded such that a higher number indicates stronger agreement.

Measures

This study utilized four scales developed by Link et al. (1989). The questions used to create the scales were modified only to make them relevant to sex offenders instead of former mental patients.

Devaluation/discrimination

This measure consisted of 12 questions administered using a five-point Likert scale where 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicated 'strongly agree'. The scale was designed to indicate the level to which an individual believes he will be devalued and/or discriminated against based on his status as a convicted sex offender. The stigma scale was calculated using the mean of the 12 questions, and could range from 1 to 5,

Table 1. Offender characteristics.

	Survey sample (N=150)		State registry ^a (N=12,922)	
	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Age</i>				
Younger than 25	24	16.0	1037	8
25–64	110	73.3	11,347	87.8
65 or older	16	10.7	538	4.2
<i>Race</i>				
White or Hispanic	127	84.0	8324	64.4
Black	7	4.7	3900	30.2
Asian	1	0.7	66	0.5
Unknown or other	5	3.3	632	4.9
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	136	90.7	12,591	97.4
Female	6	4.0	331	2.6
<i>Married</i>				
Yes	34	22.7	N/A	
No	109	72.8	N/A	
<i>Parole/probation</i>				
Yes	150	100	1128	8.7
No	0	0	11,794	91.3

^aFrom the Illinois State Police Sex Offender Registry, summer 2006.

where the higher the number, the greater the belief that one will be devalued and/or discriminated against. This measure shows high internal consistency ($\alpha=.82$).

Secrecy, withdrawal, and education

In addition, three scales were used to indicate how likely an individual was to use one of the three main coping strategies to deal with his stigma. Each scale was created using 5–7 questions administered on a scale of 1 (no support) to 5 (full support) indicating the level to which an individual supports the use of a particular coping strategy. The mean of each set of questions was used to create the respective scale.

The first scale represents the secrecy strategy. Those who employ this strategy focus on keeping the stigma a secret from everyone except those the stigmatized individual fully trusts. Information management is especially arduous for those who employ this strategy. The five questions used for this scale demonstrated high internal reliability ($\alpha=.81$).

The withdrawal strategy involves the stigmatized individual avoiding social contact with those who might discover his stigma. Those who employ this strategy tend to associate primarily with individuals who are already aware of his status, or with those he believes will be accepting of him despite his stigma. This scale, made up of seven questions, showed adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=.73$).

Finally, those who choose the education coping strategy will attempt to educate those with whom he must interact. In the case of sex offenders, this would entail voluntarily disclosing one's status as a sex offender, while at the same time explaining why his offense was different, or why not all sex offenders are the same, or other information that could mitigate the impact of the disclosure. The education strategy scale, made up of five questions, shows adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=.61$).

There are, perhaps, other coping strategies, and certainly individuals may use a hybrid of these three. However, this study will focus on the three coping strategies, secrecy, withdrawal, and education, and their relationship to perceived devaluation/discrimination. These relationships will be examined by looking at the correlation between the level to which offenders believe they will be devalued and/or discriminated against, operationalized as the *stigma score*, and the level to which they advocate using any of the coping strategies described above. More specifically, the stigma score will be regressed on each of the coping strategies to determine the level to which the decision to use any of the strategies is affected by the level to which an offender believes he will be devalued and/or discriminated against.

Results

The average score on the stigma scale, which could potentially range from 1 to 5, was 3.87, with nearly 94% of the participants scoring above the midpoint of 3.0. This suggests that on average, sex offenders do tend to believe that they will be devalued and/or discriminated against based on their status as a registered sex offender (see Table 2).

The scores for each of the scales range from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates low support of the strategy and 5 indicates high support of the strategy. The average score on the education coping strategy scale was 3.77, with nearly 90% scoring above the midpoint of 3.0. Similarly, the average score on the secrecy coping strategy scale

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

Variable		
Race	<i>N</i>	%
White	126	84.0
Black	7	4.7
Hispanic	1	0.7
Asian	1	0.7
Other	5	3.3
No response	10	6.7
Devaluation/discrimination	Mean	SD
Range: 2.17–5.00	3.87	.56
Higher number indicates greater perceived level stigma		
Withdrawal mean	Mean	SD
Range: 1.14–5.00	3.08	.69
Higher number indicates greater level of advocating strategy		
Secrecy mean	Mean	SD
Range: 1.00–5.00	3.18	.92
Higher number indicates greater level of advocating strategy		
Education mean	Mean	SD
Range: 2.00–5.00	3.77	.59
Higher number indicates greater level of advocating strategy		
Income (per year)	<i>N</i>	%
1 <\$10K	56	37.3
2 \$10K–\$19.9K	23	15.3
3 \$20K–\$29.9K	25	16.7
4 \$30K–39.9K	22	14.7
5 \$50K or more	13	8.7
9 No response	11	7.3
Age	Mean	SD
Range: 18–78	37.44	13.52
Education (in years)	<i>N</i>	%
1 8th Grade or less	4	2.7
2 Some high school	15	10.0
3 General Educational Development (GED)	24	16.0
4 High school grad	30	20.0
5 Some college	40	26.7
6 College grad	24	16.0
9 No response	13	8.7

was 3.18, but with only about 54% of the respondents scoring above the midpoint. Finally, the average score on the withdrawal coping strategy scale was 3.08, with only 51% scoring above the midpoint. These scores indicate that education is the preferred coping strategy, and that withdrawal from society is the least supported strategy, with secrecy falling somewhere in between the two.

The scores for each of the three coping strategies were tested against the scores for the stigma scale. The purpose of this comparison is to determine if the degree to

which a person believes he will be devalued or discriminated against affects his use of a particular coping strategy. This effect was tested using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, controlling for age, income level, education level, and race. The results are shown in Tables 3–5. A statistically significant effect ($p < .01$) was found between a person's belief that he will be devalued and discriminated against and his tendency to use the withdrawal or secrecy coping strategy. Thus, the more an individual perceives he will be devalued or discriminated against, the more likely he is to advocate keeping his offense a secret or withdrawing from society. No significant association was found between the stigma score and the education coping strategy score. Although the education coping strategy was supported to a greater degree than either secrecy or withdrawal based on the mean score, there does not appear to be a significant association between the degree to which an individual believes he will be devalued or discriminated against and his tendency to use the education coping strategy.

An analysis of the survey data, then, suggests that the greater an individual's belief that he will be devalued or discriminated against, the more likely he is to withdraw from society and/or try to keep his offense a secret. Not surprisingly, the data also suggest that individuals will worry more about being exposed as a sex offender if they perceive that they will be devalued or discriminated against.

Discussion

Stigma and shame are powerful motivators (Arneson, 2007; Schwarcz, 2003). In an orderly society, they can be used to insure that its members 'follow the rules'. Stigma and shame can also produce collateral consequences (Crocker & Major, 1989; Goff-

Table 3. Regression of withdrawal coping strategy on devaluation discrimination.

Variable	Equation (1)		Equation (2)	
	(N=150)		(N=150)	
	B	β	B	β
Level of perceived devaluation/discrimination Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)	.301*	.251	.338**	.282
Age (in years)	(.104)		(.106)	
Income level Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)			-.001	-.023
High School Diploma/GED ^a			(.005)	
Some college (no degree) ^a			-.022	-.045
College degree ^a			(.044)	
White ^b			.113	.312
Constant			(.093)	
R ²	1.97		-.174	-.486
	.063		(.096)	
			.094	.262
			(.108)	
			.003	.005
			(.047)	

Notes: B=unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; β =standardized regression coefficient. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

^aCompared to less than high school.

^bCompared to nonwhites.

Table 4. Regression of secrecy coping strategy on devaluation discrimination.

Variable	Equation (1)		Equation (2)	
	(N=150)		(N=150)	
	B	β	B	β
Level of perceived devaluation/ discrimination Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)	.622*** (.133)	.386	.640*** (.135)	.397
Age (in years)			.004 (.006)	.050
Income level Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)			-.063 (.056)	-.097
High School Diploma/GED ^a			.096 (.119)	.198
Some college (no degree) ^a			-.143 (.123)	-.297
College degree ^a			.059 (.138)	.123
White ^b			-.109 (.061)	-.149
Constant	.831		.892	
R ²	.149		.194	

Notes: B=unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; β =standardized regression coefficient. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

^aCompared to less than high school.

^bCompared to nonwhites.

Table 5. Regression of education coping strategy on devaluation discrimination.

Variable	Equation (1)		Equation (2)	
	(N=150)		(N=150)	
	B	β	B	β
Level of perceived devaluation/ discrimination Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)	.036 (.091)	.036	.053 (.094)	.052
Age (in years)			-.002 (.004)	-.039
Income level Range: 1 (lowest)–5 (highest)			-.003 (.039)	-.007
High School Diploma/GED ^a			.053 (.082)	.174
Some college (no degree) ^a			-.009 (.085)	-.029
College degree ^a			.002 (.095)	.007
White ^b			.000 (.042)	.000
Constant	3.62		3.36	
R ²	.001		.026	

Notes: B=unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; β =standardized regression coefficient. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

^aCompared to less than high school.

^bCompared to nonwhites.

man, 1963; Katz, 1979). Labeling theory suggests these consequences are externally driven, diminishing opportunities available to the stigmatized individual to participate in society. Modified labeling theory offers the view that stigma and shame can work internally, leading the stigmatized individual to avoid otherwise healthy social activities that would foster his participation in society (Link et al., 1989).

The responses to the questions asked in this study suggest that sex offenders, as a group, do tend to believe that they will be devalued and discriminated against by society. Although 90% of the individuals responding to the survey scored above the midpoint of 3.0 on the stigma scale, the fact that the average score was below 4.0 on a five-point scale indicates that offenders do not believe they will be discriminated against by everyone or all the time.

Sex offenders indicated a tendency to use the education coping strategy most often, with nearly 90% of the respondents scoring higher than the midpoint of 3.0 on the education coping strategy scale. There is, however, little effect of one's perceived threat of devaluation and discrimination on his use of this strategy. It is possible that sex offenders feel the need to use the education coping strategy specifically because the potential for being discredited is so great. Since nearly everyone they come into contact with will have access to the online sex offender registry, offenders may opt to preemptively educate rather than risk being exposed. This strategy, then, might be related to the potential for discrediting, rather than to the perceived level of devaluation/discrimination.

Those surveyed indicated that they tend to use the secrecy coping strategy as well. The average score on this scale was less than the educational strategy scale, and only about 54% of the respondents scored above the midpoint on this scale, suggesting less support for keeping one's offense a secret than for educating others about one's offense. Again, given the ubiquitous nature of the sex offender registry, it is likely that sex offenders simply recognize the futility of trying to keep their offense a secret from everyone. That they endorse this strategy at all indicates that offenders still feel the need to hide their stigma from at least some people and some of the time.

The withdrawal coping strategy received the weakest endorsement. The average score on this scale was less than 3.0, and only about 51% of the respondents scored above the midpoint of 3.0. Clearly, sex offenders do not always feel that they should, or perhaps that they can, withdraw from participating in society. Since one of the requirements of parole is that offenders find a job, this would tend to force them out into the public sphere. Conversely, the amount of time paroled sex offenders are allowed to be outside their home is severely limited, inhibiting to a great extent their ability to socialize. The lack of social opportunities may have contributed to the offenders' lack of support for the withdrawal strategy.

Modified labeling theory suggests that individuals will adjust their participation in social activities in accordance with their belief that they will be devalued and/or discriminated against. This theory was tested by examining the effect of the devaluation/discrimination score on the various coping strategies. Although the education coping strategy was the most strongly endorsed, the stigma score did not exert a significant effect on this coping strategy. The data did, however, show a strong effect of the stigma scale on the endorsement of both the secrecy and the withdrawal coping strategy. This is not surprising as, intuitively, it makes sense that if a person believes he will be devalued or discriminated against, he will tend to avoid situations in which his stigma could be discovered.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that convicted sex offenders are among the most highly stigmatized members of our society today. While stigmatization, at some level, has been shown to be beneficial to society as a deterrent to others and as a way to reduce recidivism, it can also produce collateral consequences. These consequences have implications that go well beyond the direct impact to the offender himself. This paper suggests that the collateral consequences of severely stigmatizing sex offenders after their release from prison can lead to maladaptive coping strategies that exacerbate the very social issues which may have precipitated offending behaviors. The policy implications, then, are clear. It is important to understand how stigma influences offenders in their attempts to reintegrate into society, and evaluate whether the consequences intended to protect society actually accomplish the opposite. While some may claim ambivalence when it comes to reintegration efforts for sex offenders, studies have repeatedly shown that successful reintegration is essential in reducing recidivism (Petersilia, 1999).

Recent research has suggested that a balance needs to be struck between protecting society while simultaneously guarding against potentially harmful collateral consequences (see Tewksbury, 2005). This paper has offered a glimpse at some of the collateral consequences that can result from stigmatizing sex offenders beyond what is necessary to ensure compliance with society's rules. When stigma and shame are applied too heavily, offenders may abstain from healthy social activities out of fear of being devalued and/or discriminated against. Whether or not their fears are realized, the self-imposed isolation could tend to exacerbate the very issues that led to the offending behavior in the first place.

Notes

1. Governor Rod Blagojevich (Rackl & Fusco, 2005).
2. Throughout this paper, the masculine pronoun will be used. This is in part as a convenience, to avoid the awkward use of 'he/she' or 'his/her', and partly because over 95% of the individuals listed on the sex offender registry are male.

Notes on contributors

William Mingus is a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research focuses on identity and marginalized populations. His most recent publication, co-authored with Bradley Zopf, is entitled, 'White means never having to say you're sorry, the racial project in explaining mass shootings', and will appear in the upcoming edition of *Social Thought and Research*.

Keri B. Burchfield is an Associate Professor of sociology at Northern Illinois University. Her primary research interests include communities and crime, specifically investigating neighborhood structural effects and community organization on crime prevention and control, as well as the sociological experiences of released sex offenders. Her most recent publications include 'Residence restrictions' in *Criminology and Public Policy* and 'Misperceived neighborhood values and informal social control' in *Justice Quarterly with Barbara Warner*.

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