Predictors of Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders

An Honors Thesis (PSYS 499)

by

Stephanie S. Davidsen

Thesis Advisor
Dr. George Gaither

Signed

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Muncie, Indiana

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The current study examined predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders, focusing on Belief in a Just World (BJW) and religiosity as variables that were likely to be related to attitudes toward sex offenders based on previous research. Predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders may facilitate better understanding of recidivism rates among sex offenders and may aid professionals who work with sex offenders, such as probation and parole officers. Hypotheses were that Religiosity would be negatively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders and BJW would be positively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders. Responses from 252 participants were collected using a Qualtrics survey. The order of the surveys was randomized. There was no significant correlation between Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders. BJW and attitudes toward sex offenders were significantly positively correlated, possibly because attitudes toward sex offenders differ between survey conditions. It is possible that attitudes toward sex offenders are influenced by the measurement in the same study of attitudes toward other groups, such as victims of sex offenses. These findings could have significant implications for future research done within the Belief in a Just World theory, as the current study suggests data on attitudes should be controlled for the known presence of other groups in study designs.
Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank the professors from the Psychology and Criminal Justice departments for preparing me to conduct research and for encouraging me to always do my best work, rather than the work that was just good enough. Dr. Thomas Holtgraves and my fellow students in the Psychology Departmental Honors Seminar also deserve recognition as they pulled me through some of my hardest days and deepest self-doubts while working on this project.

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Predictors of Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders

Stephanie S. Davidsen

Ball State University
Abstract

The current study examined predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders, focusing on Belief in a Just World (BJW) and religiosity as variables that were likely to be related to attitudes toward sex offenders based on previous research. Predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders may facilitate better understanding of recidivism rates among sex offenders and may aid professionals who work with sex offenders, such as probation and parole officers. Hypotheses were that Religiosity would be negatively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders and BJW would be positively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders. Responses from 252 participants were collected using a Qualtrics survey. The order of the surveys was randomized. There was no significant correlation between Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders. BJW and attitudes toward sex offenders were significantly positively correlated, possibly because attitudes toward sex offenders differ between survey conditions. It is possible that attitudes toward sex offenders are influenced by the measurement in the same study of attitudes toward other groups, such as victims of sex offenses. These findings could have significant implications for future research done within the Belief in a Just World theory, as the current study suggests data on attitudes should be controlled for the known presence of other groups in study designs.
Predictors of Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders

Though definitions vary by state and country, in the state of Indiana a sex offender is a person who has been convicted of rape, child molestation, child exploitation, child solicitation, child seduction, sexual misconduct with a minor, incest, sexual battery, kidnapping a minor, possession of child pornography, human or sexual trafficking of a minor, or one of several other offenses (Indiana General Assembly, 2015). In 2005 there were 551,701 sex offenders registered in the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, accounting for 0.19 percent of the estimated population (Megan’s Report Card, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2009, registered sex offenders accounted for 0.21 percent of the estimated population, and in 2013 nearly 0.23 percent of the estimated population of the United States was made up of registered sex offenders (Megan’s Report Card, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Among the registered sex offenders in the United States, recidivism is a problem and a source of some controversy; some studies have reported rates of reoffending with a new sex offense as high as 52 percent and rates of reconviction for a new sex offense as high as 18.9 percent, although these statistics vary with type of sex offense and amount of time after release from prison (Hepburn & Griffin, 2004). Harris and Hanson (2004) conversely found that 27 percent of sex offenders had been charged with or convicted of another sexual offence after 15 years; however, these rates are still high enough to cause concern.

How can recidivism rates be improved? Hepburn and Griffin (2004) identified several factors that have negative correlations with recidivism rates: namely, probationers who have full-time employment, positive relationships with their mother, and positive social supports from other family members and friends are significantly less likely to reoffend. Therefore, the attitudes communities and individuals have toward sex offenders could play a role in recidivism
rates. If sex offenders reintegrating into society and the professionals assigned to their cases have knowledge of predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders, they may be able to use that information to adjust their plan for a higher chance of success. Belief in a Just World (BJW) might be a predictor of attitudes toward sex offenders, as people with a high BJW tend to convince themselves that those who experience negative outcomes deserve those outcomes (Lerner and Miller, 1978) and this can affect their attitudes and actions toward those people.

**Attitudes toward Sex Offenders**

There has not been much research completed on public attitudes toward sex offenders. Many studies have been conducted with people who work with sex offenders and with sex offenders themselves, studying topics from why sex offenders commit offenses to what factors influence recidivism and beyond (Harris and Hanson, 2004; Hepburn and Griffin, 2004), but few have looked at the attitudes of the larger community toward sex offenders and how this might affect fields that interact with sex offenders on a regular basis. The following studies are a selection of those that look at the relationships between attitudes toward sex offenders and personal beliefs and characteristics. The results of these studies indicate that attitudes toward sex offenders are negative, both in the community and among professionals who work with sex offenders. Furthermore, one study indicated that community members and professionals alike would be unwilling to form any sort of relationship with sex offenders.

Day, Boni, Hobbs, Carson, Whitting, and Powell (2014) examined differences in attitudes toward sex offenders between two groups of professionals who work with sex offenders in Australia: health workers and police officers. They used purposive sampling to make groups of 18 (11 female) health workers and 17 police officers. The health workers group was made up of six psychologists, three case workers, one teacher, and eight case managers. There was no
demographic data on the police officers. The Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders scale (CATSO) was used to measure beliefs and attitudes toward sex offenders and sex offender policies. The CATSO has 18 items, which measured how much participants agreed or disagreed with each item by using a 6-point Likert-type response scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Day et al. found that Australian police officers (\(M = 45.7, \ SD = 5.8\)) were significantly more likely than health workers (\(M = 37.6, \ SD = 8.2\)) to have negative views toward sex offenders' capacity to change and deviancy, and were significantly more likely to attribute blame to sex offenders than to victims. Male health workers in Australia were more negative than women toward sex offenders' capacity to change and attributed more blame to sex offenders (Day et al.).

Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, and Baker (2007) examined the perceptions Florida residents had about sex offenders and community protection policies in a convenience sample of 193 participants (110 female). They used measures created specifically for the study, assessing familiarity with community notification, the types of personal information about sex offenders that the participants believed should be disclosed to the public, beliefs and perceptions about sex offenders and sex crimes, confidence in community protection strategies, and opinions about the optimal length of sentencing, treatment, and probation. Levenson et al. reported that the majority of participants believed the fingerprints, home telephone numbers, and employment information of sex offenders should not be disclosed to the public. Women were found to feel more fear than men when a sex offender is in the same area as them (Levenson et al.). Levenson et al. found that on average, participants believed 74 percent of sex offenders commit another sex offense; 50 percent of participants reported a somewhat strong or strong belief that sex offenders will reoffend even after receiving psychological treatment. Levenson et al. reported that a majority of
participants supported tough sentencing laws and long periods of community supervision, but also believed that sex offenders should receive treatment in addition to sanctions.

Olver and Barlow (2010) studied public attitudes toward sex offenders, correlating participants' attitudes with personality factors and demographic factors. Their sample was 78 undergraduate students (60 female) in an introductory psychology class. Olver and Barlow examined attitudes in total and in two components: attitudes toward systems that manage sex offenders and attitudes toward rehabilitation in sex offenders. They found that students who declared a religious affiliation had significantly less positive rehabilitative attitudes ($M = 9.4, SD = 3.8$) than individuals who did not identify a religious affiliation ($M = 11.1, SD = 1.9$). There was a significant gender difference: females ($M = 61.7, SD = 16.6$) estimated higher recidivism rates among sex offenders than males did ($M = 51.0, SD = 19.2$). Of the personality factors, agreeableness was the only significant factor; it positively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders, suggesting that individuals with traits of empathy, compassion, and sensitivity might have more favorable attitudes toward sex offenders (Olver and Barlow). Personality factors and their link to the relationship between attitudes toward sex offenders and belief in a just world will be discussed further in the next section.

Shechory and Idisis (2006) investigated victim blame and rape myth acceptance in a purposive sample of 176 female subjects: 51 therapists and 125 first-year social science students. Rape myth acceptance, sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, sexual conservatism, and acceptance of interpersonal violence were assessed as constructs related to victim blame and attitudes toward rapists. Social distance, defined as how willing a participant was to interact with someone, was measured for rapists and victims. Sexual conservatism and social closeness with victims were negatively correlated, indicating that sexually conservative participants were
less willing to be acquainted with or friends with a victim. Shechory and Idisis found that participants rejected social closeness with rapists; less than five percent of therapists and less than two percent of students indicated they were willing to spend time with offenders, live in the same room as an offender, or be a close friend to an offender. Less than three percent of therapists and less than one percent of students indicated they would be willing to marry a rapist. This is important to the current study because close relationships and social support are factors that influence recidivism in sex offenders and can indicate the attitudes of the person toward sex offenders in general.

Although the above studies provide a general idea of attitudes toward sex offenders and some personal beliefs that might be correlated with these attitudes, they leave much to be desired. The samples in each of these studies is limited. Day et al. (2014) studied health workers and police officers, severely limiting the extent to which results could be generalized to the public. The sample size of 35 individuals was likewise too small to achieve valid and generalizable results. Levenson et al. (2007) used a convenience sample of 193 individuals that was generalizable to the county in which the study was conducted, but not beyond it. Shechory and Idisis (2006) studied 176 social science students and therapists, all female, and Olver and Barlow only studied 78 participants, all undergraduate students. The current study will overcome these challenges by obtaining a larger and more diverse sample through Ball State University’s Communication Center and by posting the survey on Reddit, allowing most individuals with internet capabilities to access it.

**Belief in a Just World**

Belief in a Just World (BJW) is a theory built around the Just World Hypothesis, which states that “individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally
get what they deserve” (Lerner and Miller, 1978). Believing that the world is just, Lerner and Miller say, allows an individual to impose stability and order on his or her environment even when none is present and makes it easier for him or her to commit to goals and behaviors that depend on a stable and orderly environment to function properly. Lerner (1965) was the first to observe the Just World phenomena when he studied how knowledge of an outcome, e.g. knowing which one of two workers received a reward for their work, influenced observers’ opinions of which worker contributed more work. He found that people take the outcome of an event into account while making sense of their observations, and that this is true even when the outcome is dependent on chance and not the participants of the event. Lerner described this effect with the phrases “people deserve what happens to them” and “once I know what has happened to someone I will be more comfortable if I can believe that he has earned it”, laying the foundations of the BJW theory (Lerner, 1968). Since Lerner’s work, numerous articles and papers have studied the theory in different populations and circumstances but none have directly studied the connection between BJW and attitudes toward sex offenders. The following studies examined the relationships between BJW and personal beliefs and characteristics, which can be used to study the relationship between the two subjects with greater reliability.

Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, and Goch (2000) conducted three experiments studying Belief in a Just World and Belief in an Unjust World (BUJW), specifically testing whether the two are distinct constructs by comparing correlations between the two constructs and various personal beliefs and values. These correlations are useful to the current study as markers of how individual variables vary with BJW.

Study 1 studied correlations between BJW, BUJW, and religiosity in a convenience sample of 111 German psychology students (81 female). Religiosity was measured with a six-
item scale that assessed church attendance, self-rated religiosity, and strength in the belief that religion gives meaning to one’s life. Dalbert et al. (2000) found that Belief in a Just World (BJW) was positively and significantly correlated with Religiosity ($r = 0.24; p < 0.05$).

Study 2 surveyed a convenience sample 171 German psychology students (105 female). Correlations between BJW, BUJW, psychological well-being, and political preference were measured. Dalbert et al. (2000) reported that participants’ BJW positively correlated with more positive moods and higher satisfaction.

Bègue (2000) hypothesized that there was a positive correlation between BJW and interpersonal trust among French people. They studied religiosity, interpersonal trust, and BJW in a convenience sample of 58 participants (28 female). Religiosity was measured by the frequency of church attendance, with low and high choices of never and once a week. All participants who indicated they were religious identified themselves as Catholic. No differences were found between genders for BJW (Bègue). Bègue found that religious attendance and BJW were significant predictors for interpersonal trust, specifically traits of honesty, reliability, unselfishness, and altruism. This ties religiosity and interpersonal trust to attitudes toward sex offenders through Olver and Barlow (2010) who, as mentioned above, found that the personality trait of agreeableness (as characterized by empathy, compassion, and sensitivity) is positively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders.

Kleinke and Meyer (1990) studied reactions toward rapists and rape victims in the broader context of just-world research, using a just world scale and personal attribute inventory in an experimental study. A convenience sample of 165 participants (100 female) was used in the study. Kleinke and Meyer found that when assigning responsibility for an act of rape, men ($M = 2.63, SD$ not given) assigned more responsibility than women ($M = 2.1, SD$ not given) to
the rape victim while women ($M = 9.63, SD$ not given) assigned more responsibility than men ($M = 8.86, SD$ not given) to the rapist. Regardless of gender, participants with a high BJW recommended lower recommended prison sentences for the rapist, on average recommending a 23.6 year sentence where participants with a low BJW on average recommended a 41.3 year sentence (no standard deviations given) (Kleinke and Meyer).

**Current Study**

The studies above demonstrate that BJW and traits such as religiosity and interpersonal trust are correlated, and that BJW can be linked to attitudes toward rapists. However, they are limited by small sample sizes and the populations from which participants were selected, as well as what they studied and what measures they used. Kleinke and Meyer (1990) examined only attitudes toward rapists and did not look at attitudes toward all sex offenders, making it difficult to apply their findings elsewhere because sex offenders who commit lesser offenses are not often separated out from rapists or serious offenders in research or in the public eye. While 165 participants is a decent sample size, all participants were students in psychology and sociology and therefore the sample was homogenous (Kleinke and Meyer). Similarly, the sample sizes in Dalbert et al. (2000) were 111 and 171 and all participants were psychology students. Bègue (2000) achieved a more diverse sample by drawing participants randomly from city streets, but the sample size was only 58. Furthermore, Religiosity was studied by Bègue and Dalbert et al. but the two studies used different measures, one of which was created for the specific study and neither of which reported scale means to assess validity and reliability. Similarly, different measures of BJW were used in each study. The current study will obtain a large and diverse sample of 300-500 participants from various places throughout the United States and will study attitudes toward all sex offenders, making it more generalizable and relevant to today’s population and challenges than previous studies. It will also use the Centrality of Religiosity
scale, which has reliabilities ranging from 0.92 to 0.96 (Huber and Huber, 2012), in order to eliminate variability from the previous studies caused by the use of different measures. Lipkus' (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale will be used in the current study because of the variability of measures used by the previous studies.

Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, and Goch (2000) and Bègue (2000) find a positive correlation between religiosity and BJW. Bègue identifies personality traits in interpersonal trust that are positively correlated with BJW while Olver and Barlow (2010) identify similar personality traits in agreeableness, which is positively correlated with attitudes toward sex offenders. Olver and Barlow also find that religiosity is negatively correlated with positive attitudes toward rehabilitation of sex offenders. Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, and Baker (2007) and Kleinke and Meyer (1990) reported results indicating that women have more negative attitudes toward sex offenders than men. Based on these results, the current study hypothesizes the following: BJW and attitudes toward sex offenders will be positively correlated; BJW and Religiosity will be positively correlated; Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders will be negatively correlated; males will score higher than females on BJW.
Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through the Ball State Communication Center, which provides students and faculty at Ball State University with a link to the survey, and through Reddit, which provides global users with a link to the survey. Participants were not offered incentives. There were 340 participants in the current study, 150 through the Ball State Communication Center and 190 through Reddit. Further analysis of participants is reported in the results.

Materials

Three scales were used to measure participants' religiosity, belief in a just world, and attitudes toward sex offenders. Demographics were also gathered. All measures are collected in Appendix A.

**Community attitudes toward sex offenders scale.** The Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders scale (CATSO, Church, Wakeman, Miller, Clements, and Sun, 2008) is an 18-item scale which uses a 6-point Likert-type response scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The CATSO will be used to measure participants' attitudes toward sex offenders through questions designed to assess attitudes concerning four factors regarding sex offenders: Social Isolation, Capacity to Change, Severity/Dangerousness, and Deviancy. Social Isolation assesses how strongly participants agree that sex offenders isolate themselves from others (i.e. *Most sex offenders keep to themselves*). Capacity to change measures how strongly participants believe that sex offenders can change and be better members of society (i.e. *Trying to rehabilitate a sex offender is a waste of time*). Severity/Dangerousness examines how strongly participants agree that sex offenses are serious offenses and that sex offenders are dangerous (i.e. *Only a few sex offenders are dangerous*). Deviancy measures participants' beliefs about the
sexual preferences of sex offenders (i.e. *Sex offenders have high rates of sexual activity*). The range of scores is 18 to 108. Some items are reverse scored so that the direction of the items is consistent. The scale has a chi-square score of $\chi^2 (108) = 280, p = 0.18$, indicating that it is a good fit to the construct. Standardized loading coefficients were all over 0.40, indicating acceptable validity, and each of the factors is strongly and positively correlated with the total CATSO score; factors are also significantly correlated with each other, besides Deviancy and Capacity to Change. Cronbach’s alpha indicates that the CATSO has an internal consistency of 0.74, while the alpha estimate for Social Isolation is 0.80, Capacity to Change is 0.80, Severity/Dangerousness is 0.70, and Deviancy is 0.43. Outside statistics for reliability and validity could not be located.

Three items on the CATSO were reverse-scored. These items were recoded before analysis of the scale. An internal consistency estimate of reliability was computed for the CATSO. Cronbach’s alpha was .77, indicating satisfactory reliability within the scale. An inter-scale reliability matrix was computed for the CATSO, showing that deletion of any item from the scale would not produce a significantly higher scale reliability. The range of the CATSO was 18 to 108, with a mean score of 49.80 ($SD = 9.25$) reported by participants.

**Global belief in a just world scale.** The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS, Lipkus, 1991) is a 7-item scale which uses a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The GBJWS will be used to measure the strength of participants’ belief in a just world, measuring the extent to which they agree with statements made about attitudes concerning the world and justness (e.g. *I feel that people get what they deserve*). The range of scores for this scale is 7 to 42. The GBJWS has resulted in alpha scores ranging from 0.79 to 0.82 (Furnham, 2002). Lipkus found that the GBJWS has convergent and discriminant validity.
Parikh, Post, and Flowers (2011) found that the GBJWS had a Kuder-Richardson reliability index of 0.82 among school counselors.

An internal consistency estimate of reliability was computed for the GBJWS. Cronbach's alpha was .87, indicating satisfactory reliability within the scale. An inter-scale reliability matrix was computed for the GBJWS, showing that deletion of any item from the scale would not produce a significantly higher scale reliability. The range of the GBJWS was 7 to 42, with a mean score of 19.97 ($SD = 5.84$) reported by participants.

**Centrality of religiosity scale.** The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15, Huber and Huber, 2012) is a 15-item scale which uses a combination of objective frequencies recoded into five levels and subjective frequencies with five levels ranging from *never* to *very often*, as well as five levels without frequencies ranging from *not at all* or *never* to *very much so* or *very often*. The CRS-15 will be used to measure the centrality and importance of religious meanings in personality, which indicate the degree of religiosity of a participant. The measure's mean and standard deviation are 2.84 and 1.10. After recoding, the scale range is 1 to 5. Outside reliability and validity statistics could not be found. Five dimensions of religiosity are examined in the CRS-15: intellect, ideology, public practice, private practice, and religious experience. The intellectual dimension examines the knowledge a participant has of their religion and their interest in the religion (e.g. *How often do you think about religious issues?*). The dimension of ideology studies participants' beliefs and convictions (e.g. *In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?*). The public practice dimension looks at patterns of action in the religion and participants' sense of belonging to the religious community (e.g. *How often do you take part in religious services?*). The private practice dimension studies patterns of action and a participant's personal style of devotion to the religion (e.g. *How important is personal
prayer for you?). The dimension of religious experience examines patterns of religious perceptions and participants' religious experiences and feelings (e.g. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?).

An internal consistency estimate of reliability was computed for the CRS-15. Cronbach's Alpha was .97, indicating satisfactory reliability within the scale. An inter-scale reliability matrix was computed for the CRS-15, showing that deletion of any item from the scale would not produce a significantly higher scale reliability. The range of the CRS-15 was 15 to 75, with a mean score of 34.88 (SD = 16.79) reported by participants.

Procedure

Participants will receive a link to the survey through the Ball State Communications Center or Reddit. The link will go to a Qualtrics survey which starts with an informed consent page. If the participants consent, they will begin the survey; if they do not consent, they will be skipped to the end of the survey. The survey will start with demographics. The first question in the survey will be the participant's age; participants must be 18 or older, and participants who provide an answer of less than 18 will be skipped to the end of the survey. If the participants are 18 or older, the survey will continue with the CATSO, GBJWS, and CRS-15 scales presented in a randomized order. No incentives will be offered.

Results

Participants

This study collected data from 340 participants, 150 through the Ball State Communication Center and 190 through Reddit. A total of 88 participants were excluded from the data set. Eighty-seven participants were excluded because they failed to respond to at least one question from the three main measures, and one participant was excluded because they were
under the age of 18. Therefore the results of this study were computed from a data set of 252 participants. Eighty-nine participants were male and 154 participants were female. Approximately 77 percent of participants lived in the United States; nearly 10 percent of participants lived in Europe, 7 percent lived in Canada, and the remaining 6 percent were from another location. Participants were predominantly White, accounting for 89 percent of the data set. Over 60 percent of participants reported that they were agnostic or atheistic, while approximately 30 percent of participants identified as Christian or Catholic. Sixty-seven percent of participants identified their sexual orientation as straight, 21 percent identified as bisexual, and 12 percent identified as gay, lesbian, or other. The mean age was 28.76 years old (SD = 13.26). For more demographic data, see Table 1.

**Differences in Demographics by Source**

Chi-square tests were conducted between demographic scores and source to determine if there were significant differences between the sources. The gender of participants differed significantly between sources, $\chi^2(3) = 16.34, p < .01$ (two-sided). Participants from the Communication Center were more likely to be female (72.09%) than Reddit participants (49.59%). There was a significant sexual orientation difference between sources, $\chi^2(1) = 16.18, p < .01$ (two-sided). Communication Center participants were more likely to identify as straight (78.91%) than Reddit participants (56.10%), and Reddit participants were more likely to identify as bisexual (29.27%) than Communication Center participants (12.50%). A significant difference was found between sources in religion, $\chi^2(2) = 46.96, p < .001$ (two-sided). More Communication Center participants identified as Christian or Catholic (49.61%) than Reddit participants (10.57%), while Reddit participants were more likely to identify as agnostic or atheistic (83.74%) than Communication Center participants (44.19%).
Table 1

Demographics

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Differences in Main Measures by Source

An independent samples t-test was conducted for sources on the sum of the CRS-15. Levene’s test was significant, $F(1, 250) = 68.67, p < .001$, therefore equal variances were not assumed. Reddit participants ($M = 26.11, SD = 9.94$) were significantly less religious than Communication Center participants ($M = 43.24, SD = 17.73$), $t(203.243) = 9.52, p < .001$ (two-tailed) (see Table 2).

An independent samples t-test was conducted for sources on the sum of the GBJWS. Levene’s test was not significant, therefore equal variances were assumed. Communication Center participants ($M = 20.88, SD = 5.72$) had significantly more belief in a just world than Reddit participants ($M = 19.01, SD = 5.83$), $t(250) = 2.58, p < .05$ (two-tailed) (see Table 2).

An independent samples t-test was conducted for sources on the sum of the CATSO. Levene’s test was not significant, therefore equal variances were assumed. Communication Center participants ($M = 50.22, SD = 8.79$) and Reddit participants ($M = 49.36, SD = 9.72$) did not have significantly different attitudes toward sex offenders, $t(250) = .74, p > .05$ (two-tailed) (see Table 2). Because attitudes toward sex offenders was the main focus of this study and there were no differences between sources on this measure, data from the two sources were combined for hypothesis testing.
Table 2

Differences in Main Measures by Source

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
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<td>129</td>
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<td>5.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRS-15</td>
<td>9.517***</td>
<td>203.243</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>43.24</td>
<td>17.73</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>26.11</td>
<td>9.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Hypothesis Testing

The first three hypotheses for the current study were that Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders would be positively correlated, Belief in a Just World and Religiosity would be positively correlated, and Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders would be negatively correlated. Correlation coefficients were computed among the three main measures to test the first three hypotheses. There was a significant positive correlation between the GBJWS and the CATSO, \( r(250) = .187, p < .01 \) (two-tailed). There were no significant correlations between the CRS-15 and the CATSO or between the CRS-15 and the GBJWS (see Table 3).

The fourth hypothesis for the current study was that males would score higher than females on Belief in a Just World. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted for the GBJWS and gender. Levene’s test was significant, therefore equal variances were not assumed. Men (\( M = 21.15, SD = 6.61 \)) scored marginally significantly higher in Belief in a Just World than women (\( M = 19.63, SD = 5.17 \)), \( t(150.50) = 1.86, p = .065 \) (two-tailed).
Table 3

*Correlations between Main Measures*

<table>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.187**</td>
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<td>2 GBJWS</td>
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*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of the current study was to identify predictors of attitudes toward sex offenders. The four hypotheses used to evaluate this were that Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders would be positively correlated, Belief in a Just World and Religiosity would be positively correlated, Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders would be negatively correlated, and males would score higher than females on Belief in a Just World. The first hypothesis was not supported: because a high score on the GBJWS indicates high Belief in a Just World and a high score on the CATSO indicates more negative attitudes toward sex offenders, the positive correlation found between the two scales indicates a negative correlation between Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders. The second and third hypotheses were unsupported, as no significant correlations were found between Religiosity and Belief in a Just World or Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders. The fourth hypothesis was also unsupported, as males and females were not significantly different in Belief in a Just World.

The finding that Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders are negatively correlated is not consistent with the previous research. Kleinke and Meyer (1990) found that participants with a high Belief in a Just World recommended lower prison sentences for rapists, which would suggest that people with a high Belief in a Just World have more positive attitudes
toward sex offenders than people with a low Belief in a Just World. However, the current research indicated the opposite, that people with a high Belief in a Just World have more negative attitudes toward sex offenders than people with a low BJW. This finding could be explained by the discrepancy in terms used to describe the subjects of the CATSO measure. The current study looked at attitudes toward general sex offenders, while the previous research focused solely on rapists. These differences were apparent to participants in the verbiage of each survey. Although rapists are themselves sex offenders, it is not unreasonable to expect that attitudes toward rapists would be more negative than attitudes toward sex offenders in general. Furthermore, it is hard to draw parallels between concepts as fundamentally separate as recommended prison sentences and attitudes toward sex offenders, as attitudes toward sex offenders is more likely to influence recommended prison sentences than the other way around.

Another possible explanation for the finding that Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders are positively correlated is that Belief in a Just World was measured using different methods in the current study than in Kleinke and Meyer (1990). Kleinke and Meyer used the 20-item Just World Scale designed by Rubin and Peplau (1975), which utilizes statements that address justness in specific situations as well as specific populations such as parents and students. The statements in the GBJWS used by the current study, however, are more general in nature and do not specify any single population or situation. The current study selected the GBJWS for the general nature of its statements and because it was more widely used and validated than Rubin and Peplau’s scale, however this may have resulted in different versions of Belief in a Just World being measured and compared to each other which would reduce the validity of the results.
One additional consideration is the manner in which attitudes toward sex offenders were measured in the current study and in Kleinke and Meyer (1990). The current study, being interested only in attitudes toward sex offenders, measured these attitudes alone. Kleinke and Meyer, however, measured both attitudes toward rapists and attitudes toward rape victims. The juxtaposition of these two viewpoints could very well have influenced the results; it seems likely that attitudes could be influenced by the presence of a second, related group and be different than attitudes measured without presentation of a second group. Because of this influence, it may be more difficult to compare results obtained using the two separate methods found in Kleinke and Meyer and the current study.

The finding that there is a negative correlation between attitudes toward sex offenders and Belief in a Just World has several implications for the Belief in a Just World theory and real-world applications. While these results are not consistent with Kleinke and Meyer's (1990) findings, they are consistent with a theory proposed by Rubin and Peplau (1975). Rubin and Peplau proposed that individuals with a high Belief in a Just World should have more harsh attitudes toward individuals who cause unjust suffering because of their need to believe the world is just. This theory could apply to the current research, especially when taking into account the differences inherent between measuring attitudes towards victims and perpetrators side by side and measuring attitudes toward perpetrators alone. However, these findings are not consistent with the broader theory of Belief in a Just World, which states that people who feel a need to believe the world is just will rationalize occurrences to make them fit into a “just” category, and thus would likely place less blame on the perpetrator of an unjust action. Therefore it is necessary to investigate if there is a difference in attitudes toward sex offenders, measured independently, from attitudes toward sex offenders measured alongside attitudes
toward victims. This could have significant implications for the Belief in a Just World theory, as it could influence interpretation of previous studies investigating different conditions of Belief in a Just World side by side. For professionals working in the rehabilitation of sex offenders, these findings may still be of value as they indicate that those who strongly believe in a just world may be more likely to have strong negative attitudes toward sex offenders.

The finding that there was no correlation between Religiosity and Belief in a Just World is not consistent with previous research, as Dalbert et al. (2000) found that Religiosity was positively correlated with Belief in a Just World. This inconsistency could be a result of the different scales used to measure Religiosity, as Dalbert et al. used a six-item scale measuring church attendance, self-rated religiosity, and strength in the belief that religion gives one’s life meaning, while this study used the CRS-15 which primarily measures the centrality and importance of religious meanings in personality as a measure of the degree of religiosity in an individual. The two scales are similar, however the CRS-15 is more commonly used and is more extensive in both the number of items and the aspects of religion measured by those items, resulting in a more comprehensive and thorough measure of Religiosity. This could affect how measured Religiosity correlates with Belief in a Just World and result in the differences found by the current study. Population differences may also be a factor, as Dalbert et al.’s study took place in Germany while the majority of participants in the current study were from the United States. Location could play a role in this instance through demographic and religious differences. As no correlations were found between Religiosity and Belief in a Just World, it is unlikely that Religiosity could be used to assist professionals such as probation and parole officers in predicting the strength of belief in a just world of community members, or in predicting attitudes toward sex offenders in communities to which sex offenders will return.
The finding that there was no correlation between Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders was not expected based on previous research. Olver and Barlow (2010) found that participants who declared a religious affiliation had significantly more positive rehabilitative attitudes toward sex offenders, which the current study reasoned might extend to attitudes toward sex offenders in general. The most plausible explanation for these findings is that there is a relationship between Religiosity and rehabilitative attitudes, but there is not a relationship between Religiosity and overall attitudes toward sex offenders. Rehabilitative attitudes are just one aspect of overall attitudes toward sex offenders, meaning that even if there is a relationship between rehabilitative attitudes and Religiosity, this relationship could be negated in overall attitudes toward sex offenders by other aspects that have no relationship or an opposing relationship with Religiosity. How Religiosity was measured may have also affected this discrepancy, as Olver and Barlow measured only religious affiliation without addressing the other aspects of Religiosity that the current study included. As no correlations were found between Religiosity and attitudes toward sex offenders, it is increasingly unlikely that Religiosity could be used to assist professionals in predicting attitudes of the communities to which sex offenders will return.

The absence of a gender difference on BJW is not consistent with what was expected based on previous research. No gender difference was found in the current study, however, Kleinke and Meyer (1990) found that women assigned more responsibility to rapists than men did. This finding was expanded in the current study’s hypothesis that women would score lower on Belief in a Just World than men. Kleinke and Meyer also found that men assigned more responsibility to the rape victim than women, further supporting the initial hypothesis of the current study. The discrepancy found between Kleinke and Meyer and the current study could
be a secondary effect of the study differences described above, in that Kleinke and Meyer measured variables for rapists and rape victims side by side while the current study measured variables for sex offenders alone. It is possible that there is a gender difference in expression of Belief in a Just World when participants consider victims alongside sex offenders, especially as women are more likely to be victims themselves, but that this gender difference does not appear when participants consider sex offenders without also considering victims. This could be used to the advantage of future studies and professionals in rehabilitation, as knowledge of this effect may be used to further manipulate study conditions and rehabilitative guidelines.

The current study has a number of strengths due to its methodology, scope, and unique combination of measures. There were more participants in the current study than in previous studies of Belief in a Just World or attitudes toward sex offenders, and participants were from a diverse number of locations rather than from one geographic area. These two demographic strengths improve the generalizability of the study’s findings, and allow for them to be applied to a larger population than previous studies. However, this study has several strong limitations. The sample was not racially diverse, with nearly 90% of participants identifying as White. Over 60% of participants identified as agnostic or atheistic, which may have limited the usefulness of the CRS-15 in determining Religiosity and correlating it with Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders.

Future research may aim to collect a more representative sample in order to improve the ecological validity. Future research may also explore why a negative correlation between Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders was found when the opposite correlation was expected. It may be useful in future research to investigate Belief in a Just World and attitudes toward sex offenders further by breaking the CATSO into its subscales and examining the
relationships between Belief in a Just World and each subscale because attitudes may vary over these subscales. The current study did not compute these correlations because the sample was not sufficiently diverse or representative to justify any results found in further analysis.
References


Appendix A: Measures

Demographics

1. What is your age? [Please enter numbers only]

2. How do you identify for your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Trans
   d. Other ________

3. Are you a college student?
   If yes, what is your enrollment status?
   a. Part-time
   b. Full-time
   If yes, how many semesters have you been enrolled in college? _____ [Please enter numbers only]

4. What is your career status?
   a. Full-time employee
   b. Part-time employee
   c. Not employed

5. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
   a. Straight
   b. Gay
   c. Lesbian
   d. Bisexual
   e. Other ________

6. What is your Geographical location?
   Canada - Maritimes and Newfoundland
Canada - Eastern Canada (Quebec and Ontario)
Canada - Central Canada (Manitoba, & Saskatchewan)
Canada - Western Canada (Alberta & B.C.)
U.S. - North East
U.S. - North West
U.S. - Southeast
U.S. - Southwest
U.S. - Mid-West
U.S. - California
Mexico
Caribbean
Central America
South America
Europe
Africa
Asia
Middle-East
Other, please specify

7. What is Your Racial/Ethnic Background
   African
   Arab
   Black
   Caribbean
   East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean)
   Indian/Pakistani/Sri Lankan
   Indonesian
   Latino (Central or South-American descent)
   Malaysian
   Native American
   South East Asian (Filipino, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.)
   White (Caucasian)
   Multi-Racial
   Other, please specify

8. Religion:

Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders Scale
1. With support and therapy, someone who committed a sexual offense can learn to change their behavior.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
3. Probably disagree
4. Probably agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly agree

2. People who commit sex offenses should lose their civil rights (e.g., voting and privacy).
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

3. People who commit sex offenses want to have sex more often than the average person.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

4. Male sex offenders should be punished more severely than female sex offenders.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

5. Sexual fondling (inappropriate unwarranted touch) is not as bad as rape.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
6. Strongly agree

6. Sex offenders prefer to stay home alone rather than be around lots of people.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

7. Most sex offenders do not have close friends.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

8. Sex offenders have difficulty making friends even if they try real hard.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

9. The prison sentences sex offenders receive are much too long when compared to the sentence lengths for other crimes.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

10. Sex offenders have high rates of sexual activity.
11. Trying to rehabilitate a sex offender is a waste of time.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

12. Sex offenders should wear tracking devices so their location can be pinpointed at any time.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree

13. Only a few sex offenders are dangerous.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree

14. Most sex offenders are unmarried men.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
3. Probably disagree
4. Probably agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly agree

15. Someone who uses emotional control when committing a sex offense is not as bad as
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

   someone who uses physical control when committing a sex offense.

16. Most sex offenders keep to themselves.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

17. A sex offense committed against someone the perpetrator knows is less serious than a sex
    offense committed against a stranger.
    1. Strongly disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Probably disagree
    4. Probably agree
    5. Agree
    6. Strongly agree

18. Convicted sex offenders should never be released from prison.
    1. Strongly disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Probably disagree
    4. Probably agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly agree

Global Belief in a Just World

1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree
5. I feel that people get what they deserve.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Probably disagree
   4. Probably agree
   5. Agree
   6. Strongly agree

**Centrality of Religiosity**

1. How often do you think about religious issues?
   1. Very often
   2. Often
   3. Occasionally
   4. Rarely
   5. Never

2. To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?
   1. Very much so
2. Quite a bit
3. Moderately
4. Not very much
5. Not at all

3. How often do you take part in religious services?
   a. More than once a week
   b. Once a week
   c. One or three times a month
   d. A few times a year
   e. Less often
   f. Never

4. How often do you pray?
   a. Several times a day
   b. Once a day
   c. More than once a week
   d. Once a week
   e. One or three times a month
   f. A few times a year
   g. Less often
   h. Never

5. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?
   1. Very often
   2. Often
   3. Occasionally
   4. Rarely
   5. Never

6. How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
4. Not very much
5. Not at all

7. To what extent do you believe in an afterlife – e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
   4. Not very much
   5. Not at all

8. How important is it to take part in religious services?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
   4. Not very much
   5. Not at all

9. How important is personal prayer for you?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
   4. Not very much
   5. Not at all

10. How often do you experience situation in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or reveal something to you?
    1. Very often
    2. Often
    3. Occasionally
    4. Rarely
    5. Never

11. How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?
    1. Very often
2. Often
3. Occasionally
4. Rarely
5. Never

12. In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
   4. Not very much
   5. Not at all

13. How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?
   1. Very much so
   2. Quite a bit
   3. Moderately
   4. Not very much
   5. Not at all

14. How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?
   1. Very often
   2. Often
   3. Occasionally
   4. Rarely
   5. Never

15. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?
   1. Very often
   2. Often
   3. Occasionally
   4. Rarely
   5. Never
The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on December 11, 2015 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educations practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Category 2: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior</td>
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<td>X Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.</td>
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Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.

Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Editorial Notes:

1. N/A

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project. Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity