Specialization in the criminal careers of sex offenders

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SPECIALIZATION IN THE CRIMINAL CAREERS OF SEX OFFENDERS

by

Jodi K. Olson

Bachelor of Science
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Criminal Justice
Department of Criminal Justice
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

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Specialization in the Criminal Careers of Sex Offenders

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Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College
ABSTRACT

Specialization in the Criminal Careers of Sex Offenders

by

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Dr. Terance Miethe, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Recent public policy has been implemented with the assumption that sex offenders are highly motivated and tend to exhibit specialization and compulsivity in their offending patterns. Past research has not been able to confirm or invalidate this assumption, and has reflected many inconsistencies when drawing conclusions about sex offender profiles and career trajectories.

Drawing upon a national sample of offenders, the current study examines the degree of specialization in the criminal careers of sex offenders and other groups of offenders. Results from the adjacent specialization analyses of the general offense categories indicated that sex offenders are among the least specialized group of offenders and tend to become less specialized as their criminal careers progress. The crime specific analyses revealed that child molesters exhibit higher levels of specialization than rapists and that these two groups of sex offenders exhibit relatively low levels of specialization when compared to other specific groups of non-sexual offenders. A discussion of implications for future research and public policy follows the data analysis.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With respect to patterns of specialization, recidivism, and persistence in offending, the findings of the existing sex offender literature is inconclusive. Despite these inconsistencies, however, public policy governing sex offender notification and treatment assumes specialization exists, and is intended for a distinctly specialized population of offenders. According to Spier et al. (2001), "specialization is a term used to describe a tendency to repeat crime types over time. If offenders specialize it would make sense to label them according to their crime of choice (a violent offender), and treat them accordingly" (p. 19).

More often than not, the criminal profile of sex offenders has been treated as a homogeneous one, applicable to all sex offenders, although this assumption is erroneous. There is also a commonly held belief that sex offenders are more dangerous than other types of criminals and are more likely to commit subsequent crimes. The notion that sex offenders are more likely to recidivate than other offenders can be disputed by extensive studies conducted on offender recidivism. Further, the validity of current tools that are used to assess the dangerousness of sex offenders can also be questioned, but is beyond the scope of the current study.

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To date, the notion that sex offenders may display patterns of versatility in their offending seems to have been overlooked by lawmakers, treatment professionals, and even police. Further research on the criminal careers and profiles of sex offenders as a group and within their specific offense categories is warranted to better understand, manage, and treat sex offenders.

Review of Existing Literature

The importance and potential benefits of studying the “criminal careers” of offenders was first integrated into criminological research by Wolfgang et al. (1972) with their longitudinal study of delinquency and adult criminality in a birth cohort (Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996). The initial research was more concerned with the chronic offender, but it soon broadened into a more general focus on criminal careers, as illustrated by the work of Blumstein and colleagues (1986). Though the approaches to measuring crime and the methodological vigor of the study of criminal careers differs, Tracy and Kempf-Leonard (1996: 2) state that “it is indisputable that this ‘criminal career paradigm’ has dominated criminological research over at least the past 15 to 20 years.”

At present, there is strong empirical support for the concept that versatile or general criminal careers are more common than specialization (Kempf, 1987). On the other end of the spectrum, there are also studies that show support for a tendency towards specialization, suggesting that “specialization may be more evident when criminal careers become more established” (Kempf, 1987, p. 403; Bursik, 1980; Farrington, 1986; Quay and Blumen, 1963). A similar argument posits that among adult offenders, those remaining criminally active into older ages have displayed higher levels of specialization (Blumstein, Cohen, Das, and Moitra, 1988a).
Blumstein et al. (1988a) also found that when similar offenses were grouped into "clusters," the adult offenders in their sample demonstrated "tendencies toward increased switching among offenses within a cluster and decreased switching between these clusters" (p. 342). Mazerolle et al. (2000) discovered proof of a significant relationship between onset age (of offending) and specialization in offending in which early onset offenders are more versatile and diverse (generalists) than late onset offenders with respect to offending patterns.

Other research reflects a tendency among non-sexual offenders to rarely engage in any type of sexual offenses. It has been found that while sex offenders commit other types of offenses, other types of offenders rarely engage in sex offending (Bonta and Hanson, 1995; Hanson, Steffy, and Gauthier, 1993). Speir et al. (2001) replicated these findings in their examination of criminals in Georgia in which they found the probability of a non-sex offender being arrested for a sex crime at his next arrest is about 2 percent, while the probability of a sex offender being arrested for a sex crime at his next arrest is about 22 percent.

Soothill et al. (2000) argues that sex offenders can be both generalists and specialists, but recognizes that specialization within sexual offending also exists. In addition, Soothill et al. (2000) point out that when examining sex offending, there are two levels of analysis: 1) an analysis of their participation in crime in general and 2) a specific analysis of their sexual offending career. Upon performing an analysis on the offending patterns of specific groups of sex offenders, Soothill et al. (2000) revealed that "sex offenders are much more specialized in their sexual offending behavior than perhaps has been hitherto thought" (p. 65). If members of a sub-group of sex offenders are convicted
of a subsequent sexual offense, it is probable that they will be convicted of the same kind of sex offense (Soothill et al., 2000).

Sex Offender Policies

The current literature on sex offenders does not point to one definitive socio-demographic profile, nor can it confidently conclude that sex offenders are a highly specialized group of offenders. The existing literature reflects such a diverse collection of findings and substantiates the need for future research.

With respect to public policy, it is important that lawmakers are able to propose and implement legislature that is based on credible research. Certain legislation (i.e. community notification of sex offenders, increased sentences for sexual offenders) and treatment modalities for sex offenders (i.e. chemical castration) are based upon the ideas that 1) making the community aware of the presence of sex offenders is the best way to deal with the issue of sexual assault and 2) sex offenders lack self-control and are perpetually driven to reoffend.

The efficacy of existing laws that require sex offender registration and community notification and even civil commitment laws can be questioned with respect to the population they are targeting – only those sex offenders who have been detected. Further, legislators should keep in mind that sex offenders will also benefit from legislation that has been thoroughly researched and properly implemented. Research focusing on the criminal profiles and career paths of sex offenders will serve as a valuable resource for lawmakers, law enforcement agencies, and sex offender treatment professionals.
The Proposed Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the differences in the criminal careers between sex offenders and other criminals, but also to explore the differences in career trajectories between sub-groups of sex offenders. In particular, this study will address the following research questions: 1) Do sex offenders display distinct patterns of specialization with respect to the offenses they commit over the course of their criminal careers? 2) Is there any evidence that sex offenders exhibit a greater level of specialization than their non-sex offending counterparts?

These research questions will be addressed through the secondary data analysis of a national sample of over 38,000 convicted criminals. Subsequent chapters will focus more specifically on past studies, the basis for the current research questions, the description of the sample, and the analysis of the results.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criminal Career Research

The concept of the criminal career and the use of the criminal career paradigm have dominated criminological research in the past several decades (Tracy and Kemp-Leonard, 1996). Blumstein and colleagues (1988a) define criminal career as "a characterization of the longitudinal sequence of crimes committed by an individual offender. . . A criminal career isolates the onset, the recurrence, and finally, the termination of criminal activity during an individual’s lifetime" (p. 304).

Blumstein et al. (1988a) propose that there are two main areas of research with respect to research on criminal careers. The first area concentrates on the scope of the criminal career as it is defined by participation in criminal activities. This area is concerned with the beginning of the criminal career, the end of the criminal career, and "participation in offending within various population subgroups" (p. 304). The second area emphasizes patterns of offending among those who participate in criminal activity. Specific patterns of offending can be examined in terms of frequency of offending, diversity of offending, crime-type switching, and specialization and escalation of offending (Blumstein et al., 1988a).
According to Stander et al. (1989) the criminal career approach brings a developmental point of view to criminology by inquiring as to why people begin offending, why they continue to offend, and why they desist. In addition, this approach examines key concepts such as prevalence, frequency, onset, continuation, desistance, career length, specialization, and escalation with respect to the commission of offenses. The criminal career approach is also interested in examining how these concepts are related to one another. For example, one might question how the age of onset influences the length of an offender's criminal career and their frequency and specialization of offending (Stander et al., 1989).

Although the concept of the criminal career is not a theory, it is a valuable tool for the development of criminological theory (Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington, 1988b). The criminal career approach allows for the quantitative analysis of the dependent variable of offending. Models of offending can be employed and quantitative predictions can be tested to confirm or reject theories about criminal careers (Blumstein et al., 1988b).

The scope of criminal career research holds a wide variety of policy implications in diverse areas within criminal justice (Blumstein et al., 1988b; Stander et al., 1989). Several of the main policy options directly affected by criminal career research include prevention, both general and specific deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation (Blumstein et al., 1988b). For example, knowledge of certain factors that lead to decreases in levels of criminal activity could enhance the success of prevention programs. Variables that effect frequency of offending and termination of the criminal career could be incorporated into specific deterrence and rehabilitation programs to reduce offending.
or stop it for good (Blumstein et al., 1988b). Further, "information about the time course of criminal careers is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of sentences designed to achieve the penal aims of individual deterrence, rehabilitation, or incapacitation (Stander et al., 1989, p. 318). Specific theoretical and policy implications of criminal career research with respect to specialization in the careers of sex offenders will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion of this paper.

Specialization in Criminal Careers

Research examining the concept of specialization within the criminal career has not only yielded inconsistent findings, but it has also evoked controversy and disagreement among criminologists. Perhaps a possible explanation for the inconsistent results plaguing criminal career literature is that studies of specialization utilize different techniques for measuring the construct, examine different types of criminal behavior, and also study different groups of offenders. Essentially, these differences can sometimes prevent a proper scientific comparison of research studies. The concept of offense specialization, as employed by Wolfgang et al. (1972) examined the probability that a certain type of offense will precede a similar type of offense. For the purposes of the present research, specialization will be defined as the "tendency to repeat crime types over time" (Spier et al., 2001, p. 19).

Kempf (1987) points out that "the dismissal of specialization has become widely accepted among criminologists" (p. 399) due to the absence of support for specialization patterns. Further, Kempf (1987) argues that the rejection of the concept of specialization has important implications for the development of criminological theory and public
policy and should not be prematurely dismissed. When Kempf (1987) studied specialization among the 1958 Philadelphia Birth Cohort, the results for each of the measures of specialization indicated a “low level of specialization amid more random, general, or versatile behavior” (p. 416).

Additional research on patterns of specialization among offenders committing general types of crime has also found support for the concept of specialization (Blumstein, Cohen, Das, and Moitra, 1988a; Britt 1996; Bursik et al, 1980; Carcach and Leverett, 1999; Lattimore et al., 1994; Mazerolle et al., 2000). Blumstein et al. (1988a) concluded that there was some evidence of specialization within all of the crime types examined for adult offenders. They also found that adult offenders displayed the propensity of increased offense switching within crime-type clusters\(^1\) and decreased switching between two different clusters (Blumstein et al., 1988a).

Though some studies have found only minimal evidence in support of offense specialization (Kempf, 1987; Lattimore et al., 1994), others have found more significant patterns of specialization and are able to find differences in specialization among groups of offenders (Britt, 1996; Mazerolle et al., 2000). In examining the relationship between subgroup differences and specialization in offending, Mazerolle et al. (2000) concluded that early onset offenders displayed significantly more diversity in offending patterns in relation to the late onset offenders. In a study that attempted to measure patterns of escalation and specialization in criminal careers, Britt (1996) found significantly marked differences in patterns of specialization between subgroups of black and white offenders.

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\(^1\) “Clusters represent natural aggregations of crime types such that offenders display a tendency to switch among crime types within a cluster and a corresponding tendency not to switch to crime types outside the cluster” (Blumstein et al., 1988a, p. 326)
Some research has concluded that there is in fact support for both versatility and specialization in criminal offense trajectories (Carcach and Leverett, 1999; Farrington et al., 1988; Klein, 1984). In a review of 33 research studies that examined juvenile offense patterns, Klein (1984) found 21 studies in which juveniles exhibited more versatile styles of offending, 8 studies that contain evidence reflecting patterns of both versatility and specialization, and 4 studies that clearly provided evidence in support of specialization. In addition, Carcach and Leverett (1999) also concluded that juveniles tend to display both specialization and versatility in offending and that patterns of specialization are particularly evident for violent offenses, breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, and other theft. Finally, in an analysis of specialization in juvenile criminal careers, Farrington et al. (1988: 483) concluded “that there was a small but significant degree of specialization superimposed on a great deal of versatility,” suggesting that specialization in certain offenses was apparent across a wide variety of other criminal activities.

Despite evidence of mixed findings with respect to patterns of specialization, some of the existing literature claims that there is no support for the occurrence of offense specialization in criminal careers (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1988; Simon, 1997). After a review of studies examining patterns of specialization in the criminal career, Simon (1997) contends that “although some evidence of specialization commonly is found, the overwhelming weight of the evidence supports the idea of versatility or generality of criminal offending” (p. 37). Simon (1997) also points criminologists in the direction of control theory when attempting to explain patterns of criminal offending, positing that control theory suggests criminals are versatile in their patterns of criminal
offending and that offenders who commit crimes also have the tendency to participate in non-criminal activities that involve antisocial or self-destructive behavior.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1988) also dismiss the concept of specialization in criminal careers in favor of other explanations. In fact, the research of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1988, 1987a, 1986, 1983) posits that the career paradigm of studying crime should be de-emphasized so criminology can concentrate on theoretical explanations of crime. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1988) point to earlier studies of criminal career research (Blumstein and Cohen, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1981; Wolfgang et al., 1972) and conclude that “it is not now reasonable to assume that offenders tend to specialize in particular types of crime. Research shows that they do not” (p. 39). Further, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1993) suggest that one of the best ways to measure the propensity to offend is a variety index that counts the number of different types of crimes committed. In their theoretical explanation for crime, lows levels of self-control are associated with high levels of variety scores that signify high levels of versatility in offending (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1993; Mazerolle et al., 2000).

Patterns of Specialization Among Sex Offenders

There is a substantially smaller pool from which to draw literature and assumptions regarding patterns of offense specialization among sex offenders. However, due to the major policy implications of this research, it is important to forge the gap between research on sex offender specialization and that of other criminal activities.

Similar to some of the specialization findings for general offenders, Soothill et al. (2000) argued that sex offenders could be generalists and specialists and that they should
not be forcibly dichotomized into groups. This study found that sex offenders are more specialized in their sex offending behavior than has previously been thought (Soothill et al., 2000). Further, Soothill et al. (2000) concluded that if members of a sub-group of sex offenders are convicted of a subsequent sexual offense, it is probable that they will be convicted of the same kind of sex offense.

Two studies in particular provide evidence for the existence of specialization among sex offenders and serve to offer several important insights into the profiles of sex offenders (Speir et al., 2001; Stander et al., 1989). In their study of offenders in Georgia, Speir et al. (2001) deduce that “... regardless of specific sex crime, evidence of specialization indeed exists” (p. 21). Further, this study finds that there is only a 2% chance of a non-sex offender being arrested for a sex crime at their next arrest. Hence, violent, property, and drug offenders participate in many types of crimes, but very rarely engage in sexual offending. However, sex offenders have a 22% probability of being arrested for a sexual offense at their next arrest, suggesting that while sex offenders tend to participate in non-sex crimes, non-sex offenders will very rarely participate in sex crimes (Speir et al., 2001).

Stander et al. (1989) employed the use of forward specialization coefficients\(^2\) to measure the degree of specialization of offending in criminal careers. They found that sex offenders, in particular, tended to exhibit patterns of specialization. In addition, this study discovered that persistent offenders tended to become increasingly specialized in committing fraud over the course of successive convictions. This led the researchers to suggest that criminological theories should consider the possibility that several specific

\(^2\) A forward specialization coefficient is a measure used with transition matrices to quantify the degree of specialization in a given type of offending (Stander et al., 1989).
constructs underlie criminal behavior as opposed to one general underlying construct such as antisocial tendencies, weak social bonds, or weak conscience (Stander et al., 1989).

Existing literature that provides evidence of versatility in the offense patterns of sex offenders doesn’t necessarily refuse to recognize the existence of specialization. Instead, it argues that while sex offenders exhibit minimal patterns of specialization, they tend to be more versatile than specialized in their criminal activities (Grunfeld and Noreik, 1986; Soothill et al., 2000; Simon, 1997; Simon, 2000; Weinrott and Saylor, 1991). Soothill et al. (2000) explain their position on the concept of specialization within the careers of sexual offenders with an interesting analogy:

Offenders may or may not specialize in sex offending within their general criminal career, and may or may not specialize in specific kinds of sex offending within their sexual criminal career. An analogy may be helpful. A person may play many sports, but specialize in football with a favoured position of centre forward. A person can, indeed, be regarded as a versatile sportsperson and a specialist football centre forward at the same time. A sex offender can behave in the same way (p. 57).

Simon’s (1997) review of criminal specialization literature argues that the very idea that offenders specialize in certain types of crime is a misconception that is evident in both the criminal justice and mental health systems, sex offenders included. Simon (1997) goes on to warn that the act of attaching labels to certain criminals based upon their official records can be misleading. Further, this research suggests that “as with offenders who assault their intimate partners, the idea that offenders who commit sex crimes are specialists results from official focus on the most serious crimes that an offender commits, and ignores criminal and deviant behavior that is inconsistent with the perceived specialty” (Simon, 1997, p. 41).
Simon (1997) acknowledges that a few specialists do in fact exist, but points out that most criminals tend to demonstrate more generality or versatility in their commission of offenses. According to Simon's (1997) review of past studies examining sex offender specialization, some of these studies inadvertently point out that sex offenders are not specialists while actually attempting to communicate that they are specialized in their sexual offenses. Simon (1997) points to the study by Hanson et al. (1995) as a prime example of inconsistency in which the researchers claim to discover that child molesters exhibit specialization while a table in their article depicted numbers indicating versatility.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the existing studies that examine patterns of offense specialization in general and with respect to the commission of sexual offenses. Most of the studies included in Table 2.1 use different measures of specialization and very different samples of offenders. It is clear that the results are widely inconsistent across studies, making it difficult to make any generalizations about specialization in criminal careers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Offender Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speir et al. (2001)</td>
<td>Sex offenders dabble in non-sex crimes, while non-sex offenders dabble in all but sex crimes. In this focus on Georgia sex offenders as a group, regardless of specific sex crime, evidence of specialization does exist.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soothill et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Sex offenders are much more specialized in their offending behavior than has been previously thought. If members of a group are convicted of another sexual offense, they are likely to be convicted of the same kind of sex offense. Some groups of sex offenders are more exclusively confined to their group than others. Sex offenders can be considered specialists and/or generalists and shouldn’t be forcibly dichotomized.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon (2000)</td>
<td>Past research does not indicate that criminal offenders, sex offenders included, specialize in crime type. Most offenders commit a variety of crimes and share similar criminal characteristics.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon (1997)</td>
<td>Few rapists or child molesters specialize; the idea that offenders who commit sex crimes are specialists result from official focus on the most serious crime that an offender commits, and ignores criminal behavior that is inconsistent with the perceived specialty. Except for the atypical and persistent sexual fantasies and deviant sexual preferences, the characterizations of sex offenders parallel the descriptions of other criminal offenders.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weinrott and Saylor (1991)</td>
<td>Based on self-report data, they found more versatility among sex offenders with respect to type of victim and type of sex crime. Also found that sex offenders participated in a variety of nonsex offenses.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stander et al. (1989)</td>
<td>The use of forward specialization coefficients showed that sex offenders in particular tend to be specialized, and also that persistent offenders become increasingly specialized in fraud. This suggests that criminological theories should not assume that just one general construct underlies offending, but several more specific constructs do. Knowledge about specialization in different types of crimes could help in predicting future offense types and assist policy-makers.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bynum et al. (2001)</td>
<td>Research demonstrates that while sex offenders are much more likely to commit subsequent sexual offenses than the general criminal population, they do not exclusively commit sexual offenses. Some aspects of intervention with the general criminal population may have implications for effective management of sex offenders.</td>
<td>Sex Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kempf (1987)</td>
<td>Found differences by crime type and race, but the results of each method of measurement of specialization showed a low level of specialization amid more random, general, or versatile behavior. By adhering to the definition of criminal career that provides for longitudinal paths that don’t necessarily involve exclusive or principal career activities, this study accepts the findings as support of minimum levels of specialization in the criminal career.</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lattimore et al. (1994)</td>
<td>Results were broadly consistent with those of other researchers, suggesting a tendency toward specialization. Individuals with two consecutive offenses of the same type were more likely to be charged upon the third arrest in that sequence with an offense of that same type than any other offense.</td>
<td>General (Juveniles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumstein et al. (1988a)</td>
<td>Some specialization was found in all crime types for adult offenders. Adult offenders in all jurisdictions exhibited definite tendencies toward increased switching among offenses within a cluster and decreased</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
switching between these clusters. Levels of specialization found for adults were higher than those previously reported in analysis of offending by juveniles. These higher levels of specialization suggest that offenders who remain criminally active until older ages are also more specialized.

Mazerolle et al. (2000) Early onset offenders exhibit significantly more offending diversity relative to late onset offenders. Offenders who begin their offending behavior early in the life course and persist into adulthood exhibit more diverse and versatile offending patterns than those who do not.

Carcach and Leverett (1999) Specialization occurs when a single underlying process drives offending. Their results indicate patterns of both specialization and versatility in juvenile offending. Their results support the hypothesis that there is an initial tendency towards specialization among juvenile offenders, particularly for violent offenses. Results also indicate that patterns of juvenile offending do tend to remain stable over time.

Britt (1996) Using conditional quasi-symmetry to evaluate specialization and escalation in offenses, this study found significantly different patterns of specialization between groups of black and white offenders in the sample.

Tracy and Kemp-Leonard (1996) Conceptualize specialization as a career concept rather than an offense-by-offense analysis that focuses on transitions. Consider as specialists those who concentrate in a primary offense type by committing 50% or more of their acts within the category yet may fluctuate among different offense types between any given transition number. They found that adult crime status was more likely among juveniles who concentrated their juvenile offending within particular offense categories.

Farrington, Snyder and Finnegan (1988) Theoretically, research on offense specialization and/or versatility is important because it can provide insight as to the number of dimensions that may underlie delinquency. Found a “small but significant degree of specialization superimposed on a great deal of versatility” and that “specialization tended to increase with successive referrals” (p. 483).

J. Cohen (1986) Due to the fact that crime control policies focus on particular categories of offenders, knowledge of offense specialization is important in focusing crime control efforts on offenders who are most likely to continue to commit particular offenses.

Klein (1984) In a review of 33 studies examining offending patterns among criminals, 21 support the concept of versatility (“cafeteria-style”), 8 studies provide evidence for both specialization and versatility, and 4 provide clear evidence of specialization patterns.

Bursik (1980) “There is definite evidence that some degree of specialization occurs in the offense histories of white and nonwhite delinquents” (p. 859). Points out methodological flaws in past studies examining offense specialization and provides implications for future research techniques.

Studies that are not necessarily focused on patterns of specialization in the criminal careers of sex offenders can still help to shed light on their offending patterns (Grunfeld and Noreik, 1986; Weinrott and Saylor, 1991). For example, a study
examining self-reports of crimes committed by a sample of sex offenders shared several implications with specialization literature. Specifically, Weinrott and Saylor (1991) suggested that sex offenders do not specialize with respect to the types of victims that they choose. More specifically, it was found that even when sex offenders were divided into specific sub-groups, only half of the self-report disclosures from the sample (47 out of 99) could be classified by their particular choice of victim.

Self-report disclosures uncovered that 32% of official rapists reported sexual contact with a child, while 12% of the official child molesters disclosed at least one instance in which they attempted to force sex upon an adult female. Additionally, 34% of men who were thought to exclusively molest outside the home were also involved in incest, while 50% of the incest offenders disclosed that they abused children outside of the home (Weinrott and Saylor, 1991). Thus, it can be concluded from this particular self-report study that sex offenders do not exclusively specialize in a certain type of victim.

Weinrott and Saylor (1991) also found that sex offenders engaged in a variety of criminal activities outside the realm of sex offending. In the twelve-month period leading up to the incarceration of the 99 men in this sample, they collectively reported committing 19,518 nonsexual crimes. Among rapists, the mean number of different nonsex offenses committed was 10.5, with each man committing an average of 305 nonsexual crimes. Child molesters committed an average of 121 nonsex offenses each. Almost half of the rapists assaulted their partner, while 20% of the child molesters reported being involved in assault, theft, burglary, possession of stolen goods, and drug offense in the course of one year (Weinrott and Saylor, 1991).
Although an exhaustive examination of sex offenders' recidivism rates is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to mention that these types of studies can also help to uncover patterns of specialization and/or versatility in sexual offending. One study in particular that examined recidivism rates of sex offenders in Norway (Grunfeld and Noreik, 1991) concluded that “so-called pure sexual criminals seem to be rarities. The usual pattern is a combination of different types of offences. Those exclusively involved in sex crimes represent a small minority” (p. 101). Further, the authors concluded that most of the males in the sample who had been criminally convicted displayed a record of “mixed criminality” which was dominated by crimes of violence and profit (Grunfeld and Noreik, 1991, p. 102).

Studies of sex offender recidivism are also important to consider when addressing the issue of sex offender dangerousness. The likelihood of an offender committing subsequent crimes is sometimes equated with a certain level of dangerousness. Table 2.2 provides a summary of some of the extensive research on sex offender recidivism. The differences in each study's definition of recidivism, population of sex offender studied, and follow-up period is noted in the table. It is evident in this table that studies with longer follow-up periods report higher levels of recidivism for sex offenders. In contrast, Table 2.3 illustrates the ranges of recidivism rates for several groups of untreated sex offenders as noted by Marshall and Barbaree (1990). Most of the studies included in this review were also included in an extensive meta-analysis of 42 recidivism studies done by Furby et al. (1989).
Table 2.2 A Review of Sex Offender Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Measure of Recidivism</th>
<th>Follow-Up Period</th>
<th>Rate of Recidivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grunfeld and Noreik, 1986</td>
<td>N=541 Norwegian Sex Offenders</td>
<td>Repeated sexual offenses</td>
<td>Nine years</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbens, Soothill, and Way, 1978</td>
<td>N=117 parent/child and sibling incest offenders</td>
<td>Conviction for a sexual offense</td>
<td>Twelve years</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanson and Bussiere, 1998</td>
<td>N=28,972 sex offenders from a meta-analysis of 61 studies</td>
<td>Average sex offense recidivism across studies</td>
<td>Average of four to five years</td>
<td>13.4% overall, N=23,393; 18.9% for rapists, N=1,839; 12.7% for child molesters, N=9,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall and Barbarce, 1988</td>
<td>Untreated (N=68) and treated (N=58) child molesters</td>
<td>Sexual reoffense</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abel et al., 1988</td>
<td>N=98 nonfamilial child molesters</td>
<td>Self-report of sexual reoffenses</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langan et al., 2003</td>
<td>N=9,691 sex offenders released from prison in 1994 from 15 US states</td>
<td>Rearrest for new sex crime</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reconviction for new sex crime</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship and Thornton, 2001</td>
<td>N=1,090 sex offenders released from prison sentence of 4+ years in 1992 &amp;1993</td>
<td>Reconviction for a sexual offense</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanson et al., 1995</td>
<td>N=197 child molesters</td>
<td>Reconviction for a sexual offense</td>
<td>15-30 years</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cann et al., 2004</td>
<td>N=419 adult male sex offenders discharged from prison in 1979</td>
<td>Reconviction for a sexual offense</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langevin et al., 2004</td>
<td>N=230 sex offenders seen for psychiatric assessment between 1966 and 1974</td>
<td>Reconviction for a sexual offense</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.3 Summary of Findings from Marshall and Barbaree (1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Range of Recidivism</th>
<th>Description of Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cox, 1980; Marshall and Barbaree, 1990</td>
<td>Untreated exhibitionists</td>
<td>41-71%</td>
<td>Recidivism study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furby et al., 1989; Marshall and Barbaree, 1990</td>
<td>Untreated rapists</td>
<td>7-35%</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furby et al., 1989; Marshall and Barbaree, 1990</td>
<td>Untreated child molester with male victims</td>
<td>13-40%</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furby et al., 1989; Marshall and Barbaree, 1990</td>
<td>Untreated child molesters with female victims</td>
<td>10-29%</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dangerousness of Sex Offenders

Current sex offender policies are predicated on the idea that sex offenders are “simply more dangerous than other criminal offenders because they exhibit a greater degree of compulsion for their crimes than that found for nonsexual offender groups” (Sample and Bray, 2003: 60). The public’s perception of sex offenders is driven by stories in which children have been sexually assaulted and murdered by released sex offenders. Stories such as these serve to perpetuate “an image of the sex offender as a compulsive recidivist who continues to present a danger to society despite any efforts at rehabilitation or reform” (Sample and Bray, 2003: 62). Current research has suggested that there is widespread public support for the current sex offender laws as an avenue to prevent recurrence of sexual offending and that the public believes that sex offenders have a high propensity of recommitting sex crimes (Dundes, 2001; Phillips, 1998; Sample and Bray, 2003).
The belief that sex offenders are more dangerous than other types of offenders and that they are more likely to reoffend does not appear to be supported by empirical literature. In fact, Sample and Bray (2003: 65) suggest that “the empirical evidence to date does not seem to suggest that sex offenders have higher rates of recidivism than other groups of offenders and are thus in need of greater levels of surveillance and control.” A meta-analysis of sex offender recidivism studies conducted by Hanson and Bussiere (1998) found that the recidivism rate for committing a new sexual offense was 13.4% out of a sample of 23,393 offenders for a 4 to 5 year follow-up period. Hanson and Bussiere (1998: 357) contend that that “the present findings contradict the popular view that sexual offenders inevitably reoffend.”

Several studies that have examined the recidivism rates of sex offenders when compared to other groups of offenders have yielded results that further question the belief that sex offenders are more dangerous and display higher rates of reoffending than other groups of offenders. Hanson et al. (1995) compared the recidivism rates for child molesters to a group of nonsexual offenders and found that when recidivism was measured for any type of offense, 83.2% of the nonsexual offenders were reconvicted compared to 61.8% of the child molesters during the 15 to 30 year follow-up period (Hanson et al., 1995).

Upon examination of the same data set being used in the current study, which examines recidivism rates for a large sample of sexual and nonsexual offenders released from prison in 15 states in 1994 (Langan and Levin, 2002), it was found that with respect to re-arrest rates for any type of crime over the three-year follow-up period, the recidivism rate for rapists was 46% and the recidivism rate for other sexual assailters was

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41.5%. The recidivism rates for other groups of offenders were measured in the same way. Those groups of offenders with the highest rearrest rates were robbers (70.2%), burglars (74.0%), larcenists (74.6%), and motor vehicle thieves (78.8%). According to this measure of recidivism, sex offenders exhibited the lowest rearrest rates. With respect to the commission of sex offenses in the three-year follow-up period, this data reflected that 1.3% of non-sex offenders (3,328 out of 262,420) were rearrested for the commission of a new sex crime. The released sex offenders exhibited a 5.3% rearrest rate for the commission of a new sex crime in the follow-up period – a rate four times higher than that for non-sex offenders (Langan and Levin, 2002).

More limited studies of sex offender recidivism patterns for offenders from one state have demonstrated trends similar to those observed in the national data set. For example, Sample and Bray (2003) found that for a sample of offenders from Illinois, during a five-year follow-up period, those offenders whose most serious offense had been robbery exhibited the highest likelihood of rearrest (74.9%), followed by offenders arrested for burglary (66%), nonsexual assault (58%), larceny (52.9%), and sex offenders (45.1%). The only two groups with lower rearrest rates than sex offenders during the five year follow-up period were those offenders arrested for homicide (44.2%) and property damage (38.8%) (Sample and Bray, 2003).

A study of offense-specific rearrest rates for these offenders demonstrated that "the sex offender category had a lower offense-specific rearrest rate in five years (6.5%) than did arrestees in most other categories" (Sample and Bray, 2003: 73). The only categories with lower offense-specific rearrest rates were homicide (5.7%), kidnapping (2.8%), and stalking (5%). Similar to the findings of Langan and Levin (2002), this
state-level recidivism study did find that sex offenders had the highest percentages of rearrest for a sex crime at one, three, and five years in the follow-up period with respective rearrest rates of 2.2%, 4.8%, and 6.5%. While these rates for the commission of a new sex offense by sex offenders are high in comparison to the other groups of offenders, it is relevant to point out that 93% of the sex offenders were not rearrested for a subsequent sex offense. Further, it is possible that sex offenders face greater levels of rearrest because they are such a highly visible group of offenders and are readily available for law enforcement to question (Sample and Bray, 2003).

Current Crime Control Policies

The current trends in public policy involving sexual offenders include sex offender registries, community notification campaigns, civil commitment laws, and increased sentences for sexual offenses (Wood, Grossman, and Fichtner, 2000). These public policies are largely based on the assumptions that sex offenders do not participate in other criminal activities (Simon, L, 2000, 1997) and that sex offenders should be “managed” rather than rehabilitated (Simon, J., 1998).

The moral panic that accompanies the devastating victimization of children and the extreme cases of sexual abuse that involve kidnapping and even murder also have a strong influence on criminal justice policy. Heavy media coverage of sexual crimes evokes an emotionally-based, fearful reaction from the public. According to Palermo and Farkas (2001: 154), “While these types of brutal, heinous sex crimes constitute a small percentage of offending, they generate an enormous amount of media attention and ignite fear, passion, and outrage of various individuals and groups in the community.” Public
outrage and hysteria serve to put an extreme amount of pressure on legislators to “do something” about sex offenders. This unique mixture of false assumptions regarding the profiles of sex offenders and the moral panic caused by the extremely rare and heinous cases puts lawmakers in a position to crack down on sexual abuse.

It can be argued that sexual predator laws symbolically serve to pacify public outrage. Sexual predator laws are even referred to as an example of “feel-good legislation” (Freeman-Longo, 1996:2). However, these policies are intended for the sexual offender who is both highly specialized and untreatable, assuming that there is a population of sex offenders that fall into this category. These assumptions result in public policy that is intended for a very narrow, homogeneous population, also known as “one-size-fits-all” legislation. Further, even when criminal justice policy for sex offenders is based on research conducted through the use of official data, it is inappropriate to generalize these findings because a majority of sexual assaults are not reported and secondly, because the sex offenders who are identified by the criminal justice system cannot be considered representative of all sex offenders (Wood et al., 2000).

The unintended consequences of the laws and public policies pertaining to the management of sex offenders have negative impacts on sex offenders, victims of sexual abuse, and the community in general. Public policies such as sex offender registration and community notification programs can create a false sense of security for the community (Freeman-Longo, 1996; Prentky, 1996). The public usually isn’t aware that sexual abuse is frequently committed by someone the victim knows. Recent research suggests that in nearly 75 percent of sexual assault and rape cases, and in 90 percent of
those involving children, the victim knew the offender (Greenfield, 1997). While one of the goals of community notification and registration is to educate the community about sexual abuse, these policies may give the public a false sense of security if they believe that those offenders already labeled as dangerous are the only ones who pose a potential threat to their children (Trivitis and Repucci, 2002). In reality, only a fraction of sexual offenders are affected by sex offender legislation.

Another problem with sex offender laws is that they could potentially introduce a certain degree of bias into police practices (Hanson et al., 1995) and even hinder sex crime investigations (Simon, 2000). Whether or not there is agreement in criminal justice research regarding the existence of specialization in sex offending, Hanson et al. (1995:335) suggests that specialization in offending may reflect specialization in the detection of sex offending. Further, this research suggests “law enforcement practices may be biased toward apprehending suspects who have been previously convicted of the same type of crime.” Similarly, Simon (2000) points out that sex offender registries are used by law enforcement to help solve sex crimes, this practice being based on the assumption that convicted sex offenders specialize in sex crimes and will likely be a suspect in subsequent sex crimes. This leads Simon (2000:278) to the conclusion that “narrowing investigations of sex crimes to registered sex offenders often hampers or delays investigations, increasing the danger for victims.”

Certain sexual predator laws allow the state to civilly commit sex offenders who are thought to be psychologically disordered and pose a continual threat to society. Simon (2000: 46) points out that “given the fact that we have no evidence that offenders who commit sex crimes have higher recidivism rates or that they are in fact more
dangerous than other types of offenders, civilly committing them to secure mental hospitals for an indefinite amount of time after they have served their prison sentence does not make sense.” In addition, the existing assessments that are used to predict the future dangerousness of sex offenders have not demonstrated high levels of accuracy in their predictions of future dangerousness (Simon, 2000).

The Current Study

Two distinct approaches to the study of criminal offending apply to the current research: the criminal career paradigm and control theory. Simon (1997:36) explains the criminal career approach in the following manner:

The schema of the criminal career concept assumes that a criminal offender engages in a career or profession in the same way that a legitimately trained individual chooses to be a lawyer or doctor. Moreover, the criminal career paradigm requires that an offender is a specialist in a distinct type of crime or crimes (e.g., rapes or robberies) in the same way that a doctor or a lawyer would specialize in, say cardiology or tax law.

While the criminal career paradigm suggests a high degree of specialization in the criminal career, control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) proposes an alternative view by assuming that criminals display versatility in their patterns of offending and are characterized by anti-social tendencies that penetrate into other facets of their lives. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990:91) state that “our image of the ‘offender’ suggests that crime is not an automatic or necessary consequence of low self control. It suggests that many noncriminal acts analogous to crime (such as accidents, smoking, and alcohol use) are also manifestations of low self-control.” Further, this theory of low self-control points to versatility in the exhibition of deviance in a variety of criminal acts. To directly
quote the authors, “the variety of manifestations of low self-control is immense. In spite of the years of tireless research motivated by a belief in specialization, no credible evidence of specialization has been supported” (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990:91).

Expected Empirical Findings

Based on the literature and existing public policy, the working assumption of this study is that sex offenders are more likely to exhibit patterns of specialization and than other types of offenders. It is also expected that offense specialization of sex offenders will be exhibited within sub-categories of sex offenders, such as rapists and child molesters. Although it is anticipated that sex offenders will exhibit higher levels of specialization than other types of offenders, the degree of offense specialization among sex offenders is not expected to be as strong as public opinion and legal policy currently suggest.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A secondary data analysis was conducted to examine the criminal careers of a sample of sex offenders and to test for the presence of offense specialization. A detailed description of the sample and measures of variables is included in the following section. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board via the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects approved the use of data involving human subjects on November 19, 2004.

The Sample

The data set in this study is a national sample of convicted criminals who were released from prison in 15 different states in 1994. These states include: Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) chose these states because they “are large and diverse, collectively accounting for the majority of prisoners released in 1994” (Langan and Levin, 2002: 11). Altogether, these 15 states released 302,209 prisoners in 1994.
The Department of Corrections in each state supplied computerized records on each of the 302,209 prisoners. The computerized record included the offender’s name, date of birth, sex, race, department of corrections identification number, FBI identification number, imprisonment offense, sentence length, date of entry into prison, and date of release in 1994.

Using these official records, each prisoner was placed into one of thirteen offense categories that matched the conviction offense that resulted in the prison term. The thirteen offense categories included homicide, rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/motor vehicle theft, fraud, drug trafficking, drug possession, weapons offense, driving under the influence, other public order, and a category entitled “other” that included offenses that did not fall into the other categories.

Samples were drawn from each of the thirteen categories within each state. As noted by Langan and Levin (2002: 12), in the case of those prisoners with multiple conviction offenses, the offense that result in the longest prison sentence was designated as the imprisonment offense. The sample size for each category was determined by a target that was set for each state. The targeted sample sizes are summarized in Table 3.1. Table 3.2 presents the sample sizes for each of the thirteen offense categories.
Table 3.1 Population, Sample, and Analysis Subset by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Selected from total to be in the sample</th>
<th>Selected from sample to be in this report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>302,309</td>
<td>38,624</td>
<td>33,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>7,418</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>105,257</td>
<td>7,183</td>
<td>7,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>24,751</td>
<td>2,893</td>
<td>2,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>18,606</td>
<td>2,615</td>
<td>2,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>11,639</td>
<td>2,117</td>
<td>1,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>8,049</td>
<td>2,315</td>
<td>1,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>1,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>13,567</td>
<td>2,289</td>
<td>2,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>31,406</td>
<td>2,639</td>
<td>2,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>25,797</td>
<td>2,314</td>
<td>2,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>19,313</td>
<td>2,664</td>
<td>1,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>5,009</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>1,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>22,852</td>
<td>2,550</td>
<td>2,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>5,725</td>
<td>2,103</td>
<td>2,026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Target Sample Sizes by Offense Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Serious Release Offense</th>
<th>Targeted Sample Size in Each State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape/Sexual Assault</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny/Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug trafficking</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Possession</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons Offense</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Under the Influence</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Public Order</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For one State (California), targeted sample sizes are two times those shown.


There were deviations from the target sample sizes in several instances. For the state of California, the sample size was doubled to improve the precision of the estimates (Langan and Levin, 2002: 12). In addition, all released prisoners from the states of Delaware and Minnesota were included in the data set instead of a sample of them. The final data set consisted of 38,624 prisoners, 28,078 of whom were released non-sex offenders, and 10,546 of whom were released sex offenders. All sex offenders among the original 302,209 released prisoners were included in the sample, whereas a subset of offenders was selected from the other offense categories.
Once the sample was drawn, staff of the Bureau of Justice Statistics engaged in several additional procedures to complete their study. They began by contacting the State agency that had access to criminal history files and obtaining a RAP\(^1\) sheet for each of the prisoners that was sampled from that particular state. In order to obtain the needed information, the Bureau of Justice Statistics supplied the State agencies with individual identifiers that could match the prisoners to the criminal history files. The BJS staff was able to obtain computerized RAP sheets from respective State agencies for 37,647 of the 38,624 released prisoners in the sample.

The next step in the original data collection process was to obtain criminal history information from the FBI for each of the released prisoners. BJS staff was able to supply the FBI with individual identifiers for 35,985\(^2\) of the 38,624 prisoners in the sample. In turn, the FBI was able to supply the BJS with RAP sheets for 34,439 of those 35,985 released prisoners.

After information on the released prisoners in the sample was obtained from each source (i.e. the 15 departments of corrections, the 15 State criminal history repositories, and the FBI), BJS staff combined the information into a database. A total of 6,520 variables are available in this data file, 6,435 of which serve to document the prisoner’s entire adult criminal history. Information is collected for up to 99 separate arrest dates for each prisoner. For the 10 prisoners who had more than 99 different dates of arrest, their 99 latest arrest dates were included in the database (Langan and Levin, 2002: 13).

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\(^1\) According to Langan and Levin (2002: 12), a RAP sheet is a record of arrest and prosecution. The RAP sheets that were obtained from State agencies were computerized.

\(^2\) The identifiers for the 35,985 prisoners did not include any identifiers for the 2,639 prisoners from New York because New York law prohibited the BJS from supplying the FBI with identifying information (Langan and Levin, 2002: 13).
The database identifies the total number of offenses the person was charged with at the time of their arrest, the nature of the offense, and whether the offense was a felony or misdemeanor. If the person was arrested for more than three offenses at a particular time, only the three most serious offenses were coded. The data file adheres to a hierarchy that recognized felonies being more serious than misdemeanors. For arrest, charges, and conviction, the hierarchy coding of offenses, from most to least serious includes: homicide, rape/other sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/motor vehicle theft, fraud, drug trafficking, drug possession, weapons offense, driving under the influence, other public order, and “other offenses” (Langan and Levin, 2002:13).

The final sample includes 9,691 of the 10,546 released sex offenders who met all four parts of the selection criteria. The selection criteria for released sex offenders as outlined in the report compiled by Langan et al. (2003: 39) required that the prisoner was male and that: 1) a RAP sheet on the prisoner is located in the state criminal history repository, 2) the released prisoner was alive throughout the entire course of the three-year follow-up period, 3) the prisoner’s sentence was greater than one year, and 4) the state department of corrections that released the prisoner in 1994 did not designate him as any of the following release types: release to custody/detainer/warrant, absent without leave, escape, transfer, administrative release, or release on appeal.
Defining Sex Offenders

All of the 9,691 sex offenders released in 1994 were men who were labeled violent sex offenders. According to Langan et al. (2003: 3), their offenses are called "violent" because their crimes are widely defined in State statutes as "violent" sex offenses. 'Violent' means the offender used or threatened force in the commission of the crime or, while not actually using force, the offender did not have the victim's 'factual' or 'legal' consent.” The category of violent sex offenses does not refer to commercialized sex offenses such as prostitution, pimping, and pornography. Further, the category of violent offenses does not include non-violent morals or decency offenses such as indecent exposure, voyeurism, bestiality, adultery, incest between adults, and bigamy (Langan et al., 2003).

In the study conducted by Langan et al. (2003), violent sex crimes are divided into two main groups: rape and other sexual assault. Each of the 9,691 sex offenders was classified as being either a rapist or a sexual assaulter. The classification of the sex offenders in this sample was based upon information regarding the offender’s imprisonment offense that was contained in the prison records that were supplied for each offender. Offenders who were assigned the rape classification committed an act of forcible rape. For the purposes of this research, the term rapist refers to all sex offenders “whose imprisonment offense was defined by State law as forcible intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral) with a female or male” (Langan et al., 2003, p. 3). The definition of rape does include the acts of forcible sodomy and penetration with a foreign object, but excludes acts such as statutory rape or other nonforcible sex acts with minors or persons unable to give the appropriate legal or factual consent (Langan et al., 2003).

3 In the current study, sex crimes are classified into the categories of rape and child molestation.
Those sex offenders whose imprisonment offense did not allow them to be grouped into the rape classification were put into the “other” sexual assaulter category. Sexual assaulters are identified as those offenders whose imprisonment offense fell into one of three categories: 1) forcible sex acts that did not amount to intercourse, with a victim of any age, 2) nonforcible sex acts with a minor (i.e. statutory rape with a minor, incest with a minor, fondling), and 3) nonforcible sex acts with a person who is legally or factually unable to give consent due to mental or physical reasons (Langan et al., 2003).

The sample used in the current research includes the 9,691 sex offenders released from prison in 1994 whose imprisonment offense was a sexual offense, and in addition, the sample includes any prisoners who committed a sexual offense at any point in their criminal careers. By including those prisoners who committed a sexual offense at any point in their criminal careers in the sample, the current study will capture the widest possible sample of sex offenders. The inclusion of prisoners who have committed a sex offense during the course of their criminal careers in the current sample increases the sample size to 10,266. If the current research used only those sex offenders classified on the basis of their imprisonment offense, the study would be biased by the assumption that offenders specialize based solely on one offense for which they were arrested and convicted. Initially assuming such specialization in offending would directly conflict with the objectives of the study.

Coding of Variables

The major variables in this study involve measures that examine the offenses committed by sex offenders throughout the course of their criminal careers. The primary
dependent variable is the degree of offense specialization. The independent variables in this study include gender, race, type of imprisonment offense, number of arrest cycles (i.e., the length of criminal career), age at time of first arrest, age at time of release, whether or not the prisoner had any prior arrests, and whether or not the prisoner was rearrested in the three-year follow-up period.

Offense and Offender Typologies

Offense Types. The hierarchy of the thirteen offense categories observed in the current study are homicide, rape/other sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/motor vehicle theft, fraud, drug trafficking, drug possession, weapons offense, driving under the influence, other public order, and “other offenses” (Langan and Levin, 2002). The definitions of rape and other sexual assault were previously described. The definitions of the other offenses in this study are summarized below.

According to Langan and Levin (2002) murder can be constituted by 1) intentionally causing the death of another person without extreme provocation or legal justification, or 2) causing the death of another while committing or attempting to commit another crime. Robbery is the unlawful taking of property that is in the immediate possession of another, by force or the threat of force. Aggravated assault includes 1) intentionally and without legal justification causing serious bodily injury, with or without a deadly weapon or 2) using a deadly or dangerous weapon to threaten, attempt, or cause bodily injury.

Among the types of property offenses, burglary is considered the unlawful entry of a fixed structure used for regular residence, industry, or business to commit a felony or theft. Larceny is defined as the unlawful taking of property other than a motor vehicle
from the possession of another. Motor vehicle theft is the unlawful taking of a self-propelled road vehicle owned by another. Fraud includes forgery and embezzlement, and involves using deceit or intentional misrepresentation to unlawfully deprive a person of his or her property or legal rights.

Drug trafficking includes manufacturing, distributing, selling, smuggling, and possession with intent to sell. Drug possession is defined as the possession of an illegal drug. Weapons offenses include unlawful sale, distribution, manufacture, alteration, transportation, possession, or use of a deadly or dangerous weapon. Driving under the influence is defined as driving while intoxicated. Other public order offenses include probation or parole violation, traffic offenses, escape, obstruction of justice, court offenses, nonviolent sex offenses, commercialized vice, family offenses, liquor law violations, bribery, invasion of privacy, disorderly conduct, contributing to the delinquency of a minor and miscellaneous public-order offenses. The other offenses category includes all offenses that do not fall into the other twelve categories.

Offender Types. Based on their offense behaviors, there are different ways of classifying offenders. In this study, three types are considered. These include classifications based on 1) the offender’s imprisonment offense, 2) an offender who has any arrest for a particular offense category in their criminal history, and 3) an offender who exhibits complete specialization in one exclusive offense category. Accordingly, a sex offender may be someone who is imprisoned for a sex offense, committed any sex offense at some point in their criminal career, or someone who has only committed sex offenses and is a complete specialist. All three types of offenders will be considered in this study.
Specialization

As addressed in an earlier chapter, specialization is defined as "the tendency to repeat crime types over time" (Spier et al., 2001: 19). Four different measures were used to assess offense specialization among sex offenders. These measures include 1) percentage rules, 2) the diversity index, 3) transition probabilities, and 4) Farrington's Forward Specialization Coefficient.

Percentage Rules. A basic measure of specialization involves "the percentage concentration of offense types that are repeated over the criminal career" (Miethe et al., 2004: 13). The use of percentage rules in measuring offense specialization involves adhering to decision rules when defining what constitutes specialization. For example, when examining the offenses involved in each of K arrest cycles in a prisoner's criminal history, one may declare the individual to be a specialist if some fixed percentage (e.g. 75% or more) of the offenses committed by the offender are in the same qualitative category.

For the purposes of the current study, an offender will be defined as a specialist if at least 50% of the individual's offending history involves the same offense type. An advantage of employing the use of percentage rules to measure specialization is that it can be used to measure the concentration of similar offense types in non-adjacent arrest cycles as well as adjacent arrest cycles. However, because this "majority rule" is somewhat arbitrary, the pattern of specialization for different types of offenders will also be explained using a 75% and 100% decision rule to define specialization.

Measures of offense concentration can be broken down into four levels: 1) careers with less than 50% of a particular offense, 2) careers with 50% or more of a particular...
offense, 3) careers with 75% or more of a particular offense, and 4) careers consisting of 100% of a particular offense, signifying perfect specialization.

**Diversity Index.** Similar to percentage rules, the diversity index can also be used as a measure of specialization spanning entire offending careers, and can be used with adjacent and non-adjacent arrest cycles. The diversity index ranges in value from 0 to 1.0, with 0 representing complete specialization and 1 representing a complete lack of specialization in offending. Computation of the diversity index for a particular individual \( d_i \) requires the assessment of the proportion of the individual’s offenses \( p_{mj} \) that are included within different offense categories \( m \) (Mazerolle et al., 2000: 1154). The diversity index for that individual, \( d_i \), is then given by the following formula:

\[
d_i = 1 - \sum_{m=1}^{M} p_{mj}^2
\]

Although percentage rules and the diversity index provide a picture of specialization on the whole of an offender’s criminal career, several other measures can explore offense-type switching between adjacent transitions in the criminal career. These other measures assume that the particular sequence of offenses across stages is what characterizes specialization or diversity.

**Diagonal Transition Probabilities.** One of the most widely used measures of specialization involves the computation of diagonal marginal probabilities. These probabilities represent the likelihood of an individual repeating the same offense type at one arrest cycle \( k \) and at the subsequent arrest period \( k + 1 \). Miethe et al. (2004: 12) point out that using average diagonal probabilities as a measure of specialization “is reasonable as long as there is stability in the transition matrices over arrest cycles.” This
study found a significant negative correlation between arrest cycle number and the diagonal probabilities for sex offenses, but uncovered significant positive correlations between arrest cycle number and diagonal probabilities for property offenses and public order crimes (Miethe et al., 2004).

Farrington's Forward Specialization Coefficient. Another measure of specialization, Farrington's Forward Specialization Coefficient (FSC), assesses the extent to which cases tend to cluster along the main diagonal cells of a transition matrix. This measure of specialization is used for adjacent career transitions, the transition from arrest \( k \) to \( k + 1 \), or specialization in a forward direction (Farrington et al, 1988: 473). The FSC measure is derived from adjusted comparisons of observed and expected cell frequencies. Farrington et al. (1988) explain that the FSC value will be 0 when there is complete versatility in offending (when observed frequencies are equal to expected frequencies) and the quantity will equal 1 when there is complete specialization. The equation for the calculation of the forward specialization coefficient as proposed by Farrington (1986) is:

\[
FSC = \frac{O - E}{R - E}
\]

Where \( O \) = observed cell frequency, \( E \) = expected cell frequency, and \( R \) = row total.

The FSC measure, along with diagonal probabilities, assesses specialization in adjacent arrest transitions, while percentage rules and the diversity index provide a summary of offense patterns over the entire course of a criminal career. The use of both adjacent and non-adjacent measures of specialization provides a more thorough examination of offense patterns and allows for an assessment of the possibility of variability in results across measures.
Analysis Plan

The data from the sample was compiled into a full data set and is available for analysis through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). The data set was then coded for analysis in the SPSS 11.0 statistical analysis program.

The initial stage of data analysis involved measuring offense specialization among sex offenders using the four measures mentioned above. The next phase of data analysis compares offense patterns between groups of offenders. By comparing sex offenders with non-sex offenders, it is possible to examine the accuracy of the current ideals held by public policy and driven by the media that sex offenders evolve into a highly specialized and persistent offender.

Patterns of specialization will be analyzed for the first 25 arrest cycles in the criminal careers of the sample of sex offenders. Preliminary data analyses indicate that 94% of the prisoners in the entire sample (sex and non-sex offenders) have 25 or fewer arrests. These data analyses also indicate the profiles of those offenders who continue to offend and whose careers span over 60, 70, 80, 90, and up to 99 arrest cycles are primarily characterized by commission of property offenses. Under these conditions, the focus on the criminal careers of sex offenders is not unduly limited by focusing the analysis only on the first 25 separate arrests in their careers.

Strengths and Limitations of Sample

There are several characteristics of this sample that serve to strengthen the current study. The large sample size of nearly 10,000 male sex offenders is also a national
sample of fifteen different U.S. states. According to Langan and Levin (2002), this sample represents two-thirds of all prisoners who were released in the United States in 1994. Coupled with its large size and national coverage, this sample also provides thorough and inclusive criminal histories for each of the released prisoners. These official records include state and FBI RAP sheets, juvenile and adult arrest records, and arrest cycles for each offender that ultimately allow offense patterns to be compared. The coverage of up to 99 arrest cycles for each prisoner provides the ability to investigate transitions in offending at different points in the criminal career. Miethe et al. (2004: 9) points out that “in terms of sample size and national coverage, no other data source collected in the United States is even remotely comparable.”

Even though the sample was chosen over other secondary data sources, it is important to acknowledge that these data also have several limitations. The most serious limitation is that they rely exclusively on official arrest records in defining the criminal career. Unreported criminal behavior is not included in the data set. In addition, the use of convicted sex offenders who have spent at least one year in prison also limits the generalizations that can be made with regards to patterns of specialization in the criminal career. This group of sex offenders may differ from other sex offenders who have not been incarcerated in that they may have more extensive arrest records or committed more serious crimes. The convenience of official data is countered by the burden of missing or incomplete records, and is subject to human error. Given the use of exclusively official data, the results of the current study should be considered exploratory findings. More definitive statements must await the collection of more comprehensive data that covers both official and self-reported sex offenses.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

There are several ways in which an offender can be classified for analytic purposes. The current study examines offenders on the basis of 1) their general imprisonment offense (i.e. sex, violent, property, and public order offenses) 2) the specific classification of their imprisonment offense (murder, rape child molestation, robbery aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, arson, drug offenses and other offenses) and 3) any arrest for one of the offenses in the four general categories.

The Univariate and Bivariate Distribution

The preliminary analysis involves the examination of the univariate distribution of the major variables and their bivariate comparisons across different types of offenses. Table 4.1 reveals the demographic profiles of offenders, based on general imprisonment offenses and any arrest for one of the four general categories.

Nearly all of the sex offenders were male, and over 60% of them were white. The majority of sex offenders were also arrested for the first time during their adult years. According to their criminal offense histories, the vast majority of sex offenders have had a prior arrest. However, less than half of them were rearrested in the three years following their release from prison.

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The current analysis also breaks down the sample into eleven more specific offense categories. When specific categories are examined for sex offenders (not shown), the socio-demographic profiles and arrest histories were somewhat similar to those based on the general offense categories. For example, the predominance of males and older persons among sex offenders was also observed within the specific categories of rapists and child molesters. However, child molesters were more likely to be white than rapists (74% vs. 43%, respectively) and were slightly older at the time of their first arrests (mean = 27 vs. 23).\(^1\)

Bivariate comparisons between sex offenders and other types of offenders reveal several significant differences between groups. In particular, sex offenders were found to be significantly more likely to be male, white, and older at time of first arrest and release from prison than other offenders. They also were substantially less likely to have a prior record and to be rearrested within three years of their prison release in 1994. These analyses indicate that released sex offenders have relatively distinct socio-demographic and arrest profiles when compared to other offenders.

\(^1\) A tabular summary of demographic profiles for the specific offense categories is not presented here, however it available from the author upon request.
Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Sample by Imprisonment Offense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Total Number Offenders</th>
<th>Sex Offense</th>
<th>Violent Offense</th>
<th>Property Offense</th>
<th>Public Order Offense</th>
<th>Sex Offense</th>
<th>Violent Offense</th>
<th>Property Offense</th>
<th>Public Order Offense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>0 = white</td>
<td>14,435</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>41.8%*</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = black</td>
<td>14,745</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 = other</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0 = male</td>
<td>2,102</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>91.3%*</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = female</td>
<td>31,524</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at First</td>
<td>0 = ≤ 20</td>
<td>19,302</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>57.9%*</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest</td>
<td>1 = 21-30</td>
<td>14,214</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 = 31-98</td>
<td>3,967</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at Release</td>
<td>0 = ≤ 20</td>
<td>1,089</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3.5%*</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = 21-30</td>
<td>13,310</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 = 31-98</td>
<td>19,233</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Arrest</td>
<td>0 = no</td>
<td>4,015</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>7.7%*</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = yes</td>
<td>29,623</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearrest</td>
<td>0 = no</td>
<td>13,841</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>36.9%*</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = yes</td>
<td>19,797</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Number of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*denotes significant chi-square at the .001 level for all four general imprisonment offense categories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#percentages for any arrest offenders will sum to be greater than 100 as these categories are not independent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As discussed in the methods section, specialization may be measured across the entire criminal career or by analyzing only the adjacent arrest cycles. The results of these specialization analyses are presented in Tables 4.2 through 4.4.

**Specialization Among General Offense Categories**

When transition probabilities are employed to determine the chance of repeating the same offense at the next arrest cycle, sex offenders exhibit far less specialization than their violent, property, and public order offender counterparts. As shown in Table 4.2, slightly over one-fourth of sex offenders repeat their offense type at the next arrest cycle. A comparison of the diagonal probabilities for the other general offenses reveals that nearly a third of the violent offenders and over half for the property and public order offenders repeated the same offense at their subsequent arrest.

Using the mean Forward Specialization Coefficient (FSC), Table 4.2 indicates that sex offenders also have the lowest degree of specialization among general offense categories. Thus, regardless of what particular measure is used to assess the diagonal probabilities for the adjacent arrest cycles, sex offenders have a comparatively low level of specialization.

Based on both measures of adjacent arrest probabilities, sex offenders also exhibit less specialization across their criminal careers. For example, the probability of repeating a sex offense decreases from .39 to .15 between the first two and the last two arrest cycles in their careers. In contrast, both property and public order offenders became more specialized over the course of their offending careers.
Table 4.2 Measures of Specialization for Adjacent Arrest Cycles: General Offenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrest Type at Cycle k and k + 1</th>
<th>Diagonal Probabilities for k to k + 1 Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Offense</td>
<td>.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offense</td>
<td>.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offense</td>
<td>.523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Order Offense</td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrest Type at Cycle k and k + 1</th>
<th>Forward Specialization Coefficient by Arrest Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Offense</td>
<td>.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offense</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offense</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Order Offense</td>
<td>.294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diversity index presents a measure of specialization over adjacent and non-adjacent arrest cycles. Measures of diversity can range from 0 to 1.0, with 0 signifying complete specialization. Based on the analysis of the four general categories of offenders, only small differences in diversity are found (see Table 4.3). However, consistent with the analysis of adjacent probabilities, the mean scores on the diversity index indicate that sex offenders have the least specialization among the four general offense categories over the course of their criminal careers.
Table 4.3 Career Measures of Specialization: General Offenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type at Arrest Cycle k</th>
<th>Diversity Index by Offense Type at Arrest Cycle k</th>
<th>( k_1 )</th>
<th>( k_2 )</th>
<th>( k_3 )</th>
<th>( k_4 )</th>
<th>( k_5 )</th>
<th>( k_{10} )</th>
<th>( k_{15} )</th>
<th>( k_{20} )</th>
<th>( k_{25} )</th>
<th>mean ( k_1 - k_{25} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex Offense</td>
<td></td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>.594</td>
<td>.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offense</td>
<td></td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>.536</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offense</td>
<td></td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Order Offense</td>
<td></td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Career Offense Concentration Using Percentage Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type</th>
<th>&lt; 50%</th>
<th>≥50%</th>
<th>≥75%</th>
<th>Complete Specialists</th>
<th>One-Time Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex Offense</td>
<td>76.6% (6951)</td>
<td>23.4% (2120)</td>
<td>6.6% (600)</td>
<td>468 (5.2%)</td>
<td>5493 (60.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offense</td>
<td>83.8% (15974)</td>
<td>16.2% (3084)</td>
<td>2.9% (553)</td>
<td>260 (1.4%)</td>
<td>6878 (36.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offense</td>
<td>62.9% (14248)</td>
<td>37.2% (8406)</td>
<td>11.2% (2526)</td>
<td>640 (2.8%)</td>
<td>5175 (22.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Order Offense</td>
<td>51.3% (13349)</td>
<td>78.8% (12694)</td>
<td>17.2% (4472)</td>
<td>1576 (6.1%)</td>
<td>4774 (17.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of diversity scores at different arrest cycles indicates that sex offenders are substantially less specialized as their criminal careers progress. In contrast, property offenders maintain a relatively stable level of specialization, whereas violent and property offenders exhibit marginally small shifts toward less specialization.

Using a percentage rule of 50% to define specialization, Table 4.3 suggests that both violent offenders and sex offenders are less likely to specialize than the property or public order offenders. Over three-fourths of sex offenders had less than one-half of their arrests for sex offenses, whereas less than half of public order offenders had this comparable level of specialization (or lack thereof). When a 75% rule is used to define specialization (i.e. at least three-fourths of a person’s offenses must be of the same general type) only about 6% of sex offenders would be considered specialists.

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The use of other decision rules yields somewhat different conclusions about the relatively low levels of specialization among sex offenders (see Table 4.3). When observing a “one-timer rule” (i.e. an offender has only one arrest in their general offense category), sex offenders are far more likely than any other general offender category to have only one arrest for their particular “specialized” crime during their careers. Under an absolute specialization rule (100% of a person’s offenses must be of the same general type), less than 10% of offenders are classified as complete specialists with regards to their general offense category. However, a slightly higher percent of sex offenders (5%) would be defined as complete specialists than violent offenders (1%).

**Crime-Specific Analysis of Specialization**

When examining specific offense categories, conclusions about the most and least specialized criminals are more dependent upon the type of sex offender and how specialization is measured (see Table 4.4). In particular, the mean diagonal and FSC measures demonstrate that child molesters exhibit a higher level of specialization than rapists. Compared to the other specific types of offenders, rapists are among the least specialized with a mean diagonal probability and FSC measures comparable to those of murderers. However, the adjacent specialization measures of child molesters are more comparable to those offenders imprisoned for larceny.

An analysis of diagonal probabilities at each of the 25 arrest cycles (not shown) reveals that both rapists and child molesters tend to become less specialized as their criminal careers progress. The FSC measures of rapists and child molesters at each arrest cycle illustrates a similar pattern of decreasing specialization throughout the career for
Table 4.4 Measures of Specialization for Specific Categories of Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type</th>
<th>Mean Diagonal Probability</th>
<th>Mean FSC Coefficient</th>
<th>Mean Diversity Index</th>
<th>Percentage Rules</th>
<th>Complete Specialists</th>
<th>One-Time Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 50%</td>
<td>≥50%</td>
<td>≥75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>91.3% (2139)</td>
<td>.8% (21)</td>
<td>.8% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td>87.4% (2945)</td>
<td>12.5% (422)</td>
<td>1.9% (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Molester</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>74.2% (1764)</td>
<td>25.8% (612)</td>
<td>6.4% (152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td>93.4% (8162)</td>
<td>6.6% (574)</td>
<td>.9% (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>92.1% (10645)</td>
<td>8.0% (897)</td>
<td>.8% (92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>.319</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>89.7% (11589)</td>
<td>10.2% (1320)</td>
<td>1.6% (205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>96.9% (3596)</td>
<td>3.1% (116)</td>
<td>.2% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.V. Theft</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>97.1% (3921)</td>
<td>2.9% (120)</td>
<td>.3% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.571</td>
<td>94.9% (481)</td>
<td>5.1% (26)</td>
<td>.2% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Offense</td>
<td>.451</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>76.5% (12875)</td>
<td>23.6% (3956)</td>
<td>6.6% (1103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Offense</td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>40.7% (11123)</td>
<td>59.3% (16190)</td>
<td>22% (6004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
rapists, whereas FSC measures for child molesters indicate a more stable level of specialization for child molesters as their careers progress.

The diversity index measures for the eleven specific offense categories are presented in Table 4.4. Again, there is little variation among mean diversity index measures. However this measure indicates higher levels of specialization among the sex offenders (rapists and child molesters) than the adjacent measures of specialization. It is notable that with this measure of specialization, child molesters once again exhibit a slightly higher level of specialization than rapists. Analysis of the diversity index at each of the 25 arrest cycles further indicates that while rapists exhibit a level of stability in specialization across arrest cycles, child molesters become less specialized throughout their careers.

Measures of specialization according to percentage rules for specific offenders are also summarized in Table 4.4. Using a 50% rule to define specialization, we find that nearly 90% of rapists and over three-quarters of child molesters are not considered to be specialists. However, when a 75% specialization rule is employed, child molesters have the third highest percentage of specialization (6.4%) behind other offenders (22%) and drug offenders (6.6%). Among the least specialized under the 75% rule are those imprisoned for arson, larceny, and motor vehicle theft (.2%, .2%, and .3%). However, rapists also exhibit low levels of specialization under this rule with just 1.9% of them considered to be specialists.

Complete specialization occurs when all of an offender’s offenses (100%) fall into the same offense-type category. While no specific offense category has higher than 10% of its offenders exhibiting complete specialization, child molesters do display the
second highest rate of complete specialization (5%), lower only than the other offense category (7.7%). Those offenders who have only committed one offense in their designated category are considered “one-timers.” When using the one-timer rule to define specialization, this analysis reveals that about 70% of both rapists and child molesters are one-time offenders, whereas only 32% of drug offenders and 15% of other offenders are considered one-timers.

In sum, the adjacent and non-adjacent measures of specialization employed in this research provide a comprehensive analysis of specialization in offending patterns. The degree of specialization for each offense can and does differ depending on the way the offense is classified and measure of specialization used (adjacent or non-adjacent). A discussion of these results and implications for future research will follow in the subsequent section.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The current research has examined the existing literature and empirical studies regarding the concept of offense specialization, specifically within the criminal careers of sex offenders. Existing literature provides some evidence that sex offenders exhibit specialization, but it is not clear to what extent. The analysis in the current study offers a greater degree of clarity with respect to the degree of specialization displayed by sex offenders and other types of offenders. Further, the profiling of sex offenders as specialists has important ramifications for public policy. This analysis has revealed that not all sex offenders exhibit a high degree of specialization and therefore proposes new directions for sex offender public policy.

Summary of Results

A preliminary analysis of the frequency distribution of major variables indicated that sex offenders have a rather distinct socio-demographic profile. Sex offenders are more likely to be white, male, and get arrested for the first time in their adult years. Further, sex offenders are less likely than the other four general offense categories to have a prior arrest in their criminal histories and to get rearrested upon their release from prison.
The analysis of the four general imprisonment offense categories demonstrates that sex offenders were among the least specialized group of offenders across the diagonal transition probability measure, the FSC measure, the diversity index measure, and the 50% and 75% specialization rules. Sex offenders had one of the lowest percentages of complete specialists (100% of the person’s offenses fall into the same crime-type category). In addition, the career measure analysis also revealed that the sex offender category had the highest percentage of one-time offenders (60%), which was nearly four times the number of one-time offenders for public order offenses.

When offenses were classified into more restrictive categories, somewhat different patterns of specialization emerged. The rapists and child molesters could no longer be considered the least specialized offenders. With respect to the adjacent measures of specialization and the diversity index, it became evident that child molesters exhibited higher levels of specialization than rapists. Adjacent measures of specialization also show that rapists are among the least specialized categories of offenders, while child molesters exhibit a level of specialization falling more toward the middle of the distribution.

The percentage rule analysis demonstrated different conclusions about the level of specialization among rapists and child molesters across different decision rules. For example, rapists and child molesters (child molesters to a greater extent) were among the most specialized categories of offenders under a 50% rule. However, when a 75% decision rule was used to define specialization, rapists were among the least specialized groups of offenders, while child molesters were the third most specialized group. The child molester category had one of the highest percentages of complete specialists, while
the percentage for rapists was among the lowest. About 70% of both rapists and child molestors were one-time offenders, making the percentage of one-time offenders in these categories among the highest.

**Explanation of Results**

When the four general offense categories were examined, sex offenders displayed consistently lower levels of specialization than non-sex offenders. However, when more specific offense categories were examined, neither the rapists nor the child molestors ever demonstrated the lowest level of specialization in any of the four measures. Further, it became evident that child molestors were more specialized than rapists. The differences found in levels of specialization may in part be due to the way in which offenders were classified. When offenses are classified into general categories, a greater variety of offenses fell into each of the four general imprisonment offense categories, making it relatively easy to detect specialization. However, when offenses were classified into more restricted offense categories, only repetition of very specific offenses indicated specialization, making it more difficult to detect specialization.

Another explanation for differences in specialization is that with three of the measures used to assess specialization (diagonal probabilities, FSC, diversity index,) scores for each sex offender were averaged across 25 arrest cycles. By averaging across cycles, we lose the ability to compare specialization for certain categories of offenders at different points in their arrest cycles. Averaging specialization scores across arrest cycles also fails to take into account the number of people repeating their “specialized” offense at each arrest cycle. The quantity and quality of offenders being arrested at each
successive cycle is certainly not the same. The smaller number of offenders with the
greater number of arrest cycles will tend to exhibit lower levels of specialization as they
have been committing crimes longer and have had the opportunity to participate in a
variety of different offenses. In contrast, there are many offenders with just a few arrests
who have participated in only several different offense types and will therefore exhibit
higher levels of offense specialization.

Study Limitations

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the current research is that the findings are not
highly generalizable. It is important to keep in mind that the conclusions based on these
findings should be examined more closely because the degree of specialization found for
the offenders in this sample vary depending on how the offender was classified, what
type of measure was used, and also the particular stage in the career at which
specialization is being measured.

There are methodological limitations involved with each measured used to assess
specialization in this study. Diagonal transition probabilities and the Forward
Specialization Coefficient both overlook offense patterns that are repeated at non-
adjacent arrest cycles. The use of percentage rules in determining specialization is
directly affected by the offender’s number of arrest cycles. Finally, the scores on the
diversity index vary as a function of the number of arrest cycles and number of offense
categories in addition to the level of specialization.

Though the sample used in this study has comprehensive national coverage, it
limits the findings of this study for several reasons: 1) the data set is based on official
records and overlooks unreported crimes, and 2) the data set focuses on a very specific
group of offenders: those sex offenders who were released from prison for a sexual
offense in 1994. The use of a sample of incarcerated offenders also suggests that these
offenders may be quite different from other sex offenders in that their offense patterns
may differ from non-incarcerated offenders and also that they have less time “at risk” to
offend since they have spent at least a year in prison.

Implications for Policy and Future Research
The results of this study indicate that sex offenders exhibit relatively low levels of
specialization in the course of their arrest careers. At the very least, these results suggest
the levels of specialization observed with sex offenders in both general and specific
categories are quite comparable with those of non-sex offenders. These findings call into
question public policies, treatment modalities, and police practices that assume sex
offenders are highly specialized. Aside from empirical evidence, clinical and case studies
also call into question the specialization assumption. Miethe et al (1994) point out that
assuming specialization in sexual offending is highly problematic considering the wide
variety of sexual paraphilias, motivations for offending, target preferences, and modus
operandi of sex offenders (see Bradway 1990; Knight and Prentky, 1990).

The possibilities for future research involving the career trajectories and offense
patterns of sex offenders are wide open. The use of multiple measures of specialization
should be employed across a greater number of arrest cycles and across diverse samples
of sex offenders. Trends in offending should be compared at different point throughout
an offender’s criminal career. Data used in future studies of sex offenders should include
self-reports as well as official records. Research on the careers of sex offenders should also be concerned with other types of offending patterns besides specialization. Analyses involved in the examination of escalation and persistence in sexual offending would be invaluable to sex offender treatment programs and to legislation concerned with the future dangerousness of sex offenders.
REFERENCES


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