

Edited book – Call for contributions

Researching People who have offended sexually: Behind the Scenes

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Researching people who have offended sexually raises unique epistemological, ethical, emotional, methodological, practical, and personal issues. Researchers (including psychologists, criminologists, anthropologists, gender scholars and forensic researchers, among many others) must navigate a complex minefield of misconceptions, safety concerns, gender, class and other interpersonal dynamics. They also face “squeamishness” (Schultz, 2005), discomfort, and resistance about the topic from Institutional Review Boards, funding agencies, peers and colleagues, advocacy and lobby groups, and even family and friends. Despite this, academic and research interest in sexual violence and those who perpetrate it has accelerated significantly in recent years, and sexual violence continues to be a popular topic of fictional television, true crime podcasts, and community concern and fear. The powerful *#metoo* movement also sparked renewed, difficult conversations about how to make sense of and deal with those who cause sexual harm to others.

However, researchers in this field rarely get a chance to discuss *what it is really like* to undertake research on this challenging topic. This edited collection (which has indicative interest from Palgrave) will lay bare the warts-and-all reality of conducting research on people who have offended sexually. International and interdisciplinary in scope, the book will present short, accessible chapters (of approx. 6,000 words including references) that discuss what goes on “backstage” when researching people who have sexually offended – material that usually ends up on the “cutting room floor” and rarely forms part of the sanitized accounts of research typically included in academic books and journal articles.

We invite contributions from both emerging and established scholars (employed in academic and other research environments) that explore:

- The broad range of challenges, pitfalls, successes and unexpected events that occur when conducting research on people who have offended sexually
- Challenges and innovations in accessing people who have offended sexually – a hard-to-reach population
- Survivor-scholars’ experiences of researching people who have offended sexually
- The impacts of researchers’ and/or participants’ gendered, racialized, classed and/or other marginalized identities in researching people who have offended sexually

- Challenges and innovations with a range of relevant gatekeepers (e.g. IRBs, funding bodies, government/industry/community research partners)
- The issues that accompany researching undetected or unconvicted people who have offended sexually
- The issues that accompany translating knowledge (especially unpalatable findings) into policy and practice
- The use of emerging technologies to research people who have offended sexually
- The impacts of researching people who have offended sexually (e.g. professional, career, personal, familial, psychological)
- Building rapport with people who have offended sexually
- The strengths and challenges of cross-cultural and/or cross-national research with people who have offended sexually
- Safety concerns (e.g. physical, emotional, psychological)
- Issues of definition and/or measurement
- Experiences of hope, redemption, reform, atonement, restoration etc
- Moral and ethical conundrums
- Epistemological matters, including but not limited to the thorny representation of people who have offended sexually, their actions, and their life stories
- Issues of sample representativeness and generalisability
- The issues that accompany researching treated or untreated people who have offended sexually
- Managing others' reactions about your research on people who have offended sexually ...

...and we welcome other suggestions aligned with the overarching aim of the book!

Timeline (subject to change):

- Abstract deadline – 31 March 2026
- Notification of acceptance¹ – 1 May 2026
- Draft chapters due – 30 September 2026
- Feedback from Editors on draft chapters – 31 December 2026
- Revised chapters due (if required) – 30 March 2027
- Publication – late 2027

Please email Kelly Richards (k1.richards@qut.edu.au) with the following:

- 1) an abstract (approx. 200 words); and

¹ Please note we anticipate that we will not be able to accept all abstracts.

2) an opening narrative (approx. 500 words). We anticipate starting each chapter with an engaging first-person story, written in a creative nonfiction, narrative style (see examples attached). This opening story is designed to capture reader and will form the introduction to your more formally written chapter.

For queries, please contact:

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Example opening narrative #1 (taken from Richards (2022) *Desistance from sexual offending: The role of Circles of Support and Accountability*: Routledge):

If you are at all familiar with Circles of Support and Accountability, you're probably expecting this book to start with the story of Charlie Taylor. But this story begins differently. We'll get to Charlie Taylor. This story starts a day or so after I arrived in the town of Fresno, California, for the first time, in late 2010. Fresno is a small regional city by American standards, with a population of about half a million. Located about 300 kilometres southeast of San Francisco and 350 kilometres northeast of Los Angeles in the San Joaquin Valley, it ranks second on a list of American cities for extreme poverty {Calix, 2018 #647}. It is one of the most multicultural cities in America {The Business Journal, 2020 #648}, with a Latino population of about 50 percent and an Asian population nearing 14 percent according to www.dataus.io. I'd arrived in Fresno after a short domestic hop from my then home town of Canberra, Australia's capital, followed by a 13-hour flight from Sydney to San Francisco, and two train rides totaling about five hours. But it wasn't just my jetlag that made this day memorable.

I'm in a Wendy's restaurant – which to my surprise serves real food, not just ice creams like Wendy's in Australia – with two people I've just met. The first is Clare-Ann Ruth-Heffelbower, a Fresno local and then Director of Circles of Support and Accountability Fresno. Clare-Ann is immensely welcoming, a slim and energetic woman who makes me feel immediately comfortable in her presence. The second is a man in his late forties who I will call Rory. Like Clare-Ann, Rory is warm, articulate, and lovely. He too makes me feel welcome immediately. Rory identities as Mexican-American, he tells me later. He is what I come to learn is known, in the world of Circles of Support and Accountability, as a 'core member'. Core members are the individuals served by Circles of Support and Accountability programs; in other words, they are the people who have been convicted of and incarcerated for sexual offences, usually those committed against children. Rory's story is not atypical. He spent 11 years in prison for sexually abusing two boys who had been enrolled in the school at which he was Headmaster. When we meet at Wendy's, he'd been out of prison for about two years. We chat a little about our lives – Rory has all the usual questions about Australian wildlife and how it can kill you – and order food. Before we eat, Rory invites Clare-Ann and me to join in

a prayer of thanks. We bow our heads, Rory says grace, and I silently ask myself what on earth I am doing here.

Example opening narrative #2 (by Danielle Arlanda Harris):

I was waiting with my daughter for our takeout order in a small Thai place. Much like I have always been, I was hyper aware of my surroundings. A tired mother waited to order, with children jumping around her feet. There was a man behind her who, despite the late August warmth, was wearing long trousers. I detected a bulge around his ankle and instantly clocked it as a GPS bracelet, used to monitor his whereabouts electronically. Perhaps he was on probation, perhaps he was out on parole. Either way he was likely a registered sex offender, subject to Intensive Community Supervision by the County Sheriff's Department.

I interviewed several officers from this department last year. They went to great lengths to demonstrate the technology they employed to monitor the state's most dangerous predators. I was surveying their approach to sex offender management... containment... prevention... rehabilitation. The specific noun depended on who you were asking.

I wondered if the man was 24 or 34. I wondered if the tattoo on his arm was his only one. I wondered what he had done, or rather, what he had been caught for, and whether he would do it again. Did he intentionally rape a stranger with a weapon? Was he a 'hands off guy' with a single count that represented hundreds of images. Did he cross a line with a cousin at a camp in junior high? The bulge on his ankle was an unmistakable symbol, but it could symbolise just about anything.

The man stood awkwardly in line. He was uncomfortably self-conscious as the children frolicked around him. I instantly felt sympathy for him.

He could have spent many years in a treatment program where he has learned that he remains at risk to reoffend sexually until his death. He is "at risk" despite the years that have passed since his arrest. And he is "at risk" regardless of how accurately his official FBI record reflects the nature of his actual or alleged behaviour.

My interviewees told me how they police their own bodies as they move through the world. Malcolm uses a shopping cart even if he only needs a few groceries. That way he can maintain a physical boundary between himself and any other human. He knows that

accidentally bumping into the wrong person could instantly lead to a breach of his probation that would land him back in jail for “incidental contact with a child”.

The man held his hands up and together, as if he was holding a small box at his chest. He reminded me of Albert, an interviewee who had only been released a few weeks before we met. He sat with the heels of his wrists together for almost the entire conversation, as if they were still in cuffs. I wondered if this man was holding his hands this way deliberately, as a kind of insurance against accidentally bumping into someone.

At no point did I think Alex was in any danger. But I had a very strong desire to engage the man in conversation, to let him know he could relax. I also felt strongly that I didn’t want Alex to fear him, the way I had learned to fear every single stranger I encountered as a child.

I motioned for Alex to come and sit next to me, and to stop jumping around so much. My primary concern in that moment was his discomfort and not my daughter’s safety. What kind of a mother does that make me?