

SCOTT HANNAH E. M.A. Can Social Learning Theory Explain Child Sexual Assault? (2024)  
Directed by Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar. 88 pp.

This research seeks to examine if the social learning theory proposed by Ronald L. Akers has potential in explaining patterns among men who report engaging in sexual assault. Many studies reveal an association between CSA (child sexual abuse) and adult violent behavior, examining a victim-offender overlap and social learning being at least one of the reasons for it. These studies, however, do not focus inherently on Akers' social learning theory or extensively on the adult male sex offender population in America. Social learning theory posits that actions like sexual violence occur when an individual is exposed to such deviant behavior through different associations favorable to crime and through imitation and learning reinforcement. The present study examines pre-recorded videos of adult male-identified persons convicted of sex crimes from a social learning theory lens. Specifically, I assess the extent to which the interviewees use language and/or other expressions that reflect social learning components at macro- (systemic) and micro-(interpersonal) levels. The question driving the research is: Can Akers' Social Learning theory explain men's sexual assault? The pre-recorded videos are from the single playlist, 'Sexual Abuse,' on the publicly available YouTube channel, *Soft White Underbelly* created by Mark Laita who is also the interviewer for each video. All the interviewees in the sample are registered sex offenders in the state of Florida. Using a guide sheet to assess various components of social learning theory, I systematically evaluate the validity of Akers' social learning theory. My results indicate that five of the eight male sex offenders in the sample experienced CSA. The large majority of the sample sexually violated minors. Some, but not all, of the men imply or directly state that they learned how to sexually assault by interactions with others, thus supporting aspects of Akers' social learning theory.

CAN SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY EXPLAIN CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT?

by

Hannah E. Scott

A Thesis  
Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Greensboro

2024

Approved by

---

Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar  
Committee Chair

## DEDICATION

Mom and Dad, all your struggles and sacrifices have allowed me to get to this moment and for that I am extremely and utterly thankful. My love for you both is limitless. The phrase, “Thank You,” will never be enough.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Hannah E. Scott has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar

Committee Members

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Steven R. Cureton

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Ting Wang

March 11, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

March 11, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY .....	3
Differential Association .....	4
Differential Reinforcement.....	5
Definitions .....	7
Imitation .....	8
Learning Occurs in Social Structures .....	9
CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
Male Offenders and Sexual Assault .....	12
Demographics of Sexual Assault Offending .....	12
Victim-Offender Overlap .....	12
Power .....	14
Social Learning Theory and Sexual Assault .....	14
Social Learning Theory and Sex Offenders .....	16
CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY .....	18
Content Analysis .....	18
Soft White Underbelly.....	19
CHAPTER V: RESULTS .....	22
Frankie.....	22
Basic Information .....	22
Social Learning Theory .....	22
Bill.....	30
Basic Information .....	30
Social Learning Theory .....	30
Mike.....	34
Basic Information .....	34
Social Learning Theory .....	35

Ian.....	42
Basic Information .....	42
Social Learning Theory .....	42
Ed.....	45
Basic Information .....	45
Social Learning Theory .....	46
Tony.....	49
Basic Information .....	49
Social Learning Theory .....	50
Marshall.....	55
Basic Information .....	55
Social Learning Theory .....	56
Lee .....	62
Basic Information .....	62
Social Learning Theory .....	63
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION .....	68
Discussion .....	68
Limitations.....	73
Future Research.....	74
REFERENCES .....	75
APPENDIX A: VIDEO INFORMATION .....	82
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS.....	83
APPENDIX C: GUIDE SHEET .....	86

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Sexual offending has been researched throughout the social sciences for years, with scholarship indicating a disproportionate gender ratio of perpetrators, the majority being men (Fagan 2001; Widom and Maxfield 2001; Plummer and Cossins 2018; FBI 2019). In addition, evidence suggests that women and girls are more often victims or survivors of sexual assault (Fagan 2001; Schwartz et al. 2006; Plummer and Cossins 2018).

The research study seeks to examine if the social learning theory proposed by Ronald L. Akers has potential in explaining patterns among men who report engaging in sexual assault. Social learning theory posits that actions like sexual violence occur when an individual is exposed to conforming or deviant behavior, failure of socialization of conventional societal norms, as well as different associations, reinforcement, imitation, and definitions that allow a person to learn. Given these propositions, some interesting questions are raised considering existing evidence about sexual assault.

For instance, even though women and girls are more likely to be victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) than men, males who have been victimized, in turn, commit sexual assault at higher rates than women who have been victimized (Fagan 2001; Schwartz et al. 2006; Plummer and Cossins 2018). These findings appear to challenge some of social learning theory's arguments. First, if women and girls are more likely to be involved in sexual abuse, why do we find such a consistent gender ratio gap in sexual assault offending? Second, why do males with a history of CSA more commonly become offenders themselves as compared to women with similar CSA backgrounds?

It is worth acknowledging that the United States operates with extensive patriarchal social conditions which treats women and girls as inferior to men and boys and thus posits male-bodied

persons and masculinity as generally dominant and authoritative, Perhaps, then, the gender ratio of sexual assault offending by men and boys is a reflection of systemic patriarchy?

The present study examines pre-recorded videos of adult male-identified persons convicted of sex crimes from a social learning theory lens. Specifically, I assess the extent to which the interviewees use language and/or other expressions that reflect social learning components at macro- (systemic) and micro- (interpersonal) levels. Social learning theory has been previously applied to study various individual-level behaviors, such as delinquency (Solakoglu and Yuksek 2020), sexual homicide (Chan, Heide, and Beauregard 2011), substance use (Miller et al. 2008; Yun and Kim 2015), adolescent cigarette smoking (Krohn et al. 1985; Akers and Lee 1996), and pornography (Check and Malamuth 1986).

Although a few existing studies have also used it to examine sexual offending (Burton, Miller, and Shill 2002; Felson and Lane 2009), the present research seeks to extend this literature in a few ways. First, I use a unique methodological strategy. Specifically, I have located several rigorous and systematically conducted videos of men convicted of sexual assault that are publicly available online. By closely examining these videos, I was able to assess the applicability of social learning theory. Second, a relatively extensive literature review reveals little research utilizing Akers' social learning theory to explain acts of male sex offenders. I find this lack of research compelling given the popularity of this theory in criminological research and the extensive research on sexual assault across numerous disciplines. The question driving my research is: Can Akers' social learning theory explain men's sexual assault offending?



## CHAPTER II: SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Ronald L. Akers' social learning theory was first proposed with Robert L. Burgess in 1966, integrating differential association theory theorized by Sutherland (1947) and psychological behaviorism based on operant conditioning, theorized by Skinner (1953). Once known as "differential association- reinforcement theory," Akers and Burgess transitioned to "social learning theory" formally in Akers' first publication of social learning theory, *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach* (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). In that book published in 1973, there was an integration of operant learning and differential association theories that constituted a social learning explanation of deviant behavior (Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). In the criminological sector, social learning theory has become a general social and psychological explanation of crime, deviance, and delinquency (Akers 2009). Since it is a general theory of crime, it explains both criminal and conforming behavior; the social learning theory looks at motivations to conform and motivations to not conform on an individual level (Akers 2009). In Akers (2009:51) words, "It answers the questions of why people do and do not violate norms."

While creating a new theory of crime, Akers and Burgess revised and integrated Sutherland's theory of differential association. Sutherlands' differential association theory consisted of symbolic interactionism, theorizing that criminal and non-criminal behavior is learned by interaction with others (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). It is all about the balance of interacting with those who abide by the law and those who do not in order to be a law-abiding citizen. If one was to connect more with others who commit criminal acts or behaviors, then this person is more likely to learn criminal behavior. There were many criticisms that led to the fusing of psychological behaviorism to create a social learning approach, such as the neglect

of the learning mechanism (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Akers and Burgess found space for the addition of psychological behaviorism as well as Bandura's cognitive behaviorism in tandem with differential association theories. With that being said, Akers' social learning theory includes Sutherland's concepts of differential association and definitions.

Learning theories are quite complex, filled with multiple facets and various forms of learning techniques and behaviorisms. As for the social learning theory, the theory proposes, ... that differences in behavior can be explained by individual variations in past and current exposure to conforming and deviant patterns, incomplete or failed socialization in conventional values, and other countervailing and balancing processes of associations, reinforcement, imitation, and attitudes that go well beyond reference only to learning subcultural or group norms. (Akers 2009:xxvii)

As seen above, Akers social learning theory focuses on four major explanatory concepts that can be used to explain conforming and non-conforming acts as well as criminal or non-criminal behaviors: 'differential association,' 'definitions,' 'differential reinforcement,' and 'imitation' (Akers and Jensen 2010). Each of these four elements are discussed in great detail below.

### **Differential Association**

Differential association acknowledges that interactions with family, friends, and others are vital in the mechanisms of learning behaviors. These associations differ between different groups and expose an individual to different social contexts. Depending on the social environment, normative behaviors can either be conforming or non-conforming based. Inspired by Sutherland's theory of differential association, Akers' theory contains four principal 'modalities' that can effectively transform one's behavior: intensity, duration, frequency, and priority (Akers 2009; Akers and Jennings 2009; Akers and Jensen 2010). All four modalities, as

Akers calls them, play an important role in individual definitions either favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior. For example, it is Dylan's first year in college, and he has met a few friends who also live in his dorm building. He has never used an E-cigarette before, but on a Wednesday afternoon between classes, his friends ask him if he wants to hit their vape device, Dylan says yes. This will not be the last time Dylan and his friends vape, this deviant behavior becomes a daily routine throughout the whole year. In fact, Dylan buys his own vape a few weeks later for the first time. Based on the intensity, frequency, duration, and priority, Dylan is more likely to engage in vaping, a deviant behavior in this scenario, because he is differentially associated with a group that has norms, values, and beliefs that seem like a catalyst for this behavior.

Specifically, these norms, values, and beliefs that he now surrounds himself with are in support of vaping. The modalities here influence the amount, frequency, and probability of differential reinforcement and an individual's exposure to either conforming or nonconforming behavior (Akers 2009). These associations and environments provide an individual with exposure to different values, beliefs and attitudes that can affect a person's behavior (Akers and Jensen 2010). In other words, interaction, association and identification with others influences a person's own behaviors and attitudes, depending on the social environment.

### **Differential Reinforcement**

Differential reinforcement refers to the rewards or punishments connected to a behavior; this includes positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment (Akers and Jennings 2009). It is important to note here that the terms 'positive' and 'negative' are synonyms of addition and subtraction of a stimuli in connection to a specific behavior (Akers 2009). The frequency of deviant or conforming behavior relies on either the positive or negative consequences of behavior over time (Akers et al. 1979; Akers and Jensen

2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Positive reinforcement of behavior occurs when an individual is met with a positive reward. Consider a 7-year-old girl named Mia, who just stole a toy from the toy store because her parents wouldn't buy it. Instead of her parents getting upset once they find out, they allow her to keep it. This will increase the likelihood of Mia stealing another item from the store later on since her behavior resulted in a positive reward. According to Akers and Jennings (2009) negative reinforcement of behavior occurs when that behavior allows a person to avoid or even escape conflicting or unwanted situations. Let's say Marcus, a college student, doesn't want to go to Chemistry class today because his fraternity is throwing a day party. Instead of going to class, Marcus sends an email to the professor saying someone he knows has been hurt and is in the hospital. His professor emails him back and tells him to take the rest of the week off from class so that Marcus can be with that person. The likelihood of Marcus doing this again, perhaps in another class, has increased. Regarding positive and negative punishment, these punishments influence a person's decision to act on a specific behavior in the future. A negative punishment refers to the removal of a reward as a consequence of the behavior (Akers 2009). A positive punishment is when a troublesome consequence is attached, or added, to the behavior (Akers 2009). Remember, differential association has 4 modalities: intensity, duration, frequency, and priority; while differential reinforcement has 3 modalities: amount, frequency, and probability (Akers 2009; Akers and Jensen 2010). In the words of Akers and Jensen (2010):

The greater the relative value or amount of reward over punishment, the greater the relative frequency of reward compared to punishment, and the higher the probability of reward for a given behavior (as balanced against the differential reinforcement for alternative behavior), the greater the likelihood that it will occur and be repeated. (P. 3)

## Definitions

Through social interaction, people learn *definitions* of behavior being either good or bad, right or wrong, conforming or non-conforming. People can have different orientations, beliefs or attitudes to criminal or non-criminal behavior. In the social learning theory, there are three categories of definitions: favorable, unfavorable, and neutralizing. One may define deviant behavior with a positive definition favorable to criminal activity and other non-conforming acts. However, if one defines a behavior with a negative definition, then that person disapproves or disagrees with that behavior. Neutralizing definitions excuse or justify a behavior while also determining it either right or wrong (Akers 2009; Akers and Jennings 2009; Akers and Jensen 2010). For example, some sex offenders may recognize that they did not see anything wrong with molesting a child while committing such acts, in other words they defined this criminal behavior with a favorable definition. In spite of that, later in life, perhaps after therapy or civil commitment, they recognize that that behavior is wrong, and it becomes defined unfavorably. However, there may be some sex offenders who recognize that molesting a child is wrong, but they justify it because they were abused in their childhood, this is an example of a neutralizing definition. Akers argues that in the range of definitions favorable to deviance, neutralizing definitions are more common than positive definitions as they include various excuses and justifications for behaviors (Akers and Jennings 2009). Additionally, these definitions lean more towards favoring deviant behavior based on the position of finding such behavior as necessary, justifiable, or excusable (Akers 2009). Overall, unfavorable or favorable definitions are learned behaviors that allow a person to define a given situation, behavior, or act. Instead of reinforcing behaviors directly, this concept shapes how people view situations. It's important to note that

favorable and unfavorable definitions are a continued balance while an individual is being exposed to others; it happens to be more of an internalized process that sits on a continuum.

### **Imitation**

Imitation refers to engaging in a behavior that was once observed. Imitating a behavior from another individual depends on desirable or undesirable characteristics, the type of behavior observed and the consequences that are observed, which is why differential reinforcement is very important to this theory (Akers and Jennings 2009; Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Observational learning has less of an effect on the maintenance of behaviors but more of an effect on the actual behavior being committed (Akers and Jensen 2010). Therefore, Akers and Jennings (2009) state, imitations matter more to the individuals if they have never participated in or observed such behaviors before:

Imitation matters more to an individual who has never participated in a certain behavior before, observes a model engage in the behavior and receive benefits from the behavior, and then the individual decides to partake in the behavior via imitation. (P.109)

An example of imitation being studied through a learning perspective is the Bobo doll experiment. In 1961, Bandura conducted an experiment to study the imitation of aggression in young children (Bandura et al. 1961). The results showed that aggressive behavior can be learned through observations. The children in the aggressive model showed more imitated aggression compared to the control and nonaggressive models. Understanding that this experiment is solely based on physical aggression, this experiment is still worth noting here, as observational learning can be explained by imitation.

## **Learning Occurs in Social Structures**

Ronald L. Akers expanded the social learning theory to include social structures while linking them to individual-level behavior; this theory being Social Structure-Social Learning (SSSL). SSSL proposes that social structures allow for variations in crime rates, affecting the major social learning concepts- differential association, differential reinforcement, definitions, imitation (Akers 2009). As indicated, Akers' social learning theory may be used to explain behaviors that exist outside of the individual, such as those patterns of behavior embedded in systemic behaviors of social systems or social institutions. In Akers' social learning theory, not only is peer influence theorized, but so are social structures outside of the primary groups. Social structures provide learning environments where learning mechanisms are impacted and potentially produced; they are deeply rooted in our society, hence structural theories of crime and deviance, such as patriarchy, anomie, and social disorganization (Akers 2009). Society, communities, and other forms of social interaction allow for the presence of definitions, imitation, differential reinforcement, and differential association. In specific social contexts, there are norms that are defined by people's behaviors, attitudes, reinforcements, and punishments where learning behaviors flourish. This is different from family, school, church, peer groups, sport teams, etc., since these groups have a more immediate impact on an individual's behavior (Akers 2009). Given the focus of the research, I will be discussing feminism, masculinity, and gender at both the macro and meso-level.

Looking at feminism, some feminist theorists argue that male sex offenders were brought up in a culture where victimizing children is condoned, accepted, and rather the norm (Faupel and Przybylski 2015). Perpetrators are conditioned in childhood based on their own victimization or observation of others being victimized, linking back to learning theories. This creates a power

structure where the child feels powerless and begins to seek out the feeling of being powerful with victims that are not, such as women or children (Plummer and Cossins 2018); this discussion of power is touched on again shortly in the literature review. The concept of power leads us into the next two social structures that can influence an individual's behavior.

Masculinity is a social construct that comes from the construction of the gender power hierarchy. There are various literatures within the social sciences, both past and present, that examine the potential relationship between masculinity and deviant behavior. For example, Wilkinson (1985:259) found masculinity to be “somewhat important” in relation to delinquent behavior while also suggesting more research on this association. For this paper specifically, hegemonic masculinity can explain the dominance and power that males may want to seek. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:832) describe this type of masculinity as being a pattern of acts and behaviors that support the dominance of men over women; the authors described it as being the “most honored way of being a man.” Hegemonic masculinity informs the patriarchal power system and gender hierarchy in a society where subordinate groups have been dominated by men. It’s important here to recognize that the socially constructed power system anchored in masculinity is in relation to deviant, delinquent, and criminal behavior.

Throughout criminology, hegemonic masculinity has been used to explain crimes being perpetrated by men, many times looking through a comparative lens of gender. According to Akers (2009:337), the gender structure within society creates “crime-related differences in male and female socialization, associations, rewards, definitions, and models.” These differences may help understand why males commit crimes at a higher rate than females. It’s important to ask the question of how differences in social structures produce differences in individuals, which is something that is touched on in Akers’ social learning theory, but more specifically in Akers’



social structure-social learning (SSSL) theory of crime (Akers 2009). Even though the previous statement is not my research question, it is important to ground this paper in social structures and the possible differences between genders; what is produced by these social differences is what I am focusing on while examining the narratives of male sex offenders.

## CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Male Offenders and Sexual Assault**

#### **Demographics of Sexual Assault Offending**

Generally, men have higher rates of violent criminal behavior than females. Despite the fact that females are victims of CSA more than males, males are known to be perpetrators of CSA more than females (Fagan 2001; Widom 2001; Plummer and Cossins 2018). In that, a cycle of abuse in males is more prominent and supported by research than a cycle of abuse found in females. Other than gender, sexuality is another characteristic that has been studied over time. Some research found a causal link between CSA and the development of sexuality (Plummer and Cossins 2018). Akers (1985) explains how masculinity and femininity is formed by the sex-roles within a society. In a way, sexuality and sexual identification are determined by parents and others later in the life course. Akers goes on to explain, initially same-sex relations occur through adults or peers. I say this because in this sample, you will see some of the sex offenders remember being molested by adults, some of them being males. Later in their life, or even during their childhood years they mention having sexual relations with males. It is imperative to the research to show that Akers' social learning theory can also predict sexuality to an extent.

#### **Victim-Offender Overlap**

Indicated in the 'Introduction,' the cycle of violence is closely related to a few of the social learning theory's concepts, discussing criminogenic risk factors occurring in childhood. Various literature demonstrates the importance of childhood in offenders, and for this research specifically, sexual offenders. A history of sexual abuse in childhood is known to have a positive effect on the increase of the likelihood of criminal offending. Sociologists, criminologists, and psychologists continually research this transition from victim to offender, also known as the

“cycle of abuse” or “intergenerational transmission of violence.” The “cycle of abuse hypothesis” suggests that abuse in childhood predisposes the victim to violent, criminal and delinquent behavior (Widom and Maxfield 2001; Reckdenwald, Mancini, Beauregard 2013). The “intergenerational transmission of violence” is the process where violence is transferred from one generation to the next, a child is abused by a parent and then becomes an abuser themselves (Reckdenwald et al. 2013). To illustrate, mentioned earlier in this paper, Widom (1989) found that abused and neglected children have a higher chance of violent and criminal behavior than the controls. Widom and Ames (1994) found that victims who have been sexually abused in childhood were more likely to be arrested for sex crimes compared to the control groups. Marshall and Marshall (2000) presented a theory that suggests sex offenders usually experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, etc., which contributes to their sex offending. Their study found that due to vulnerability, sex offenders tend to use sex to make them feel better; much of this is due to poor social skills, lack of love and self-esteem. Additionally, DeLisi et al. (2014) all male study supports a victim-offender transformation, with findings that show a massive risk increase between CSA and sexual offending. Similarly, Reckdenwald et al. (2013) found expected evidence of the association between previous sexual abuse and sexual offending. Some of the studies mentioned so far do not specifically examine male sex offenders, however, Nunes et al. (2013) sample included 462 adult male sex offenders who had been incarcerated in Canadian federal prisons. Their findings were tailored more to child victimization. Accordingly, male sex offenders who were victims of child sexual abuse at the age of 16 or younger had significantly younger victims than sex offenders who did not have a history of CSA. Considering the sex of the abuser, sexual offenders who were abused by a male were more pedophilic than those who had a female abuser. However, sexual abuse is not always studied when researching the cycle of

abuse, Maxwell et al. (2016) found a strong association between being physically abused as a child and becoming a physically violent offender in the future, supporting the social learning theory. This criminological term and hypothesis, cycle of violence, will be used throughout the present research study.

### **Power**

Within a criminological context, power and control is also linked to sexual assault in more ways than one. The abuser-victim relationship represents a power dynamic that is continuously being sought by the offender. For many young male victims, power becomes intangible, and the feeling of powerlessness strengthens as the abuse continues. For Plummer and Cossins (2018) experiencing powerlessness and power is a common thread between four factors that predispose male victims of abuse to becoming child sex offenders. Child sexual abuse can also lead to the conditioning of specific sexual interests, behaviors and partners in younger boys (Marshall and Marshall 2000; Plummer and Cossins 2018). Some research findings support an association between abuse and sexual expression, in ways where the young boy may try to reaffirm his masculinity later in life by offending others. The power dynamic relates to the cycle of abuse by creating a normalizing relationship between abuse and sexual experiences (Plummer and Cossins 2018). Feminists' theories touch on this feeling of power in men as well, especially regarding gender inequality (Faupel and Przybylski 2015).

### **Social Learning Theory and Sexual Assault**

There are very few studies that I could find in my limited time frame that solely explained sexual assault by using Akers' social learning theory. Many of the studies that do test the social learning theory focus on the difference in genders, with multiple comparing males to females. Finding literature on the act itself is difficult when it solely relies on the behaviors of

individuals. However, there some research that focuses on sexual aggression, sexual assault, and normative sexual behaviors.

In *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*, Akers examines rape and sexual aggression through individual differences of males and females who exhibit physical and nonphysical aggression in order to obtain sexual intercourse. Understanding that I am examining male interviews, it is imperative to recognize the differences between genders when it comes to sexual aggression, as Akers calls it. However, Akers without fail, gives a loose lineage explanation of how social learning theory can be used to explain sexual aggression and rape in a general sense.

From a social learning perspective, the readiness to use, or a low level of inhibition against, force or violence as a technique for gaining sexual access (and other forms of sexual aggression) is acquired, enacted, and changed through variations in association, definitions, reinforcement, imitation, and discriminative stimuli. (Akers 2009:256)

Despite a comparative discussion based on gender, Akers (2009) mentions Boeringer et al.'s (1991) study that found being exposed to various rape depictions including magazines, videos, and books influences rape. This result falls under the component of imitation within the social learning theory; being exposed to violent behavior directly and indirectly through family, peers and other social groups allow for the imitation of a model's behavior (Bandura 1961; Bandura 1977; Akers 2009).

In the third edition of *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach*, Akers spends much time on explaining sexual behavior, both deviant and conforming through a social learning theory lens. Since Akers' social learning theory theorizes both conforming and nonconforming

behavior, the question being answered here is specifically the process in which deviant sexual behavior is formed in a society where many people conform to the sexual norms (Akers 1985). The availability of stimuli is restricted in a human society where socio-cultural do's and don'ts are portrayed. Akers (1985) suggests that sex training in childhood can lead to deviance in two ways: through reinforcement of deviant behavior and through the conveying of heterosexual norms which may lead a child to commit deviant behavior based on the lack of preparedness the parents have given them. In other words, the individual is not prepared for normal sexual acts, but rather ill prepared based on the sex training in childhood. When parents and others fail to socialize their child and provide normative sexual education, they may instead introduce or influence deviant sexual behavior in both an indirect and direct way. For the male adult sample in this current research study, many of the parents succeed in introducing sexual deviant behavior directly, as will be discussed later in this paper.

### **Social Learning Theory and Sex Offenders**

Examining sex offenders is different from sexual assault where many sexual offenses go unnoticed or unreported by authority. Sex offenders are those who have been convicted of a sex offense such as specified offenses against minors, sexual act and sexual contact offenses, and other general sex offenses (SORNA § 111(1)). It's important to make a distinction between sexual assault and sex offenders, even though there may be a common link between the two terms. For this research in particular, there are some sex offenders who remember being sexually assaulted as a child, but the perpetrators were not 'sex offenders' under federal law.

There have been various etiological studies on childhood sexual victimization and whether or not it is a good predictor of sexual offending in later life. Burton et al. (2002) findings supported the social learning theory as a significant percentage of sexually offending youths

reported childhood victimization. Many of the principles mentioned in the theory such as: frequency, duration, intensity, and imitation were found within the Burton et al. (2002) research sample:

If the sexual victimization of the youth is characterized by greater repetition and relative severity, as indicated in the results of this study, we posit that the youth then has knowledge that is different from the nonvictimized youth and has had a different learning experience that is more likely to result in sexual offending behavior. (P. 903)

Similarly, Marganski's (2013:225) logistic regression analyses, revealed an association between family violence and adult violence, "In particular, parent-to-child violence and sibling violence victimization were associated with adult violent behavior." In the study of DeLisi and colleagues (2014), where N=2,520 adjudicated male delinquents in Southern confinement facilities, there is a very brief mention of social learning being a reason for the victim-offender overlap. Despite this brief discussion, the results show a positive criminogenic effect between CSA and future offending. Fagan (2001) compiles various cycle of abuse studies that rely heavily on the social learning theory to explain the victim to offender transition. In other words, Fagan (2001) is able to combine past research that has been able to demonstrate the association between childhood maltreatment and criminal behavior. Further support for the social learning theory in explaining the connection between CSA and male sex offenders was found in Felson and Lane (2009) research. In the sample that included 13,964 male offenders, sexual abuse was strongly associated with sexual offenses in adults, especially sexual offenses that victimized children: this finding, among others, supported the social learning theory.

## CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

This study uses content analysis to evaluate 8 pre-recorded sex offender interviews uploaded on the website, YouTube, under the channel name *Soft White Underbelly*. This channel is publicly available and maintained by its creator, Mark Laita. Below I describe more about the channel and videos before turning to a discussion about the content analysis method.

### **Content Analysis**

I conduct a content analysis of each video and use a guide sheet that prompts me to look at the interview for answers to questions relevant to Akers' social learning theory (see Appendix C).

Based on the qualitative research technique chosen for this project, interviews have allowed for the examination of behaviors and language during conversations, creating opportunities for content analysis (Rahman 2017). Content analysis is a systematic method used to examine messages or communication using human-coded analyses. This method relies on images, texts, and/or videos to draw conclusions based on systematic organization and analysis. It has been used in various fields of study such as sociology and psychology and continues to expand with wide acceptance (Neuendorf 2017). Due to the expansion of content analysis in various areas of scholarship, there are multiple different ways to conduct content analysis depending on the researcher and the study itself.

This study uses a guide sheet rather than a code sheet. Since I am assessing 8 videos that vary in length and are rich with detail, qualitative summaries of each video were created below, that answer the questions contained in the guide sheet shared here as Appendix C. In doing so, I was able to systematically evaluate how frequently ideas contained in Akers' social learning theory are invoked or exemplified in each video.



## **Soft White Underbelly**

I found *Soft White Underbelly* by performing a preliminary search for ‘male sex offender’ interviews on YouTube, reviewing and watching videos that contained only male interviewees. After watching multiple videos, I noticed videos labeled ‘sex offender’ on a YouTube channel called, *Soft White Underbelly*.

The creator of *Soft White Underbelly* is Mark Laita, a photographer with studios in Los Angeles and New York. According to his website (MarkLaita.com), Laita has been living in Los Angeles since 1986 but also operates a studio in New York for his clients. Before creating *Soft White Underbelly*, he was an established photographer for well-known companies such as Adidas, Budweiser, and Estee Lauder.

As mentioned above, *Soft White Underbelly*, is a publicly available YouTube channel. The channel was developed in 2016 and is maintained by Laita. In an Introduction video posted on his channel, Laita details his motives for this channel stating, “These videos are meant to create awareness of things that are broken in our country” (Intro Video, 0:59). On the ‘About’ tab located on his channel page, he adds another simple description of the channel, which reads “*Soft White Underbelly* interviews and portraits of the human condition by photographer, Mark Laita” (YouTube). His supposed interest in starting this channel was to feature videos of persons who are often invisible in society. In describing why the channel holds this name, Laita’s Introduction video (0:47) says it was based on a comment Winston Churchill made in World War II, calling Italy the ‘soft underbelly’ of Europe. Although there are valid questions about Winston’s use of this phrase, Laita conveys it as an important motivation in naming his channel, which likely reflects his interest in revealing human vulnerabilities. Critics have taken notice and

argued that *Soft White Underbelly* humanizes those who bear “society’s stamp of condemnation” (Robinson 2022).

As of June 5, 2023, there were 1.5k videos and 24 playlists on the channel and collectively *Soft White Underbelly* has obtained almost 900 million views, signaling its popularity. Many of the videos are filmed in his LA studio on skid row. However, all 8 of the interviewees in the videos that I use in the sample for my study are of men who are being evaluated and are registered as sex offenders in the state of Florida.

The videos in this sample were found under a playlist titled ‘Sexual Abuse’ on Laita’s YouTube channel, *Soft White Underbelly*. To be clear, the ‘Sexual Abuse’ playlist contains 39 videos but only 9 are interviews with sex offenders. One of those is a female interviewee, which is not used in this research study. Appendix A provides a complete list of the videos used for this study.

I selected to use the videos posted on *Soft White Underbelly* for several reasons. First, the videos are public availability. Second, the content of the interviews contains information that allows me to assess the applicability of Akers’ social learning theory. Third, the videos are conducted by the same interviewer. Fourth, the videos show consistent and directed interview questions. Fifth, the videos are posted on the same domain, channel, and produced by the same person, again, providing consistency across the interviews. Finally, all the videos were published in the last few years. Seven of the videos were published in December 2020, and one was published March 2022.

The video production quality is straightforward. Visually, the set of the sample videos contain a backdrop, a chair, and the offender. Laita interviews each participant in a studio where

he records the interviewee, who sits facing a camera while speaking. Each video, either in the middle or closer to the end, contains a professional, studio photograph of the interviewee.

As implied above, there are multiple questions asked throughout the interview based on the information provided by the interviewee, but a few questions provide anchors, so they are asked in every interview, creating consistency across interviews<sup>1</sup>. Appendix B provides detailed information about the questions across interviews. As indicated in Appendix B, each video contains information about the interviewee's childhood, history of abuse (or lack thereof), and past criminal behavior. Many indicate their past offense(s) and/or mention time in the Department of Corrections (DOC) or on probation, which suggests the subjects in this study were classified as sex offenders after having been convicted and/or found guilty of sexual crimes.

---

<sup>1</sup>Some questions vary slightly depending on the convicted offense and the information the interviewees give while answering other questions. Some interviewees, for example, provide information about themselves without being prompted, while others require more directed questioning. I also note that some men did not talk as much as others did, which allowed for variability in the questions-answer structure. Despite the variability, the information provided information relevant to the posed research question for this study.

## CHAPTER V: RESULTS

The results section is organized in a way that makes it easy to read as a reader. I follow the layout of Appendix C and present findings for each interviewee selected below. Again, following Appendix C, below I present basic information about the interview before discussing how the interview reflects components of social learning theory.

### **Frankie**

#### **Basic Information**

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, with both parents, Frankie acknowledges that he had a very exciting childhood, and he specifically claims that this excitement was due to his holding an identity that was deemed marginal, that is, he was gay.

At the time of the video, Frankie is 74 years old, but he recounts his childhood from the age of 6. According to him, he only sexually assaulted young boys. He discusses his first sexual crime and first criminal charge as occurring at the age of 11 or 12 where he started paying for boys at school for sex acts. In his 30s, he was criminally charged with another sex crime when he was found to be having sexual relations with a 16-year-old boy. At the time of the video, Frankie describes his last sex-related crime charge from 2003. Although he justifies the sex act as consensual and implies it may have occurred more than once, the victim was a 13-year-old boy, who reported the interaction to legal authorities. Frankie seems to recognize the wrongness of his acts to an extent. He also mentions that there were many boys who he assaulted but was not criminally prosecuted for. Frankie is registered as a “sex predator” in the state of Florida.

#### **Social Learning Theory**

Despite Frankie having both parents involved in his life growing up, he rarely mentions his father during the interview. What he does share indicates that his father was much older than

his mother, leaving his mother to search for boyfriends even while his parents were married. Even though his father is barely mentioned in the interview, I inferred from what he shares that he learned noncriminal behavior from his father and perhaps both of his parents. His parents were embarrassed by his sexual offending when he was in school, hence why they moved from Ohio to Florida for a different social environment. This feeling of embarrassment allows for the inference of his family finding his behavior as unfavorable and wrong. Notice that Frankie says, 'his parents' rather than his mom and her boyfriend, revealing that it was not just his mom (his abuser) but his father who felt embarrassed who is also the parent that did not sexually abuse Frankie. Furthermore, as stated earlier, Frankie speaks briefly of his father. From a social learning perspective, it seems that Frankie learned much of his 'wrong' behavior from his mother being that she is the only parent Frankie consistently brings up during the interview.

Despite this, Frankie suggests that he did learn deviant behavior, and specifically sexually deviant behavior, from his mother. Based on Frankie's statement, his relationship with his mother fits an interpersonal relationship that social learning theorists would classify as having priority, frequency, intensity, and perhaps duration.

Frankie's narrative shows evidence of his learning sexually deviant behavior from his mother in a couple of ways. First, Frankie references his mother being his primary parental relationship, stating that he lived with her on a day-to-day basis from his earliest recalled memories. As mentioned above, reflective of social learning theory, Frankie's relationship with his mother could be characterized as having priority (occur early in life and thus have greater impact) and frequency (occur often). It is also possible that Frankie's relationship with his mother has intensity (admiration) and duration (long-lasting), two other salient components

according to social learning theory. Below I explain more about how these modalities appear in Frankie's interview.

Given the length of time and content of discussion that Frankie shares about his mother and their relationship, he gives weight to their relationship in forming his own self-identity and problematic sex-related behaviors. In short, he highlights her as a person from whom he learned inappropriate sexual activities. In fact, it seemed very important for Frankie to mention that he was victimized as a child due to his mother and his physical closeness to her while she and one of her boyfriends participated in sexual contact. More than once in the interview, Frankie blames his mother for his own sexual offending behaviors. Specifically, he believes laying in the same bed as his mother and her boyfriend, who he called Uncle Joe, as they engaged in sexual relations, "sort of screwed up my life," which Frankie describes as resulting in his uncontrollable sexual desire (7:21).

Frankie states that he began hearing sounds when he got older that he realized were sexual noises even though as a child, he considered these sounds as "common" and therefore unproblematic (1:24). It was only later in life, once he was involved in sexually assaulting others that he realized that the noises were the result of sexual interactions. Frankie's youthful understanding of sex-related noises as "normal" relates to social learning in that the theory argues that the content of what is learned is specific to one's cultural references, without clear judgement about the wrongness of them (Cullen and Wilcox 2010).

To illustrate this further (and the likelihood that Frankie's relationship with his mother meets social learning theory's definition of intensity). Frankie recalls seeing sexual contact between his mother and her boyfriend so frequently and causally when Frankie was a young boy that he initiated sexual content with his mother's boyfriend himself.

When my uncle, supposedly Uncle Joe, who she was messing with would spend the night at our house, I'd get up in the middle of the night and try to make it with him in the bed. I mean that's all I knew. I thought that was normal. (7:43)

Uncle Joe refused Frankie's sexual advances, which confused Frankie. According to him, he was simply seeking attention, perhaps not realizing the cultural boundaries that he was breaching. This, again, reflects the underlying argument of social learning theory, which explains criminal behavior is learned as all behaviors are-- by one's most salient cultural references without decisiveness of their "moral" rightness or wrongness (Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). This also demonstrates the component of imitation, as he may have been imitating the actions of his mother. Frankie's comment, "I thought that was normal," shows that the act of getting in bed with an older individual was completely normalized to him, which also depicts that observational learning influenced Frankie's possibility of committing a certain behavior. This also reveals Frankie's favorable definition of sexual behavior as an adolescent.

Differential reinforcement is an important element of social learning theory (Akers and Jennings 2009; Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Differential reinforcement is heavily based on psychological behaviorism and operant conditioning (Akers 2009; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Operant conditioning is when, "... a voluntary behavior leads to a subsequent consequence" (Cullen and Wilcox 2010:7). Around age 11 or 12, Frankie began paying young boys at school for sexual behaviors, demonstrating from a young age that he had somewhat of a sexual desire coupled with a sense of normalcy and dominance. Some feminist theories argue that the imbalance of power is linked to male sexual violence (Faupel and Przybylski 2015; Plummer and Cossins 2018). Taking this a step further, around this age Frankie knew he was gay, and he found that to be exciting (0:38). His excitement may suggest pleasure in a

marginalized social identity, during a time in America where homosexuality was judged heavily. Plummer and Cossins (2018) mention the development of one's sexuality based on power and control due to CSA:

For male CSA victims, the development of a sexuality based on their abusive experiences may represent a cultural resource for expressing power and control, so that a cycle of CSA may be perpetuated by “men who normalize their own experience of sexual abuse” more so than victims who do not (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996, p. 231). (P. 300)

Upon being caught doing so, Frankie was punished and got one-year criminal justice probation and was sent away to spend two summers on an Amish farm. Social learning theorists describe positive punishment as an adverse punishment being attached to a specific behavior (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). In this way, I characterize Frankie's punishment as positive punishment. Yet, it did not deter Frankie's sexual misconduct based on his future crimes.

In the same year that Frankie was caught paying young boys for sexual contact at school, his parents voluntarily removed him from the school and moved their family to Florida. Frankie attributes this move stemming from his family's sense of embarrassment. Social learning theory may describe such a response and consequences from Frankie's behavior a form of negative punishment which is the loss of a positive stimulus (Akers 2009). For instance, to the extent that school may have been viewed as a positive encounter for Frankie, his loss of this reward acts as punishment. What is more, being pulled away from his school not only inhibited his ability to his ability to pay for sexual behaviors with other boys he knew in school; but it also removed him from a close and perhaps growing social network of peers.



Again, despite the punishment Frankie received after being caught participating in sexually deviant acts as a boy, they did not deter his future behavior. In this way, some aspects of social learning theory seem negated. As a reminder, from the Cullen and Wilcox (2010) text, social learning proposes,

Operant behaviors that are punished- that is, followed by an adverse consequence (positive punishment) or by the cessation of a pleasurable state (negative punishment) – will decrease in frequency. (P. 7)

When he was around 30 years old, Frankie paid for a 16-year-old boy who Frankie describes as “a hustler” for sexual contact (2:30). Upon the young boy reporting the assault to authorities, Frankie was sentenced to 5 years of house arrest and went to “group,” as he calls it. While admitting to going to “group,” Frankie doesn’t describe what “group” is and he doesn’t reveal how he felt about that form of punishment. After serving time and “group,” he was released, but in 2003 Frankie was once again charged with sexual misconduct with a minor. He was sentenced to 8 ½ years in prison for sexually offending a 13-year-old boy.

Again, despite facing many forms of positive punishment, which relates to the differential reinforcement component of Aker’s social learning theory, Frankie’s sexual offending continued over a long period of time. Akers (2009) theorizes that the likelihood of an act being repeated relies on the rewards or punishments for it. Frankie’s repeated sexual offending supports the social learning theory by suggesting that Frankie received more rewards than punishments for his sexual behavior. His positive rewards may be connected to the social concept of masculinity and the culture of rape. In feminist research, the culture of rape is inclusive to the idea of power hierarchy within the context of masculinity and femininity (Sivakumaran 2005). Frankie admits to repeating his deviant behavior multiple times throughout his life, “Well there’s an old saying,

as many dicks that were put in me, if they were sticking out, I'd look like a porcupine. That's how many" (10:02).

From another perspective, it's plausible to say, his sexual offending of young boys continued for years because he wasn't charged for each crime; he was only caught three out of the many escapades with young boys. These steady acts of nonconforming behavior reveals that he did not show much care for the consequences attached to sexual offending. One can infer that the rewards and positive reinforcement perpetuated Frankie's sexual behavior. Remember, the greater the value of the rewards compared to the overall punishment, increases the probability of an individual repeating the behavior which also increases the frequency of such behavior, whether it be conforming or deviant (Akers 2009). It's important to note here that Frankie mentions other societal based punishments due to his sexual behavior, "Because if you go out and do something that you shouldn't do with an underage person, it is hell afterwards" (4:52). He comments on the marginalization of sex offenders and how "... you're never away from it" (6:33). The label of sex offender has stayed with him since the beginning and will continue to do so. Perhaps one can imply that the label of sex offender has been more of a punishment for him than the 8 ½ years of prison sanctioned by the state.

Given Frankie's continuum of sex offending, I can infer that he found pleasure in sexually offending young boys, allowing for the probability of him committing another sexual offense to increase. I could also theorize that he felt a sense of power when sexually violating younger boys who indeed had very little power themselves, increasing the frequency the criminal acts were committed. From another perspective, this could be a display of masculinity; Plummer and Cossins (2018) found support of an association between abuse and sexual expression, proposing that young boys may try to reaffirm their masculinity or in this case equate abuse to

normalized sexual acts. In other words, creating a cycle of abuse where a young boy is abused and then goes on to abuse others by justifying his behaviors as normalizing or conforming. In all inferences, the component of positive reinforcement is evident potentially linking the behavior to rewards such as power, pleasure, and masculinity.

At the time of the video, Frankie mentions he does have a small sense of guilt and feels as if he took advantage of the young boys. Contradicting, when asked if he felt remorse, Frankie hesitates before answering which can imply from a social learning perspective that he may not actually feel guilty in participating in stigmatized behavior also suggesting that he still sees his actions as normalized behavior. Despite feeling guilty, closer to the beginning of the video Frankie reveals he may not have learned his lesson.

I'm not going to say I've learned my lesson because everybody says they learned their lesson. I know I'm not going to do that again. I'm 74 years old, my sex life is over with. (4:22)

Once again he is indicating the favorable or 'right' personal justification and definition of his nonconforming behavior. In addition, much later in the video, Frankie comments on the lack of sex drive as he has increased in age stating, "I guess when you get to certain age, you just don't care if you have sex anymore" (12:23). It can be possible that the lack of sex drive inhibited the criminal acts he was once committing, removing the emotion or feeling of pleasure from a sexual act that was very much desired for years demonstrating negative punishment as a human nature consequence.

## **Bill**

### **Basic Information**

Bill was born in Chicago, Illinois. At the time of the video, Bill is 58 years old living in Florida. Despite growing up in a middle-class, suburban home with both parents and an unspecified number of siblings, Bill describes his childhood as being chaotic, very abusive and having an expectation of perfection.

He discusses his first sexual crime and first criminal charge occurring in 1990, attempted capital sexual battery. In 1996 he was charged with his second sex crime, lewd and lascivious battery. Bill seems to recognize the wrongness of his acts and takes full responsibility, adamantly stating that his sexual misconduct is no one's fault but his own, "I did what I did, I made the decision..." (9:35). It seems to be that he was taught his behaviors were wrong after he was criminalized by the state and when he was in therapy, as he states in the interview that he justified his actions and deemed them to be okay when he was committing them (6:51).

At an unclear time in Bill's life, he was married and had two sons that he never gets to see, along with a daughter and stepdaughter who he actively connects with. He has been out of prison and Arcadia, a sex offender therapy center, for 12 years at the time of the video. Bill is registered as a "sex offender" in the state of Florida.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Bill and his siblings were abused by their mother, father, and babysitter. Bill's father was the physical and emotional abuser while his mother and babysitter were both sexual abusers to the children. When asked by Mark Laita what type of abuse Bill fell victim to, he said,

Molestation, I was physically abused, emotionally abused. Kind of every kind of abuse there could be to a kid we were, but it was in the 60s and 70s, so that was just the norm, we thought. (0:24)

From early childhood, his definition of sexual abuse was normative, speculating that since it was the 60s and 70s his parents were conforming to the social expectations at that time, are so he thought. Bill's abuse by a parental figure was crucial in the literature review of Plummer and Cossins (2018) where they found evidence of an increase in the likelihood of becoming a child sex offender if the child was abused by someone they depended on. Based on Bill's statements, his relationship with both of his parents fits an interpersonal relationship that social learning theorists would classify as having priority and frequency, but potentially not intensity and duration.

Bill's relationship with his parents could be characterized as having priority (occur early in life and thus have greater impact) and frequency (occur often). It doesn't seem very possible for Bill's relationship with his parents to have intensity (admiration) and duration (long-lasting), since he was kicked out at a young age and claims he hasn't talked to his parents in decades (8:42). As for his relationship with the babysitter, there was very little discussed on the topic besides the sexual abuse he and his siblings experienced. However, since the abuse took place in early childhood the relationship could have priority as well as frequency, but that depends on how frequent the babysitter was around. Intensity and duration are unlikely as well based on speculation; since Bill was kicked out very young and it's hard to determine how much admiration he had for the babysitter.

From early childhood, Bill was taught things noncriminal, for example he learned to not cry. According to Bill, his parents would beat him and his siblings while telling them to

“swallow it” and to stop crying (12:12). It was only until recent treatment after being in prison that he was able to cry for the first time in years. Additionally, during high school Bill considered himself a loner and a kid that always got in trouble. He realizes that he never picked up any social skills which affected his life in later years, even referring to himself in the interview as a loner still (1:00). Even with the opportunity of social learning in the educational institutional realm, he was not able to develop social skills which ultimately lead to a dislike of society and a distrusting of people. All these different experiences or lack of may have contributed to the increase of criminal propensity by creating favorable definitions of crimes, which is expected in the social learning theory.

Unlike Frankie, Bill doesn't give the viewers a detailed chronological summarization of his life from childhood to present. Instead, he discusses what he learned at Arcadia for most of the interview. Treatment taught him multiple things about his sexual offending, below I summarize his time at Arcadia and the lessons he learned through a social learning perspective.

Bill has had a lot of treatment that helped him come to terms with his criminal behavior; he recounts his daily treatment being for six to eight hours a day, four to five days a week for about 8 and a half years (2:35). In that time span he was able to understand what caused his sexual behavior. When asked by Mark what he worked on when he was at Arcadia Bill said, “Everything. I mean, everything's related to your sexual offending. So, it's from childhood all the way up to the present day” (2:48). From early in life up until treatment, Bill was not able to emotionally connect with people (7:06), suggesting that when the offenses took place, he may not have felt much guilt or remorse. He believes that the lack of empathy is what allowed him to cause harm to another human being (7:11). However, at the time of the video, his attitudes and

definitions towards his sexual offending have changed, especially recognizing that he did harm his victims in order to fill a void.

And again, it's just as a sex offender, and I think as a human being, we can't cause harm to another human being without giving ourselves some kind of justification, some kind of permission. We have to convince ourselves in some kind of way, although its irrational, that it's okay to do what we're doing. (6:44)

Adding on, Bill's statement above demonstrates neutralizing definitions as these definitions, "... acknowledge the general improbity of an act yet furnish justification or rationalization for engaging in the act nonetheless" (Cullen and Wilcox 2010:8).

While disapproving of his own offending, Bill also seems to disapprove of his victimization when he was a child and his overall environment during childhood stating,

I've learned to see not just my shortcomings, but the things that contributed to it.

A lot of it falls into the way I was raised and the atmosphere I was raised in. And I just have no desire to go back to it at all. (9:10)

Even though Bill disapproves of his childhood and the environment he was raised in; he continues to take full responsibility for his sexual crimes. No one made him commit the crimes he was found guilty of, but there are situations in his life that contributed to his actions. There were multiple voids that Bill wanted to fill, or perhaps felt a desire or need to fill. When he began filling these voids through nonconventional means, his behavior was positively reinforced. This is to say that Bill's sexual violence was rewarded by having a sense of fulfillment.

Bill's parents wanted nothing but perfection from him and his siblings. This high standard created emotional wounds when Bill realized that he couldn't meet those expectations (10:33). It seemed to him that he was reaching for an ideal person that was simply intangible

(10:36). Bill's sexual offending was his way of "nursing" his emotional wounds (10:39), and potentially avoiding certain situations or feelings which is an example of negative reinforcement as negative reinforcement is the "cessation of an unpleasant state" (Cullen and Wilcox 2010:7).

Moreover, it is unclear why his relationship with his sons and wife were strained, it could be due to his sexual offending or a situation unrelated. With that being said, it is also unclear whether those relationships are an example of negative punishment. However, he did not lose the relationship with his daughter or stepdaughter, and he gained a relationship with his grandchildren (8:16).

Since Bill was punished for his sexual offending by being sent to prison and then an intense treatment center, positive punishment is evident in his narrative. Bill admits that he did not want to be at the treatment center, but he's glad he went, "I never wanted to be there, but I'm absolutely glad I was there" (3:31). This suggests that his attitudes toward therapy have changed along with the definitions of sexual abuse transforming from positive to negative. Lastly, Bill agrees with Mark when he asks him if he feels like a better member of society after the treatment he had to undergo (3:38). It's clear that therapy for Bill created new definitions of his sexual offending and provided positive punishment.

## **Mike**

### **Basic Information**

Mike was born in Rochester, New York. At the time of the video, Mike is living on the west coast of Florida, but he recounts his childhood from a very young age. During childhood, Mike was surrounded by his mother and 8 siblings; his father passed away when Mike was young. While living with his mother, he was sexually abused frequently by older men who his mother brought over to the house.



Mike was married twice, the first when he was 19 years old and the second a few years later. Both ended in divorces.

Mike is registered as a “sex predator” in the state of Florida. According to Mike, he only sexually assaulted young boys when he got older. His interest in young boys lasted from the age of 18 to when he underwent therapy (around 2012) and realized that individuals under the age of 18 were not able to give consent. He discusses his first criminal charge as occurring in the 90s when he was arrested during a sting operation in Clearwater, Florida, also known as the Clearwater 28; Frankie was also arrested in this operation. Mike was also arrested for a DUI in New York before his first sex crime charge, but all charges were dropped when his test came back clean.

According to Mike, he committed several sexual crimes for which he was never criminally charged or arrested. For example, when Mike was 18 years old, he met a young boy who mowed the lawn of the property Mike lived on. Mike and the young boy began having sexual relations.

Mike suggests that he learned that his sexual assault behaviors were wrong only after he was criminalized by the state. Specifically, he stated in the interview that he “thought it was fine” when he was younger (10:01). In therapy the message of the wrongness of his sexual activities with children continued.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Mike knew his mother and father, but his father was an alcoholic and passed away when Mike was a young boy. After his father’s death, Mike became responsible for all 8 siblings since his mother, who was the only caretaker at the time, “wasn’t a very good mother” (0:33). Despite living under the same roof as his mom, he rarely associated with her, “My mom, we never could

talk to her, never associated with her half the time” (1:08). Based on Mike’s statements, his relationship with his mother fits an interpersonal relationship that social learning theorists would classify as having priority, duration, frequency, and intensity. Mike’s relationship with his mother could be characterized as having priority (occur early in life and thus have greater impact) and frequency (occur often) since his mother frequently brought men around who assaulted Mike. His mother is teaching him definitions towards sexual assault even though he rarely associated with her. Mike’s relationship with his mother demonstrates intensity (admiration) because his mother’s relationship had a major effect on his criminal behavior. Duration (long-lasting) is debatably visible in his narrative, as his mother’s relationship lasted long enough for him to be sexually assaulted quite frequently, even if he ran away from home when he was in the fourth grade (2:20).

Mike’s mother was his caretaker, but she was also the individual who introduced abuse to him during childhood. At the age of 7 years old, his mother brought over guys who she called “uncles”, or “friends of the family” and they molested Mike quite frequently. Mike put up with the abuse for quite some time because he thought his mom was getting paid by the abusers suggesting that as a young boy, he may have thought the reward was worth the abuse (1:37). Mike also began smoking and drinking at 7 years old, potentially indicating that the sexual molestation had a negative impact on him at a very young age.

Mike believes that the sexual abuse he experienced influenced his interest in boys and his overall sexuality. In the interview, Mike says that he “learned to be gay” due to the molestation he went through as a child (1:56). Later in the video, Mike defines gay as a learning behavior when the interviewer asked him if what happened to him as a child effected his behavior as an adult,

I think that nobody's born gay... I think what happened in life, early on in life, you're taught things and you take those things, and you learn those things, and what you can make out of it. (12:47)

Multiple times throughout the interview Mike implicitly states that his childhood taught him wrong behaviors, especially deviant sexual behaviors. Mike seems to blame a lot of his sexual offending and other nonconforming acts on not being taught correctly during childhood, "... the behavior was there in not being taught right" (19:14). Akers (1985) mentions sexual behavior as a learning behavior stating,

The kind of sex training given to children may lead to sexual deviance in two ways: (1) The parents and others who socialize children into sex-role behavior may provide direct reinforcement (wittingly or unwittingly) for deviant behavior; or (2) more commonly, they may conduct the heterosexual socialization in such a way that the individual is ill prepared for normal sexual behavior and is made a likely candidate for deviant alternatives. (P.187)

Analyzing Mike's interview, the first and second type of sex training is supported by Mike's narrative. Mike was socialized into certain [criminal] behaviors by men who his mother brought home, which informed Mike's deviant behavior later in life both directly and indirectly. However, it seems that Mike's learned behavior is more from direct socialization than indirect socialization which is implied in the second type of sex training.

Mike had the opportunity to go to school but did not make it very far, simply because he never went (2:05). Even with the opportunity of social learning in the educational institutional realm, Mike decided to run away from home in the fourth grade which left him homeless on the streets in Rochester. While living on the streets, Mike met multiple other young boys who were

also homeless and hustlers. By Mike's account these boys were often engaged in criminal and deviant behaviors. As he states "...[I] lived on the streets in Rochester, New York with other homeless kids who was [sic] into the sexy scene with older guys" (2:22). This recollection indicates Mike encountered sexual violence and being assaulted by men not only at home but also once he left home. In this way, we see evidence that Mike's interactions with those who have definitions favorable to crime continued throughout his life. In other words, his learning of criminal sexualized attitudes and activities lengthened in duration, continued in frequency, and maintained in intense relationships.

Yet, by Mike's account, it apparently only took one young boy mentioning the high amount of money he made as a young sex worker for adult men to influence Mike into joining the group. This interaction seemed to be the catalyst for Mike's sex career with older men [clients]. For Mike to suggest that it was only one single encounter with a younger peer and one primary motivator (money), suggests affirmation of the learning theory. Recall that learning criminal behaviors to social theorists requires the association with a group or individual in which the individual is exposed to criminal behaviors and nonconforming definitions of others (Akers 2009; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). In Mike's case, he was associating with a boy who had positive definitions of hustling indicating a critical learning period in Mike's life course. What is more, money seemed to be Mike's fundamental motivator, demonstrating a type of positive reinforcement (Akers 2009). Additionally, if we recall Mike's overall interview, including statements about his mother and her boyfriends also influencing Mike's behavior, the social learning's explanatory potential increases. Especially, since as the interview goes on, Mike indicated that he learned a lot of information about working in a criminalized sex scene through his peer interactions, which is also suggested above.

Throughout the interview, Mike references multiple people who can be categorized as non-conforming persons, arguably suggesting that he knew more non-conforming people than conforming. For example, at 17 or 18 years old, Mike met an older man who took him to his house, admitting that they were sex partners at the time (3:24). Mike and the older man were with each other for a few years until the man passed away. After the older man passed away, Mike met another young boy, Mike calls him a “youngster” in the interview (3:37), mowing the property he lived on and eventually they began a sexual relationship.

But Mike appears to have influence with conforming persons as well. At around the age of 19, Mike met his first wife. They were only married for a month when she caught Mike with the young boy who mowed the lawn (4:22). Jolie told the young boy’s parents who forbid the young boy to see Mike again. This situation reveals that Jolie and the young boy’s parents saw Mike’s sexual relationship with the boy as problematic and likely abusive, suggesting definitions of behavioral wrongness. Despite this, the pair kept seeing each other demonstrating that Mike either did not see his behavior as wrong or sought to continue the relationship despite his awareness of its wrongness.

Mike’s second wife, Marianne, had 3 boys and 1 girl. While living together in Florida, Mike says a “second incident started” (4:56). Mike began drinking and drugging more, and multiple additional sexual offenses took place, some of which involved 2 of Marianne’s boys. Mike admits to “fooling around” with them (5:06). Before admitting to his sexual offending, he blatantly states that the drugs are not an excuse for what he did to the little boys. The boys did not report Mike’s sexual abuse of them until the prosecutors approached them. Importantly, the prosecutors were not initially investigating Mike’s sexual offenses with his two stepsons but with another sex offense involving underage boys.

In Clearwater Florida in the 1990's, Mike got involved with so-called hustlers who he paid to have sexual intercourse with. Mike claims that this went on for a very long time (6:38). The young boys who were often insultingly referred to as 'hustlers' were paid by Mike and other men for sexual acts. Eventually, these young boys got caught in a robbery, which ultimately catapulted to a sting operation where multiple men were arrested. This case was publicly referred to as 'The Clearwater 28.'

For his part in the crimes, Mike was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Many of the other men involved got 2 years of probation. According to Mike, the disparity in sentencing was because of the other men's access to money. He describes many of the men as prevalent bankers. Because Mike's charges were dropped, the State wanted to find another criminal charge in which to investigate and prosecute (7:35). This is where investigations about Mike's sexual misconduct with his two stepsons, who were 13 and 14 years old at the time, arose.

Right before Mike was supposed to be getting out of prison, Mike was confronted with a Jimmy Ryce case where he was sent to a civil commitment center for 8 years. Since Mike was punished for his sexual offending by being sent to prison and then an intense treatment center, positive punishment is evident in his narrative.

Social learning theorists propose that negative punishment is an important component of learning pro-social or deviant/criminal behavior. As a reminder, negative punishment can be defined as an indirect consequence of a behavior where rewards are removed (Akers 2009). Negative punishment is represented in Mike's narrative when he discusses the loss of both of his wives as well as his family,

I'm the only one in my family, my family don't have nothing to do with me. My brothers, because I'm a sex, a sexual predator. And because of what I did they

don't wanna have nothing to do with me. I lost a lot, so I have to live with it.

(13:08)

In the interview, it is clear that the therapy Mike underwent helped him come to terms with his criminal behavior revealing that learning keeps going throughout the life course. During Mike's sexual offending, he didn't understand his actions to be wrong, "When I first pursued it when I was younger, you know 'cause what happened to me, I thought it was fine" (9:57). His favorable definition towards his sexual offending is an example of positive reinforcement within the social learning theory. He claims that he didn't know about the consenting age, 18 years old, until 8 years ago which suggests that he may have thought that the young boys were giving consent, once again showing that the behavior was rather normal to Mike (9:40). However, during Mike's intense therapy treatment, he learned that his actions were wrong and began disapproving of them, "And I thought I wasn't doing nothing wrong at the time, but I was really hurting 'em, you know" (10:19). Once again, this reveals that it wasn't until his required intensive treatment that his definitions of his sexual behavior changed from right to wrong. Additionally, at the time of the video, Mike understands that he hid a lot of his feelings in drugs and alcohol, supporting the component of negative reinforcement (under differential reinforcement) in the social learning theory as it says, "Negative reinforcement of behavior is said to occur when that behavior allows the individual to escape or avoid adverse stimuli or consequence" (Akers and Jennings 2009:108). According to Akers' theory, this type of nonsocial reinforcer increased the frequency of Mike's criminal behavior (Akers et al. 1979; Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010).

## **Ian**

### **Basic Information**

Ian was born in Ohio. At the time of the video, Ian is living in Pinellas County Florida. He is rather reserved in the interview, giving short answers with very little elaboration. Ian's video is the shortest video within the sample with the time being 9 minutes and 6 seconds. Despite his reservations and lack of details, Ian tells us a small amount about his life before and after his conviction of a sex offense.

During childhood, Ian was surrounded by his mother and his stepfather. While living with both parents, he was not sexually abused and claims his childhood was "happy" (0:23). Ian has never been married and does not have children.

Ian does not discuss any other charges or problems with law enforcement besides his sex charge, attempted lewd and lascivious battery. According to Ian, he was caught in a "sting operation;" he received 3 years in prison and 3 years of probation. Ian is registered as a "sex offender" in the state of Florida.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Ian grew up in a two-parent household with his mother and his stepfather. He insists there was absolutely no abuse during childhood. Ian had the opportunity to go to school but began "slacking off" as a student athlete (0:31). Instead of staying in primary school, Ian went to vocational school and "got trades" (0:39). According to Ian's narrative, he had a relatively long time to gain pro-social skills within his household and in the institutional educational realm. Ian claims he has had many jobs, but most of them have been in the construction business. However, at the time of the video Ian is a cook since, "It's about the only job we can get" (5:08). It's important to note here that Ian uses the word "we" in reference to other sex offenders. Due to the



label “sex offender” there are multiple problems associated with employability. Ian makes sure to point this out by using “we” which encapsulates all the sex offender population.

Akers’ social learning theory acknowledges the family as being a very influential force in learning mechanisms during childhood (Akers et al. 1979; Akers 2009; Akers and Jennings 2009). With very little talk about Ian’s family besides saying his childhood was “happy” and “good” it is rather hard to gauge each modality in differential association. By using the term “good” it suggests that he was interacting with pro-social and conforming persons therefore there was an absence in crime-producing behavioral learning (0:17).

Since Ian mentions a couple times during the interview that he misses his family in Ohio there seems to be a sense of admiration (intensity). Ian’s relationship with his mother and stepfather could also be characterized as having priority (occur early in life and thus have greater impact). As for frequency and duration, it is not clear how much time he spent with his parents, but the time spent may have influenced some his behavior as Ian implies that they were conforming persons.

At an unknown time in Ian’s life, he was convicted of a sex offense, attempted lewd and lascivious battery. Ian decided to go on a hookup site where he ended up messaging a young girl who claimed she was 14 years old. Ian makes an interesting comment, “I said you’re just a kid so why are you on here” (2:11), which reveals that he knew the girl was too young to be on a hookup site and ultimately calls this a “bad idea” (2:27) when he attempts to go meet her the following night. Before Ian went to meet up with her, he stopped at a gas station where he was confronted by a police officer, and he never made it to the “sting house” (2:38). Despite never making it to the sting house, he was arrested on a sex offense and convicted of traveling with a minor (2:36). Ian was sentenced to 3 years in prison and 3 years on probation. Given laws in the

state of Florida, where Ian lived and was arrested and charged, Akers' social learning theory could characterize Ian's criminal sentencing as an example of "positive punishment" (i.e., Ian received punishment for his criminal behavior). Ian stated that if he had money, he would have received a lesser sentence, but he was not able to afford a lawyer (1:06).

Drugs were an influence in Ian's sexual offending. When asked by the interviewer what he learned from his convicted criminal behavior, Ian said, "Don't do a bunch of drugs" (3:00). Interestingly, Ian's incarceration for sexual offending enabled him to "sober up," (6:34) which suggests that he did learn a specific behavior from being incarcerated. From a social learning perspective, Ian learned to be sober while in prison simply because drugs were not accessible. This lack of access to nonconforming behavior in the prison environment allowed him to learn conforming behavior (i.e., not doing drugs). Furthermore, during the interview Ian disapproves of his behavior defining it as a "stupid mistake" for which he must inevitably pay (5:47).

At the time of the video, Ian revealed that he currently lives in a mobile park home with other sex offenders. Such a statement shows that he currently interacts with non-conforming persons. This is the only time he refers to other non-conforming groups and having to interact with them. Importantly, this occurs after his incarceration. Arguably, this suggests that he only interacted with nonconformists after he was convicted of the sex charge. This challenges Akers' social learning theory as Akers and Jennings (2009) state that interacting with nonconforming persons causes criminal behavior:

If a person is differentially associated more with those who are involved in criminal and deviant behaviors or demonstrate pro-criminal attitudes, then he or she is more likely to engage in the criminal/deviant behavior. (P. 106)

However, in Ian's case, he states that his interaction with nonconforming individuals came after he was punished for a crime.

Since being labeled a "sex offender," Ian speaks about the losses of valuable things such as freedom, rights, and relationships depicting several forms of negative punishment. He has a 10pm curfew every day, which limits his ability to do what he wants when he wants. Ian must stay in Pinellas County until he finishes the 3 years of probation, which does not allow him to see family in Ohio revealing yet another loss due to his sexual offending. Even though his family still talks to him, "They know who I am" (3:24), he recognizes that there has been a loss of connection, depicting another form of negative punishment.

## **Ed**

### **Basic Information**

Ed was born in New York. At the time of the video, Ed is a registered "sex offender" living on the west coast of Florida. During childhood, Ed grew up with both of his parents describing his childhood as "good," with no abuse. Ed stopped going to school after 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but he doesn't elaborate on why 11<sup>th</sup> grade was the farthest he went in his educational career. Since then, Ed has been doing mostly self-employed work, such as construction and handyman projects. During the video, Ed reported being married with no children.

In 2010 Ed was in possession of child pornography and was convicted of a sex offense. He spent 6 ½ years in prison followed by probation of an unknown time and which he is still on at the time of the video. Additionally, Ed underwent sex offender therapy for a little over a year.

Ed's interview is the second shortest video in the sample being only 10 minutes and 3 seconds long. Ed does not go into much detail about his childhood, but he does clearly report

there was no abuse. Furthermore, it seems imperative to this study to mention that Ed is a stroke survivor and seems to have a harder time processing words and communicating.<sup>2</sup>

### **Social Learning Theory**

There is very little information about Ed's childhood and his parents. However, he does describe his childhood as "good" which I take to suggest that his parents were conforming persons, at least in the home interactions with Ed (0:12). Since there is not much information about his relationships during childhood, differential association in childhood is nearly impossible to gauge for this participant.

Ed was convicted of a sex offense in 2010 after he was caught during a sting operation involving a file-sharing software, LimeWire. As Ed reports, law enforcement found evidence that he had files of child pornography on a computer. With much surprise from Ed, law enforcement came to his house and served a warrant early in the morning (2:20). Ed seems to define much of his attitudes towards his sexual offending with one word, "embarrassing" (4:35). Beth Birenbaum (n.d.) of the Berkeley Well-Being Institute mentions the causal factors of feeling embarrassment:

When it comes to embarrassment, "failing" usually means behaving in a way that doesn't align with the image you have of yourself or violating a social expectation... But you won't feel embarrassed unless you also have the desire to meet others' expectations and the need to be socially accepted (Wither, 2016).

Arguably, Ed did violate a social expectation and got caught in the process. It can be suggested that Ed's feeling of embarrassment is caused by his failure to meet his own standards as well as

---

<sup>2</sup> The research methodology used in this project relies heavily on the spoken narratives of the interviewees. Due to Ed's difficulty speaking and processing questions, noting such hardships is imperative to the study.

society's. In relation to social learning theory, Ed's violation of conventional values and morals favorable to conforming behavior (definitions) caused the feeling of embarrassment.

As a reminder, positive punishment involves "unpleasant consequences" attached to a behavior while negative punishment involves the "removal of a reward" (Akers 2009:68). Due to his conviction, Ed was sentenced to 6 ½ years in prison and is on probation at the time of the video, revealing that positive punishment is evident in Ed's narrative. Not only is positive punishment evident in Ed's narrative, but negative punishment is as well, after the official charge. Due to Ed's sexual offense, he lost several relationships with friends (5:27). He also implies that he lost freedom and has a few restrictions that he must live by such as being a certain amount of feet away from a school (3:28). Not only did Ed lose freedom, but his wife did too since she stayed with him throughout his incarceration. Ed states, "She stuck with me through the whole incarceration, and she is living like she is, on probation, like I am" (5:46). This shows that even though Ed lost a few relationships, he did not lose his wife but, in staying with Ed, she lost her freedom in several ways. For example, Ed has multiple limitations to where he can live which means his wife does as well being the fact that she lives with him. Ed's loss of relationships and freedom is a depiction of negative punishment as negative punishment is, "the consequence of the behavior is the removal of a reward or privilege" (Akers 2009:68).

Despite being on good terms with his family, Ed seems to find disappointing them to be the hardest for him since becoming a registered sex offender (7:45), once again hinting at a conforming family. With that, his family's disappoint reveals that they have negative definitions towards Ed's sexual offending. By disapproving of his sexual offending, they do show negative definitions and attitudes not in favor of criminal behavior. Additionally, Ed's attitudes towards disappointing his family arguably indicates priority and intensity in the differential association

component. Since priority is “occurring early in childhood” and intensity is “how emotionally close the relationship” it can be argued that Ed’s strong emotions towards his family can demonstrate these modalities (Cullen and Wilcox 2010:9). Ed being upset about disappointing his family potentially indicates a strong relationship which may have started in early childhood.

After incarceration, Ed was required to go to therapy for a little over a year. Even though this state-mandated therapy was part of his criminal sentencing, Ed, does not imply that therapy was a punishment. Instead, Ed speaks very positively about therapy, saying that the service was “very good” and helpful (8:14). The sessions once a week allowed him to define his own behavior and learn why he did what he did (8:28). Whether Ed was involved in group or individual therapy sessions, these sessions exposed Ed to definitions. Akers (2009) mentions the importance of differential association in reference to criminal and conforming behaviors,

The groups with which one is in differential association provide the major social contexts in which all the mechanisms of social learning operate. Not only do they expose one to definitions, they present models to imitate and mediate differential reinforcement (source, schedule, value, and amount) for criminal and conforming behaviors. (P. 62)

According to Ed, in the sex offender class he learned that he became desensitized from regular porn, which eventually led to child pornography. Over the course of incarceration and therapy, it seems to be that Ed was able to define his criminal behavior and potentially understand what may have caused such actions.

Looking back at his conviction and his behaviors leading up to his offending, Ed seems to be quite embarrassed and angry at himself for allowing it to happen in the first place (6:51). He

is also upset for the victims in the videos now that he understands how life-changing their victimization was,

And I feel for the people that were in the videos now that I've learned and see that their lives have changed because of somebody doing that to them. (7:07)

Based on the quote above, it seems to suggest or imply that while Ed was committing the sexual offense, he did not seem to understand that the children in them were being victimized. Ed says "now that I have learned" which implies he did not know that what the children were experiencing was negatively impacting their lives until after his conviction. This statement illustrates the changing of definitions in Ed's life, possibly transforming from positive to either negative or neutralizing definitions of his sexual offending.

## **Tony**

### **Basic Information**

Tony was born in Sarasota, Florida. At the time of the video, Tony is almost 50 years old living on the west coast of Florida, but he recounts his childhood from a very young age.

During childhood, Tony grew up with both parents in the entertainment field. When Tony was growing up a male family friend sexually abused him. Despite the assault and being openly gay in the 1970's, Tony describes his childhood as "absolutely amazing" (0:40). However, from his narrative it seems safe to say that the sexual assault traumatized Tony for several years.

Tony is a registered "sex offender" in the state of Florida. Tony sexually assaulted a 12-year-old boy. He explained that there was no interest in young boys before and after the assault but does claim alcohol played a role in his sexual offending (16:19). Tony suggested that he knew sexual offending was wrong before his own offense took place and states multiple times how upset he is about his offending.

It is not clear whether Tony went to therapy or not, or even if he was ever incarcerated. He decided to talk more about his childhood and feelings rather than his punishments.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Tony grew up with both parents in the entertainment industry stating that it was an “absolutely amazing” childhood with good surroundings and friends (0:40). He went even further valuing his childhood by mentioning this was the time he learned to accept everyone (1:15). It seems to be that his family and friends were pro-social and conforming individuals. Tony’s upbringing suggests that he learned more noncriminal behaviors than criminal behaviors from his interactions with family and friends. His narrative also suggests that he did not interact with nonconforming persons until after he was convicted and charged, this is discussed in detail later.

At the age of 12 years old, Tony was sexually assaulted by someone that the family knew. Tony mentioned how the abuser took advantage of him as he “looked like a little girl” and he “acted like a little girl” (2:21). According to Tony’s recollection, the offender seemed to capitalize on the opportunity and “played up the whole old little princess type thing” (2:37). By this, Tony means that the abuser played the role of ‘Prince Charming’ which for Tony, made it less traumatic. Tony says,

See, for me, it wasn’t a traumatic necessarily experience because it was, I was treated like a little princess. I was, it was all beautiful. And this is how it was supposed to be, Prince Charming type of thing. And then the pain came and there was pain. (17:34)

This suggests that, at least for some time when he was a young child, Tony thought of the violating sexual encounter he had as a normal [heteronormative] sexual experience, stating, “And



this is how it was supposed to be..." (17:44). From a social learning lens, Tony's definition of child sexual abuse as normal appeared at a very young age due to the experience he had with an adult who potentially is a teacher of criminal behavior.

I would be amiss not to mention the masculine and feminine ideologies present in Tony's interview. There seems to be an underlying message about masculinity and manhood in Tony's narrative. Multiple times throughout the interview Tony references a "mother" type personality that he had since he was a little boy. Remember, according to the narrative, Tony's offender capitalized on the idea of that Tony should play a "little princess" role and the adult violator would play a "Prince Charming" role. This heteronormative role-playing is not only used to validate sexual violation of the feminine, but it is accepted by Tony, the victim in this circumstance. Tony suggests in this interview that he somehow could view the assault as normal because of his role enactment, implying that a situation where the masculine or man has control is socially acceptable. This perspective rooted in masculine and feminine ideals is specifically theorized in Akers' Social Structure-Social Learning (SSSL) theory of crime, mentioned earlier in the thesis. Remember, the SSSL theory emphasizes social structures that can be associated with individual-level behaviors. In Tony's personal narrative of his victimization as a child, there is evidence of a gender power hierarchy that is socially constructed which may have influenced the adult violator's behavior.

Based on the relationship between Tony and the abuser, it is safe to assume that Tony was associated with at least one person who was nonconforming. He remembers the sexual abuse only happening once, but he doesn't remember much of the details because he "blocked" the memory out (2:39). Tony believes that his innocence was taken away from him after he was assaulted but he did gain more love and care for others,

... I had blocked it out and still don't remember a lot of the details but remember enough that it changed me in a certain way to where my caring and loving and the endearment that I wanted to show others was stronger because there was an innocence that was taken at that time. (2:39)

Despite Tony gaining more love and care for other people, he later describes his victimization as being “devastating” (5:35). This description seemingly reveals that Tony’s definitions of his sexual victimization shifted from “good” to “bad.”<sup>3</sup> This is not unlike other sexual assault survivors as studies show that survivors often have shifting views of situations and they do not change linearly (Sinko et al. 2020). To be clear, when Tony was explaining his own sexual abuse encounter, he described it as not traumatizing when it occurred, but when he talked about it in the present moment, he defines it as devastating. The definition of his own victimization as a child as bad, shows that he does disapprove of the behavior at the time of the video. However, despite believing his victimization was horrible, Tony eventually was charged with a sex offense himself.

Tony does not clarify when he committed the sexual offense for which he was arrested and convicted, but it seemed to occur, in his adult life. Tony admits that he touched a 12-year-old boy in an “inappropriate manner” (5:05). According to Tony, he still does not know exactly why he ended up sexually offending a young boy. Tony adamantly states that there was no satisfaction when the sexual offense took place, indicating that there was a lack of positive reinforcement (12:51). According to Akers’ social learning theory, positive reinforcement increases the probability of an act being committed based on the, “... rewarding outcomes or

---

<sup>3</sup> Tony does not use “good” or “bad” to describe his shifting views. Those terms were used here because they are simple and easy to understand.

reactions to it, for example, obtaining approval, status, money, awards, food, or pleasant feelings” (Akers 2009:68). In addition, Plummer and Cossins (2018) propose that a cycle of abuse may be learned throughout one’s life’s course. They conclude that male CSA victims were more likely to become child sex offenders if they were victimized at the age of 12 years or older. Tony’s narrative supports this finding.

The offense was not premeditated, and he claims the assault lasted “seconds” (6:08). Tony does not believe that his sexual victimization at a young age was what caused his own sexual offending, “I won’t accept it’s because something that happened to me in the past, we make our own decisions on what we’re going to do” (5:13). However, he does believe that it was a combination of multiple things he was going through, or previously went through that caused his sexual offending such as his mother passing away, health issues, and other factors that were a pathway into his temporary abuse of alcohol (16:58).

Tony states that he was never a “huge drinker,” but he did go through a couple stages in life where he drank alcohol excessively (15:53). Tony does not imply that he was drinking with peers or if his peers may have influenced his decision to sexually violate a child. However, he does directly state that alcohol played a role in his offending, “... I do believe that alcohol did play a role in that because I wasn’t one to drink on a regular basis. Even now I don’t drink” (16:27). It seems that Tony relied on drinking to cope with stress and grieving showing that his action was negatively reinforced, “The likelihood that an action will be taken is also enhanced when the act allows the person to avoid or escape aversive or unpleasant events” (Akers 2009:68). It’s important to remember that social learning theory is a general theory of crime and deviance. Let’s remember that Akers’ social learning theory, “... embraces variables that operate

to both motivate and control delinquent and criminal behavior, to both promote and undermine conformity” (Akers 2009:51).

Multiple times throughout the interview, Tony states how “devastated” he is of his sexual offending behavior, “Regretful, I’m devastated. I hurt somebody” (6:47). Tony makes a connection to himself implying that he feels horrible because he directly knows how child sexual assault can affect a young child. At the time of the video, Tony has not forgiven himself for his criminal behavior. This all suggests that Tony defines his criminal sexual behavior as hurtful and destructive, showing that he disapproves of his own actions. While disapproving of his actions, Tony believes that he is “not a monster” (8:55).

The question if Tony’s offender got charged with sexual assault remains unanswered, but it is conceivable Tony never saw any examples of negative or positive punishment as he did not see other people's unconventional acts punished in any way, such as the offender who sexually violated him. It wasn’t until after Tony was charged that he saw people punished for sex crimes. At the time of the video, Tony mentions his daily interactions with other sex offenders (3:42). It seems, however, that Tony differentially associated with conformers until he was convicted. According to learning models, we could arguably expect him to remain conforming and not participate in criminal activities, including a sex crime. Tony’s lack of interaction with those deemed criminal and deviant, would suggest that he would be unlikely to participate in this sexual assault crime from a social learning perspective. Yet, it is worth thinking through all the components of differential association theory, namely priority, frequency, intensity and duration.

Based on Tony’s statements, his relationship with his parents fits an interpersonal relationship that social theorists would classify as having priority, frequency, duration, and intensity. Tony’s relationship with his parents occurred early in life (priority) and it seems to be

that he was with them very frequently and for a long period of time. This relationship also demonstrates intensity, as Tony relays that his childhood was great and shows much appreciation for the way he was brought up. Tony was associated with prosocial individuals across all these aspects.

As stated earlier, it is unclear what Tony's punishment was for his criminal conviction of child sexual abuse (incarceration, probation) although it is evidence that he is registered as a sex offender in the state of Florida. In other words, exactly what types of positive punishment Tony received because of his criminal offense remains unanswered. However, it is critical to mention the *lack of* negative punishment after his sexual offense. Specifically, Tony states that he did not lose many relationships with friends and family stating that they "overlooked the mistake" (19:56). Even classifying the assault as a "mistake" is telling as it provides this criminal indirect Even classifying the assault as a "mistake" is telling as it provides this criminal incident to be seen as a "one-off" rather than an identity to be associated with Tony. As Sutherland's learning theory proposed, the development of a criminal identification is a latter, but nonetheless, important process wherein the person who has learning criminal behavior through interactions becomes more heavily associated with criminal others and thus may internalize the identity of "criminal" themselves. This does not appear to be the case with Tony or Tony's friends and family.

## **Marshall**

### **Basic Information**

Marshall was born in Pontiac, Michigan. At the time of the video, Marshall is 83 years old and living in Florida. Before his sexual abuse charges, Marshall was in prison for "writing

bad checks” (2:46). Once he was released, he got married and had 2 daughters. In 1988 Marshall and his wife got divorced because his wife “met somebody” else (5:34).

According to Marshall’s narrative, he sexually molested his daughter for several years and molested a neighbor’s daughter once. He was arrested and charged with 2 counts of attempted capital sexual battery. Marshall was incarcerated for over 30 years and was eventually sent to Arcadia, which is a sex offender treatment center in Florida. At the time of the video, Marshall is still on a 30-year probation. Marshall is registered as a “sex offender” in the state of Florida.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Marshall’s parents got divorced when he was a young boy. His mother eventually got remarried, but his stepfather, an alcoholic, and ended up passing away. Marshall’s mother had to raise 3 daughters and 2 sons by herself and ended up working 2 jobs (0:53). Arguably, at a young age Marshall was associated with someone who demonstrated prosocial characteristics, as his mother worked tirelessly to provide for her children. On the other hand, his childhood narrative reveals that Marshall was also associated with at least one person who many would consider nonconforming based on his stepfather’s alcohol addiction.

According to Akers’ social learning theory, the differential association component includes primary personal groups, such as friends and family. Family, especially, is very important to people’s behaviors, “Early on shaping of conforming and deviant behavior occurs principally in the family” (Akers 2009:60). Based on Marshall’s statement, his relationship with his mother fits an interpersonal relationship that social learning theorists would classify as having priority, frequency, intensity, and duration. Marshall’s mother was his primary parental relationship; he stated that he lived with her after the divorce and his stepfather dying. Marshall’s

relationship with his mother could be characterized as having priority (occur early in life and thus have greater impact) and frequency (occur often). Intensity (admiration) is also suggested within his narrative as he admires the way she worked 2 jobs to provide for her 5 children. Adding to this, Marshall mentions that his mother used to “brag” about him as a child because he was a caring young boy (14:41), indicating another example of the “intensity”- that Marshall’s mother is showing admiration to Marshall. Duration (long-lasting) is evident since Marshall was with her until he went into the military. According to social learning theory, the military would be considered another salient reference group in Marshall’s life. Marshall never mentions his mother participating in unconventional behavior, which suggests that Marshall was not taught criminal behavior by his mother, especially not sexual abuse.

As for his father and stepfather, it seems to be that these relationships were much shorter in duration, frequency, and perhaps intensity, not allowing for as much association or learning when compared to his mother. Except for a brief mention of their presence and absence, Marshall does not speak of his father or stepfather throughout the interview. However, he does bring up his mother a couple of times, which again illustrates her impact on Marshall; here I infer again, the differential association components are more prominent in Marshall’s relationship with his mother than his father and stepfather.

Marshall believes he was molested when he was younger; however, he has no specific memory of this happening, saying “that’s a little fuzzy with me” (7:14). Furthermore, Marshall indicates that this possible molestation was a catalyst for his own sexual offending as he believes that “something” got him “curious” and interested” (7:17). Although there is very little said about the possible event that took place when Marshall was a child, it is still imperative to this

study as it shows that Marshall *may* have learned sexual assault behaviors from another person early in his life (priority).

Despite having interactions with his mother who Marshall describes as conforming, Marshall ended up “getting into juvenile” because he got into trouble (1:05). It is not clear what crimes or acts he was committing at this young age, but there is a possibility that he was associating with others who he may have learned these troubling acts. Interestingly, Marshall’s mother went to court on his behalf and was able to get Marshall released (i.e., have his charges dropped). This appears to be when Marshall was sent to the military, providing him a new opportunity of institutionalized learning. However, Marshall was not able to adjust to the military environment, “I did well on my job, but I just couldn’t adjust to service, so I ended up getting to go out in 1958” (1:20).

After he got out of the military, Marshall worked in factories until he moved to Florida in 1969. In Florida, he worked at Channel 10, a local news and entertainment television station. He later worked for another corporation until he was sent to prison in 1986. Social learning theorists would look to his military and work relationships as potential sites for learning. Arguably, we could expect that these legitimate institutional associations would have contributed to a decrease of criminal propensity and participation by creating unfavorable definitions of crimes. In Marshall’s case, however, he still participated in child sex crimes.

In 1986, Marshall was arrested and charged with 2 counts of attempted capital sexual battery. According to Marshall, he molested his 6-year-old daughter, “fondling” her until she turned 14 years old, at which time he had intercourse with her (3:18). Marshall also molested a neighbor’s daughter, involving oral sex, who was around 9 years old (16:02). Marshall describes how he manipulated the young girls to participate in the sexual activities, “... kids look up to



grown-ups, they obey what grown-ups tell them. That was my mode of operation that at that time knowing that that's how they would react" (15:47). This quote is telling in how Marshall understood certain learning mechanisms commonly invoked by social learning advocates (i.e., modeling, reinforcement). In short, though it may be unclear where Marshall learned definitions and skills favorable to sexual assault, it seems clear he can teach them even if through manipulating the young girls to participate in his criminal acts.

Marshall was sentenced to 50 years in prison and 30 years probation. However, his prison sentence was reduced due to "good behavior" which took about a third off his prison time (5:00). Additionally, in his 40's Marshall was released from prison and sent to Arcadia, a sex offender treatment center in Florida. In 2011, he was released from Arcadia.

Marshall went to 2 years of therapy after Arcadia. He was living in a sex offender community in Florida. It is important to mention, that Marshall does not imply that Arcadia or the 2 years in therapy after his release were punishment. He states, "It was a good program" (12:57). Interestingly, while incarcerated and at Arcadia, it is arguable that Marshall's differential association could be equally association with people who have definitions and skills favorable and unfavorable to crime as those who are incarcerated with him have been criminally charges and thus may have definitions favorable to crime, while those working at the institutions have definitions unfavorable to crime.

As mentioned earlier, Marshall and his wife got divorced in 1988, two years after his sexual offending became public. It is not clear what his wife's definitions towards crime/conformity were as Marshall does not discuss this information of his relationship with his wife. Instead of blaming the divorce on his sexual assaults, Marshall says that his wife "met somebody" (5:34). In the interview, Marshall mentions his wife was visiting him while he was in

prison the first time for “writing bad checks” (2:46). To be clear, this occurred before they were married; they got married once he was released. This potentially shows that his wife didn’t see his fraudulent criminal behaviors as unfavorable, suggested that she may have had some definitions favorable to crime. Based on Marshall’s narrative, then, I could argue that her definitions toward Marshall’s criminal behavior were either positive or neutralizing as both favor crime and deviance behavior (Akers 2009). Recall in Akers’ social learning theory, positive definitions of crime, “are beliefs or attitudes that make the behavior morally desirable or wholly permissible” and neutralizing definitions, “favor violating the law or other norms not because they take the acts to be positively desirable but because they justify or excuse them” (Akers 2009:79). This coupled with evidence of having no positive punishment or what Akers, et al. (1979:638) calls “aversive stimuli,” suggests that Marshall’s wife’s behavior did not decrease the probability of criminal behavior occurring again. Such statement is not meant to suggest blame of his wife, of course, but is made in light of the learning components that I am examining herein.

Indeed, Marshall’s wife did leave him. In addition, Marshall was not allowed to contact his daughters due to court ruling, but they were allowed to contact him. In prison, Marshall received letters from his youngest daughter, but at the time of the video, he has not received anything from her since he was released. Marshall’s oldest daughter did not send him letters, but she did give her sister a picture of her children so that Marshall could see them. This potentially shows a father-daughter connection that was not completely lost until *after* he was released. Since he was not allowed to contact his daughters per court order, this could be an example of negative punishment. Akers (2009:68) describes negative punishment as, “... the removal of a reward or privilege.”

Marshall was required to go to treatment, he learned a lot about his criminal behavior. When asked what his mindset was during the time of the sexual offenses, Marshall agrees with the interviewers' statements that he was "blind to the repercussions" (14:01). Marshall seems to agree because he continued to sexually abuse his daughter. Arguably, this suggests that Marshall received no [positive or negative] punishment until he was arrested. The arrest, charge, and incarceration, in other words, were the first punishment he perceived. According to the social learning theory, the lack of positive or negative punishment is what increases the frequency of the criminal behavior, as the presence of these punishments are meant to decrease the frequency of such behavior (Akers and Jennings 2009; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Furthermore, Marshall admits that he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he also says that he "numbed" himself and "... didn't dwell on it, about what I was doing being wrong" (20:28), so there seems to be some contradiction in his statements. What seems clear is that Marshall continued to sexually abuse his daughter for years, so he may have had a neutralizing definition to crime, as these definitions, "see the behavior as not generally good but is acceptable, justified, or excusable given the circumstances" (Akers and Jennings 2009:107).

It was not until his participation in the Arcadia program that Marshall's attraction to young girls was diminished. Due to the treatment at Arcadia, and the two years of treatment post-release, Marshall realized that he was a "terrible" person. In the video, he says he feels sorry for what he did (9:56). This admission suggests that he now has unfavorable definitions of his past criminal behaviors, indicating that he learned unfavorable definitions of crime in treatment. This supports the social learning theory as Akers and Jensen (2010) state that definitions are learned behavior:

These definitions favorable or unfavorable to criminal and delinquent behavior are themselves learned behavior that provide cognitions and internal discriminative stimuli that do not directly reinforce the behavior but shape the person's view of the situation (or situations) as an opportunity to commit an offense or one in which certain behavior is expected or appropriate. (P. 4)

Adding to this point, Marshall believes he was a good father to his children stating, "I did well working and being a good father in that respect" (24:03). This suggests that Marshall believes that the sexual abuse was perhaps the only "terrible" act he was doing. This also is an example of how different behaviors can have different personal definitions and attitudes within one individual. Marshall states that he was a "terrible" person because of his consistent sexual abuse, but simultaneously he was also a "good" father because he was working.

At the time of the video, Marshall believes that he has tried to be a "good" person since being released from prison (10:06). Treatment was able to build Marshall's compassion and empathy for others (12:42). He was also able to realize what potentially caused the sexual offending and molestation of young girls (i.e., his own possible victimization) and is "consciously keeping my mind on those thoughts" (26:07).

## **Lee**

### **Basic Information**

Lee was born in Dayton, Tennessee. At the time of the video, Lee is in his 70s and living in Florida. According to him, he never sexually offended anyone, so he maintains his innocence of any sex crime. In this way, Lee is starkly different from the other interviewees that I discuss above.

Lee was married twice, having two kids by his first wife and four stepdaughters from the second wife. He also admits to having a child “out of wedlock;” however, it does not appear that he had a relationship with that child. Lee was criminally charged with sexual offending for an assault that occurred in 1984. Specifically, he was accused of sexually abusing his daughter and niece. During this time, he recalls drinking alcohol a lot and getting in trouble with legal authorities a few times, including having multiple DUI’s. Even though Lee was charged, sentenced, and registered as a sex offender, Lee adamantly states that the sexual abuse never happened. Lee is registered as a “sex offender” in the state of Florida.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Lee lost his mother when he was 9 years old and his father at 17 years old, so he did not grow up with both of his biological parents. When asked if he experienced any abuse during his childhood, Lee answered “None” emphatically (0:51). His family reportedly grew up very poor in a rather poor region of Tennessee where Blackland farming was the dominant way to make money. Lee went to school for a minimal amount of time. He failed the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and then quit school in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In this way, one could argue that Lee had a relatively short time in which to develop pro-social learning mechanisms within the institutional educational realm.

After quitting school, Lee registered for the army, but he was denied entry, yet another example of the lack of institutionalized learning that many young men from his rural, poor area may have accessed. The minimum institutional learning and structure Lee participated in may have restricted his mainstream opportunities leaving Lee with a deficient of definitions favorable to conventional (i.e., conforming) attitudes and behaviors. As Lee puts it, he became a ‘jack of all trades.’ Lee doesn’t specifically indicate that he learned criminal acts, behaviors, or morals

from others, but he does spend time throughout the interview pointing out his lack of involvement with traditional notions of conforming, like the presences of two parents, educational attainment, and skilled work.

Other than his sexual offense from 1984, the only other criminal charges Lee speaks of are his DUI's. Lee claims he never sexually assaulted anyone despite his ex-wife claims. Hence, unlike other participants in this study, Lee denies a history of sexual offending.

Important to understandings of social learning theory and centrality of associations with others, Lee acknowledges, "I learned to be careful who I mess with." In this sentence, Lee reveals an understanding about the importance of who one interacts with (8:26). Although some of his statements sound as if he loved his wife, he also speaks about how her erroneous charged against him was wrong and unjustifiable. Revealing underlying martial tensions and his traditional masculine ideals of dominance, Lee discusses his wife wish to leave the marriage. Rather than conceding that the marriage should end, he reportedly denied his wife a divorce, stating that he told her, "Well, whenever I married you, I didn't marry you to give you no divorce" (3:00). About 2 minutes later in the interview, Lee states, "... I feel like I got cheated out of a marriage, out of my kids" (4:26). With these statements, Lee shows anger towards his ex-wife who, according to Lee, set up the accusations of sexual assault to get out of their marriage.

Based on the definition of differential association there was a lack of priority, intensity, frequency, and duration for definitions favorable to crime. As mentioned earlier, Lee learned noncriminal behaviors and trades from others, but denies any involvement in criminal activities besides his DUI's. Despite Lee having a relatively short time to develop pro-social learning behaviors in the educational realm, he was still searching for another type of institutional

learning. The military was his next step, but Lee was denied entry. This lack of institutional learning suggests he may have had a harder time developing conventional learning mechanisms, indicating that differential association with conforming groups was scarce for Lee. However, a scarcity of conforming interactions does not equate to an abundance of interactions with nonconforming groups. Analyzing Lee's narrative, it is arguably clear that the frequency of interactions with conforming persons was much greater than his interactions with nonconformists, suggesting a very short (if at all) time spent with unconventional peers (duration). Again, his lack of interaction with those deemed unconventional, would suggest that he would be unlikely to participate in this sexual assault crime from a social learning perspective.

Additionally, Lee never stated that he knew more conforming persons than non-conforming, but it can be implied based on his lack of criminal charges. Despite that, it is fair to argue from a social learning perspective that the ratio between non-conforming and conforming individuals was not 50/50. Many of the questions in Appendix C focused on previous sexual assault, since Akers' social learning theory is based on previous victimization and the learning tendencies that come with interacting with others. This is to say that Lee was never sexually assaulted and did not interact with persons who sexually violated others so it can be implied that he did not learn how to sexually assault from social interactions, considering he never actually committed sexual misconduct himself.

Nevertheless, Lee did socialize with non-conforming groups once he was incarcerated for 15 years and after his release at Arcadia where he underwent inpatient therapy for 19 years. Being that his only socialization with criminals was when he was institutionalized, *after* his arrest for sexual violence, social learning theory would expect that Lee would be unlikely to

participate in this sort of crime. Since Lee denies sexually abusing his 10-year-old daughter and 9-year-old niece, imitation according to Akers' social learning theory does not apply here.

Despite Lee never indicating a criminal past, he does show a capacity for violent behavior. According to Lee, his daughter was assaulted by a man, and he adamantly states that he would have taken care of it,

And if she would've said something to me, I'd have took care of it 'cause that's the way I do. I take care of my family. (4:47)

This statement illustrates Lee's masculine and patriarchal attitudes, which I discuss earlier as well. Here, we see him implying that the man of the family must provide and take care of all family members. But this comment reveals another important aspect of social learning as well—that Lee finds sexual abuse as unfavorable. His desire to want to punish another man for violating his stepdaughter indicates Lee's wish for positive punishment of sexual assault.

The interview content also indicates that Lee's family finds sexual abuse as unfavorable. In explaining his familial relations after his arrest for sexual assault of a minor, Lee says, “[W]hen I went to prison, they all just seem to bury off” (5:41), suggesting that his family has severed the relationship with him, presumably because they found the behavior revolting. According to Lee, only his youngest sister still talks to him, and even then, only on an irregular basis.

I would be amiss to not mention the speculative anger and rhetoric Lee reveals throughout the interview. Perhaps this is also a show of his frustration with being charged with a crime that he did not commit, or perhaps it more specifically about being charged with the crime of sexual violence with a child, which he himself finds horrible. According to Lee, he pled no contest for the crime because he did not want to put his daughter and niece through the court



process. Again, this demonstrates a potential protective ideal, which could be arguably defined as patriarchal. From a social learning perspective, one could argue that such an ideal was based on an association with his own father or someone else who he admired (intensity).

As stated earlier, Lee spent 15 years in prison and 19 years at Arcadia, a therapeutic program for sexual assault offenders. Both institutionalizations are an example of positive punishment within the differential reinforcement component being that his sentencing was a consequence to his behavior. He also reveals that he hasn't seen his children since 1984, alluding to a form of negative punishment within social learning theory. One could argue that seeing his children brought pleasure to Lee and once he was indicted, his sense of pleasure was taken away. This shows a loss of something valuable, familial relationships, which was also mentioned as earlier when talking about probability. Additionally, Mark asks, "Are you staying away from kids" and Lee answers with, "Yes" (8:33), revealing yet another form of positive punishment that many sex offenders must deal with. Regarding therapy, mentioned earlier, Lee spent 19 years at Arcadia. While he was talking about this required therapy, he didn't seem thrilled that he had to go. This may be because he never committed the acts that he was being 'helped' for and was forced to undergo treatment for something he was not guilty of; all Lee says is, "I made it through it" (7:28).

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

### Discussion

This research study sought to examine the presence of social learning in the behaviors and narratives of adult male sex offenders. The question driving my research was: Can Akers' social learning theory explain men's sexual assault offending? The sample consisted of 8 pre-recorded interview videos located on the YouTube channel, *Soft White Underbelly*. I constructed a guide sheet to allow for extensive evaluation of the social learning theory within the interviews. Analysis indicates that the social learning theory has mixed results with how well it explains the interviewees' sexual assault offending. The results vary person to person, but it is safe to say the theory was both supported and negated in various ways.

Recall that differential association consists of four modalities: frequency, duration, intensity, and priority. All four modalities, play an important role in individual definitions either favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior. Frankie, Bill, Mike, Tony, and Marshall's interviews suggest that differential association may be an important component of their learning sexual assault behaviors. For instance, each of them shares experiences of sexual abuse in their childhood by either family or friends of the family. Among these men, all but Tony, give weight to their relationships in childhood in forming their identity and problematic sexual behaviors. In doing so, the modalities of differential association, seem to be important in defining their criminal sexual behavior.

To be more specific, Frankie, Bill, and Mike were sexually abused by their parents in various ways and more than once, revealing priority and frequency of crime favorable behaviors within their parental relationships. Intensity seemingly varies throughout all interviewees as some have more admiration for family or family friends than others. Duration is also varied

amongst all interviewees. For example, Bill and Mike either ran away from home or were kicked out a young age, indicating that their duration with family members potentially teaching criminal sexual behavior was cut short.

Lee, Ian, and Ed's childhood raise questions about the importance of the modalities of differential association. Lee, Ian, and Ed's narratives do not reveal much association with those with favorable definitions of crime. In fact, their associations with prosocial behaviors were more frequent, and they had many legitimate opportunities to learn conforming behaviors and attitudes. However, they still were charged with sex offenses, although remember that Lee denies that he actually committed sex crimes.

Lee, Ian, and Ed's associations are similar to the narratives of Tony and Marshall. Despite Tony and Marshall being sexually victimized once in their childhood, they do not reveal other interactions with those deemed criminal or deviant. From a social learning perspective, Tony and Marshall would be unlikely to participate in sexual assault crimes given the propositions of differential association (i.e., the ratio of associations unfavorable to crime outweighed those favorable to crime). It seems, however, that their childhood victimization carried greater weight in initiating their victimization of others. In other words, although the modalities of Tony and Marshall's criminal learning were not frequent, durable, or arguably intense, the priority and/or another unexplained actor seems related to their subsequent criminal behavior.

Exposure to other's definitions is where one's attitudes begins to formulate (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Definitions were apparent in some but not all the interviews. There is a pattern of changing definitions from positive to negative within a few of these narratives. Bill's definition of sexual abuse was normative during childhood and neutralizing when he was committing the

sexual abuse. However, his definitions toward sexual offending changed due to therapy. Mike's definitions of sexual offending started off positive due to his intense, frequent, and early association with his mother. When he ran away, he was still associating with those who had positive definitions of sex crimes. Despite this, Mike's definitions of his sexual behavior changed from favorable to unfavorable when he started intense therapy treatment. Tony had positive or neutralizing definitions and attitudes toward his own victimization as a young child, as evident in him describing them as normal, but he no longer has these positive definitions at the time of the video. In fact, he voices a negative attitude toward his own criminal sexual behavior. Marshall had positive definitions of crime for a long duration of time but seems to have a transformation from positive to negative attitudes. These changes in attitudes are due to the years of sex offender therapy, which supports the basic premise of social learning theory. In short, the data reveals that definitions favorable and unfavorable to crime are changeable depending on the referent group in which one associates.

Not all interviewees, however, indicated a real change in their attitudes favorable (or unfavorable) to crime. Ian defines his sexual behavior as a "stupid mistake" (5:47); indicating that he either has always had negative or neutralizing definitions of his sexual offending. Somewhat similarly, Ed finds his sexual offending to be "embarrassing" (4:35), which is arguably a negative definition. This feeling of embarrassment comes from the violation of conventional definitions that happen to be favorable to conforming behavior. It is unclear given his statements in the interview if Ed's definitions became negative or potentially neutralizing due to the therapy he received or if he always had them.

A couple of the sex offenders had static definitions of crime. For example, Frankie's attitudes/definitions did not change from childhood to adulthood. His only statement for not

committing criminal sex acts again was due to his age, not changing definitions. Additionally, Lee's unfavorable definitions of sexual offending does not waver throughout his life course. Interestingly, based on his narrative Lee was not associated with persons who had favorable definitions of crime, revealing a lack of support for Akers' social learning theory. If Lee was not associated with teachers of crime, specifically sexual crime, then how did he learn criminal sexual behavior?

According to the social learning theory, "Imitation occurs through the observation of the behavior of others" (Cullen and Wilcox 2010:8). Cullen and Wilcox (2010:8) also mention that Akers finds it to be "an indispensable component of the learning mechanism." Despite this argument, imitation is very distant in most of the narratives of the interviewees. It is hard to say whether their sexual crimes were influenced by observing or experiencing it in the past. However, there is a time mentioned in Frankie's narrative where sexual behavior was learned based on observation. Frankie tried to initiate sexual interaction with his mom's boyfriend because he frequently saw his mom and her boyfriend have sexual intercourse (7:43). Later, Frankie gets in trouble at school for paying for sexual endeavors, and his sexual desires begin to evolve. As a major component in Akers' theory, it is safe to say that imitation is supported in Frankie's learned behavior of sexual assault. I would like to add since Mike, Frankie, and Bill had more exposure with criminal role models it can be argued that the likeliness of criminal behavior being imitated is increased (Cullen and Wilcox 2010). As for Tony and Marshall, they were sexually violated at least once, which shows a potential for the increase in criminal propensity. However, in Tony's case, he was associated with pro-social individuals where he learned noncriminal behavior, which would oppose the social learning theory. This is not the case for Lee, Ian, and Ed. These 3 men indicated that they were not associated with criminal role

models in their childhood and only became associated with persons favorable to crime when incarcerated, which raises some additional questions about the import of the imitation component of the theory.

The findings are mostly in support of the differential reinforcement in the social learning theory. To begin, Mike hid a lot of his feelings in drugs and alcohol, supporting the component of negative reinforcement as it allowed him to avoid certain feelings. According to Akers' theory, this type of nonsocial reinforcer increased the frequency of Mike's criminal behavior (Akers et al. 1979; Akers and Jensen 2010; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). This is also present in Bill's interview as his sexual offending was his way of "nursing" his emotional wounds (10:39), and potentially avoiding certain situations or feelings which is an example of negative reinforcement. Going a step further, Bill began filling voids through sexual assault. This is to say that Bill's sexual violence was rewarded by having a sense of fulfillment, revealing his criminal behavior was positively reinforced. Ed, Ian, and Lee, mention the loss of valuable things such as freedom, rights, and relationships depicting several forms of negative punishment. When Tony sexually assaulted the young boy, he claims there was no satisfaction, indicating that there was a lack of positive reinforcement; this could be supported since he did not sexual abuse again. Additionally, Tony relied on drinking to cope with his unpleasant state revealing that his action was negatively reinforced. Marshall was not allowed to contact his daughters per court order showing, again, that negative punishment is present. Adding to this, Marshall received no positive or negative punishment until he was arrested demonstrating that he had a lack of punishment for years. The social learning theory would say that the lack of punishment is what increased the frequency of Marshall's criminal behavior (Akers and Jennings 2009; Cullen and Wilcox 2010). Positive punishment was evident in all narratives except one (Tony's). However,

for Frankie, the interview data raises questions about Akers' social learning theory in reference to positive punishment. The direct punishment Frankie received (more than once) suggests that his sexual offending would have decreased in frequency, but as we know this is not the case for Frankie.

### **Limitations**

This study has a few limitations, one being that the sample was small and purposeful. The sample only included 8 pre-recorded interviews, all involved white adult male sex offenders in Florida. A small sample size does not allow for the data to represent the whole population of persons charged with sexual assault or even all white adult male sex offenders, so questions of reliability and validity are appropriate. The sample size and purposeful sampling design limits the generalizability of the findings within the sex offender population.

In addition, the men being interviewed knew they were being recorded and that their video would be published on the *Soft White Underbelly* platform, which could have led to intentional or unintentional recollection and social desirability biases. While this may result in a lack of trust in the information and the integrity of the data being analyzed, I found the interviews forthcoming in answering the questions, and certainly being able to access the data without burdensome restrictions was a benefit of this study.

Finally, the videos were pre-recorded and Mark, the interviewer, had his own list of questions based on his own interests and intentions. I was not able to ask my own questions of the interviewees, so questions tapping into specific elements of the social learning theory are missing. Nonetheless, the interviews provided enough data for the purposes of this project. Indeed, the research study was able to produce an extravagant amount of data. Despite the unusual sample, many findings were consistent with past studies (Widom and Ames 1994;

Marshall and Marshall 2000; Burton et al. 2002; Felson and Lane 2009; DeLisi et al. 2014; Plummer and Cossins 2018). Furthermore, the research study brings to light the influence of videos within society. The videos within the sample have hundreds of thousands of views, revealing that the public is interested in deviant and/or criminal sex offending. Thus, the content of the videos has the potential to inform public opinion/attitudes (un)favorable to crime, which is vital to the learning theory's understanding of crime.

### **Future Research**

This research study can inform other studies pertaining to CSA, social learning theory, and sex offending. Based on my findings, I think it would be helpful for future studies to do comparable theoretical work, perhaps using narratives of offenders to examine several criminological theories, including social learning but also labeling theory and strain theory. Many of the sex offenders mention elements of strain before and after their sex offending. Some also mention the label 'sex offender' to be dehumanizing, putting them in a hard place with forming relationships, accessing a new neighbor, and getting jobs. With a larger sample size and a broader criminological theory scope, researchers can analyze and examine the effects of child sex abuse and the potential cycle it produces. Future research would also benefit from answering the question "what causes sexual offending when the perpetrator has no history of sexual victimization?" It is important to understand if and how this behavior and attitudes underlying it form, in that it could provide a solution for sexual victimization of both minors and adults.



## REFERENCES

- Akers, Ronald L. 1985. *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach*. 3rd ed. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Pub. Co.
- Akers, Ronald L. 2009. *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers.
- Akers, Ronald L., and Wesley G. Jennings. 2009. "The Social Learning Theory of Crime and Deviance." Pp. 103–20 in *Handbook on Crime and Deviance*, edited by M. D. Krohn, A. J. Lizotte, and G. P. Hall. New York, NY: Springer New York.
- Akers, Ronald L., and Gary F. Jensen. 2010. "Social Learning Theory: Process and Structure in Criminal and Deviant Behavior." Pp. 56–71 in *The SAGE Handbook of Criminological Theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Akers, Ronald L., Marvin D. Krohn, Lonn Lanza-Kaduce, and Marcia Radosevich. 1979. "Social Learning and Deviant Behavior: A Specific Test of a General Theory." *American Sociological Review* 44(4):636–55. doi: [10.2307/2094592](https://doi.org/10.2307/2094592).
- Akers, Ronald L., and Gang Lee. 1996. "A Longitudinal Test of Social Learning Theory: Adolescent Smoking." *Journal of Drug Issues* 26(2):317-343. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002204269602600203>.

- Bandura, Albert, Dorothea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross. 1961. "Transmission of Aggression through Imitation of Aggressive Models." *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 63(3):575–82. doi: 10.1037/h0045925.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Birenbaum, Beth. n.d. "Embarrassment: Meaning, Examples, & Psychology." *The Berkeley Well-Being Institute*. Retrieved January 17, 2024  
(<https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/embarrassment.html>).
- Burton, David L., Diane L. Miller and Tai S. Chien. 2002. "A Social Learning Theory Comparison of the Sexual Victimization of Adolescent Sexual Offenders and Nonsexual Offending Male Delinquents." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 26(9):893-907. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134\(02\)00360-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00360-5).
- Chan, Heng Choon (Oliver), Kathleen M. Heide, and Eric Beauregard. 2011. "What Propels Sexual Murderers: A Proposed Integrated Theory of Social Learning and Routine Activities Theories." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 55(2):228–50. doi: 10.1177/0306624X10361317.
- Check, James V. P., and Neil M. Malamuth. 1986. "Pornography and Sexual Aggression: A Social Learning Theory Analysis." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 9(1):181–213. doi: [10.1080/23808985.1986.11678607](https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1986.11678607).

- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19(6):829–59.
- Cullen, Francis, and Pamela Wilcox. 2010. "Akers, Ronald L.: Social Learning Theory." Pp. 22–29 in *Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- DeLisi, Matthew, Anna E. Kosloski, Michael G. Vaughn, Jonathan W. Caudill, and Chad R. Trulson. 2014. "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Victimization Translate Into Juvenile Sexual Offending? New Evidence." *Violence and Victims* 29(4):620–35.  
doi:10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-13-00003.
- Fagan, Abigail A. 2001. "The Gender Cycle of Violence: Comparing the Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect on Criminal Offending for Males and Females." *Violence and Victims* 16(4):457-74. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.16.4.457>.
- Faupel, Susan, and Roger Przybylski. 2015. "Chapter 2: Etiology of Adult Sexual Offending." *Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking*. Retrieved April 6, 2023 (<https://smart.ojp.gov/somapi/chapter-2-etiology-adult-sexual-offending>).
- FBI. 2019. "Table 42." *Arrests by Sex, 2019 Crime in the United States*. Retrieved June 4, 2023 (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-42/table-42.xls>).

- Felson, Richard, and Kelsea Lane. 2009. "Social Learning, Sexual and Physical Abuse, and Adult Crime." *Aggressive Behavior* 35:489–501. doi: [10.1002/ab.20322](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20322).
- Krohn, Marvin D., William F. Skinner, James L. Massey, and Ronald L. Akers. 1985. "Social Learning Theory and Adolescent Cigarette Smoking: A Longitudinal Study." *Social Problems* 32(5):455–73. doi: 10.2307/800775.
- Maxwell, Kendal, Jennifer L. Callahan, Camilo J. Ruggero, and Beth Janis. 2016. "Breaking the Cycle: Association of Attending Therapy Following Childhood Abuse and Subsequent Perpetration of Violence." *Journal of Family Violence* 31(2):251–58. doi: 10.1007/s10896-015-9765-z.
- Marshall, William L., and Liam E. Marshall. 2000. "The Origins of Sexual Offending." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 1(3):250–63.
- Marganski, Alison, PhD. 2013. "Adult Attachment as a Criminological Construct in the Cycle of Violence." *Violence and Victims* 28(2):210-32. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.11-00155>.
- Miller, Holly Ventura, Wesley G. Jennings, Lorna L. Alvarez-Rivera, and J. Mitchell Miller. 2008. "Explaining Substance Use among Puerto Rican Adolescents: A Partial Test of Social Learning Theory." *Journal of Drug Issues* 38(1):261–83. doi:10.1177/002204260803800112.

- Neuendorf, Kimberly A. 2017. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Nunes, Kevin L., Chantal A. Hermann, J. Renee Malcom, and Kayla Lavoie. 2013. "Childhood Sexual Victimization, Pedophilic Interest, and Sexual Recidivism." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 37(9):703–11. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.01.008.
- Plummer, Malory, and Annie Cossins. 2018. "The Cycle of Abuse: When Victims Become Offenders." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 19(3):286–304. doi:10.1177/1524838016659487
- Rahman, Md Shidur. 2016. "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language 'Testing and Assessment' Research: A Literature Review." *Journal of Education and Learning* 6(1):102. doi: 10.5539/jel.v6n1p102.
- Reckdenwald, Amy, Christina Mancini, and Eric Beauregard. 2013. "The Cycle of Violence: Examining the Impact of Maltreatment Early in Life on Adult Offending." *Violence and Victims* 28(3):466–82. doi: 10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00054.
- Robinson, Breanna. 2021. "What we can All Learn About Life from YouTube's 'Soft White Underbelly.'" *Indy100*. August 25. Retrieved June 7, 2023.  
<https://conversations.indy100.com/soft-white-underbelly-youtube-docuseries>

- Schwartz, Barbara K., Deborah Cavanaugh, Ann Pimental, and Robert Prentky. 2006. "Descriptive Study of Preursors to Sex Offending among 813 Boys and Girls: Antecedent Life Experiences." *Victims & Offenders* 1(1):61–77. doi: 10.1080/15564880500498986.
- Sinko, Laura, Michelle Munro-Kramer, Terri Conley, Courtney J. Burns, and Denise M. Saint Arnault. 2020. "Healing Is Not Linear: Using Photography to Describe the Day-to-day Healing Journeys of Undergraduate Women Survivors of Sexual Violence." *Journal of Community Psychology* 48(3):658–74. doi: 10.1002/jcop.22280.
- Sivakumaran, Sandesh. 2005. "Male/Male Rape and the 'Taint' of Homosexuality." *Human Rights Quarterly* 27(4):1274–1306.
- Soft White Underbelly. 2020. *Soft White Underbelly Intro Video*. Retrieved May 31, 2023 (<https://youtu.be/hA50FoqW-MY>).
- Solakoglu, Ozgur, and Durmus A. Yuksek. 2020. "Delinquency Among Turkish Adolescents: Testing Akers' Social Structure and Social Learning Theory." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 64(5):539–63. doi: 10.1177/0306624X19897400.
- Widom, Cathy Spatz. 1989. "The Cycle of Violence." *Science*, vol. 244, no. 4901, pp. 160–66. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1702789>.

Widom, Cathy Spatz, and M. Ashley Ames. 1994. "Criminal Consequences of Childhood Sexual Victimization." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 18(4):303–18. doi:[10.1016/0145-2134\(94\)900337](https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(94)900337).

Widom, Cathy S., & Michael G. Maxfield. 2001. An Update on the "Cycle of Violence." Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Wilkinson, Karen. 1985. "An Investigation of the Contribution of Masculinity to Delinquent Behavior." *Sociological Focus* 18(3):249–63.

YouTube. n.d. "YouTube." Retrieved April 11, 2023 (<https://www.youtube.com/>).

Yun, Minwoo, and Eunyoung Kim. 2015. "Illicit Drug Use Among South Korean Offenders: Assessing the Generality of Social Learning Theory." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 59(11):1166–87.  
doi:10.1177/0306624X14530671.

APPENDIX A: VIDEO INFORMATION

<b>Video #</b>	<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	<b>Video Release Date</b>	<b>Video Length</b>
1	Tony	December 16, 2020	24:40 min
2	Frankie	December 8, 2020	15:15 min
3	Ed	December 18, 2020	10:04 min
4	Mike	December 21, 2020	21:47 min
5	Ian	December 18, 2020	9:06 min
6	Bill	December 27, 2020	17:54 min
7	Lee	December 30, 2020	10:20 min
8	Marshall	March 18, 2020	28:59 min



APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS

<b>Interview Questions Asked</b>	<b>What video(s) include this question?</b>
Where are you from originally? Where did you grow up?	ALL
Tell me about your family? Did you have both your parents growing up?	ALL
How would you describe your childhood?	Ian, Ed, Lee, Frankie, Bill
No abuse, nothing like that?	Ian, Ed, Lee, Tony
Abused by who?	Bill,
What kind of kid were you in high school?	Ian, Bill
How far did you go in school?	Ed, Lee, Mike
What did you do after school?	Lee
What kind of jobs have you had?	Ian, Ed, Marshall
You've been married, have kids?	Ian, Ed, Lee, Bill, Marshall
How old are you today?	Bill,
At one point you got convicted of a sex offense (or convicted as a sex offender)? Tell me about that. (Or what offenses do you have?)	Ian, Ed, Lee, Bill, Marshall
What would you say to your daughter if you could communicate?	Marshall
Tell me about your mindset when you were doing this with the young girls. How did you seduce the neighbor's girl?	Marshall
You must have understood what you were doing was wrong?	Marshall
The incident with the kids, that was something that actually happened? So you claim it never happened?	Lee
How do you view all of that?	Lee
How did that happen? Did they come to your house?	Ed
What year was that?	Ed
Where do you think the interest in that kind of pornography (ot young girls) came from? Is there anything in your childhood, or anything like that that may have cause it?	Ed, Marshall
Do you feel like what happened to you as a young boy kind of caused this?	Mike, Tony
So your interest in young boys lasted for how long?	Mike

And now you're branded as a sex offender for the rest of your life?	Ian,
You have to register, what, every year?	Ian, Ed
How much prison time did you do for that?	Ed, Lee
Does that affect your job opportunities?	Ian,
How does it affect your life?	Ian, Ed
So it was just one offense that you got convicted of?	Ian,
How old was the girl?- Various questions about victims	Ian, Lee
How old were the boys?	Mike
How many young boys do you think you had fun with?	Frankie,
Your escape that you got arrested for, were there others that you engaged in that you didn't get caught for?	Frankie, Marshall
So you never actually touched anyone?	Ian,
You just look like you attempted to, or you tried to meet with her?	Ian,
Were you doing drugs?	Ian, Bill,
And how has this affected your family? Your relationship with your family?	Ian, Ed, Lee, Mike, Bill, Marshall, Tony
It leaves a trail of destruction, doesn't it?	Marshall
Do you have friends?	Ian, Ed, Lee, Mike
What is your curfew time?	Ian,
What are you doing for work now?	Ian,
You're in a situation where you're staying away from kids?	Ian, Lee
And when you give your ID for something, job applications, something like that, does it come out?	Ian,
Do you still have an attraction to or desire for young girls?	Ian, Marshall
Does the temptation still exist?	Bill,
How are those memories for you? Are they pleasant, are they painful? Do you have guilt over them? or What are your feelings towards what you did?	Frankie, Marshall
Do you feel like you took advantage?	Frankie,
Is it still a battle for you?	Mike
Has everything you've gone through changed your views on pornography? How so?	Ed
What's the craziest escapade you involved yourself in?	Mike

How much of your questionable behavior was fueled by alcohol or drugs?	Mike
Did you do therapy? Did you find it helpful? What kind of things did you get into with therapy? What kind of things do they work on?	Ed, Lee, Bill
Arcadia is a sex offender treatment center here in Florida?	Marshall
Do you feel like you're a better, safer member of society now?	Bill,
How often is it in your thoughts?	Tony
What kind of emotions do you deal with?	Ian, Lee, Mike, Bill
What's the anxiety over? What are you worried about?	Ian,
Are you happier now?	Bill,
What's the most painful part of all this for you?	Ian, Ed
What's the hardest part for you?	Bill,
And how do you feel all of this, this experience has changed you?	Ian,
What advice would you give to somebody else who's living a reckless life like you were?	Ian, Bill,
And this ruins your life for how long?	Ian,
Looking back at your life, do you have any regrets or remorse? What would you have done differently?	Lee, Mike, Frankie, Marshall
What lesson have you learned from this?	ALL

## APPENDIX C: GUIDE SHEET

### Basic information

Where is the interviewee from?

At what age did the interviewee first sexually assault someone?

What age is the interviewee in the video?

What other demographics are revealed?

What was the interviewee's childhood like? How did the interviewee describe their parents/guardians?

Was the interviewee required to go to therapy?

### Learned Behavior, in General

Did the interviewee indicate that he learned things (criminal and noncriminal) from his interactions with others?

Did the interviewee indicate that he learned his criminal tendencies from family members?

Did the interviewee indicate where he thinks the sexual desire came from?

Did the interviewee state/imply that the use of drugs or alcohol was an influence on his sexual offending?

### Differential Association

Did the interviewee state/imply that he interacted with a non-conforming group?

Did the interviewee state/imply that he knew more offenders than conforming persons?  
(differential association)

Did the interviewee state/imply that he knew a lot of people who had sexually assaulted others?  
(intensity)

At what age was the interviewee 1<sup>st</sup> sexually assaulted, if he was? (priority)

Who sexually assaulted the interviewee, if it occurred? (intensity)

How many times was the interviewee sexually assaulted himself, if he was? (frequency)

Did the interview state/imply that the sexual offending came from desensitization? (frequency)

### Learning Mechanisms

#### Imitation

Were the circumstances of the interviewee's victimization similar to his offending pattern?

Did the interviewee state/imply that he was doing what he knew?

Did the interviewee indicate that he learned how to sexually assault others from another person?

If the interviewee was sexually assaulted, did his first offense of sexual assault (ie his offending another) take place after his own sexual assault victimization?

### Definitions

Did the interviewee state/imply his attitudes towards his sexual offending when the offenses took place?

Did the interviewee state/imply his attitudes towards his sexual offending at the time of the video?

Did the interviewee state/imply that he disapproved of being victimized as a child?

Did the interviewee state/imply that he disapproved of his criminal behavior?

Did the interviewee state that the therapy he underwent helped him come to terms with his criminal behavior? Did the therapy help define his own behavior later in life?

### Differential reinforcement (Operant Conditioning)

If the interviewee was sexually assaulted himself, did he talk about how he felt about this?

If the interviewee was sexually assaulted himself, did he talk about its consequences apart from his feelings as indicated above?

### Negative Reinforcement

Did the interviewee see others punished for sexual assaults?

Was the interviewee punished for the sexual assaults he conducted?

Did the interviewee express that sexual assault is bad, immoral, or hurtful behavior?

What response did others give the interviewee when it was found out he was sexually assaulting someone?

Did others who knew about the interviewees sexual violent acts help him hide them?

### Positive Reinforcement

Was the interviewee rewarded for sexual violence? How so?

Did the interviewee perceive sexual violence as normal or favorable? How so?

Was the interviewee only assaulting girls and women, and if so, what reason was given?

Was the interviewee only assaulting boys and men, and if so, what reason was given?

Were widespread ideas related to patriarchy or masculine identity discussed as a reason for sexual assault?

Did the interviewee discuss clear differences between men and women?

Did the interview discuss or imply ideals about men, masculinity or manhood?

*Negative Punishment (indirect)*

Did the interviewee speak about losses of something valuable (freedom, rights, relationships) once his sexual assault offending was found out?

Did the interviewee mention who in his family still talks to him, if any?

Was the interviewee prohibited to contact family members due to the court ruling?

*Positive Punishment (direct)*

Did the interviewee speak about receiving punishment (incarceration, probation, fines, harsh reactions) once his sexual assault offending was found out?

Did the interviewee state/imply therapy was a punishment?