

## HONORS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROJECT PROPOSAL FORM

### Basic Information

Full Name: Batsheva Serota

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College: A&S

Major: Psychology

Title of Project: The Female Sex Offender

Thematic Area: Research

Expected Project Start Date: January 30, 2013

Expected Project End Date: August 30, 2013

### Project Information

1. Provide a detailed abstract of your proposed honors experiential learning project.

For this project, I will be conducting a thorough analysis of female sex offender data, reflecting upon what I find, and producing a paper as a result.

The basis of my research will involve investigating a spreadsheet containing compiled profiler data, which includes information about age, physical descriptions, race, zip code, and type of offense for a variety of female sex offenders ( $n = 407$ ). My itinerary for the project as a whole will include the following steps:

1. searching for background research about female sex offenders
2. analyzing the compiled sex offender data
3. asking a research question once the data has been reviewed
4. attempting to answer the above question in a research paper while connecting my findings to my initial research.
5. creating poster presentation based on my paper & presenting it at the URC

**\*My time commitment for this project will be 3hrs/week for 30 weeks.**

I will start by finding and reviewing previous research that has been conducted about female sex offenders so that I can see what research has already been done. This step will not only prevent me from being redundant in my dissemination but also help steer my findings in the right direction. Next, I will review the data set and start thinking about research questions that I could ask based on what I find. In order to do this most effectively, I will organize the data and look for patterns, while at the same time working on coming up with a research question. Once I have compiled all the data and previous research as it relates to my hypothesis, I will use this information to write a complete research paper and create a poster presentation.

The main thing I hope to learn from this research is to be able to better understand the female sex offender. From this, my goals for the completion of this project are two-fold— both personal and professional. My personal goal involves my work with sexual assault victims, because I am determined to help those who are affected by offenders. The professional goal I am working towards not only involves learning about the clinical population of sex offenders, but also being able to use the information I learn to help clients I may work with in the future.

Ultimately, from this project I intend to paint a better picture of the female sex offender by investigating patterns in background information and type of offense (because I have a particularly large data set, this will be more accurate than previous studies). As a Reclaim (UC) peer advocate on the support team, my job is to aid victims of sexual assault, so the completion of this project will help me to better do this. Not only that, but my professional goals involve working in the mental health field, so being able to

understand patients with a history of deviant behavior will allow me to more competently assist those in need.

Because I have several reasons for completing this project, which include what I will learn about female offenders as well as how I can use that information in the present and the future, my reflection will involve evaluating how each step of my research will impact my volunteer work as well as my career goals. This project is personally meaningful to me because it will help me do a better job in the work that I am passionate about. I will also strive to reflect upon how this research could potentially have global implications.

**Clearly and thoroughly address how each of the following elements will be exhibited in your work:**

2. Connection to Learning Outcomes within the Honors Thematic Area (identified above)

This project will allow me to achieve several learning outcomes of the research theme, because I will be working on understanding past research, analyzing data, writing a paper and creating a poster presentation, and thinking about how this research impacts me, the world, and future research developments.

First and foremost, I am going to be working on forming and evaluating a research question regarding female sex offenders. I will be able to come up with a relevant question only after organizing and analyzing the data spreadsheet that I have access to. I have never had such a large data set in my possession, so I will be developing strategies to tackle it as I go along. I will have to learn as I go along how to relate the different variables to each other, how to detect patterns, and how to formulate a question based on what I find in the data. I will also be using Dr. Taylor's expertise to determine the best way to analyze the patterns that I find—this will involve building upon my knowledge of statistical techniques.

In order to do form a complete and well thought out question, I will need to look into previous research as well as the data set. This will allow me to possess a well-developed awareness of literature regarding characteristics of female sex offenders, as well as background information regarding what other research has been done. This is important so that I know what patterns to check for in my data as well as how to connect what I have to what has previously been studied. That way, I can expand and build upon the past research without being redundant. Next, through extensively reviewing previous research on the topics at hand in addition to examining the data, I will be able to form a hypothesis based on my research question that will be the cornerstone of my research paper.

I hope to be able to look past the completed research and use it to think about how my worldview has been impacted by the experience in terms of how we view sexual assault and what we think of when we see the words "sex offender." Research on female sex offenders is small compared to research on male sex offenders. In addition, the public's views on male sex offenders are much more negative than their views on women who have committed the exact same crimes. As a result, any research on female sex offenders is important in order to contribute to and build up the information pool.

Since my reflection will partially serve as a medium to look into the media's depiction of male versus female sex offenders, I will be able to explore this topic more in depth and be able to see past what I am doing and apply it to the real world. I hope that I can use my research dissemination to educate others and change their views on gender differences. I want people to see an offense as what it is—an egregious violation of someone's emotional and physical health that should not be taken lightly, whether it is a man or a woman committing the crime.

Thinking about future research on the topic of female sex offenders is important, as well, and I will be considering this as I work through my project. Because my research will be mainly focused on understanding the female sex offender, future research that should be considered includes how to use this information to aid victims of sexual assault and treat female sex offenders. Since my research is mainly

informational, I will be brainstorming ways that my research can be utilized to develop other research projects that are broader in a sense that they can be applied in real-life settings. These real-life settings can include shelters, treatment centers, hospitals, and even college campuses. Sexual assault is a crime that is committed in a variety of setting and situations, so the opportunity for research on this topic is extensive, and I will attempt to think of ways to narrow it down and use it for the good of the community.

### 3. Connection to Goals and Academic Theories

As an aspiring clinical psychologist, I will probably have to deal with my fair share of deviant clients—that is, criminal behavior can be correlated with certain mental health problems. Conducting this research project will allow me to better deal with my future patients that may have committed offenses. Not only that, but I will also be able to help patients who have suffered at the hands of sex offenders. In my current endeavors, I will be able to more effectively help victims through my work with Reclaim if I have more access to information about offenders. Therefore, the completion of this project will help me develop both as an advocate and as a future mental health professional.

I have identified several articles that I will read as part of my research. They are each listed, organized into groups, and explained below.

The following articles deal with comparing male and female sex offenders, which will be beneficial in allowing me to further understand the differences between the two genders, especially considering that male sex offenders are more widely known in our society and the media especially. This will help me dispel certain assumptions or stereotypes as an advocate, while at the same time adding to my pool of knowledge regarding sex differences in certain clinical populations.

- *Exploring Sex Differences among Sentenced Juvenile Offenders in Australia* (Fitzgerald, 2011)
- *A Cluster-Analytic Investigation of MMPI Profiles of Serious Male and Female Juvenile Offenders* (Espelage, 2003)
- *Juvenile Female and Male Sex Offenders* (Vandiver, 2006)

I will also be reviewing some articles that try to explain the reasons why women develop into sex offenders. This will allow me to get a better look at why these women are committing the crimes that they commit, so that I will be able to better understand my deviant clients when I start to work in the mental health field.

- *From Defense to Offense: The Development of an Adolescent Female Sex Offender* (Higgs, 1992)
- *Female Sex Offenders—An Exploratory Study* (Hendriks, 2006)
- *Examining the Sexual Offenses of Female Juveniles: The Relevance of Childhood Maltreatment* (Roe-Sepowitz, 2008)

The following single article details the treatment of female sex offenders once their crimes have been committed. This is particularly of interest to me, especially considering my clinical aspirations regarding treating clients with mental health issues.

- *Young Female Sex Offenders: Assessment and Treatment Issues* (Vick, 2002)

### 4. Initiative, Independence, and Creativity

Although I have never had the chance to take a course with my project advisor, Dr. Taylor, I found out from those who did as well as the UC website that his research interests line up with mine. I have always been interested in how mental health relates to deviant behaviors, so I knew I had to set up a meeting with him. I did not know this from the beginning, but Dr. Taylor is notoriously hard to get a meeting with due to his extensive work at his private practice as well as hours spent during court hearings through his practice. I ended up securing a meeting with him, and when I found out he had access to compiled female

sex offender data, I was intrigued. However, after meeting with him a few times to talk about my research plans, I had trouble securing any more meetings with him due to his hectic and variable schedule. I was still determined, though, so, when I ran into Dr. Taylor in an elevator, I jumped at the chance to get the data from him. Because I took the initiative to obtain the data set, within days I was on my way to developing an independent research project.

When it comes to independence in the actual project, I will be doing most of it on my own, facilitated by some feedback from Dr. Taylor, my advisor. For this project, I will be formatting and analyzing the data, conducting background research, and forming a research question on my own. While the data I am using has already been collected, I will be looking at it from a different viewpoint and trying to piece things together independently. I will also be personally writing a research paper and creating a poster presentation that will each reflect my research and findings.

I will demonstrate creativity through looking at the data set with a new set of eyes—this is definitely important when a specific data set has been used in more than one research paper. My attempt to find novel ways to organize the data and compare specific variables within the data set will provide this project with a creative aspect.

## 5. Reflection

The reflection for my project will involve a lab notebook/journal hybrid where I will document things that surprise me, problems I encounter, interesting things I learn as they come up, as well as my feelings throughout the project. I will also connect how this research involves my personal and professional goals as I work through it, such as my work through Reclaim and my aims to become a clinical psychologist. I also believe that because the female sex offender is not normally depicted in the media, it is important for there to be further research on this topic—this is why I will use my reflection as an outlet to review the roles of female versus male sex offenders in the media.

Ultimately, I will consider several different questions that I will attempt to answer throughout my reflection. These will relate to my research goals, involve my professional goals, as well as try to paint a picture about why this research is important in our society. These questions are listed and explained below:

1. How does what I am learning relate to my work with Reclaim?
2. In what ways will my research impact my future career and my professional goals?
3. How can my research change the way society views what the “typical” sex offender looks like?

Firstly, as I write my journal entries, I will be asking myself, “How does what I am learning relate to my work with Reclaim?” I will be reflecting upon how my research on female sex offenders will help me grow as an advocate, in terms of in what ways it will allow me to better aid victims of sexual assault. Not only that, but I will also think about how I can educate my fellow Reclaim advocates about the female sex offender, because we typically deal with women who have been assaulted by male perpetrators.

The next important question I will be asking is “In what ways will my research impact my future career and my professional goals?” Through asking myself this question, I will explore how understanding the female sex offender will affect my future work in the mental health field, such as how I interact and treat deviant patients and victims alike.

Because the public’s view of sex offenders typically involves a male suspect, the third and final question that I will be exploring throughout my reflection is: “How can my research change the way society views what the ‘typical’ sex offender looks like?” Since this particular research on sex offenders has a unique perspective in terms of looking at the *female* as opposed to the male sex offender, I plan on doing some research in order to look into how often female sex offenders are mentioned in the media, as well as how

they are depicted as compared to men. This aspect of my reflection is important because working on this paper could potentially help change what comes to mind when we think of sex offenses, especially if I present this project in the UC community via a poster display. If people assume that only men can be sex offenders, this is a constrictive and dangerous way of thinking in that it can lead to minimizing the problem of females who do commit these crimes.

In addition to these three questions, because I will be working on not just a journal, but a lab notebook/journal hybrid, I will also be documenting the steps of my research in terms of what is working, what is not working, the difficulties I face, the surprises I may encounter, and what the limitations are on my research. I will also be exploring future paths that I can take with research on sex offenders after I finish this project.

## 6. Dissemination

For the dissemination of my project, I am planning on completing a research paper and a professional poster display.

My choice in deciding to write a paper and submit it to a peer-reviewed journal for potential publication is two-fold. Firstly, I want to get experience writing research articles and learning about the publication process firsthand. Secondly, I would like experts in the field of sex offenses and deviancy to be able to have access to my findings and data, because these are the type of people that will be able to get the most from my research and be able to use what I discover through it.

I will be considering the following peer-reviewed journals when I finish my paper and begin the publication process. Each of these journals includes research on sex offenders, which is why they are each ideal for what I am working on.

- The Journal of Sex Research
- Journal of Sexual Aggression
- International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology

For the poster display, I am going to submit an abstract to the Undergraduate Research Conference in 2014. I will be contacting Heather Baker, who runs the program, in order to submit my abstract. I want to complete a poster presentation for the URC because I feel that it is important to educate my community about the female sex offender. Considering the University of Cincinnati is in such an urban area, sex offenses are something UC students are, unfortunately, familiar with. Because of this, I want to open students' eyes and show them that male sex offenders aren't the only threat, as I attempt to break the stereotype of the "typical" sex offender.

The last way that I will disseminate my project is through RECON, in which I serve as a mentor for undergraduate students looking for research opportunities. I will be able to share this research, not only when I complete it but also throughout the project itself, with the students that I mentor in order to show them what research opportunities are available at UC as well as how to approach a research project. In addition to sharing my specific research with undergraduates, I will be able to use my research experience to demonstrate to students what steps a student need to take to eventually be in charge of his own personal research project.

## 7. Project Advisor (list the person's name, title, and contact information)

Dr. Purcell Taylor, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
taylorp@ucmail.uc.edu

## 8. Budget (if applicable)

3 hrs/week, 30 weeks