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Female Sex Offenders- Reflective Essay

Going into this project, I thought that my main goal was to use data that I analyzed to publish a paper on the profile of female sex offenders. I knew that I wanted to use this to educate people along the way, but my main goal was to, ultimately, end up with publication. After all, I thought, getting a publication will be good for getting into graduate school and pursuing my future carreer. However, as I continued along with the research process, I ended up surprising myself, and I mean this in a good way. My goal no longer became about going through the publication process and getting my research out there for other professionals to see. My audience began transforming and changing, and I became more passionate about addressing the general public and teaching them about the diverse and heated topic of female sex offenders, as opposed to gearing the knowledge I had gained towards sharing my work with other professionals. While presenting your work to other professionals is all well and good—it teaches you about truly knowing your topic and presenting in front of those who know more than you—I chose to go a different route, and I couldn’t be happier with the results I obtained. Throughout my project, I struggled with producing concrete, tangible goals, such as a paper, with more subtle, indefinable goals, such as teaching others about female sex offenders. While I could not measure the impact I had on others, I know that I taught people something they did not know during the dissemination of my project, and I am thrilled that I was given the opportunity to do this. After all, the people I relayed information to did not have a test, they did not have to spit back what I had just told them, but I could just tell that I made a difference, and shocked a lot of people to the point in which they left with something to think about.

My project consisted of doing research on the group of female sex offenders, and creating a profile set based on what I had learned. I did this by looking at past research as well as analyzing a particularly large data set. I started out by extensively reading background research through searching for scholarly journals about the group of female sex offenders. I slowly began to understand that the gap in the research was not simple, but consisted of the entire body of research on the topic—this is because female sex offenders are usually studied through very small data sets, and I was in contact with a very large one (8 to 12 convicted subjects versus 408 convicted and non-convicted subjects). Through this, I realized that not much research has been done on this particular group. Like I said earlier, I started out my project thinking I would learn the research process and publish a paper, but I ended up with much more than that. After I had realized the extent of the small amount of research that had previously been done on female sex offenders, I began to contemplate what I really wanted to get out of this project. This is where it all started to unfold in terms of changing where I wanted to go during this project. Once I completed my background research, I became curious about what the general public knows about female sex offenders, so I did a quick and dirty google search. What I found out was that people either do not know that female sex offenders exist, or people view them as being some sort of sex goddesses. This made me infuriated, so I brought the topic up with the sexual assault advocate group I was in at the time, which is called Reclaim and is stationed here at UC. While they all agreed that something needed to be done about this, they were fairly uninformed about the topic of females sex offenders, themselves. This knocked some sense into me, as I thought, “if a sexual assault response group does not know about this type of offender, something needs to be done.” So, it became my mission to educate people and prevent offenses from happening as frequently as they are.

This project has led me to fulfill several of the research learning outcomes, but there are a few in particular that merited the most importance during the course of my project. First of all, I was able to form and evaluate a research question, in which I asked what the main characteristics of female sex offenders are. I used not only background research but also the data set I had access to in order complete this portion of the project. Not only that, but by reading several important articles on the topic and exploring the media’s view of female sex offenders, I was able to possess a well-developed awareness of literature in the field. However, the most important learning outcomes that I achieved was thinking beyond the completed research, because my world view has been changed by this particular experience in many, many ways. First of all, I had no idea that female sex offenders were so prominent, almost as prominent as male sex offenders, in society. This has changed my world view because it led me to have a different image in my head when I pictured a sex offender, because now I know the diverse nature of this group. Not only that, but I also realized the extent to which others are uninformed about the female sex offender, and this has changed my world view because I have now become passionate about educating others about the topic at hand. Finally, it has taught me that sex offenders come in all shapes and sizes, and that I should realize this before stereotyping certain groups, such as males as opposed to females.

The readings I did contributed to this project because they truly showed me that I cannot judge a book by its cover—anybody, no matter what they look like or what gender they are, are a sex offender if they commit a type of sexually violent crime. I think that my peers, as well as myself, have had trouble in the past grasping this because we see sex offenders as being large, dominant, and scary- looking, but this is not always the case. I struggled with this, myself, during my research, so I definitely understand the surprise people had when I was educating others. The theories that impacted my project the most were those that detailed the different types of female sex offenders. This is because I went in to the project thinking I was going to come up with a single profile of female sex offenders, when in reality there are different groups of sex offenders that offend for different reasons, have different personalities, and offend against different demographic groups. Ultimately, I think the academic theories that stuck with me most were those that detailed that female sex offenders get cut more slack than male sex offenders, and this is what helped motivate me to continue with the project and to educate others.

I started by sharing my learning with Reclaim, the sexual assault advocate/ education group that I described above, because I realized I needed to start educating the people who helped others deal with sexual assault. After all, if a male or female came in to the Women’s Center who was assaulted by a female, how would we deal with this if we were mainly trained on males who were the sexual assaulters? So, I started my dissemination by teaching Reclaim about the topic, and I moved on to the general student body. I presented my work not only to college student, but to high school students as well. I took a trip to my old high school to share this research with them, and I could see the squirms of students in their seats, because they weren’t used to hearing this type of discussion. As a result of this, I realized it was important to spread the word about not only female sex offenders, but sexual assault in general, so that people would not be offended or made uncomfortable by it. After this experience, I presented my research powerpoint to my own peers at the University of Cincinnati’s Health Professions Fair. At this event I was taken aback by the amount of students who did not know that female sex offenders existed, let alone how often sexual assaults instigated by females occurred.

From both of these experiences disseminating my project I learned that I needed to spread the word as much as I could, formally or through casual conversation, about female sex offenders and how common they are. I was shocked by how the media portrayed female sex offenders as sex symbols, and my goal in the future is to stop this. Not only that, but my personal interactions with female sex offenders through my internship at River City Correctional has not only inspired me to advocate for counseling and other help for these women, but also has pushed me to pursue a career in criminal justice and counseling so that I can help these women myself.