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# Perspectives on severe, adult child molesters : a look at their adult attachment styles, use of pornograhjy, and chaoes in families-of-origin

Jennifer Lynne Trebby

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Jennifer Lynne Trebby  
Perspectives on Severe, Adult Child Molesters: A Look at Their Adult Attachment  
Styles, Use of Pornography, and Chaos in Families-of-Origin

ABSTRACT

Abstract 1: Many researchers have commented on the insecure attachment styles common to sexual offenders. Models have been created to account for the role attachment plays in an individual's movement towards sex offending behaviors, and all suggest a complex relationship that may not be stable throughout the lifespan. A few researchers have explored the current, adult attachment styles of sex offenders in order to answer questions about differences both within the group, within the larger group of criminals, and in comparison to the general population. Both the fearful-avoidant style and the preoccupied style have previously been shown to be prevalent in the child molesting subset of the sex offender group.

Based on this, we hoped to explore the adult attachment styles of a group of incarcerated adult, male child molesters, with attention to their current, romantic relationships. We hypothesized that there would be a relationship between their particular style and the ways in which they approached their victim, specifically, their use of force or use of courtship/grooming behaviors. Additionally, with the understanding that each style brings with it different internal templates for relationship-building, a relationship between attachment style and number of victims was proposed. The findings confirmed that for the group under review, preoccupied and fearful styles were represented in greatest numbers. A significant difference was found in the offenders' use of force, with the fearful group using more force than the preoccupied group. While there was not a

significant difference in the number of victims in each style-group, there was a difference worthy of attention in future research.

Abstract 2: The extent to which pornography use plays a role in the development of sexually offending behaviors has been debated in the literature. The question is a controversial one for many reasons, beginning with the very act of defining pornography, and continuing with those who view pornography as dangerous, those who view it as potentially cathartic, and those who suggest a more complicated relationship. Current research seems to point to pornography as potentially dangerous on a sub-set of the population who may be predisposed to sexually offend, for a variety of developmental reasons. Based on this, data from 105 adult, male sex offenders – most of whom were incarcerated, and primarily fell into the category of child molesters – was collected with the hope of getting a clearer picture of the relationship between the pornography they consumed and their offenses. Relationships between the frequency of use of pornography and the number of victims, the type of pornography viewed and the type of victims (by gender and age) abused, and the arousal rates to various types of pornography and victim types were all hypothesized.

A relationship that we expected to see – that pornography use, especially in close proximity to the offenses, is associated with a greater number of victims, and greater victimization in general – did not hold true for this study. While frequency of use of child pornography was moderately related to the number of child victims, the relationship was not a strong one, as was predicted. Differences between male and female child victims were shown in a couple of different analyses, suggesting areas for further study. Arousal to various kinds of pornography was shown to be strongly related to numbers

and types of victims, especially in the case of arousal to and abuse of female victims under the age of 10. More examination of the complex relationship between arousal, pornography viewed, and offending behaviors are suggested by the results of this project. Implications of this and further research include the identification of those prone to re-offend and programs to target and treat those individuals.

Abstract 3: Many researchers have studied the constellation of factors that make up the early home environments of individuals who become sexual offenders. Focus has been paid to a few developmental antecedents, including violence in the home, physical and sexual abuse perpetrated against the sex offender, neglect, and poor emotional relationships with caregivers (Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003; McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002). Limited research has been done on the family system – disruptions in who lives at home, criminality of parents, removals from the home, etc – as a whole, to determine if there's a relationship between a chaotic environment and the development of sexual offending behaviors. Based on what has already been studied, it was hypothesized for this study that the more chaotic an offender's home environment was, as indicated by presence of certain disruptive variables, the greater the number of victims he would report.

Respondents – by-and-large incarcerated, severe, adult child molesters – indicated the presence or absence of the disruptive variables in their families-of-origin.

Comparisons were made between the groups based on their yes-or-no responses.

Significant group differences were found for those that reported sexual abuse in the home, - they reported a higher average number of victims than those who did not have sexual abuse in the home. An unexpected finding was a significantly lower, average

number of victims for respondents who reported that children (other than themselves) were removed from the home. Differences, though not significant, were found for a few of the other variables as well, indications that further research is needed to determine the impact of chaotic environments on the etiology of sexual offending.

PERSPECTIVES ON SEVERE, ADULT CHILD MOLESTERS: A LOOK AT THEIR  
ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLES, USE OF PORNOGRAPHY, AND CHAOS IN  
FAMILIES-OF-ORIGIN

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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The collection of the data used for this project was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of the University of Michigan

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Running Head: ADULT CHILD MOLESTERS

Adult Attachment Styles in Relation to the Modus Operandi of Severe, Adult Child  
Molesters

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### Abstract

Many researchers have commented on the insecure attachment styles common to sexual offenders. Models have been created to account for the role attachment plays in an individual's movement towards sex offending behaviors, and all suggest a complex relationship that may not be stable throughout the lifespan. A few researchers have explored the current, adult attachment styles of sex offenders in order to answer questions about differences both within the group, within the larger group of criminals, and in comparison to the general population. Both the fearful-avoidant style and the preoccupied style have previously been shown to be prevalent in the child molesting subset of the sex offender group.

Based on this, we hoped to explore the adult attachment styles of a group of incarcerated adult, male child molesters, with attention to their current, romantic relationships. We hypothesized that there would be a relationship between their particular style and the ways in which they approached their victim, specifically, their use of force or use of courtship/grooming behaviors. Additionally, with the understanding that each style brings with it different internal templates for relationship-building, a relationship between attachment style and number of victims was proposed. The findings confirmed that for the group under review, preoccupied and fearful styles were represented in greatest numbers. A significant difference was found in the offenders' use of force, with the fearful group using more force than the preoccupied group. While there was not a significant difference in the number of victims in each style-group, there was a difference worthy of attention in future research.

## Background

The efforts to locate the etiology of criminal sexual behavior in attachment theory have been controversial (Ward, Hudson, Marshall, 1996; Marshall, Serran, Cortoni, 2000; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998; Smallbone & Dadds, 2000; Smallbone & McCabe, 2003; Lyn & Burton, 2004; Lyn & Burton, 2005). To begin with, there are multiple perspectives on the influence of childhood attachment style on behavior in adulthood. Some researchers have suggested that attachment does not represent a stable pattern throughout an individual's lifetime; patterns of interaction change over the life-span and can even shift as self-states shift (Karen, 1994).

Other researchers have suggested a relationship between childhood attachment and present day attachment, and that looking at both is necessary to understand the individual in the present. As Hazan and Shaver write, "attachment types relate in the manner predicted by theory to the way love is experienced, to expectations (or internal working models) concerning love relationships, and to memories of childhood relationships with parents" (1990, p. 271). In the context of sex offender treatment, this would suggest that interventions aimed at children with insecure attachments would reduce their risk of perpetrating sexual violence later in life. However, to this point there has also been much critique, suggesting that a multiplicity of factors are at play in the presence of an insecure attachment – poor environment, poor self-esteem, the development of anger and anxiety, temperament differences, and so on (Marshall, 1993; Ward et al, 1996; Lyn & Burton, 2005). There have been questions, too, about the accuracy of assessing attachment styles. Smallbone and Dadds write, "Self-report measures of childhood and adult attachment have generally not been found to be strongly

related, and it is unclear whether this represents inherent lability, measurement error, or both” (2000, p. 12). The case for causation, then, is extremely difficult to make.

Regardless of these other factors, the extent to which a childhood attachment style persists into adulthood and is or is not related to adult attachment style still remains a question in the field.

On one hand, researchers have suggested a relationship between an insecure childhood attachment style and the development of criminality in general (Ward et al, 1996; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998). Some researchers have argued that insecure and/or disorganized attachments are more significantly related to sexual offenders than to violent offenders overall. For example, Smallbone and Dadds’ (2000) research found “partial support” for the predictive power of troubled childhood attachment to “coercive sexual behavior,” finding stronger relationships between it and paternal attachment styles between the same with maternal attachments. Lyn and Burton’s (2004) also found support for a unique relationship between insecure attachment style and sexual offending, and they found that the relationship strengthened when considering individuals who have committed sexual offenses against children.

Specific strains of attachment have been related to tendencies towards criminal sexual behavior- a difference was found between child molesters and rapists, for example, having avoidant vs. anxious-ambivalent styles - but these relationships have been limited (Ward et al, 1996). Many of the studies on childhood attachment that have been undertaken have used college, undergraduate, males with sexually aggressive histories as participants. There are limits to the potential diversity offered in such a sample. Also, retrospective reports – asking participants to reflect on early

developmental history decades after their childhoods – have been criticized for their ability to accurately capture childhood experiences. (Smallbone & Dadds, 2000; Smallbone & McCabe, 2003). Lastly, as was previously mentioned, there is controversy about the staying power of childhood attachment. Researchers have wondered whether early child attachment represents a stable pattern throughout one's life. Based on the limitations outlined above, a more productive understanding of attachment may come from focusing on present-day patterns. In other words, what will likely be most productive and informative in terms of understanding sexual offending will be an investigation of offenders' current, adult attachment styles.

Taken alone, a further look at adult attachment style is warranted, because it may reveal important information about the dynamics of aggression for an individual offender. Both Ainsworth and Main, and then Hazan and Shaver, developed tools to understand the patterns of relating an adult has established (Levy and Blatt, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). For the purposes of looking at present-day attachment in sexual offenders, the approach offered by Hazan and Shaver is appropriate. They predicted a similarity between the styles of relating among adults and their romantic partners, and the patterns of relating between infants and their caregivers. To ascertain the qualities of those attachments, questionnaires were developed that ask individuals to report, in the present day, on both their current, important, love relationships, and to reflect back on relationships with primary caretakers.

Hazan and Shaver's research (1987) produced three categories of adult attachment styles – secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. The characteristics associated with secure adult attachment include high reports of intimacy, love, collaboration, and support,

whereas avoidant relationships tend to be defined by a fear of intimacy and desire to be alone. The anxious-ambivalent adult attachment style tends to be characterized by instability, a desire for merging, and obsessions. A more marked experience of loneliness appears to be present for both avoidant and anxious-ambivalent styles. As would be expected, taken as a whole, these characteristics tell us important things about the quality of those adult relationships. Levy and Blatt write, “Adult attachment styles have significantly predicted relationship outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, breakups, commitment), patterns of coping with stress, couple communication, and even phenomena such as religious experiences and patterns of career development, as well as behavioral predictions” (Levy & Blatt, 1999).

Bartholomew expanded on the work that Hazan and Shaver began by suggesting a fourth category, a second type underneath the avoidance umbrella. She conceptualized that there were two “dimensions” upon which the types were based, those of “anxiety” and “avoidance” (though others refer to them as “Model of Self” and “Model of Partner.” Therefore, the four specific types of adult attachment can be looked at in terms of where they fall in the two-dimensional space between anxiety and avoidance: secure (low anxiety, low avoidance), dismissing-avoidant (low anxiety, high avoidance), fearful-avoidant (high anxiety, high avoidance), and preoccupied (high anxiety, low avoidance; also referred to as anxious-ambivalent) (Fraley, 2004 ).

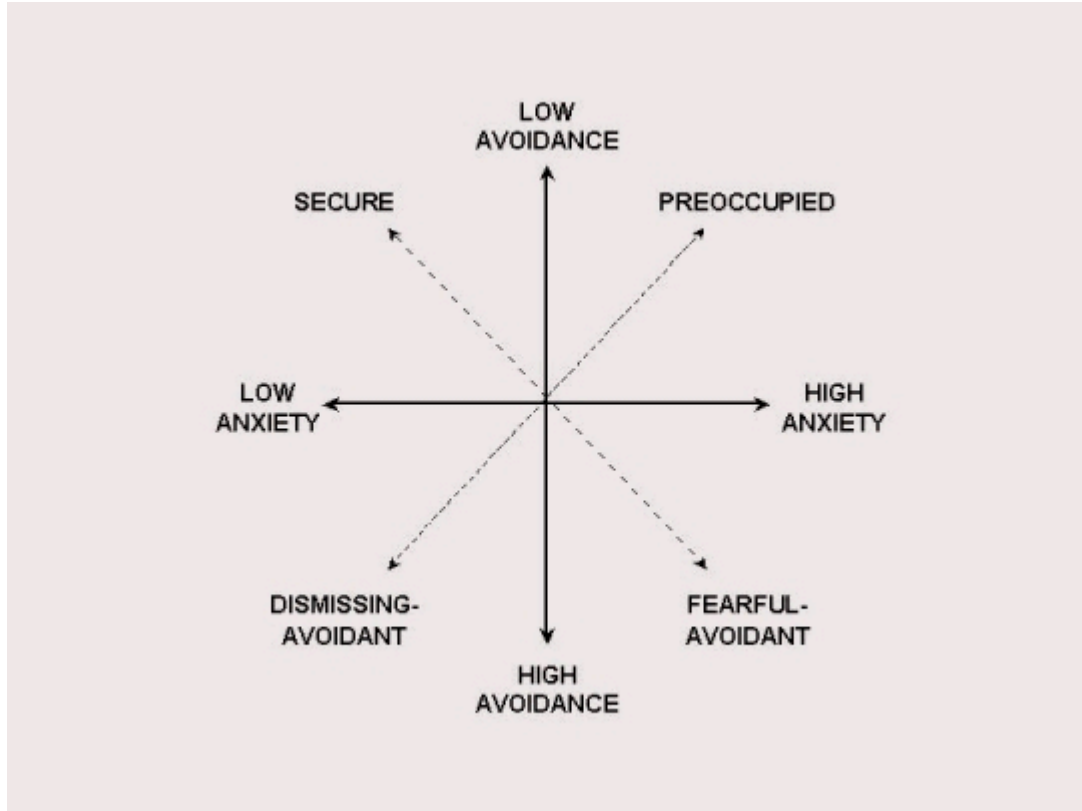


Figure 1, taken from Fraley, 2004 <http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm>

Thinking about the specific implications of attachment styles for understanding sexual offenders and their adult attachment results in a set of heretofore unresearched questions. One way of understanding the relationship between adult attachment and sexually offending behaviors is that it is self-fulfilling. Those with insecure attachment styles have not learned the set of social skills required to navigate the intricacies of adult relationships. Research suggests that sexual offenders have less emotional closeness with peers in their adult lives and that as children, both rapists and child molesters have fewer reported friendships in their youth than those without a history of sexual offending (Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, & Mann, 1989). As a result, the person with an insecure attachment style encounters more rejection by the people in his life. This, in turn, leads to the development of a world view where others are seen as unreliable, rejecting or



dismissive (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997; McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002). As McCormack et al argue, “The adult attachment styles of these men (sexual offenders) are likely to...lead to problematic interpersonal expectancies, goals, and strategies” (p. 87, McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002).

One hypothesis put forward for the association between adult attachment and sexual offending is that loneliness plays a key role in the development of offending behaviors. A qualitative study undertaken by Ward, McCormack and Hudson in 1997 attempted to establish loneliness as a key, common, relational factor at play in sexually offending behaviors. They conjectured that in an effort to avoid loneliness, intimacy was sought through sex, even if that required sex to take place with a non-consenting partner or in sexually aggressive ways. These “intimacy deficits” were expected to come through as a category in the researchers semi-structured interviews about their adult relationships. However, loneliness did not emerge as a strong category in this study, and as suggested above, the explanation offered was that skill deficits and interpersonal clumsiness were common factors amongst offenders. One additional, illustrative piece of data that emerged was that sex offenders and violent offenders had more in common – more impaired relationships - in their responses to interview questions than did nonviolent offenders. The researchers suggest one reason for this is that both violent and sexual offenses involve transgressions of boundaries, suggesting “serious violations of others' physical integrity” (p. 68, Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997).

Taking into consideration all of the above, why might it be a valuable contribution to look closer at the adult attachment styles of incarcerated sex offenders? Cynthia Shilkret's work on attachment suggests that understanding a client's attachment style is a

necessary part of the therapist/client dyad – helping a therapist know when to interpret cancellations, for example, and when this would be overwhelming for the client (2005). Fonagy’s research goes further in suggesting that a client’s attachment style can change from insecure to secure through the course of psychotherapy, through examinations of several techniques, all of which are based on adult attachment style (Fonagy & Target, 2005). Goal-setting for treatment is also a key area where information about a client’s attachment style can enhance the quality of treatment. For example, Ward et al write,

“The intimacy problems faced by a man whose offending is characterized by fears of rejection and the attempt to cultivate "safe" relationships are very different from one who is dismissive of the value of emotional intimacy. Unless appropriate goals that are related to overcoming the problematic relationship style are clearly specified, relationship or social skill interventions may be less than optimally effective” (24).

Thus, information related to the adult attachment styles of the offenders may suggest areas of concern in a therapeutic relationship between an offender and the therapist. Because of the importance of the therapist-client dyad, it would be important to know the impact that attachment limitations have on the therapeutic alliance. Given what we know about attachment styles influencing enactments by clients in therapy, this research might suggest alternate ways of engaging with sex offenders in treatment.

Based on contributions to the literature that have already been made, I would expect that adult attachment styles should relate to levels of forcefulness of the acts and the types of victims sought. I would also expect to see that the offenders’ poor attachment styles have limited their experience of healthy and appropriate adult relationships. Much has been written on the underlying interpersonal factors involved in sex offending, for instance, the factors of loneliness and interpersonal deficits.

Extrapolating from there, it is easy to see a potential connection between an offender's learned style of attachment and the way in which he pursues and interacts with his victim. This, too, has implications for finding appropriate interventions.

Research has suggested some (though limited) relationships between the fearful attachment style and child molester-type offenders, and the preoccupied attachment style and rapist-type offenders. I would expect to see in the data that more of the child molesters fall into a fearful attachment style whereas the rapists ought to fall into a preoccupied category. Provided the four attachment styles are represented (it is unlikely, for instance, that many of the respondents will fall into the secure category), my predictions about the types, based on the literature, are as follows:

- Secure type – This attachment style is not likely to be sexually aggressive towards others. Those who fall into this category will report having healthy and appropriate relationships with other adults. They will likely be socially competent, in that they can read the social cues of others. I would imagine high degrees of empathy, security in the face of loneliness, and lack of abuse histories to be protective factors from significant offending behaviors. Based on this, it is likely there will not be a high percentage of participants in the study who can be categorized into this attachment style.

#### Insecure Types

- Preoccupied – As Marshall has previously researched (1993), people who fall into this category are likely to develop the distorted belief that they have a “love” relationship with the victim. For this reason, I would expect to see a minimal use of force in the victimization. Offending behaviors would likely

include positive reinforcement provided to the victim, gifts or enticements offered to the victim, and so on. Levy/Blatt discuss the “desire for union” that characterizes many preoccupied-attached individuals, so I would imagine that the relationships between victims and offenders would be intense and heated (1999). Along the same lines, I would not expect to see that these offenders would garner any enjoyment or satisfaction from thinking that they have been aggressive towards their victims; rather, I imagine they would construct and distort their reality to believe they were “merging” with the victim.

McCormack/Hudson/Ward’s research also points to the prevalence of child molesters in this type, and that their offending takes on a “grooming and courtship” character (1996).

- Fearful-avoidant – For both fearful and dismissing attachment types, researchers have found tendencies towards aggression in their acts (McCormack, Hudson & Ward, 1996). Mikulincer & Shaver (2005) have described defensive processes of the two types of avoidant attachments, suggesting that difficulties arise in the “encoding” of the relationship. With both types, then, the problem can be seen as the way the relationship templates have been storied for each (Carnelley/Brennan, 2002). Thus, in both of the avoidant categories I would expect to see higher levels of force used than in the preoccupied category. However, what is unique about fearful is that is high on the anxiety scale, so elements of their behavior may cross-over into the preoccupied group (since they are also high on the anxiety subscale). The difference, I imagine, lies in their approach to the victim. There will likely be little ambivalence about the

object/victim choice – fearful types tend to be afraid of the intensity of relationships with others. Based on this, there may be use of force in retaliation against the victim should he perceive the victim attempting to be in relation to him.

- Dismissing-avoidant – I would expect the most forceful behavior from this group, as they are low on the anxiety subscale but high on avoidance. This suggests an avoidance of connections with others, but when initiated, they are not as sensitized to others as the other groups would be. I would expect more rapists to fall into this category. McCormack, Hudson, & Ward suggest that there is more autonomy in this category of offenders, and in relation, they are less likely to victimize children, and instead will gravitate towards adults (1996).

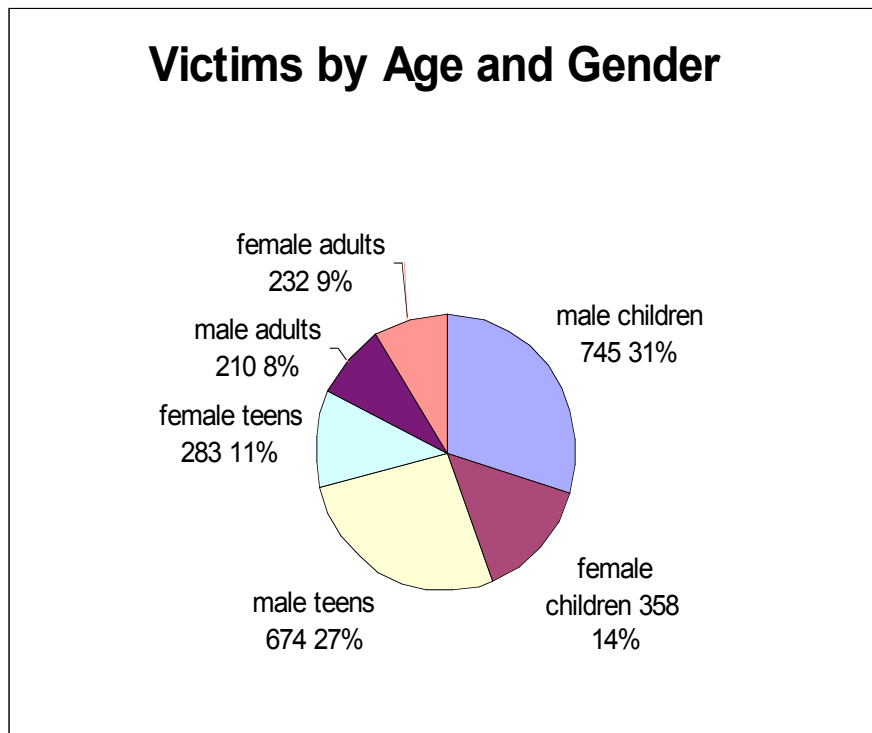
With these literature-based hypotheses in mind, the current project will examine the relationships between the attachment style of the offender and their numbers and types of victims sought. Additionally, we will investigate relationships and group differences between attachment styles and the amount of force, or, on the other end of the spectrum, “nice” behaviors, used by offenders in relation to their victims. Finally, the respondents’ answers to questions posed about their current romantic relationships will be compared to their attachment style.

## Methods

The survey for the project was created with the participation of sexual abusers who have undergone treatment, under the supervision of Wayne Bowers at the Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance (see below for details).

### *Participants*

105 adult males, all of whom have sexually abused children, make up the project sample. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents reported being incarcerated at the time of survey completion, and 87% reported previous incarceration. Because of the anonymity of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to report a wide array of sexual crimes without concern about reprisal. Respondents were able to select from several different victim-types, with respect to victim age, gender, relationship to offender, etc. Collectively, they reported 1,720 victims, with each participant averaging 16.38 victims (the *range* was from 1-122, *SD* 25.08 victims), and 19 different combinations of gender and age group were reported by the men across their offenses (for example one subject abused male children, male teens and adult women). Of the total respondents, 26.67% reported abusing only one gender and age combination (See Figure 1 below). Overall, there was a considerable amount of cross-over of victim-type.



Typical of sexual offender research, the sample consisted largely of Caucasian men (88.6%;  $n=93$ ), in addition to 3.8% men who identified as Black ( $n=4$ ), 5.8% of men who identified as “other,” inclusive of Hispanic and American Indian ( $n=6$ ), and 1.9% not responding to this question ( $n=2$ ). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 71 years old, with the mean age of the group 44.39 years ( $SD=9.6$  years). On the whole, the respondents were likely to have attained higher education degrees, with 26.7% reporting an associate’s degree ( $n=28$ ), 26.7% reporting a bachelor’s degree ( $n=28$ ), and 12.4% reporting a master’s or doctoral degree ( $n=13$ ). Out of the total number of respondents, 67.6% reported having a high school diploma ( $n=71$ ), with 33.3% reporting a GED ( $n=35$ ). A large portion of the sample grew up in a household with two parents (67.6%;  $n=71$ ), while 17.1% reported being raised in a house with a single mother ( $n=18$ ), 3.8% in a house with a mother and partner ( $n=4$ ), 2.9% in a house headed by a grandparent ( $n=3$ ), 2.9% in a foster house ( $n=3$ ), 1.9% in a house headed by a single father ( $n=2$ ), and 1.9% in a house headed by “other relative” ( $n=2$ ).

### *Administration*

Individuals were identified for this project based on their involvement with a national, non- profit treatment organization called SATA/CURE-SORT (Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance/ Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants – Sex Offenders Restored through Treatment). A total of 230 surveys were mailed out to program participants, and 147 were returned, for a total response rate of 64%. No incentives were offered for the return of the surveys. Attention to maintaining the anonymity of the participants was paid throughout the project. Participants gave their consent to involvement through a check-mark after completion of the survey. Because many of the

respondents were incarcerated at the time of survey completion, prison security required the use of some identifying information on the return envelopes. To combat this, surveys were returned to the SATA/CURE-SORT office, where staff destroyed traces of identifying information before forwarding the surveys for data entry and analysis to researchers at another site. SPSS 12.0 and 16.0 were used for data entry and analysis.

### *Measures*

The survey included questions aimed at obtaining information about the participants backgrounds, including questions related to their families-of-origin, childhood experiences, educational histories, and histories of previous criminality. This demographic and history form has been used previously in other studies on sexual aggression (Burton, 2003; Burton, Miller & Shill, 2002). This measure includes a number of behavioral scales including number of victims, level of force used with victims, and a question on healthy relationships. From this measure, a 7 point scale of modus operandi, (1 = babysat or played with victims; 2 = threats; 3 = threats and babysat/games; 4 = force; 5 = force and babysat/games; 6 = force and threats; and 7 = force and threats) was created for further analyses.

Included in the survey was the 36-item measure entitled “Experiences in Close Relationships” (ECR, 1998). This measure was created by Brennan et al (1998) with two subscales; Avoidance and Anxiety. The items included on the survey were the result of Brennan’s factor analysis of the previous measures of adult attachment (the one developed by Hazan/Shaver in 1987 and the Relationships Questionnaire (RQ) developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz in 1991). Participants in the study were asked to reflect on questions about their romantic/close relationships with significant, appropriate others



– reactions to being left alone by partner, ability to share feelings with partner, extent to which they feel comfortable getting close to partner, etc. Participants responded to aa1-7 Likert scale, with 1 being “disagree strongly” and 7 being “agree strongly” for each question. In order to determine Bartholomew’s four attachment types, calculations based on the norm sample of 1082 subjects were used as instructed on a web page from one of the measure’s original authors (Shaver, 2002). In the current project, inter-item reliability was sound for both scales, with avoidance  $\alpha = .935$  and anxiety  $\alpha = .89$ .

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## Results

To determine the existence of the four adult attachment types within the surveyed group, their responses to the ECR were scored on the anxiety and the avoidance subscales. The average score on avoidance for the group was 4.23 ( $SD = 1.35$ ) and the average score on anxiety for the group was 4.69 ( $SD = 1.05$ ). Of the 101 men who completed the entire ECR, 2 (2.0%) scored as having a secure attachment type, 8 (7.9%) scored as having a dismissive-avoidant type, 24 (23.8%) scored as having a preoccupied type, and 67 (66.3%) scored as having a fearful-avoidant type.

Because so few of the participants fell into the secure and dismissive-avoidant categories, these types were not used in further analysis. Analyses were completed for the remaining groups to determine differences between the groups. In doing so, a significant difference on the number of victims between the two was not found; however, an implied difference for future research was suggested. Respondents who fell into the preoccupied attachment type reported an average of 12.38 victims ( $SD = 22.72$  victims), while respondents who fell into the fearful attachment type reported an average of 17.84 victims ( $SD = 27.67$  victims) ( $t = .95, p = .173$ ).

The two groups were also assessed for difference with respect to the amount of force used in their offenses. On the whole, many respondents indicated using no force whatsoever. In the preoccupied group, respondents averaged a MO score of 1.22 ( $SD = .61$ ), while in the fearful group, respondents averaged a MO score of 1.68 ( $SD = .91$ ) ( $t = 2.60, p = .012$ ). This indicates a significant difference between the two groups. On the opposite end of the spectrum, respondents indicated that they overwhelmingly engaged in enticing, “courtship” behaviors in interactions with their victims. Answering the question

“Did you offer favors, babysit, play games with, or offer candy to victims?”, 19 (86.4%) within the preoccupied group answered yes, while 37 (61.7%) within the fearful group answered yes. See Table 1 below for more details.

Table 1: Levels of Force (Modus Operandi) by Attachment Type

Level of force	Preoccupied	Fearful
1 = Offered favors, babysat, played games, gave them candy, etc.	19 (86.4%)	37 (61.7%)
2 = Made threats of harm to victim or others	1 (4.5%)	5 (8.3%)
3= Were forceful	2 (9.1%)	18 (30.0%)

The participants in the study were asked to respond to a question asking if they had ever been in a healthy and appropriate romantic relationship with another person. Most of the subjects indicated having been in such a relationship, although this was more likely the case for subjects in the preoccupied category ( $n = 22, 91.7\%$ ) than for those in the fearful category ( $n = 53, 80.3\%$ ). Due to the small cell sizes of the responses, an association between attachment style and relationship history Type could not be determined.

### Discussion

The findings that came out of the study and subsequent analysis suggest several interesting things and also highlight areas in need of further research. To begin with, the breakdown in the attachment types represented within the group was within the range of expectations. Ward, Hudson and Marshall, in their 1996 study of child molesters, rapists, violent non-sex offenders, and non-violent offenders, used the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) to investigate differences in the Bartholomew attachment types between groups. Given that the subjects in the present study are by-and-large child

molesters, the group of child molesters studied by Ward et al are appropriate for comparison. Of 55 child molesters, they found that 10 (18%) were secure, 12 (22%) were preoccupied, 21 (38%) were fearful, and 12 (22%) were dismissing. They had expected to see a greater number of dismissing types and a smaller number of fearful types among the child molesters. While the percentages are different in the two studies (and the sample size of child molesters is smaller in the Ward et al study), in both cases the fearful-avoidant type of attachment is most frequently represented. Unlike the present study, in Ward et al.'s study, almost as many respondents fell into the secure category as the preoccupied and dismissive categories. One key difference between the present group of offenders and Ward's group to keep in mind is the location of the offenders – whereas the offenders were all from the U.S. in the present study, the offenders were from New Zealand in Ward's study.

Another study undertaken by Ward et al (1997) made connections between child molesters' tendencies to be involved in more committed relationships than other types of offenders, their preoccupied attachment style, and their lack of intimacy skills. They argue that child molesters confuse sex with emotional closeness, and offenses tend to escalate when the intimacy deficits get in the way of getting emotional needs met. This is also based on Marshall's (1993) conjectures about the relationship between attachment needs and desires for intimacy being met through deviancy or promiscuity. This frame, previously hypothesized, holds when thinking about the results of the preoccupied group in the present study. It stands to reason that child molesters with a preoccupied style would 1) tend to report a healthy and appropriate relationship (93% did) and also 2) use a "nice" (86.4% of them) approach in relating to their victims. One interesting relationship

to explore in a future study would be the association between periods of dissatisfaction in intimate, “appropriate” relationships and numbers of victims/offenses during those times.

Given that prior research has suggested that rapists and those who use violence in their acts tend to be dismissive in their attachment style, it is fitting that there were not enough dismissive respondents to this survey to do an analysis (Ward et al, 1996; Ward et al, 1997). As mentioned previously, the participants in this study were almost exclusively child molesters, and their crimes tended to be low on the force scale. This suggests an area for additional research, and the importance of finding a sample that includes a diversity of offender-types.

Even with the constraints of the sample, a statistically significant difference was found between the two groups with respect to their use of force – the preoccupied group, as hypothesized, had a lower force score than did the fearful group. Comparing the two attachment styles, individuals with a preoccupied style are low on avoidance and high on anxiety, while individuals with a fearful attachment style are high on both avoidance and anxiety. So there is likely something within the avoidance realm that is involved with the modus operandi of the fearful group. Unlike the preoccupied group, whose members may use the victimization of children as a stand-in for the emotional closeness they crave, the fearful group may be acting out from a sense of extreme sensitivity to rejection. While preoccupied individuals tend to think well of their intimate partners, fearful individuals assume the worst about their peers and partners. A reaction from a place of extreme sensitivity, and less care about cultivating or “courting” a relationship with a victim, would seem to predict a higher force score (Ward et al, 1997). These findings seem to be in line, then, with what the literature says about adult attachment styles.

Additionally, perhaps the anxiety results– that both groups tend to be high on that scale – is another way of explaining both groups’ targeting children, as opposed to adults, to victimize. As Marshall (1993) suggested, there is less of a worry about being overpowered or threatened by a child, making victimization of children more compelling for this group. Lastly, both preoccupied and fearful individuals have in common a sense of self that it is generally negative (Ward et al, 1997). This potentially explains the pull towards victimization of children versus adults, since, as Marshall suggested, there is less of a threat of being overpowered or being rejected with children.

Even though it was not a significant difference, there was implied notable difference in the numbers of victims between the two groups, with the fearful group having a greater average number (nearly 50% greater) of victims than the preoccupied group. It would seem to follow from the hypotheses already posed about the relationship-seeking quality of preoccupied individuals versus the avoidant, reactionary posture of fearful individuals that the fearful group would have a larger average number of victims. However, to detect if this is an actual versus a random difference, a larger sample is needed. Thus, further research is needed in order to make any substantial claims about the differences between the two styles in terms of victim numbers.

The last finding of note was the respondents’ answers to questions about whether they had been in an appropriate, healthy romantic relationship. By and large, the group responding to this survey found themselves in healthy, appropriate romantic relationships - 80% of the time (for those with fearful attachments) and 93% of the time (for those with preoccupied attachments). This is in keeping with what Ward et al (1997) found, namely, that, nonviolent offenders were more satisfied with their intimate, sexual

relationships than were violent offenders or rapists. Since we found that the sample were overwhelmingly nice in their courtship or grooming behaviors towards the victims, a relationship between the ability to sustain a romantic relationship and the lack of forceful aggression towards victims is supported.

As has been suggested throughout, a larger, more diverse sample is needed in order to more clearly assess differences across the four attachment styles. A four group sample composed of child molesters and rapists, as well as violent and nonviolent offenders, would help elucidate the differences in offenders' modus operandi, use of force, and number and type of victim, and would expand on the work already outlined by Ward et al (1996 and 1997). Moreover, further investigations to help clarify the reasons why, in intrapsychic, cognitive, and behavioral terms, the relationship between attachment style and victim choice, use of force, and modus operandi exists. While these and other differences have been explored, differences along a number of variables have yet to given a lot of attention in the literature.

All of these questions have direct application to clinical work. To begin with, assessment is a key piece of any clinical intervention with an offender. Knowing the attachment style, then, helps clinicians get a general sense of the ways an offender likely interacted with their victims. This has implications for the offender's ability to align with a therapist, and this is a key piece of the treatment efficacy. Serran, Fernandez, Marshall and Mann (2003) found that the therapeutic alliance between offender and clinician is one of the most important variables in the outcome of the therapy. Additionally, attachment theory suggests that engagement with individuals in a treatment relationship is predicated on their ability to form an attachment to a new object – in this case, a

therapist. As Shilkret (2005) suggests, it is of utmost importance to the therapist/client dyad to have a sense of the client's working attachment style. It would be important to know when the attachment system is getting activated, perhaps signaling tendencies towards re-offending, and when/how to focus interventions so that they have the greatest impact. Furthermore, identification of particularly at-risk offenders (those in-between romantic relationships – a period of vulnerability Ward (1997) et al have suggested) can be improved with greater attention to the adult attachment styles of the offenders. Lastly, it has been suggested by some researchers that internal templates for relating to others can shift over the course of a lifetime. If this is the case, attention to offenders' present ways of relating to the world, with the intention of helping those patterns to shift, is valuable.



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Pornography Use and its Impact on Sexual Offending Among Severe Adult Child  
Molesters

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## Abstract

The extent to which pornography use plays a role in the development of sexually offending behaviors has been debated in the literature. The question is a controversial one for many reasons, beginning with the very act of defining pornography, and continuing with those who view pornography as dangerous, those who view it as potentially cathartic, and those who suggest a more complicated relationship. Current research indicates that pornography may be dangerous for a sub-set of the population who may be predisposed to sexually offend, for a variety of developmental reasons. Based on this, data from 105 adult, male sex offenders – most of whom were incarcerated, and primarily fell into the category of child molesters – was collected with the hope of getting a clearer picture of the relationship between the pornography they consumed and their offenses. Relationships between the frequency of use of pornography and the number of victims, the type of pornography viewed and the type of victims (by gender and age) abused, and the arousal rates to various types of pornography and victim types were all hypothesized.

A relationship that we expected to see – that pornography use, especially in close proximity to the offenses, is associated with a greater number of victims, and greater victimization in general – did not hold true. While frequency of use of child pornography was moderately related to the number of child victims, the relationship was not a strong one, as was expected. Differences between male and female child victims were shown in a couple of different analyses, suggesting areas for further study. Arousal to various kinds of pornography was shown to be strongly related to numbers and types of victims, especially in the case of arousal to and abuse of female victims under the age of 10.

More examination of the complex relationship between arousal, pornography viewed, and offending behaviors are suggested by the results of this project. Implications of this and further research include the identification of those prone to re-offend and programs to target and treat those individuals.

### Background

Much attention has been paid to the possible consequences of pornography consumption on individuals and the societies in which they live (Vega & Malamuth, 2007; Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000; Marshall, 1988; Seto, Maric, & Barbaree, 2001; Carter, Prentky, Knight, Vanderveer, & Boucher, 1987). Of particular interest is the potential role that some forms of pornography may play in sexually aggressive behaviors. The question does not come without a host of social and political baggage. Writers have divided the field into several different camps, each of which attributes its own theories to the pornography question, namely, to what extent viewing pornography affects one's tendency towards sexual aggression. Malamuth and Billings (1984) provided an overview of the perspectives, ranging from those who view pornography as a form of sexual communication, psychoanalytic theorists who suggest that pornography helps resolve developmental conflicts, Marxist theorists who position pornography as a form of dominance over those of lower status, feminists who see pornography as a tool of patriarchy to keep women in a one-down position, religious or moralist figures who confront pornography as an assault on the values of a community, to sociologists who see pornography as one measure of a society's ability to withstand change (Malamuth & Billings, 1984; Seto et al, 2001).

Another frame for understanding the discourse around pornography is offered by Linz and Malamuth (1993). They suggested three overarching ideologies that shape how pornography is defined – liberal, radical feminist, and conservative – and consequently, these views have shaped the study of pornography and its effects (Linz & Malamuth, 1993; Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000). Yet another frame for looking at pornography is the one offered by Senn (1993), who, attending to the role of women in shaping opinions about pornography, contrasts the radical feminist perspective (antipornography) with the liberal, psychoanalytic, or socialist feminist (anticensorship) perspective. Here there is particular attention paid to the way both sides have developed a body of research and theories to position their views (Senn, 1993). In looking at all of these conceptual contributions to the literature about pornography, what becomes clear is that the discourses surrounding the study of pornography are politically charged and controversial.

Given the multiple ways pornography has been framed, operationalizing the term is complex. The etymology of the word ‘pornography’ is Greek, translating to the writing of harlots, or elsewhere, of prostitutes (Seto et al 2001; Malamuth & Billings, 1984). Distinctions have been made between pornography and erotica, violent and non-violent pornography, violent and degrading pornography, and “inoffensive erotic art and pruriently offensive material” (Carter et al, 1987; Seto et al, 2001; Marshall, 1988; Senn, 1993; Malamuth and Ceniti, 1985). Others use the more inclusive category “sexually explicit media” to talk about all forms of material that have, as their intent, to be sexually arousing to the consumer. To distinguish between nonviolent pornography (“consenting sexual depictions”) and violent pornography (“sexually violent media”), these same

authors use “coercive material” as the dividing line (Vega and Malamuth, 2007; Malamuth et al, 2000). The legal system in the U.S. has been similarly challenged to arrive at a clear definition of pornography. As Justice Stewart wrote, concurring with the *Jacobellis v. Ohio* appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it...” (Stewart, 1964).

While pornography is difficult to define, a look at the literature suggests a split between those who feel that pornography plays a contributing role in the problem of sexual offending, and those who either suggest the opposite, or do not support any relationship between the two. Seto et al (2001) summarize the three types of findings (via causal models) in the literature regarding the impact of pornography on sexually aggressive behaviors as follows: “Pornography may have both direct and indirect effects on sexual offending, require the presence of an additional ‘catalyst’ factor to have these effects, and may be at least partly related because of common predispositional or situational factors” (p. 40).

To begin with, there is a small body of research that points to a possible preventive effect. Researchers have termed this the “catharsis hypothesis,” or the, “use of sex materials to relieve an impulse to commit an offense” (Carter et al, 1987). Their data -- self-reports -- supports the catharsis hypothesis as it applies to child molesters; they appear to use pornographic material in lieu of acting out their impulses (Carter et al, 1987). The researchers posited an explanation that pornography, for certain types of offenders, serves as a middle ground between an internal fantasy world and offending



behaviors. However, this appears to be true only for a small and undefined subtype of offenders' reporting. All in all, the research on the catharsis hypothesis is limited and does not seem to be in line with a more current review of the literature.

In addition, some research on the broad, population level has suggested that when a culture's global use of pornography increases, there is no corresponding, parallel increase in sexual offending. Kutchinsky examined the incidence of sexual violent crime during a period of time in the U.S., Denmark, West Germany, and Sweden (1964-1984) when pornography became more accessible due to lessening constraints on obtaining it. He did not find a corresponding increase in the number of relevant crimes (Kutchinsky, 1991, in Seto et al 2001) although such is infamously difficult to measure. Other researchers have similar conclusions about the relationship between availability of pornography and sexual violence, or have suggested that the increase in availability of such materials is a myth, unsupported by evidence (Fisher & Grenier, 1994). However, and contrary to these finding and opinions, some population-level studies' authors were able to correlate availability of pornography and rate of sex crimes (Court, 1976; and Cline, 1974; both as cited in Marshall, 1988; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981).

A number of reviews of empirical research have been published with the intent to critique the body of research that suggests that pornography is related to increased sexually offending behaviors. For example, Mould's (1998) work looked at Malamuth and Check's research on the effects of pornography on "rape proclivity" for both offenders and non-offenders, through self-reports and penile tumescence measures. Looking at both this research and at research by Abel et al, Mould critiqued the validity of the construct of "proclivity." Findings by Donnerstein and Berkowitz, from their

experiments examining relationships between varying depictions of females in pornographic films and subsequent behavior, were also scrutinized regarding limited generalizability beyond the lab and faulty assertions targeted as areas of concern (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982; Mould, 1988). Mould suggests that "...a close examination of research directly concerned with violence embedded in erotica indicates serious flaws in the design, validity, and generalizability of virtually every aspect considered" (p. 339, 1988).

In a similar vein, Fisher and Grenier's (1994) research has focused on critiquing the findings suggesting links between aggression in pornography and sexual violence against women. Their work included a broad review of the literature and the creation of a chart listing the critiques of each study or experiment under review, with the general conclusion that the research "fails to confirm" any notable effects from exposure to pornography on violence (Fisher & Grenier, 1994; Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000). While Fisher and Grenier's research has also been critiqued, it is important to consider that there is a conflict in the literature about the impact of pornography on sexually offending behaviors.

A current look at the research seems to overwhelmingly point to the impact of pornography as having a multiplier effect on certain types of offenders who may be predisposed to a sensitivity to its use. The descriptors of offenders who possess this vulnerability are complex, but most seem to involve an aggressive personality, a tendency towards irritability, and traits associated with antisocial personality disorder (Marshall, 1988; Seto et al, 2001; Vega & Malamuth, 2007; Malamuth et al, 1995; Malamuth & Ceniti, 1996). As Marshall suggests,

...exposure to or the persistent pursuit of sexually explicit materials will not be essential to the etiology and maintenance of sexual offending; but should a man, coming from the background we described (unfortunate formative experiences), be exposed to these stimuli, it should have a stronger negative impact upon him than upon others (p. 269, 1988).

Marshall's social learning theory posits that certain characteristics and experiences – neglect during childhood, exposure to traditional gender roles with the addition of a powerful, male figure, lack of social skills training, and others – prime men to seek out materials that help reinforce their sense of themselves as males. Marshall argues that these men look towards the type of pornography that props up “hypermasculinity” – and this typically includes material that includes aggression towards women, or humiliation and domination of women. This further confirms their beliefs that women need to be dominated, thus this is one way that pornography can have an intensifier effect on men who may be at risk for sexual offender status (Marshall, 1988; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990).

For some men, however, the idea of overpowering a woman feels too threatening. Marshall suggests that this group of men is more likely to turn to pornography featuring children, because they can have their overpowering needs met in a less threatening way. Just as with porn involving aggression towards women, child pornography, as predicted, will have a reinforcing quality and, Marshall argues, will likely be used in anticipation of offending (1988).

Empirical findings from Marshall's (1988) research, in keeping with later research on this topic, point to a greater use of sexually explicit material by both child molesters and rapists than by non-offenders or by incest offenders. Additionally, high percentages of both rapists and child molesters reported that pornography incited them or

was part of their planned preparation for offending – 53% of child molesters and 33% of rapists who were studied. Marshall’s research is in line with Carter et al.’s suggestion that the effect of pornography is more powerful for child molesters than it is for other types of offenders (Marshall, 1988; Carter et al, 1987).

Other ways of thinking about the effect of pornography on behavior is suggested by the Confluence Model. Malamuth and Sockluskie (1991) have suggested that early negative experiences interact in such a way as to put some children onto a path of sexually aggressive behavior against women. While several factors are at play in the model, it suggests the etiology of sexual offending via a hyper-masculinity path and via a sexual promiscuity path. Other research has suggested that pornography may interact with the risk factors accounted for in the model to increase the likelihood of sexually offending behaviors (Malamuth & Ceniti, 1986). Vega and Malamuth (2007) suggest that “...analyses indicated that the reason pornography contributed significantly to the overall equation is because of its importance in the context of men who are at relatively high risk for sexual aggression” (p. 114).

After a review of the literature, it is clear that the relationship between pornography use by adult male sexual offenders and their sexual offenses is complex, yet powerful. Looking further at convicted, incarcerated, offenders should yield valuable information on the extent to which pornography’s multiplier effects on behavior show up in relation to their pornography use. Because of the multiplier effect others have found, and because others have found that child molesters, especially, are likely to use pornography as part of their aggression, it also is probable to find a relationship between the type of pornography consumed and the type of victim involved in the offense.

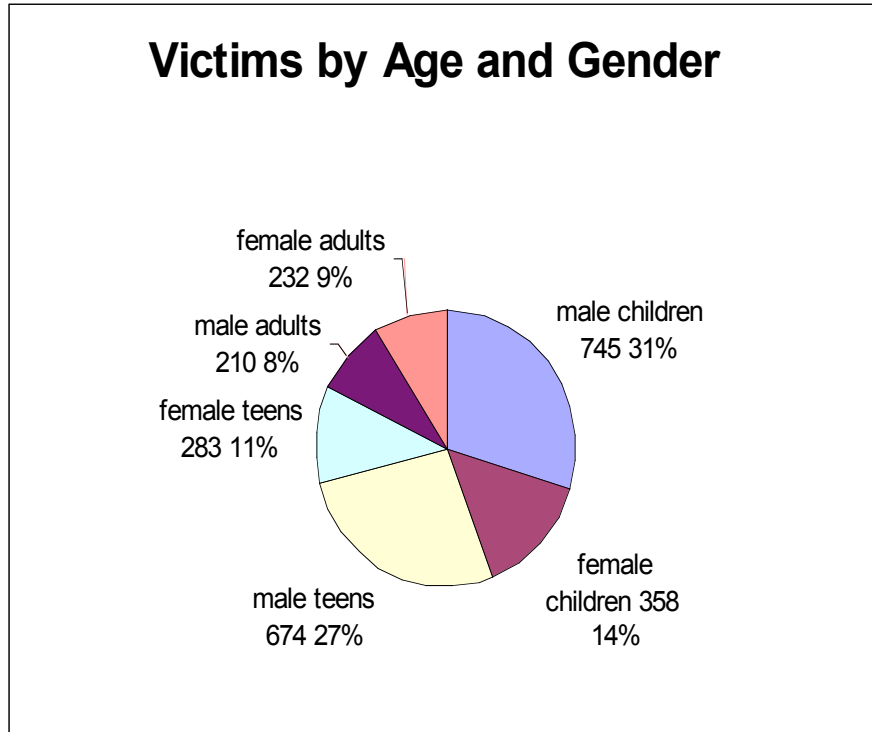
Another relationship I would expect to see would be between the types of offenses committed and the offenders' self-reports of pornography viewed, especially in close proximity to the event (either before or after). Many researchers have suggested that masturbatory fantasies facilitate the relationship between the pornography viewed and the behaviors expressed in close proximity to the viewing. It stands to reason that what is viewed is chosen in part for its high-arousal rate, helping to determine the intensity of the fantasies, and thus also the offenses that are committed. I would also expect to see a strong relationship between arousal vis-à-vis what is chosen to view and types of offenses because research has already suggested that some types of offenders (child molesters, for instance) use pornography differently than other sexual offenders. If this is true, then there is likely something about the way the pornography is consumed, processed, and acted out (i.e., in the midst of an offense or in close proximity to) that effects those offenders and, in turn, the way they victimize, differently than with other, non-using offenders. Given all of the above, especially the known multiplier effect of pornography, I would also expect to see a relationship between amount of pornography viewed, in both childhood and adulthood, and the total number of victims an offender has abused.

## Methods

The survey for the project was created with the participation of sexual abusers who have undergone treatment, under the supervision of Wayne Bowers at the Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance (see below for details).

### *Participants*

105 adult males, all of whom have sexually abused children, make up the project sample. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents reported being incarcerated at the time of survey completion, and 87% reported previous incarceration. Because of the anonymity of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to report a wide array of sexual crimes without concern about reprisal. Respondents were able to select from several different victim-types, with respect to victim age, gender, relationship to offender, etc. Collectively, they reported 1,720 victims, with each participant averaging 16.38 victims (the *range* was from 1-122, *SD* 25.08 victims), and 19 different combinations of gender and age group were reported by the men across their offenses (for example one subject abused male children, male teens and adult women). Of the total respondents, 26.67% reported abusing only one gender and age combination (See Figure 1 below). Overall, there was a considerable amount of cross-over of victim-type.



Typical of sexual offender research, the sample consisted largely of Caucasian men (88.6%;  $n=93$ ), in addition to 3.8% men who identified as Black ( $n=4$ ), 5.8% of men who identified as “other,” inclusive of Hispanic and American Indian ( $n=6$ ), and 1.9% not responding to this question ( $n=2$ ). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 71 years old, with the mean age of the group 44.39 years ( $SD=9.6$  years). On the whole, the respondents were likely to have attained higher education degrees, with 26.7% reporting an associate’s degree ( $n=28$ ), 26.7% reporting a bachelor’s degree ( $n=28$ ), and 12.4% reporting a master’s or doctoral degree ( $n=13$ ). Out of the total number of respondents, 67.6% reported having a high school diploma ( $n=71$ ), with 33.3% reporting a GED ( $n=35$ ). A large portion of the sample grew up in a household with two parents (67.6%;  $n=71$ ), while 17.1% reported being raised in a house with a single mother ( $n=18$ ), 3.8% in a house with a mother and partner ( $n=4$ ), 2.9% in a house headed by a grandparent ( $n=3$ ),

2.9% in a foster house ( $n=3$ ), 1.9% in a house headed by a single father ( $n=2$ ), and 1.9% in a house headed by “other relative” ( $n=2$ ).

### *Administration*

Individuals were identified for this project based on their involvement with a national, non-profit treatment organization called SATA/CURE-SORT (Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance/ Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants – Sex Offenders Restored through Treatment). A total of 230 surveys were mailed out to program participants, and 147 were returned, for a total response rate of 64%. No incentives were offered for the return of the surveys. Attention to maintaining the anonymity of the participants was paid throughout the project. Participants gave their consent to involvement through a check-mark after completion of the survey. Because many of the respondents were incarcerated at the time of survey completion, prison security required the use of some identifying information on the return envelopes. To combat this, surveys were returned to the SATA/CURE-SORT office, where staff destroyed traces of identifying information before forwarding the surveys for data entry and analysis to researchers at another site. SPSS 12.0 and 16.0 were used for data entry and analysis.

### *Measures*

The survey included questions aimed at obtaining information about the participants backgrounds, including questions related to their families-of-origin, childhood experiences, educational histories, and histories of previous criminality. This demographic and history form has been used previously in other studies on sexual aggression (Burton, 2003; Burton, Miller & Shill, 2002). The survey includes several ordinal behavioral scales, targeting potential areas of sexual arousal (for instance, arousal



to females under 12, males 12-18, etc). Respondents were asked to use a 0 (not at all) to 4 (a great deal) scale. They were also asked if they had used pornography in close proximity to - a question asking about use just before and another question asking about use just after their offenses - using a 1 (never) to 5 (always) scale.

To measure pornography exposure/use, a pencil and paper version of Leguizamo's (2000) interview was developed. These questions evaluate the frequency of childhood (before the age of 10) and adolescent exposure to or use of several types of pornography, including child pornography and violent forms of pornography, on the following scale: 0 (never), 1 (1-5 times), 2 (6-25 times), 3 (26-50 times), 4 (51-100 times), to 6 (over 500 times). The scales used in the current project have good inter-item reliability, with viewing child pornography as an adult  $\alpha = .93$ , and viewing forceful pornography as an adult  $\alpha = .795$ .

### Results

Using simple correlations, given that this is a cross-sectional design, the proposed hypotheses are reviewed below. Table 1 lists the varying amounts of exposure to pornography, based on type, that respondents indicated receiving prior to and after the age of 10. For exposure in the form of viewing naked adults in movies or photos, or viewing adults having sex in movies or photos, respondents were much more likely to have seen that material when they were over the age of 10 than before 10. For instance, participants reported an average score of .44 ( $SD=1.067$ ) on whether they had seen adults having sex in movies before the age of 10, compared to a score of 3.5 ( $SD=1.977$ ) on response to the same after the age of 10. Here, the scale of 0-1 suggests that respondents fell in the range of viewing this material 0-5 times, whereas the scale between 3 and 4

suggests that respondents saw the material between 26-100 times. However, material that was, on the whole, less likely to have been viewed by respondents at any age, had more similar rates of use before and after the age of 10. As an example, respondents reported a score of .12 ( $SD=.43$ ) on exposure to adults having sex with children in photos before the age of 10, and they reported a score of .69 ( $SD=1.466$ ) on exposure to adults having sex with children in photos after the age of 10. The rate of exposure to forceful sex in person (adults forcing adults to have sex in person) also showed similar before-and-after rates of use, with exposure before the age of 10 scoring a .11 ( $SD=.552$ ), and exposure after the age of 10 scoring a .25 ( $SD=.843$ ).

Table 1: Pornography exposure and use by age group

	Mean	Std. Deviation		Mean	Std. Deviation
Before the age of 10, how many times* had you seen... (sorted by mean within age group)			After the age of 10, how many times* had you seen... (sorted by mean within age group)		
naked children in person	1.86	1.86	naked adults in photos	4.28	1.85
naked adults in person	1.32	1.42	naked adults in person	3.70	1.93
naked adults in photos	1.18	1.38	adults having sex in photos	3.59	2.08
adults having sex in photos	0.71	1.20	naked adults in movies	3.52	1.99
children having sex with children in person	0.65	1.19	adults having sex movies	3.50	1.98
naked adults in movies	0.44	0.90	naked children in person	3.00	2.02
adults having sex movies	0.44	1.07	adults having sex in person	1.74	1.76
adults having sex in person	0.40	0.84	naked children in photos	1.54	1.87
naked children in photos	0.39	0.87	naked adults on the web**	1.21	2.12
adults having sex with children in person	0.36	1.01	adults forcing adults to have sex in movies	1.04	1.45

naked children in movies	0.13	0.46	naked children in movies	0.84	1.43
adults having sex with children in photos	0.12	0.43	adults having sex on the web**	0.78	1.75
adults forcing adults to have sex in movies	0.11	0.54	naked children on the web**	0.76	1.78
adults forcing adults to have sex in person	0.11	0.55	children having sex with children in person	0.76	1.42
children having sex with children in photos	0.11	0.47	adults having sex with children in photos	0.69	1.47
adults forcing adults to have sex in photographs	0.05	0.31	adults forcing adults to have sex in photographs	0.68	1.33
adults having sex with children in movies	0.04	0.26	children having sex with children in photos	0.68	1.58
children having sex with children in movies	0.03	0.27	adults having sex with children in person	0.55	1.29
naked adults on the web**	0.00	0.00	children having sex with children on the web**	0.47	1.43
naked children on the web**	0.00	0.00	adults having sex with children in movies	0.44	1.14
adults having sex on the web**	0.00	0.00	adults having sex with children on the web**	0.43	1.35
adults forcing adults to have sex on the web	0.00	0.00	children having sex with children in movies	0.38	1.22
adults having sex with children on the web**	0.00	0.00	adults forcing adults to have sex in person	0.25	0.84
children having sex with children on the web**	0.00	0.00	adults forcing adults to have sex on the web	0.25	0.91

\* 0 = never, 1=1-5 times, 2=6-25 times, 3=26-50 times, 4=51-100 times, 5=101-500 times, 6= over 500 times

\*\* given the average age of the sample, the internet was not very active when they were under 10 years of age.

The first hypothesis, that frequency of use of pornography prior to offending would be correlated with a greater number of victims, a relationship thought to be particularly strong for child pornography and child victims, did not bear out. Thus, the related hypothesis, that there is a relationship between pornography use and its impact on victimization, was not supported.

*Pornography and victims by age*

In a simple cross tabulation, viewing child pornography as an adult was not related to abusing children ( $\chi^2 = .823$ ,  $p = .36$ ) (see Table 2). However, the number of child victims is significantly related, although not with a large correlation coefficient, to frequency of use of child pornography as adults. Breaking down the child victim numbers in terms of number of male victims versus the number of female victims, it appears that there is a larger correlation between number of female victims and use of child pornography as an adult. The number of female child victims is significantly related – it has a small correlation to frequency of use of child pornography as an adult ( $r = .272$ ,  $p < .01$ ). While the number of male victims and frequency of use of child pornography as an adult is also significantly related, the relationship is smaller ( $r = .132$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

*Arousal and pornography*

The hypothesis concerning the relationship between exposure to pornography and number of victims was predicated on the involvement of arousal in the space between the material and the acts, as suggested by the literature. Arousal levels to children were

Table 2: Use of child pornography of adult and having abused children

	Abused Children	Did not abuse children	TOTALS
Viewed child pornography as an adult	44 (40.37%)	16 (14.68%)	60 (55.04%)
Did not view child pornography as an adult	32 (29.36%)	17 (15.60%)	49 (45.06%)
TOTALS	76 (69.72%)	33 (30.28%)	109 (100%)

found to be significantly related, though with small correlation coefficients, to frequency of use of child pornography in adulthood. Breaking this down further into male and female categories, the respondents' arousal to females under the age of 12 had a small, albeit significant, correlation to respondents' frequency of use of child pornography as an adult ( $r = .171, p < .05$ ). In comparison, the respondents' arousal to males under 12 had a larger significant correlation to respondents' frequency of use of child pornography as an adult ( $r = .307, p < .01$ ). Likewise, there is a positive significant correlation between respondents' arousal to rape and their frequency of use of forceful pornography as an adult ( $r = .273, p < .01$ ).

#### *Arousal and victims*

When looking at arousal type in relation to number of victims by age, there appears to be a relationship between the two. Comparing respondents' arousal to females under 12 and the number of female children they reported abusing, there is a moderate correlation ( $r = .631, p < .01$ ). Likewise, when comparing respondents' arousal to males under 12 and the number of male children they reported abusing, there is also a moderate, although smaller correlation ( $r = .474, p < .01$ ).

#### *Pornography use before offenses*

Table 3, below, shows the participants' self-reports of their use of pornography just prior to their offenses. Almost half (n = 67, 45.6%) of the respondents indicated "never" having used pornography just before their sexual offenses. However, a total of 22.4% (n = 33) of the respondents indicated that they "usually", "most of the time", or "always" used pornography before offending.

Table 3: Use of pornography just prior to offenses

Response	n	Percent
Never	67	45.6
Sometimes	47	32.0
Usually	8	5.4
Most of the time	15	10.2
Always	10	6.8
Total	147	100

*Multivariate analysis*

An analysis of the variables of arousal level to male children under 12, having looked at pornography just before offenses, and use of child pornography, was conducted using a stepwise regression (due to the small correlations, the cross-sectional design, and no a priori model of hierarchy). In this multivariate analysis, only arousal remained in the model (F = 23.8, p < .001), accounting for 22.5% of the variance in the number of male, child victims (r<sup>2</sup> = .225). Please see Table 4 for results.

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis 1

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	-2.438	3.314		.464
male under 12	7.833	1.603	.475	.000

a Dependent Variable: sexually abused male children

In a parallel analysis conducted for female victims under the age of 12, the results were different. In this case, arousal to female child victims remained the strongest variable, but use of child pornography also helped to significantly account for the number of victims

( $F = 36.8, p < .001$ ), accounting for a total of 43.2% of the number of female, child victims. Please see Table 5 for these results.

Table 5: Multivariate Analysis 2

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	-.726	.646		.263
female under 12	2.428	.316	.597	.000
child pornography exposure	.091	.037	.188	.018

a Dependent Variable: sexually abused female children

### Discussion

The participants in the study were by-and-large incarcerated men, all of whom sexually molested children. As previously reviewed, many of these participants were exposed to pornography as children and have used pornography as adults, and exposure to child pornography and forceful pornography was prominent (over half of the total participants reported having viewed child pornography as adults). Given that the literature under review pointed to the multiplier effect that pornography can have on individuals who are prone towards abusive acts, as in people high on “hypermasculinity” scales or people with aspects of antisocial personality disorder, looking at the relationships between their frequency and type of use and their acts, number of victims, and arousal levels, is warranted (Marshall, 1988; Seto et al, 2001; Vega & Malamuth, 2007). It is also important to keep in mind that the survey was conducted anonymously, and detailed accounts of each individual victim were asked for and indicated. It is more likely, then, that even the large numbers of victims reported by participants are real, though they may look like outliers in the analysis.

Reflecting on the results of the analyses, a few of the findings stand out. At an overarching level, the mean uses of pornography as adults were much higher – as much as four times as high – than were exposure rates for under the age of 10 (see Table 1). Secondly, the material viewed by adults with great frequency (the means ranked number 6 and number 8 out of the total 24 categories) included naked children in person and naked children in photos. These were viewed in similar or greater frequency to much of the material featuring adults, suggesting the population is less interested in viewing adults than they are children. This sheds light on the population participating in the survey – severe child molesters. Lastly, an important finding of the study is the high rate of exposure to naked adults (in person and in photos) reported by participants when they were under the age of 10 – the means ranked number 2 and number 3, respectively, with only “seeing children naked” ranked higher. This is in keeping with what is reported in the literature about the role of sexual abuse, of at least exposure (i.e. potential sexualization), in the etiology of sexual offending (Hudson & Ward, 2000).

When looking side-by-side at the respondents’ frequency of use of child-themed pornographic material prior to offenses and whether or not they abused children, it appears that there is not a meaningful relationship between the two. In a similar vein, though the relationship between using child pornography and the number of child victims was significant, there was not a very large correlation between the two. The research previously done and written about by Marshall (1988), Carter, et al (1987), and others, suggested that viewing any pornography, and specifically, child pornography, was potentially dangerous for individuals who were predisposed to offend. Marshall’s social learning theory (1988) used behavioral language to describe the reinforcing quality that



exposure to child pornography could have on certain groups of men, suggesting a relationship between people who view child pornography and people who offend against children.

The above results, then, stand mostly in contrast to what was hypothesized about the relationship between pornography and offending based on the literature. It also presents evidence countering the moderation hypothesis proposed (based on others' research) – that greater frequency of pornography use before offenses would be reflected in the relationship between child pornography use and the number of child victims (Vega & Malamuth, 2007) – given that the correlations found were small. Interestingly, there appears to be a difference between the effects of pornography and offenders' selections/numbers of male and female child victims. There was a stronger correlation between child pornography use and abuse of female children than child pornography use and the abuse of male children. This was not something explored in the literature, and it is worthy of further attention.

Analyses involving arousal produced the most statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$  in the multivariate analysis) and relationships in the study. Researchers have suggested further study of the masturbatory fantasies and high-arousal rates that factor into the pornography that is selected for viewing, and, as has previously been suggested, increases the type/number of victims abused. While the simple comparison tests showed significant relationships between arousal to children and frequency of use of child pornography, there were relatively small correlations. Again, just as with above, there was a difference in correlation strength when looking at arousal to males under 12 and pornography use versus arousal to females to under 12 and pornography use, with, in this

case, arousal to males having a larger correlation. Arousal and relationships to types of victims were also examined side-by-side, with moderate relationships resulting. Again, difference along male/female lines was detected. The relationship between arousal to females under 12 and number of female children abused was a stronger relationship than the one between arousal to males under 12 and number of male children abused. This in itself is interesting – what accounts for the stronger relationship between arousal to male children and pornography use relative to females, and yet a stronger relationship between arousal to female children and abuse of them, relative to males? One possibility is that is easier to gain access to female children versus male children, so that arousal to males is less likely to relate to something actually occurring with a child of that sex than arousal to females is with a female. Female children may be more likely to be left in proximity to older males than male children, or, they may be seen as easier to victimize and power-over than male children. The question of access also may explain the stronger relationship between arousal to males and viewing male child pornography – when the real-world variable of gaining access to a male child is at play, male child pornography substitutes.

Arousal continues to be a variable worth further attention after looking at the multivariate analyses that were conducted - here arousal bears out as well. When compared with viewing pornography just before offenses and frequency of use of child pornography, arousal was stronger than the other two variables in explaining the number of victims. Notably, the other two variables are related to arousal as well for females, but more projects with larger sample sizes are needed to determine the interactions between these three variables. Just as with the above, there is a difference between males and

females in the multivariate analyses, namely that in addition to arousal to female children, use of child pornography accounts for the number of female victims. One explanation may be the availability of material. Given societal heteronormativity and stigma associated with same-sex partner choice, and considering that child molesters are by-and-large men, it seems likely that fewer pornographic materials featuring male children exist.

Though the total number of rapes reported was small, and in general, the participants in the study were child molesters, analysis suggesting a positive relationship between use of forceful pornography as an adult and arousal to rape is also an important finding, for what it suggests about the importance of studying arousal. This indicates, however, that more research is needed to study the impact of forceful pornography on arousal rates that may be dangerous for individuals already predisposed towards sexually aggressive behavior against women.

Overall, arousal is worthy of further attention for a variety of reasons. When looking at this variable, it is important to consider that: 1) unlike some of the research reported on earlier, the arousal measured here is self-reported, and it is not measured in response to material in the here-and-now, but rather reflecting back on prior exposure, 2) arousal to victims, situations, etc can be seen as informing the material that offenders seek out, but it is also created by that material once the offender is exposed to it – a complicated relationship in need of further study, and 3.) deviant arousal is one of the strongest predictors of sexual recidivism, an important treatment consideration (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998).

The findings of this study, based on the research questions posed, suggest several research areas for further study. Contrary to what was expected, the use of pornography just before or just after offenses did not appear to be correlated to the number of victims. Given that this deviated from other reported results, one indicated area for future research would be comparisons between groups - those who looked at pornography before and after offenses and those who did not. This is especially relevant in light of the fact that about half of the participants in this study indicated “never” having looked at pornography in close proximity to their offenses. It would be useful to see if additional studies confirm the moderation hypothesis, or if, like this one, additional results do not support it. Likewise, the use of forceful pornography in close proximity to rape is in need of additional study; a limitation of the study under review is the limited number of rapists included in the sample, making it difficult to make any claims relevant to the moderating effect of pornography on sexual offending against adults.

More research on arousal and its intermediary effects are needed based on the findings of this project. Arousal produced the most statistically significant findings of the study, and it stood out in the multivariate analyses as the strongest factor. More multivariate analyses are needed to untangle the complex relationships between arousal, frequency of use of pornography (especially child pornography), and use of pornography in close proximity to the offense. Models that could help explain the difference in arousal rates to male vs. female children are areas for further investigation. Similarly, models and explanations that could help account for the stronger relationship between arousal to female children and numbers of female children abused, vs. a less strong relationship between arousal to male children and numbers of male children abused are

needed. While the hypothesis about access to female children is one potential explanation for this difference, more study is needed to see if this accounts for a difference, if the difference is in fact an actual difference.

Looking at the whole of the results, the arousal findings are particularly meaningful in terms of applications to clinical work. Knowing more about how arousal is related to offending will allow clinicians to more accurately know where, when, and how to intervene to limit the impact of fantasy on an offender's recidivism rate. Treatment can also be better utilized if the intermediary effects of pornography on offending can be more accurately assessed. Lastly, further knowledge about the types of individuals who are prone or predisposed to sexual offending, due to the factors that others have noted (neglect, exposure to violence in the family, etc), may help the development of models that elucidate pornography's role in the etiology of sexual offending. Thus, even if there is little predictive power in the relationships under review, they will make contributions to the greater understanding of the development into and treatment of sex offenders, with particular attention to the antisocial personality- type males who make up a large percentage of sex offenders and are also difficult to engage in treatment (Vega & Malamuth, 2007).

Other clinical implications are limited, due to the small sample size of this project. As mentioned elsewhere, it is also worth noting that arousal rates collected via the survey are through retrospective, albeit anonymous, self-reports, which has its limits. As such, additional ways of measuring arousal rates, particularly in an appropriate laboratory context, are necessary. While arousal has been targeted as an important factor in re-offending, there has been very little research to this end on changing arousal

patterns (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998). Thus, more attention to the implementation and evaluation of programs aimed at this goal makes sense.

A few limitations of this project have been suggested throughout, but one area to highlight would be the population who responded to the survey. A more diverse sample, inclusive of more people who offend against adults, may have produced very different results to the questions posed about pornography use. For instance, the modus operandi of child molesters, as noted in the literature, tends to look much different for child molesters than they do for offenders who offend against adults. Also, as noted elsewhere, the numbers of victims reported by each participant in the study are on the high side. It would be important, then, in future studies, to include respondents who are less severe in their offenses than the ones who responded to this survey.

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Chaos in the Families-of-Origin of Severe, Adult Child Molesters: A Look at  
Developmental Antecedents

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## Abstract

Many researchers have studied the constellation of factors that make up the early home environments of individuals who become sexual offenders. Focus has been paid to a few developmental antecedents, including violence in the home, physical and sexual abuse perpetrated against the sex offender, neglect, and poor emotional relationships with caregivers (Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003; McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002). Limited research has been done on the family system – disruptions in who lives at home, criminality of parents, removals from the home, etc – as a whole, to determine if there's a relationship between a chaotic environment and the development of sexual offending behaviors. Based on what has already been studied, it was hypothesized for this study that the more chaotic an offender's home environment was, as indicated by presence of certain disruptive variables, the greater the number of victims he would report.

Respondents – by-and-large incarcerated, severe, adult child molesters – indicated the presence or absence of the disruptive variables in their families-of-origin. Comparisons were made between the groups based on their yes-or-no responses. Significant group differences were found for those that reported sexual abuse in the home, - they reported a higher average number of victims than those who did not have sexual abuse in the home. An unexpected finding was a significantly lower, average number of victims for respondents who reported that children (other than themselves) were removed from the home. Differences, though not significant, were found for a few of the other variables as well, indications that further research is needed to determine the impact of chaotic environments on the etiology of sexual offending.

## Background

After a cursory review of the literature, it appears that risk factors for the development of sexual offending are abundant, complex, and difficult to disentangle from one another. Researchers have attempted to delineate the factors that put an individual on the path towards sexual offending versus other forms of criminality, violent and non-violent (McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003; Marshall, Serran, & Cortoni, 2000; Starzyk & Marshall, 2003; Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991). Many offenders of all types report a history of physical and sexual abuse; however, it seems that sexual offenders carry a higher rate of abuse, especially sexual abuse, and these offenders are more likely to have been abused by relatives or people close to the family (Stirpe & Stermac, 2003). Both sexual and nonsexual offenders report a history marked by parental neglect, “parental deviance” (which includes parent criminality and substance abuse), and violence in the home (such as between parents) (Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991; Huesmann, 1988).

Much of the research suggests that for the above factors, the difference is a matter of degree - sexual offenders report them in greater number, with more severity (Stirpe & Stermac, 2003). Given this, I am curious about the possible underlying factor – degree of family chaos – as something that will more clearly differentiate sexual from nonsexual offenders. As Stirpe and Stermac conjecture, and studies by Langevin and Prentky suggest, it may be that an unstable home environment makes it more likely that a child will be the victim of sexual or physical abuse. An unstable home environment also underlies many of the other cited risk factors, including neglect, violence, and deviance (Huesmann, 1988).

To determine the most appropriate variables to measure when thinking of family chaos, some of the literature examining familial antecedents of sexual offending was reviewed. Throughout the studies previously undertaken, there were indications that home environments with violence, including violence between parents and also violence directed at children, and with sexual abuse – what Malamuth and Sockluskie termed “hostile home environments” – were a factor in the development of later aggression against women (Malamuth & Sockluskie, 1991; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Starzyk & Marshall, 2003; Johnson & Knight, 2000; Hudson & Ward, 2000). The reasons why these early factors matter in the development of sexual offending behavior are many, varied, and disputed (Hudson & Ward, 2000). Several theories and/or models have attempted to account for the pathways by which early “hostile home environments” lead to sexual aggression in later life, some of which will be explored below.

Marshall and Barbaree (1990) explain the process by which early negative experiences in the home turn into sexually aggressive tendencies in terms of “social learning.” They suggest that early negative experiences affect an individual’s development by interfering in the development of a positive sense of self – self-worth, competency, etc. Furthermore, the failure to develop this sense of positive self leads an individual to expect failure and rejection from the people around him, and as a result, he doesn’t develop the skills required to navigate relationships with others. When development requires the individual to call upon others to help manage, the social skills needed to do so aren’t there. In turn, they suggest that the individual does not manage puberty well, and the separation between sexuality and aggression isn’t well defined, leaving the person vulnerable to being hostile and aggressive (via sex) towards others,

especially women. Overall, then, this model places etiology in mostly behavioral (though some would argue cognitive) mechanisms, through learning that occurs based on availability, or unavailability, of models.

Other models have placed their emphasis more squarely on the contributions of emotions and attachments when thinking about antecedents to sexual offense. These models see as primary the development of early, nurturing relationships with caregivers. While deficits in this arena have been shown to be related to many different kinds of delinquency – not just sexual – researchers have found different ways of accounting (as a key piece of the puzzle, for example) for the paths to offending through poor attachments. In much of the research done, reflections on early attachment suggested that caregivers were neglectful, inconsistent, and provided less supervision to their children. The researchers conjecture that this led individuals to develop negative views of self, react defensively or avoidant when confronted with interpersonal situations, and have poorly developed means of regulating their affect (McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002). The models based on attachment account for differences among sexual offenders by the type of attachment style that developed, so that key differences between rapists and child molesters, for example, can be traced to the way the attachment style developed (avoidant vs. anxious-ambivalent, for example) (Ward et al, 1997). In general, these models based on attachment argue that templates for forming relationships (internal working models) develop, leading to a chain of interpersonal deficits (loneliness, poor recognition of social cues, lack of empathy, etc) that can create a tendency towards hostility and sexual aggression (McCormack et al, 2002; Hudson & Ward, 2000).

Malamuth and Sockloskie developed a model to help account for the etiology of sexual aggression against women in early male development. Though many of the participants in the study currently under review were primarily child molesters, there was considerable cross-over of victim type, so many were also aggressive against adult women. Furthermore, many of the same etiological factors are at play when thinking about developing hostile sexual behaviors against victims who are in a one-down power position, either by virtue of their age or gender or both. Malamuth et al have suggested that early negative experiences interact in such a way as to put some children onto a path of sexually aggressive behavior against women. They called this the “confluence model,” and it rests on the interplay of five areas: 1) the identification of a common factor which predisposes some men towards the use of coercion, especially against women; 2) coerciveness can be located in early home environments, which, along behavioral, emotional/attachment, and cognitive lines, can be transferred to individuals who are exposed to violence, especially violence between parents and against children (most powerfully through sexual abuse); 3) children exposed to hostile home environments tend to have antisocial peers, so that delinquent behaviors (especially of a sexual nature) are reinforced; 4) the above delinquent tendencies operate along two paths, the first one being that certain coercive behaviors – “power and toughness,” for example, are reinforced into a kind of heightened masculinity and 5) the second path involves the “acting out” of the above through the use of sexual behavior – the more sexually promiscuous the person is, the more sexually aggressive the above will be acted out.

In other words, they suggest that the “hostility path moderates the relationship between sexual promiscuity and sexual aggression” (1991). Thus, this model posits that

home environment is one of the early funnels through which the development of sexual aggression occurs, in interaction with all of the other factors. It takes into account the roles behaviors, attachments, and cognitions all play in the process. Johnson and Knight (2000) followed up on the work started by Malamuth and Sockloskie, focusing on the developmental antecedents of offenders who being sexual aggression as adolescents. They placed emphasis on the physical and sexual abuse in the family of origin preceding the two pathways, and confirmed that “misogynistic fantasy behavior” mediates between sexual promiscuity and sexual aggression. They also accounted for the use of alcohol by adolescents and delinquency (especially associating with delinquent peers) in the development of sexually offending behaviors. All in all, these researchers provided complex models, attempting to account for the interplay of several factors, to try to understand the antecedents of sexual offending behaviors.

Ward and Beech (2004) attempted to bridge the gap between clinical practice and research by combining what has worked in the service of risk assessments with a closer look at the theoretical models that have been developed to explain etiology of sex offense. Based on this interplay, they describe the development of sexual offending behaviors through a combination of developmental variables, trait/stable dynamic risk factors (which includes things like temperament and disposition of the individual, sexual interests, etc), state/acute dynamic risk factors (which include cognitive, affective, and behavioral states, which may be brought on by specific contexts) and contextual risk factors (which vary by situation). A complex model is proposed, attempting to incorporate the various etiological models described above. In this model, it’s understood that family-of-origin factors come into play in the category of developmental

variables, but can interact with more acute factors in traits, states, or situations. They write, “We would argue that the key developmental variables of abuse history and poor attachment are highly relevant – but probably not sufficient – to explain all pathways to offending” (p. 276, 2004).

The above models have as their aim descriptions of ways in which early experiences in the home and/or with family are implicated in the etiology of sexual offending. Based on this, the question still remains - what types of family-of-origin experiences/variables have other researchers found to be related to sexual offending? Many researchers have noted the link between being a victim of sexual abuse, especially by those related to the victim, and the development of sexual offending behavior. Furthermore, this was more likely to be the case for child molesters than for rapists, though for rapists, a familial relationship was more likely to be present between the victim and victimizer (Seghorn et al, 1987). However, most agree, as the sentiment is expressed above, that sexual abuse is not a necessary nor sufficient factor in this etiology, and that a “disturbed family background” is one additional risk factor to account for (p. 542, Stirpe & Stermac, 2003; Ward & Beech, 2004; Seghorn et al, 1987).

In addition to sexual abuse, many have noted other struggles at play in the homes of individuals who later develop sexually aggressive tendencies, including neglect, violence between caregivers, and physical abuse (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991; Johnson & Knight, 2000). Other researchers have pinpointed alcohol abuse and criminal behavior by parents as key factors in sexual offenders’ backgrounds, when compared to non-offenders (Langevin et al, 1989, in Stirpe and Stermac, 2003). Seghorn, Prentky, & Boucher (1987) also found that alcohol and



criminality, in addition to physical, sexual abuse and neglect, were present in the families-of-origin of individuals who became sex offenders. They write,

This study revealed a high incidence of severe pathology in the home environments of sexually abused offenders. The sexual abuse was undoubtedly a derivative of the global pathology characterizing the family and was sufficiently integrated into the family dynamics such that covarying out the effects of the abuse would be impossible...the actual effects of the sexual abuse, per se, must be understood in terms of the emotional deprivation, physical abuse and neglect, and general family disintegration that may be concomitant with the sexual experience (p.266).

Thus, family chaos in the home is a key area worthy of further examination in this study. An attempt to capture family chaos as a risk factor for sexual offending could look at several variables that have not been given as much attention in the literature, including family disruptions, as marked by changes in who lives at home, frequent moves, homelessness, parents with criminality or substance abuse, and the like. This would provide valuable context for the development of the other risk factors that seem to be related to an individual's path towards sexual offending.

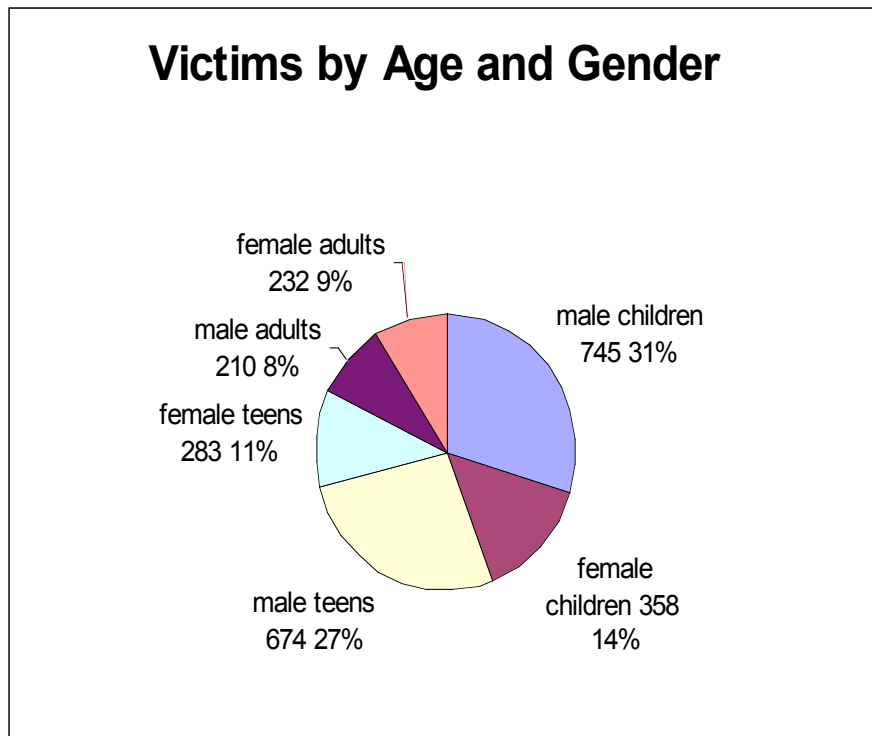
### Methods

The survey for the project was created with the participation of sexual abusers who have undergone treatment, under the supervision of Wayne Bowers at the Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance (see below for details).

#### *Participants*

105 adult males, all of whom have sexually abused children, make up the project sample. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents reported being incarcerated at the time of survey completion, and 87% reported previous incarceration. Because of the anonymity of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to report a wide array of

sexual crimes without concern about reprisal. Respondents were able to select from several different victim-types, with respect to victim age, gender, relationship to offender, etc. Collectively, they reported 1,720 victims, with each participant averaging 16.38 victims (the *range* was from 1-122, *SD* 25.08 victims), and 19 different combinations of gender and age group were reported by the men across their offenses (for example one subject abused male children, male teens and adult women). Of the total respondents, 26.67% reported abusing only one gender and age combination (See Figure 1 below). Overall, there was a considerable amount of cross-over of victim-type.



Typical of sexual offender research, the sample consisted largely of Caucasian men (88.6%; *n*=93), in addition to 3.8% men who identified as Black (*n*=4), 5.8% of men who identified as “other,” inclusive of Hispanic and American Indian (*n*=6), and 1.9% not responding to this question (*n*=2). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 71 years old, with the mean age of the group 44.39 years (*SD*=9.6 years). On the whole, the

respondents were likely to have attained higher education degrees, with 26.7% reporting an associate's degree ( $n=28$ ), 26.7% reporting a bachelor's degree ( $n=28$ ), and 12.4% reporting a master's or doctoral degree ( $n=13$ ). Out of the total number of respondents, 67.6% reported having a high school diploma ( $n=71$ ), with 33.3% reporting a GED ( $n=35$ ). A large portion of the sample grew up in a household with two parents (67.6%;  $n=71$ ), while 17.1% reported being raised in a house with a single mother ( $n=18$ ), 3.8% in a house with a mother and partner ( $n=4$ ), 2.9% in a house headed by a grandparent ( $n=3$ ), 2.9% in a foster house ( $n=3$ ), 1.9% in a house headed by a single father ( $n=2$ ), and 1.9% in a house headed by "other relative" ( $n=2$ ).

#### *Administration*

Individuals were identified for this project based on their involvement with a national, non-profit treatment organization called SATA/CURE-SORT (Sexual Abuse Treatment Alliance/ Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants – Sex Offenders Restored through Treatment). A total of 230 surveys were mailed out to program participants, and 147 were returned, for a total response rate of 64%. No incentives were offered for the return of the surveys. Attention to maintaining the anonymity of the participants was paid throughout the project. Participants gave their consent to involvement through a check-mark after completion of the survey. Because many of the respondents were incarcerated at the time of survey completion, prison security required the use of some identifying information on the return envelopes. To combat this, surveys were returned to the SATA/CURE-SORT office, where staff destroyed traces of identifying information before forwarding the surveys for data entry and analysis to researchers at another site. SPSS 12.0 and 16.0 were used for data entry and analysis.

### *Measures*

The survey included questions aimed at obtaining information about the participants backgrounds, including questions related to their families-of-origin, childhood experiences, educational histories, and histories of previous criminality. This demographic and history form has been used previously in other studies on sexual aggression (Burton, 2003; Burton, Miller & Shill, 2002). The survey measure includes a number of dichotomous yes-or-no questions regarding family chaos. These include asking respondents whether they had parents with alcohol and drug problems, parents with mental health problems or criminality, changes in who lived in the home with them, etc., as well as asking about the respondents' total number of victims.

### Results

T-tests were conducted using the presence or absence of each family variable to determine membership in a group. The groups were then tested for difference with respect to the average total number of victims reported. Respondents who indicated the presence of sexual abuse of children in the home (not including abuse perpetrated by the respondent) reported a significantly different – in this case, greater - average number of victims than those not in that group. A total of 32 respondents indicated sexual abuse in the home, and this group reported an average of 25.03 victims ( $SD = 34.21$ ). In contrast, there were 62 respondents who did not indicate the presence of sexual abuse in the home, and they reported an average of 11.66 victims ( $SD = 14.36$ ).

Another family variable where significant difference was detected was the response to whether or not children (other than the respondent) had been placed outside of the home. Those who indicated that children had been placed outside of the home

reported, on average, a smaller number of victims than those who did not. There were 12 who answered yes to this question, and their average number of victims was 5.25 ( $SD = 4.79$ ), compared to the 91 who answered no, who had an average of 17.85 victims ( $SD = 26.45$ ).

There were group differences found with respect to other family variables, as well, though for various reasons these were not found to be significant. These differences were in response to questions about whether respondents' parents had sold drugs and whether or not there were frequent changes in who lived at home. In both cases, the standard deviations for respondents who answered "yes" were large (65.53 and 42.21, respectively), which could indicate potential outlier respondents. Given that this study was administered anonymously and required the respondent to provide details about each victim, the difference within groups, though large, may represent real results. This suggests that further analysis of these variables in future studies is warranted. Please see Table 1 below for more results, including the group differences in relation to other variables.

Table 1: Group t-tests for Family Chaos Variables on Mean Number of Victims

Question	If present n, M (SD)	Not present n, M (SD)	t†
Parent with alcohol or drug problems	48, 17.95 (29.11)	50, 15.26 (22.17)	.51
Parent who sold drugs	3, 39.33 (65.53)	98, 15.96 (23.67)	.60
Illness or physical health problems in the family	40, 14.93 (24.67)	62, 17.32 (25.98)	.47
Mental health problems in the family	31, 19.84 (33.59)	61, 15.62 (21.58)	.64
Frequent changes in who lives at home	14, 28.29 (42.21)	89, 14.51 (21.17)	1.2
Neglect of children	33, 19.42 (30.47)	65, 15.31 (23.20)	.68
Physical abuse of children	39, 13.67	57, 19.46	1.12

	(22.51)	(28.03)	
Sexual abuse of children	32, 25.03 (34.21)	62, 11.66 (14.36)	2.12*
Illegal acts by family members (other than you)	28, 22.25 (35.68)	66, 14.80 A(20.50)	1.04
Hitting, slapping, punching or other violence between parents or adults at home	39, 15.15 (28.21)	59 16.30 (21.26)	.22
Children being placed outside the family (not counting you)	12, 5.25 (4.79)	91, 17.85 (26.45)	4.07 **
Lots of moves and/or homelessness	32, 17.06 ( 30.52)	72, 15.86 (22.59)	.20
Very poor (little money, food, clothes. Heat, etc)	27, 18.70 (33.18)	75, 15.73 (22.03)	.43

† Unequal variance assumed

\* p < .01, \*\*p< .001

### Discussion

Looking closer at the findings, a few pieces deserve to be highlighted.

The most significant relationship is one that, based on the literature, we expected to see: sex offenders who had been in homes where there was sexual abuse perpetrated (by people other than themselves) had a significantly greater number of victims than those who did not, when these groups were compared side-by-side. Of the total, 32 of the respondents indicated that there was sexual abuse in the home, versus 62 of the respondents who did not. The way the question is worded, it is not clear whether the respondent was himself a victim of the sexual abuse or whether he was in an environment in which sexual abuse took place.

While this is an important consideration (the relationship between sex offense and being a victim of sexual abuse has been studied in many prior projects), for the purposes of getting a clearer picture of the home environment as a variable, this distinction isn't necessary. As the literature suggests, a home environment with sexual abuse present tends to be correlated with high levels of neglect, poor

attachments to caregivers, and violence in the home (Seghorn, 1987). So it is not surprising to see that homes where sexual abuse was present produced sex offenders with an on-average greater number of victims, indicating a more severe pathology.

What is surprising, however, is that with the exception of “children being placed out of the home,” there were no other significant differences between groups who answered yes and groups who answered no to the various questions in the survey. We expected to see that, just as the homes that had sexual abuse had high mean numbers of victims, there would be a corresponding high number of victims for the other levels of chaos (as indicated by the remaining variables). For instance, physical abuse is often a co-occurring variable with sexual abuse – the “hostile home environments (Malamuth & Sockloskie, 1991) tend to produce both kinds of violence. In the present study, 39 of the respondents indicated that there had been physical abuse present, versus 57 who did not. This is about the same ratio as the sexual abuse/non-sexual abuse findings; however, the difference between those who answered yes and those who answered no on the total number of victims reported was not a large difference – 13.67 vs. 19.46 – and in fact, those who were not in physically abusive environments had a greater average number of victims than those who were. This finding further suggests that there is something unique about being in a home environment where sexual abuse is present. This represents an area for further study – perhaps the respondents’ own sexual victimization clouds the question, and it could be separated out in future research.

As alluded to above, another surprising and important finding of the present project is the group difference in total number of victims between those who homes which had children (other than the respondent) placed outside of the home and those homes where that did not happen. Interestingly, the hypothesis proposed – that changes in the home environment, such as the removal of children, would be associated with greater number of victims - was not supported. In fact, the reverse was true in a significant way – respondents who had been in homes where other children were removed indicated a smaller average number of victims. Why might this be the case? One possibility is that the removal of children frees up more resources – physical and emotional – to be available to the child/children remaining in the home. Researchers have pointed to homes lacking in materials or in emotional warmth as one piece of the etiological puzzle leading to offending behaviors of all kinds (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). Perhaps the greater number of available resources available to the respondent served as a small protective factor, leading to a less severe kind of child molester.

Another way to look at this finding is through the lens of attachment. If the caregiver in the home were more available to the respondent, s/he might be better able to help the respondent cope with the trauma of other chaos in the family system. This, too, could serve as a small protective factor for the respondent. Moreover, it could provide the kind of attachment template that the offender seeks to replicate in his offending; we know that offenders who are secure or preoccupied in their attachment style (both low on avoidance) tend to focus their efforts on a few victims, attempting to form “real” relationships with them (Ward



et al, 1996). This may be another way of accounting for the smaller average number of victims. Regardless, this is an interesting finding that deserves further study – both to see if it holds up to replication and to explore other possible reasons for the difference.

While the differences were not significant, there were substantial differences in the average number of victims between respondents who reported that they had parents who sold drugs and those who did not. The same is true for the group difference between those who reported frequent changes in who lived at home and those who did not. In both cases, those who were affected by the indicated variables reported a greater average number of victims. Due to the small numbers in each group, and the size of the overall sample, it would be premature to make claims about the meaning of these difference. However, these differences indicate the need for further research.

In total, the findings point to family chaos as a variable in need of further attention. The exploration of the various ways family chaos plays a role in the etiology of sex offense was limited by a few things in this project. To begin with, the overall sample would need to be larger to have enough numbers of respondents to test for significant differences within the group. In addition, the sample for the present study was fairly homogenous in terms of type of offense – the respondents were by-and-large child molesters who had a large number of victims and engaged in courtship and grooming behaviors with their victims. On the whole, the sample was unique in its lack of force towards victims. To more accurately gauge the impact of chaotic home environments in the etiology of sex

offense, a more diverse sample, representative of various kinds of offenders, is needed.

As has been suggested throughout, this study points to several areas that would benefit from further research. The relationship between sexual abuse in the home environment and the development of sexual offending behaviors is an important one. The present study suggests the possibility that sexual abuse is uniquely related to the number of victims an offender abuses, in a way that physical abuse and other “hostile home environment” variables are not. Furthermore, more research is needed to better understand what happens in homes where children are removed – if this somehow serves as a small protective factor, what does that indicate about possible interventions at this early, developmental stage? Lastly, more research is needed to continue to explore the array of variables that constitute the early environment in which sex offenders are situated. Doing so will help expand upon the etiological models that already exist, leading to more effective interventions at early stages.

Clinical applications of this project are limited. Knowing about the specific constellation of early experiences that shape an individual is an important part of assessment, formulation, and alliance-building in a treatment relationship. Having more knowledge about the association between certain early home experiences and patterns in offending behavior may enable clinicians to better understand where to meet the client. It could also provide the clinician with a rough roadmap of what to expect in the course of working with the individual, as it could point to areas of vulnerability, severity of their offenses, etc. More

directly, this research hopes to contribute a piece to the models of developmental antecedents already in place,, all of which are working towards early intervention and prevention in at-risk individuals.

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