

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

>> I came to San Jose State in 2004 - I finished my master's degree at the University of Maryland, then started here as an adjunct lecture, teaching various classes, and then I finished my PhD in criminology from Griffith University in Australia. I started as a tenure track assistant professor in 2008, so I've been here full-time since then.

What have been some highlights for you working here at San Jose State?

>> I really like the department. The Department of Justice Studies has grown since I've been here. I had the experience of teaching a lot of different kinds of classes and now since I've been tenure track I've created a couple of classes based on my own research, which has been really exciting. One of the things that I've been doing more recently that has been really gratifying and rewarding has been volunteering with the Record Clearance Project run by Peggy Stevenson. We expunge people's records for various crimes - mostly misdemeanors and some felonies. Usually these charges are from 20, 25 years ago and it was a DUI or a drunken disorderly or something - they've had 20 years of non-offending "street time" and they've gone through AA and they're recovered, but they can't get a job because they have to check that box that says they're a convicted felon. So the Record Clearance Project is a way of reaching out to those people. We get students involved in writing the briefs and writing their declarations and then we have an actual court hearing when a judge decides in the interest of justice that those records will be expunged or cleared. So that's been really exciting to see the experience from the students' perspective and also the experience from the clients' perspective. In terms of my individual research, last summer I had the chance to interview some individuals in Massachusetts who I had followed from file records for a number of years -- it was really exciting to meet them face-to-face and to ask the questions that I wanted to ask.

Since you've been here, what has been your main line of research?

>> Most of my research is on sexual aggression and on various aspects of that. My PhD was on specialization and versatility in criminal careers. A lot of the criminal career research is mostly focused on nonsexual offending, trivial offenses. The majority of crime is committed by adolescents and people in their early adulthood. The age crime curve is a staple of criminological thought, which basically argues that the majority of offenders have a rather early onset, peak at their mid- to late teens, and then age out (of committing crime) as they get older. There are various theories that explain the pattern, but to me, the most compelling one is that they develop some kind of stake inconformity that gives them something to lose - they get married, they join the military, or they get a job. Another explanation is simply that they age out because they get old and carrying big televisions around late at night becomes tiresome and then, you know, drugs do a number on your body - so people tend to age out as they get older. In their words, they "get sick and tired of being sick and tired." And so I've always been interested in

traditional criminology, but sex offending is something that we pay a lot of attention to in policy but it doesn't really get dealt with by criminology research.

Does it follow a different sort of trajectory? It doesn't really fit that standard story?

What we know about sex offending tends to come more from the helping professions like psychology, psychiatry and social work. So lot of the research that has been done on sex offending has taken a more therapeutic [approach]. Criminology tends to be more interested in sociological explanations for offending. And so for a long time sex offending wasn't really dealt with by criminologists. I always found that kind of frustrating, because criminology is the study of crime and sex offending is a crime -- so why not look at sex offending from a criminological perspective? It seemed like that was a fairly novel thing to do, so my PhD was on specialization and versatility in the criminal careers of sex offenders. I had access to a sample of about 900 men who were civilly committed in Massachusetts at a purpose-built treatment facility between 1959 and 1991. A lot of people assumed that sex offenders specialized in their offending - that the quintessential child molester will only offend against children - they're sort of fine upstanding members of the community except for the bit where they abuse children. And that's just not the case. My research really showed that the versatility in their offending was quite profound, and that the majority of offenders who have committed sex offenses have also committed all sorts of other crimes, they tend to have pretty long criminal records. They do a little bit of everything - they start with petty theft and joyriding, and they abuse children, but they also tend to abuse their wives, they get into bar fights, they park in disabled spaces, etc. That was a bit of a breakthrough for sex offending research, because so many people had assumed for so long that sex offenders were very specialized.

The criminal career paradigm provides a framework to explore patterns of offending over time. My research has focused on a number of elements of the criminal career including onset, specialization and versatility, and escalation. Now I'm exploring the end of the career and focusing on patterns of desistance. The Record Clearance Project is also a part of that, to look at the way that people stop offending. Criminologists spend a lot of time asking why people offend, and why people don't offend, but nobody asks why people who have offended at some point in time, stop offending. We really just assume that once an offender, always an offender; once a child molester, always a child molester -(but) there is a lot of evidence for turning points, and recovery, and redemption - and that's what I'm really focusing on at the moment.

How did you get interested in studying this?

>> I've been interested in crime and criminology for a really long time. I remember being fascinated by a documentary on forensics (back before it was cool). I remember my father taking me to see Silence of the Lambs He wasn't very enthusiastic about my interest in forensics and crime. fly all over the world. I think he honestly believed that the film would scare the living daylights out of me, and that I would be well and truly

over this 'fad'. The movie ended and I just decided that I wanted to be Clarice Starling. And so my interest in criminology really just blossomed after that. Even as far back as junior high, whenever I could choose a paper topic, I'd pick some aspect of true crime that fascinated me. Seriously, in music, I wrote a piece about Charles Manson... Now they'd probably force me to see the school counselor! I had a research internship as an undergrad and I worked with victims of sexual abuse and that led to my interest in offenders. A lot of people say 'oh my god why are you interested in that?' or 'how do you talk to pedophiles?' or those sorts of things. For me, the thing that keeps me going is that pretty much every single dinner party or social gathering that I go to ends with someone disclosing to me about something horrific that happened to them. It's such a wide spread phenomenon that it really deserves more in-depth understanding - from a victims' perspective, an offenders' perspective, and a policy perspective. So that's something that I set out to do with my research. Every time I meet somebody who's been affected by this - which is very often - it sort of re-enthuses me to keep asking these questions.

Tell me a little bit about some of the research approaches or research techniques that you use to answer these questions.

>> Well with the sample of 900 from the Massachusetts Treatment Center, I've drawn upon a lot of risk assessment tools. These are instruments that are designed to identify such things as antisocial behavior, conduct disorder, alcoholism, psychopathy and other personality disorders. All of these tools are designed to measure an individual's risk of recidivism. Over the last 20 years, the million dollar question is: "is he going to re-offend?" So we had access to the archival records of the 900 people in the facility and we coded each of them on all of these risk assessment tools. For my PhD I went through and coded each individual's criminal history - every single charge, the date, the disposition (or sentence) and how long they actually served. It was all entered in SPSS -- literally thousands of variables, about four or five thousand variables, for about 900 cases.

Just curious - I've done case file reviews, extracting information from case files and putting it into something like a risk assessment. Sometimes the way data are in the case files is messy - it's a narrative, it's just somebody's perspective, it's not like a nice checklist of characteristics. Is that an issue that arose for you in this process, and if so how did you deal with that?

>> It was an issue in all of the ways that you could possibly imagine - it was an issue down to the fact that many of these files were dusty, moldy, and smelly and printed on foolscap paper, or that onion paper that's very thin and see through and printed in purple ink. I would fly to Boston every spring break for about five years and sit in a dusty room and remove staples and photocopy these files one page at a time. But we had everything from police reports, to victim impact statements, letters that the offender had written or received in custody, various psychological test results, ward behavior, any disciplinary reports, newspaper articles that covered their case, all of that was copied.

So all different kinds of information from a lot of different sources. Which I imagine sometimes can conflict.

>> Yes, yes. And even if the information was consistent, it was still a product of the time,-for example, back then everybody was diagnosed with Schizophrenia, I don't know why but it seemed like everybody was somewhere on the Schizotypal spectrum The racism in some of the files, the sorts of words that the police used in their reports where they were describing the suspect was quite offensive. There were also files that I read where it would say things like "he has been infected with homosexuality for seven years, and we really hope that the drugs work" and then six months later, "he still has the homosexuality bug and the drugs don't seem to be working, so we're going to try electro shock." Obviously not the way we do things today, but it makes me wonder what people will say about our current practices 50 years from now.

Did you have some kind of coding scheme or coding rules that guided you through this process?

>> Yeah. All of the risk assessment tools have their own extremely complicated rules. Some are straight forward like 'was he under 25 at the time he was released?' But then there's one that asks 'did the offense occur in a public place?' and a public place according to the risk assessment tool might mean a park or a shopping mall or something, but not necessarily in a car - but a lot of the offenses occurred in the offender's car, and whether that car was parked in the garage of his home or the victim's home, or on a private street, or in a public parking lot became an issue. We did the best that we could - whenever we had a problem we would e-mail each other and come with up with ways of being consistent among ourselves. One of the things that has been so gratifying about meeting some of these guys and interviewing them, is that I get to ask my own research questions and no longer need to rely on dated information that was collected for other purposes.

Tell me a little bit more about your interviewing. Do you have a certain type of approach that you use? What are the main questions that you are pursuing?

>> I was trained in research methods at the University of Maryland which is known for being almost allergic to qualitative research, so I still find myself to be a bit of a fish out of water if there's not a huge spreadsheet that I can sink my teeth into. But at the moment I'm using the life history interview protocol, which was originally written by McAdams and has been used in previous desistance studies most famously probably by Shadd Maruna in his work in Liverpool in 2001; it was recommended in a book last year that was sort of a call to arms of research on desistance from sexual offending Basically, the questions ask the person to think about their life as a series of chapters: what was a high point, what was a low point, what was a turning point, what is your earliest memory, who has been the most positive and negative influence on your life, do you have any particular religious views, political views. I have so far interviewed 21 people, and the interviews lasted anywhere from one and a half to three hours. In asking those questions I'm also constructing a life history plot, which is a data visualization technique

I developed where you can plot when the person was married, when they were offending, when they were in custody, how many children they had, when they were born, etc. and you can start to look at relationships between offending and other life circumstances.

Is the goal of this to see whether common themes or stories emerge, or are you working to develop some kind of theory about the system?

>> Well it's sort of all of those things, because it hasn't really been done yet for a sample of sex offenders. There is such a strong assumption that if you've committed a sex offense you will do it again, it just --

That it's some kind of inherent tendency -

>> Yeah and for some people it absolutely is. One of the guys that I interviewed openly admits that he is a pedophile. His sexual interest is in children and he works every day to not offend against children sexually because that's who he's sexually attracted to. For him it really is a completely inherent biological thing, that's just who he is. For a lot of the other people it was situational - it was a one time thing, they were really drunk, they really resented the fact that they were looking after their wife's kids. They elevated the child to the role of significant other and, you know, something really horrific happened. Then they served 25 years, and now they're out. The modal case was that. They were in their late 50's, early 60's, they had served 20 years, and they were out now trying to make a go of it. They were living in a homeless shelter or they were living under a bridge. (Because now with current sex offender legislation, they can't live within 2000 feet of a school because there's this assumption that you just won't be able to control yourself).

I think it's important that one of the long-term goals of this work be the development of a theory of desistance. We understand the reasons why people desist from nonsexual offending; in the literature the most common reasons are getting a job and getting married. There is a landmark study that was done in Boston with 500 delinquents and 500 non-delinquents who were recently followed up - they're in their 80's now. Some of those individuals are in my data set as well, so I hope to interview some of those overlapping cases. The typical story from that study was of someone who offended in adolescence, maybe also as an adult, then they got out - they joined the military, they served in the army - this was back in the time of Korea and Vietnam so there was a draft in place - they got married, and a form of social control was created by having a relationship with someone. Those 'stakes in conformity' took them off the streets, that meant that they were spending their evenings at home with their family and not out in a bar getting drunk, and they've got a job, they've got something to lose.

Of course, some of the child molesters that I've interviewed have a completely different story where a job and a relationship are not going to be indicative of desistance at all - Extra-familial child molesters, fixated deviant cases who seek out positions where they can work with children, for example. One guy ran a bakery and would hire young children in the summers Then there are the step-child incest cases - (which is by

far the most common) where guys marry women with teen daughters, almost pathologically - so for those people I don't think marriage is going to part of their desistance narrative. One of the things that I want to do in investigating the sex offender samples is to see what does help. So it started out with looking for themes of desistance, I want to know if and how and why these men are moving on with their lives and desisting. It's also dovetailing nicely with the Record Clearing Project cases; so we have two really interesting examples of desistance.

Another goal more recently has been to start looking for themes of human rights violations. A lot of the people that I'm interviewing say over and over that they just want to be treated like a human being; the electronic monitoring bracelet around their ankle has to be charged 12 hours a day, and they live under a bridge or they live in a homeless shelter and they don't have access to an outlet for 12 hours a day - that's making it difficult for them to get a job. How do you get a job when you're living under a bridge? These are really important questions that I think really need to be addressed. And, you know, these are people that have served their time, they've served 20 years in custody and they're out, they're trying to make a go of it and they're already disenfranchised - and we're creating rule after rule after rule that makes it difficult to comply with probation. So developing a comprehensive theory of desistance is a long-term goal. Emergent themes of desistance, themes of stigma, evidence of human rights violations, these are the things that are coming out of the coding that I've done so far.

What would you say are some of the most compelling findings of your research so far?

>> When I was doing my doctorate the realization that the majority of sex offenders were versatile was really big, that really floored me - I was one of those people that really didn't think specialization was a question. I really did assume that sex offenders were different - we're talking about a different kind of offending, that's why criminology doesn't deal with them; because it's just different, so it needs to be dealt with differently. But the research indicated that just wasn't the case. Even the fine, upstanding incest offender, you know, the guy who holds down a job, and is a professional guy, with a strong marriage, and everybody says he was a nice sweet guy and they can't believe that this has happened in their neighborhood - even that guy has a huge record for all different kinds of things as an adolescent and as an adult - so the realization of versatility was a big finding.

The biggest 'take home' at the moment is the remarkable un-remarkableness of the men I'm interviewing. Their experiences bear almost no resemblance to the kinds of people that the legislators have in mind when they draft current sex offender policy. The majority of these guys are husbands, fathers, and grandfathers and a lot of them have professional qualifications. One gentleman that I interviewed wants to return to computer programming. He's had several interviews where he passes the interview and he gets the job pending a background check. Then as soon as a background check comes back and they see that he has a charge from 1974 for a single count of child molestation, he gets escorted off the premises. He knows that what he did was wrong, and he lives with it every

day. He's lost all contact with his family. His adult children don't want to see him, he knows he has grandchildren, but has never seen them. He's served 18 years in custody. He says he hasn't reoffended and I believe him and I think that we could deal with this differently.

It brings up a question for me in regards to the work with the record expunging project - whether those cases include sexual offenses?

>> Absolutely not. You do not get your record cleared if the offense is sexual or violent. The Record Clearance Project is a really different sample which is why it is so fascinating to see the same themes of desistance in both of these groups - their stories of being stigmatized and finding it difficult to get a job and just wanting to be treated like a human are universal. The typical charge for the Record Clearance Project is drunk and disorderly - they're not even driving under the influence, they're just walking under the influence, and they happen to get caught, they don't have a good lawyer and they're exposed to the system in that way.

What are the implications of your work for scholars, practitioners and policy makers?

>> I think that there are a lot of profound implications for policy, but it's a hard sell and nobody's going to listen to them. I went to a summit that Schwarzenegger held on residency restrictions (the law that passed in 2006 after Jessica Lunsford was raped and murdered in Florida). This law said that you can't live a certain number of feet from a place where children gather or a playground or a park or, you know, a family restaurant or a daycare center or various other things. So, I sat there at this summit where the state government had brought together all of the people in the state that knew anything about this. There were real estate agents, there were sex offender therapists, police and probation officers, and then there were researchers, and we sat there and we talked to the policymakers and we said 'but this just doesn't make sense.' Because the sex offenders that I've met all have legs and they can walk 2000 feet, or they can drive, or ride the bus. And honestly, if we're talking about the predatory, fixated guys, they've already had to overcome a number of obstacles and inhibitors to do what they did... this just isn't a deterrent. The sex offenders that I've interviewed will say, 'yeah I'm not allowed to live 2000 feet from the school, but if I have to walk past the school to go to lunch or get to the train station they can't stop me from walking past the train station' - all it does is stop where you can live. And the majority of offenders aren't committing crimes out on their front porch - it just doesn't make sense. Anyway, so there we are, explaining this to the policymakers and the senators, and all of the government players are sitting there saying 'I understand exactly what you're saying, I completely agree with you, but it's political suicide for me to say that to my constituents - I need to be reelected and we need to show that we're tough on crime. We can't be seen to sympathize with sex offenders'. So I'm always very conscious of the fact that my views can be reworked and reedited into a sound bite where it sounds like I'm hugging trees and feeling sorry for the poor sex offenders - you know, I am the first to admit that the things that these people have done are abhorrent and horrific. At the same time they've

served their sentence, and they're free, and we could be doing a much more effective job of protecting the community by better facilitating their release.

Basically, the laws that are currently in place are designed for the narrowest of circumstances - fixated, repeat offenders who abduct, attack, and sometimes kill stranger children. The undeniable fact remains that the vast majority (and I literally mean upwards of 90%) of child victims are targeted and victimized by family members and acquaintances. Informing the neighborhood about a recently released sex offender will not deter him from abusing a child that he already knows through his church. Putting someone's details on a website will not prevent her from abusing her infant nephew while babysitting. Prohibiting someone from living near a school will not prevent him from taking advantage of children already in his home.

I think that we could do a great deal of good by repealing the last three or four pieces of legislation.

Are there any tools that differentiate between people who do have a pathology, and the majority of these others who situationally offend? Because then you could just tweak the law and say it applies only to this subpopulation of people.

>> A lot of the laws are designed to identify sexually violent predators or persistent offenders and the way that they usually define persistence is having two charges. So if you're got two separate charges on two separate dates, you're 'persistent.' A lot of the risk assessment tools only look at static variables - they look at the age you were at onset, they look at whether you lived with your parents until you were 15, they look at how many times you moved house - these are all static variables.

That are never going to change.

>> No. So you're kind of stuck. One of the things I hope to propose is a desistance assessment. We know what puts someone at risk of recidivism and we know what doesn't work, so let's focus on what does - let's at least ask the question and see what might work. These guys are begging for resume training, for example, they're begging to get into a job training program they want to work, they want to be productive members of society - in the record clearance project we're seeing it tenfold. Not only do they want to work, they don't just want to work, they want to work in nursing homes, or they want to help people who are struggling with alcoholism. They have this wounded healer mentality they don't just want a job, they want to give back. And it's quite inspirational because they want to give back to a society that in a way has taken a lot away from them.

What are some of the major challenges you've run into doing your research?

>> Funding is the number one obstacle. I have friends who need expensive scientific equipment from incubators to Petri dishes. I need a tape recorder and a pen. And time. But it's a hard sell. I often find myself

trying to justify wanting to interview the scum of the earth. A mentor of mine recently explained what he could do with the amount that the government spends on a single battleship. Unfortunately there's not a lot of public currency in giving sexual offenders a voice. But my argument always returns to the cycle of abuse and the old (gender-biased) adage that "you can't keep pulling the women and children from the river unless you do something about the men who keep pushing them in." My goal is the prevention of sexual abuse and the promotion of community safety - and there should be plenty of public currency in that.

What questions are you planning to consider next?

>> The questions about human rights and sex offenders, and how we might wish to treat sex offenders as if they were human - or any offender as if they were human. The stigma that the record clearance clients talk about as well is pretty profound. So understanding the relevance of human rights in the criminal justice system is quite interesting to me. We have just launched a new minor in Human Rights in our Department and I think there will open a lot of opportunities. I'm still interested in the general etiology of sexual offending, and typological approaches; identifying rapists and child molesters and incest offenders and, like you mentioned, being able to distinguish between persistent offenders and sexually deviant offenders, and men and women that might have personality disorders or psychological problems that might lead to these behaviors versus the situational cases. We've widened the net so much and we're catching so many people in it that I think we really need to revisit how we cast this net, and what kind of net we use.

Wow, Danielle, this has been really, really fun. Thanks so much.

>> Thank you. I'm excited to be able to talk about my research for that long. Usually when I do, I assign homework, so you'll have the night off.

Great! thanks again.