KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF MEGAN’S LAW AMONG SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDENTS

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Abstract

KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF MEGAN’S LAW AMONG SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDENTS

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The purpose of this research was to gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among pre-criminal justice lower division students and criminal justice upper division students enrolled at Sacramento State University. Using a simple random sampling procedure of two criminal justice courses, 218 college students completed a self-administered survey. Although the results were mixed, it was found that both pre-criminal justice and criminal justice students have some knowledge of Megan’s Law, as well as have punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders.

_______________________, Committee Chair

Sue C. Escobar, J.D., Ph.D.

_______________________

Date
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather who passed before I could finish. Even though he is no longer here to witness this event, I know that he would be so proud of me.

Mark R. Hart
1935-2009
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I must also acknowledge the following individuals for their support and guidance throughout this entire experience:

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, a series of well-publicized violent sexual crimes were committed against innocent children. From the brutal attack of Ryan Hade to the murder of Megan Kanka, the new emphasis on more stringent punishments and regulation of sexual offenders led to the implementation of new sexual offender laws (Sample & Kadleck, 2008). The public demanded that these types of criminals were placed behind bars and off the streets. As a result, both state and federal legislatures have passed laws restricting the movement of sexual offenders to protect those who were believed to be the most vulnerable members of society, children.

In May 1989, Ryan Hade, age seven, was stabbed, raped, had his penis cut off and was left for dead in a Tacoma, Washington by a mentally ill sexual offender named Earl Shriner (Center for Sex Offender Management [CSOM], 2001; Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Kaplan & King, 1993; Leo, 1993). Shriner had a lengthy history of violent and sexual crimes committed against children. Just two years prior to this brutal act, Shriner had been serving a ten year sentence for the abduction of two teenage girls (Leo, 1993).

As a result of this crime, Washington enacted the first ever community notification law, known as the Community Protection Act of 1990 (CSOM, 1997; Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Lieb, 1997; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). This law created longer prison sentences for sexual offenders, allowed law enforcement to notify communities when sexual offenders were released into their communities and created civil commitments for sexually violent predators (SVP). Under civil commitments, the state
could hold sexually violent predators, for an indefinite period of time, at the end of their criminal sentence in psychiatric facilities until s/he was deemed safe to the community (Lieb, 1997; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). This State law foreshadowed a federal law resulting from another brutal crime against another child.

In October 1989, a masked man approached Jacob Wetterling, his brother and a friend (The Jacob Wetterling Resource Center [JWRC], 2010; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). Using a gun, the man told the boys to throw their bicycles in a ditch and to lie on the ground. He then asked each boy their age. After they responded, he ordered Jacob’s brother and his friend to run away and to not look back or they would be shot. Jacob, age eleven, was taken by the masked man and never seen again.

In memory of Jacob Wetterling, the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act (Title XVII of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994) was signed into law (CSOM, 1997, 2001). This federal statute (42 U.S.C §14071) required that all states create and implement a registry of convicted sexually violent predators. In addition, this law required states to create more stringent registration requirements for all sexual offenders. Failure to implement this law would result in a reduction of federal funding (Mason & Lieb, 1997).

Similar to the Jacob Wetterling Act, Megan’s Law was implemented in response to the brutal rape and murder of seven year old, Megan Kanka of New Jersey in 1994 (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; CSOM, 1997, 2001). Her murderer, Jesse Timmendequas was a repeat violent sexual offender, who lived across the street from Megan and her family. Megan’s parents contended that had they known about Timmendequas’ criminal history,
Megan would still be alive today (Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Schopf, 1995; Terry & Ackerman, 2009).

Just two years after the murder of Megan Kanka, President Clinton signed Megan’s Law, which amended the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act to include community notification of all registerable sexual offenders (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; CSOM, 1997, 2001; Freeman-Longo & Blanchard, 1998; Mason & Lieb, 1997). Community notification refers to the identification and notification of convicted sexual offenders who are released into the community (CSOM, 1997, 2001). This should be clearly distinguished from sexual offender registration; sexual offender registration laws require the registerable sexual offender to register their residence with local law enforcement.

Although California has required sexual offenders to register with local law enforcement since 1947, the implementation of Megan’s Law prompted significant changes to California’s sexual offender laws (California Department of Justice [CA DOJ], 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009). Community notification allows local law enforcement to notify the public of sexual predators released into their community. In California, the public is able to access information about registered sexual offenders online at the Megan’s Law Website (CA DOJ, 2004, 2008, 2009).

In 1995, California’s “900” Line was first introduced as a fee-based program which allowed the public to call in and make inquiries about convicted child molesters (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004, 2008). Due to the implementation of Megan’s Law, the program
added all registerable sexual offenders. In 2004, nearly 21,000 requests were made by telephone and nearly 2,400 requests were made by mail (CA DOJ, 2004).

First introduced in December 2004, California’s Megan’s Law website has made information about sexual offenders more accessible to the public (CA DOJ, 2004, 2008). However, contrary to popular belief, not all sexual offenders are included for public disclosure on the Megan’s Law website (CA DOJ, 2009). According to California Penal Code Section 290.46, four categories of sexual offenders are subject to public disclosure under Megan’s Law: home address category, conditional home address category, zip code category and undisclosed category. Individuals falling into the “undisclosed category” are required to register with local law enforcement (according to the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act) but are not subject to public disclosure on the Megan’s Law website.

Statement of the Problem

Since its introduction, Megan’s Law has increased the public’s awareness of sexual offenders, including SVP’s, and their presence in our communities. It has placed families and schools on alert to protect their children from sexual offenders. As a result, the media continues to present the most horrific crimes, such as kidnapping and sexual assault of children. This constant bombardment of fear has changed the public’s view of the criminal justice system and its policies (McCorkle, 1993). In a study examining the effect of media on the perceptions of Megan’s Law, Proctor, Badzinski & Johnson (2002) found that media exposure and attention to criminal investigations increased the public’s awareness of criminal justice policies but did not affect the respondent’s knowledge of
Megan’s Law. In addition, they further concluded that the media greatly influences public opinion and crime policies.

The number of individuals accessing the online sexual offender registries is also surprising. In Nebraska, for instance, adult respondents were aware of the available sexual offender registries but few accessed the online website (Anderson & Sample, 2008). In addition, the researchers found that most respondents learned about registered sexual offenders in their communities via other means such as family and friends, television or newspapers.

A recent nationwide Gallup telephone poll of approximately 1,000 adults also found similar results. In 2005, nearly 70% of all Americans thought it was likely that a sexual offender lived in their neighborhood but less than one-quarter had actually checked their state’s sexual offender registry (Saad, 2005). Respondents with minor children were more likely to access a registry than those without minor children. Similarly, Evans (2007) found that most respondents were aware of community notification laws but only 25% of respondents with children actually checked the registry. Compared to respondents with children, those most likely to access online sexual offender registries had higher levels of education.

Individuals with higher levels of education, such as a college degree, have been known to have more liberal views toward crime and punishment than those without (Astin, 1977; Benekos, Merlo, Cook & Bagley, 2002). For example, research has shown that some college majors undergo attitudinal changes throughout their college career; this is often referred to as a “liberalizing effect” (Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth, Longmire
& West, 1998; Guller, 1972). For criminal justice majors, this “liberalizing effect” results in less punitive views toward criminals, their punishments and the entire criminal justice system.

In comparison to the wider public and other college majors, criminal justice students also tend to be better informed about the criminal justice system, its components, and criminal justice policies (Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth et al., 1998). Other research has found that criminal justice seniors are more knowledgeable about the criminal justice system (Bell, Clow & Ricciardelli, 2008; Kelley & Stack, 1997; King & Reddick, 2008; Vandiver & Giacopassi, 1997) and have less punitive views (Selke, 1980) than criminal justice freshmen. In contrast, studies suggest that criminal justice students enter college with more punitive attitudes (Farnsworth et al., 1998) and hold more punitive views than other majors (Lambert, 2004). For this reason, it is essential to test the knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice students at the beginning and ending of their college experience.

While several studies have focused on the knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice majors on various areas within criminal justice, few studies have focused primarily on community notification laws. The literature fails to address criminal justice college students’ general knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law throughout their college career. The purpose of this study is to assess the differences, if any, between pre-criminal justice freshmen and sophomores (lower division students) and criminal justice seniors on the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law.
It is my intent to compare criminal justice college students in two courses at Sacramento State University during the Spring 2010 semester. The two courses, CRJ 004 and CRJ 194, are required for criminal justice majors. CRJ 004, General Investigation Techniques, primarily consists of pre-criminal justice students (freshmen and sophomores). Pre-criminal justice students must complete four lower division classes, including CRJ 004, before they can be classified as a criminal justice major. On the other hand, CRJ 194, Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice, is a writing intensive course typically restricted to criminal justice seniors. By determining the level of understanding among criminal justice majors as they enter and exit the program, we can better educate future students wishing to enter the criminal justice field on this seemingly vague and misunderstood topic.

In response to the lack of research on this issue and the significant information it may yield, two questions arise.

- **Research Question #1**: Do pre-criminal justice upper division students (juniors and seniors) have more accurate knowledge of Megan’s Law than criminal justice lower division students (freshmen and sophomores)?

- **Research Question #2**: Do pre-criminal justice lower division students (freshmen and sophomores) have more punitive views of Megan’s Law than criminal justice upper division students (juniors and seniors)?
Definition of Terms

- **Attitude polarization** – the phenomenon in which individuals with opposing views strengthen their beliefs after observing the same evidence (Lord, Ross & Lepper, 1979).

- **Biased assimilation** – The tendency for individuals to favor, or have a bias, toward a particular view even though evidence presented proves his/her belief wrong (Greitmeyer, Fischer, Frey & Schulz-Hardt, 2009; Lambert & Clarke, 2004; Lord, et al., 1979).

- **California Penal Code Section 290** – Also known as the Sex Offender Registration Act, this law mandates that persons convicted of certain sexual offenses must annually register as a sexual offender with local law enforcement (CA DOJ, 2009).

- **Community notification** – State and federal laws that authorize the public release of registered sexual offenders personal information, such as home address and/or other identifying information, when certain individuals are released into the community (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; CSOM, 1997, 2001; Matson & Lieb, 1997).

- **Jacob Wetterling Registration Act** – A federal law that requires sexually violent offenders to annually register his or her home address and other identifying information with local law enforcement, as well as more stringent registration requirements for all convicted sexual offenders (42 U.S.C §14071).

- **“Liberalizing effect”** – For criminal justice majors, this term refers to less punitive views toward criminals, their punishment and the entire criminal justice system.
(Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth et al., 1998; Guller, 1972; McCorkle, 1993; Tsoudis, 2000).

- **Megan’s Law** – First introduced as a New Jersey state law in 1994, this law requires the public notification of released sexual offenders into the community (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; CSOM, 1997, 2001). Furthermore, in 1996 this federally named law mandated that each state have a system in which the public can obtain information about registered sexual offenders in the community.

- **Moral panic** – “A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest” (Cohen, 2002, p. 1)

- **Sexual offender** – According to California Penal Code Section 288 (a) (b), “any person who willfully and lewdly commits any lewd or lascivious act, upon or with the body, or any part or member thereof, of a child who is under the age of 14 years, with the intent of arousing, appealing to, or gratifying the lust, passions, or sexual desires of that person or the child. A sex offender is any person who commits an act by use of force, violence, duress, menace, or fear of immediate and unlawful bodily injury on the victim or another person” (California Penal Code, 2010)

- **Sexual offender registration** – Laws that require convicted sexual offenders to register their residence and other identifying information with local law enforcement (CSOM, 1997, 2001).

- **Sexual offense** – “An offense involving unlawful sexual conduct, such as prostitution, indecent exposure, incest, pederasty and bestiality” (Garner, 2009).
• **Sexually violent predator** – “A person who has been convicted of a sexually violent offense against one or more victims and who has a diagnosed mental disorder that makes the person a danger to the health and safety of others in that it is likely that he or she will engage in sexually violent criminal behavior” (California Welfare and Institution Code 6600(a)(1), 2010).
Chapter 2
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Three children, Ryan Hade, Jacob Wetterling and Megan Kanka, have inadvertently and unknowingly contributed to the evolution of laws restricting sexual offenders in the United States. With the countless hours of media coverage about violent crime within our communities, the public continues to live in constant fear and push for stricter punishments and restrictions on sexual offenders. As evidenced by the enactment and expansion of various statutes, federal and state legislators continue to support public opinion regarding sexual offender laws (Lynch, 2002; Sample & Kadlec, 2008). As a result, several sexual offender laws, such as the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act and Megan’s Law, were quickly enacted during the 1990s and have drastically changed how sexual offenders can live within our communities.

History of Sexual Offender Registration & Community Notification

During the 1990s, the United States enacted a series of laws in order to protect children from the worst criminals of society, the sexual offender. The first sexual offender law was a result of the May 1989 stabbing, rape, genital mutilation and attempted murder of Ryan Hade, age seven, in Tacoma, Washington by a well-known sexual predator (CSOM, 2001; Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Leo, 1993). Earl Shriner was mentally retarded and had a lengthy history of violent crimes committed against children dating back nearly 25 years (Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Kaplan & King, 1993; Leo, 1993; Lieb, 1996). Unfortunately, due to plea bargaining and the available witnesses, mostly children, could not testify. Thus, Shriner pled guilty to lesser crimes and received
a shorter prison sentence. In one example, Shriner served only 66 days for the stabbing of a teenage boy (Leo, 1993).

Prior to his release from prison in 1987, authorities knew that Shriner intended to harm children upon his release but could not be held longer due to the current sexual offender and the civil commitment laws covering the mentally ill (Lieb, 1996). Shriner told his cellmate that he had a “desire for a van customized with cages so he could pick up children, molest and kill them” (Kaplan & King, 1993, para. 4). He also described explicit details of what he wanted to do to children once he was released from prison. Just two years after his release, Shriner brutally attacked Ryan Hade and set the scene for the introduction of the first ever sexually violent predator law in the United States.

In 1990, Washington became the first state to pass a community notification law; the Community Protection Act (CSOM, 1997, 2001; Lieb, 1997; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). As a result of this law, sexual offenders would serve longer prison sentences and community members would be notified once a potentially dangerous sexual offender was to be released into their neighborhood. This law also authorized the state to hold sexually violent predators (SVP) under civil commitments for an indefinite length of time at the end of their criminal sentence (Lieb, 1996; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). SVPs would be held at psychiatric facilities until they were deemed safe to be released into the community (Lieb, 1996). As of December 1996, over 20 individuals met the SVP criteria and an additional 23 more were awaiting trial (Lieb, 1996, 1997).

A second sexual offender law was the result of the kidnapping and disappearance of a young boy during the same year as Ryan Hade’s attack. In October 1989, Jacob
Wetterling was kidnapped near his home in St. Joseph, Minnesota (Terry & Ackerman, 2009). Jacob’s brother and friend, both present at the kidnapping, and were able to give a description of Jacob’s kidnapper to the police. Law enforcement publicly released the description but gained no significant leads. Two months after Jacob’s abduction, another young boy was pulled into a stranger’s car, molested by the man and then later released (JWRC, 2010). This suspect fit the same description of Jacob’s kidnapper. Based on this incident, law enforcement concluded that the two cases were related and that Jacob had been kidnapped by a sexual offender.

After Jacob’s kidnapping, his parents, Jerry and Patty Wetterling, became advocates for families with missing children. In 1990, the couple established the Jacob Wetterling Foundation to help prevent and reduce the exploitation of innocent children (JWRC, 2010). Furthermore, they advocated for stronger sexual offender registration requirements in Minnesota. Due to significant publicity, the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act (Title XVII of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994) was approved by Congress in August 1994 (Freeman-Longo, 1998; Matson & Lieb, 1997). This federal statute required all states to create and implement a sexual offender registry by September 1997. Failure to do so would result in a mandatory 10% reduction of Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program funding, which provides for state and local crime prevention and control programs (CSOM, 1997; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2007; Matson & Lieb, 1997).
According to the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act, sexual offenders are required to annually register their home address and other identifying information with local law enforcement (42 U.S.C §14071). Most sexual offender laws require registration annually for at least 10 years. On the other hand, those SVPs, regarded as “highly dangerous sexual offenders” are required to register every three months for life (Matson & Lieb, 1997). Under this statute, law enforcement agencies are allowed, at their own discretion, to disclose information to the public regarding an individual’s convictions of sexual crimes or requirement to register, if deemed necessary to protect the safety of the community (CSOM, 2001).

Prior to the implementation of this federal statute, several states contributed to the evolution of current sexual offender legislation. As the first state to implement sexual offender registration requirements, California has been one of the leading advocates in sexual offender legislation (Matson & Lieb, 1997). Similar to Washington’s Community Protection Act of 1990, since 1947 California required sexual offenders to register for life with local law enforcement (CA DOJ, 2008; CSOM, 2001). These laws preceded the implementation of the New Jersey and federal community notification laws.

In October 1994, New Jersey implemented its own version of the Community Protection Act known as “Megan’s Law” (Matson & Lieb, 1997). Jesse Timmendequas, a twice convicted child molester, lived across the street from Megan Kanka with two other convicted sexual offenders. On July 29, 1994, Timmendequas lured Megan into his home, raped her, strangled her and dumped her body in a nearby park (CA DOJ, 2009).
As a result of the rape and murder of Megan Kanka, Megan’s parents advocated for a statewide community notification program in New Jersey (CSOM, 2001; The Megan Nicole Kanka Foundation [MNKF], n.d.; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). Megan’s rape and murder by a repeat sexual offender solidified the need for a community notification program in New Jersey. Megan’s parents still insist had they known about Timmendequas’ past, they would have taken better precautions in protecting their daughter (Jerome & Eftimiades, 1995; Schopf, 1995; Terry & Ackerman, 2009).

New Jersey’s Megan’s Law requires all sexual offenders to register their personal and other identifying information with local law enforcement. Upon registration, the sexual offender’s offense, prison records and various other information can be reviewed by authorities to determine the offender’s level of re-offense risk (CSOM, 2001). This level of risk determines if the sexual offender’s private information should be disclosed to the public. The three levels of risk include low, moderate and high. If the risk of re-offense is low, information is not subject to public disclosure. The sexual offender’s information will only be disclosed to law enforcement agencies likely to encounter the registered offender. If the risk of re-offense is moderate, community organizations such as schools, churches and after school programs will be notified, as well as local law enforcement. On the other hand, if the re-offense risk is high, the sexual offender’s information will be publicly disclosed through “vigorous means” to reach as many members of the community as possible.

Due to the support for this highly publicized New Jersey legislation, President Clinton signed the federal version of Megan’s Law in May 1996 (CSOM, 1997, 2001;
Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; Freeman-Longo & Blanchard, 1998). Megan’s Law, the first amendment to the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act, created a sexual offender community notification system in each state (CA DOJ, 2001; Terry & Ackerman, 2009). In addition to the basic registration requirements set forth by the Jacob Wetterling Registration Act, all high risk and serious sexual offenders were now subject to public disclosure (Matson & Lieb, 1997).

Similar to New Jersey’s Megan’s Law, each sexual offender is assessed in order to determine the level of risk of reoffense (low, moderate, or high risk). Depending on the sexual offender’s level of re-offense risk, law enforcement agencies are allowed to disclose personal and identifying information about sexual offenders to communities upon his/her release (Matson & Lieb, 1997). Given the flexibility of Megan’s Law, each state is responsible for creating and implementing its own community notification system. The federal government merely mandates that each state have a system in which the public can obtain information about registered sexual offenders in the community (CSOM, 2001). It is up to each state to determine how to implement community notification and to what extent.

States also provide notification of released sexual offenders in three different ways: broad notification, notification to those at risk, and passive notification (CSOM, 2001; Matson & Lieb, 1997). States, such as California, use broad notification (Matson & Lieb, 1997). Broad notification refers to the process in which local law enforcement notifies the public when certain sexual offenders are released into the community. For example, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas release information on all sexual offenders...
returning to the community. California only releases information for high risk and serious sexual offenders. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, only offer limited notification to groups perceived to be at greatest risk. This may include schools, day care facilities, churches and/or previous victims of the sexual offender. It is up to these states to use their own discretion to determine who and what groups will be notified upon a sexual offender’s release. Passive notification, the least proactive of the three types of notification, allows the public to access to information about sexual offenders at local law enforcement agencies. States, such as Colorado, allow the public to obtain information about registered sexual offenders during regular business hours. Since each state implements community notification in different ways, it can be difficult to determine who and what should be obtained from a sexual offender at the time of registration.

California’s Megan’s Law

Until the 1990s, California’s sexual offender registration process was virtually unchanged (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009). With the introduction of the federal version of Megan’s Law, each state was required to implement a community notification system. In September 1996, California Assembly Bill No. 1562 was passed, enacting California’s Megan’s Law (Cote, 2002). For the first time, law enforcement agencies were mandated to publicly disclose information about high risk and serious sexual offenders.

Prior to this time, California provided public access to sexual offender information via a “900” phone line (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004, 2008). The “900” line, originally known as the Child Molester Identification Line, was first introduced in July
1995. This line allowed anyone interested to call in and make inquiries on up to two convicted child molesters per phone inquiry. Each call cost $10 and required the caller to provide various identifying information about an alleged child molester. In 2001, the “900” line received nearly 5,200 inquiries resulting in 179 sexual offender “hits” (CA DOJ, 2002). A “hit” occurs when the information provided by the caller matches an individual in the sexual offender registry (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004; Cote, 2002). Once a hit is matched, the caller is informed of the sexual offender’s “high risk” or “serious” status. In addition to the “900” line, individuals wishing to check the status of six or more individuals could submit a “Mail-In Request Form” for a fee of $4 (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004). This allowed organizations, such as businesses working with minors, to check the criminal status of a potential employee or volunteer prior to the start of employment. California was the first state to establish a community notification system of this kind (CA DOJ, 2002).

Upon the passage of the federal Megan’s Law in 1996, the Department of Justice renamed the “900” line to the Sexual Offender Identification Line (SOIL), as the registry now included all registerable sexual offenders subject to public disclosure (Cote, 2002). Shortly thereafter, California introduced a new means of accessing information about registerable sexual offenders. In July 1997, a CD-ROM with all registerable sexual offenders was made available for public viewing at select law enforcement agencies. The law required the California Department of Justice to distribute monthly CD-ROMs to specific law enforcement agencies with information about “high-risk” and “serious” sexual offenders.
Since the CD-ROM was only available for viewing at local law enforcement agencies, it limited the public’s access to information about sexual offenders in the community (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004; Cote, 2002). In addition, if the public wanted to view the CD-ROM, the viewer was required to meet certain requirements prior to viewing. The viewer had to be at least 18 years old, him/herself was not a registered sexual offender, acknowledge that s/he would use the information for personal use and not for retaliatory purposes and provide photo identification (e.g., driver’s license, identification card, etc.). In addition, only California residents could view the CD-ROM. Upon meeting these requirements, the viewer could search the CD-ROM by name, county or zip code (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004). Due to the CD-ROM’s limited availability, law enforcement agencies were able to regulate and control the population wishing to obtain this information. These restrictions helped law enforcement prevent unlawful use of the available information.

Until 2002, the CD-ROMs were only updated on a monthly basis, allowing for information such as a change of a sexual offender’s address, to be incorrect on the actual disk (CA DOJ, 2002, 2004). In March 2002, the California Department of Justice implemented an online sexual offender registry for law enforcement agencies via the department’s private communication network. This database was updated daily and replaced the monthly CD-ROM’s. Translatable into 12 different languages, this program allowed law enforcement to provide the most current information about sexual offenders to diverse populations.
Currently, Californians are able to access information about registered sexual offenders online at the California’s Megan’s Law Website (www.meganslaw.ca.gov/). Due to the enactment of California Assembly Bill No. 488 in December 2004, the public can now view the online sexual offender registry from the comfort of their home (CA DOJ, 2004, 2008). Maintained by the California Department of Justice, the Megan’s Law online registry contains all registerable sexual offenders subject to public disclosure. California Penal Code Section 290, also known as the Sexual Offender Registration Act, mandates that sexual offenders must register with local law enforcement no later than five days after release from prison or to report a change in their residence (CA DOJ, 2004, 2008, 2009). Most sexual offenders must register annually within five days of their birthday. Some sexual offenders, such as transients and SVPs must provide their personal information more often. For example, SVPs are required to register with local law enforcement every 90 days.

Similar to the “900” line and the CD-ROM viewing requirements, the Department of Justice requires online users to agree to the terms and conditions of the website, as well as certify that they meet certain requirements before continued viewing (CA DOJ, 2009). Once the user enters the website, s/he can search for sexual offenders by name, city, zip code, address, or other areas nearby parks and schools. Depending on the registrant’s level of risk, the registrant’s posting may consist of a full home address or simply a zip code.

In California, nearly 25% of registered sexual offenders are excluded from public disclosure on Megan’s Law Website (CA DOJ, 2009). California Penal Code Section
290.46, effective September 2004, created California’s online sexual offender registry, also known as the Megan’s Law Website, and defined which sexual offenders were subject to public disclosure on the website (CA DOJ, 2004, 2008, 2009).

According to Penal Code Section 290.46, there are four public disclosure categories in which a sexual offender’s information may or may not be disclosed to the public (CA DOJ, 2009). The four categories: home address, conditional address, zip code and undisclosed, determine what may be disclosed. The sexual offender categorized under home address must disclose the most personal information. The sexual offender’s name or known aliases, a recent photograph, a physical description, criminal history and home address must be disclosed on the Megan’s Law website. Similar to the home address category, sexual offenders subject to conditional home address must disclose the same information, except his/her home address will not be disclosed until deemed necessary by the Department of Justice. On the other hand, the zip code category refers to sexual offenders with the same provisions as a home address and conditional home address except a full address in not disclosed. Instead, only the zip code in which the sexual offender resides is disclosed. The final sexual offender category is undisclosed. These sexual offenders are required to register with local law enforcement but are not subject to public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website.

Unfortunately, due to its accessibility, the Megan’s Law Website essentially cannot prevent prohibited individuals such as registered sexual offenders or minors from viewing the website. Unlike the “900” line and the CD-ROM, the viewers do not have to provide personal identifying information or undergo a strict screening process prior to
entering the website. Absent of any screening process, virtually anyone can view the website (CA DOJ, 2009). In addition to other various concerns, Megan’s Law online sexual offender registry has some flaws that need to be addressed.

*Megan’s Law & Database Inaccuracies*

Individuals seeking information about sexual offenders expect the listings on the online registries to be accurate. Most viewers believe that the names, addresses and statuses of sexual offenders are accurate and up to date (Herman & Malesky, 2009). Unfortunately, some sexual offender registries contain errors, such as an incorrect address.

In Kentucky, a study found that nearly 25% of the listings on the online sexual offender registry were incorrect (Tewksbury, 2002). Several addresses registered to sexual offenders were non-existent or an actual business location. Similarly, the California State Auditor found significant errors ranging from inaccurate addresses to unknown whereabouts of sexual offenders (CA DOJ, 2004). In 2003, over 23,000 sexual offender records had not been updated in over a year and nearly 14,000 records had not been updated for five years. During the same year, California was subject to another audit regarding the accuracy of the sexual offender registry. The Associated Press found that law enforcement was unable to locate over 33,000 registerable sexual offenders, therefore, almost half of the registerable sexual offenders in California were missing (Curtis, 2003). Most of these inaccuracies were due to the sexual offender failing to register with local law enforcement.
Despite disclaimers listed on the online sexual offender registries regarding possible errors, most people believe that the information provided to the public is accurate (Herman & Malesky, 2009; Levenson & Cotter, 2005b). Sexual offender legislation has been harshly criticized for creating a false sense of security (Terry & Ackerman, 2009). These inaccuracies, unfortunately, mislead the public about the perceived safety of their communities, as well as create problems for law enforcement trying to locate certain sexual offenders.

*Megan’s Law & Sexual Offender Recidivism*

Even after fifteen years, Megan’s Law continues to be endorsed by political figures, law enforcement agencies and communities throughout the United States (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). The community favors public disclosure of sexual offender information and clearly does not want to give up this right. Unfortunately, the public is misinformed about these offenders and their actual recidivism rates.

Although sexual offender legislation aims to protect the community by informing the public of potential predators within their neighborhoods, little to no research has been conducted to determine its effectiveness (Terry & Ackerman, 2009; Welchans, 2005). The public misconception that sexual offenders are the most likely to reoffend is a common argument for community notification laws. In 2004, the Harvard Law Review stated that sexual offenders have higher sexually related re-arrest rates than other offenders, such as murderers (Harvard Law Review, 2004). The researchers suggested that this study alone clearly justified the need for community notification laws.
Contrary to this research, various studies have found that sexual offenders actually have lower re-arrest rates for new sexual crimes when compared to other offender groups (Petrosino & Petrosino, 1999; Sample & Bray, 2006; Schram & Milloy, 1995). For example, Schram and Milloy (1995) compared the recidivism rates among sexual offenders before and after the implementation of Washington’s community notification law. In this study, sexual offenders subject to community notification (“notification”) were compared to those who were not subject to notification (“non-notification”) for 54 months. Each group was similar in relation to sexual crimes committed and the number of victims. Schram and Milloy (1995) found that 57% of the “notification” group compared to 41% of the “non-notification” group committed a new non-sexual crime. Interestingly, they also discovered that the “notification” group was re-arrested for new crimes (non-sexual crime) faster than the “non-notification” group during the same time period. As for sexual related re-offenses, only 19% of the “notification” group reoffended when compared to the 22% of the “non-notification” group. Schram and Milloy (1995) assert that the re-arrest rates were higher for the notification group due to the constant monitoring by law enforcement.

In an extensive study of New Jersey’s Megan’s Law, Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro and Veysey (2008) sought to investigate the impact of sexual offender registration and community notification laws on registerable sexual offenders in New Jersey. This study focused on three main areas: (1) the overall effect of Megan’s Law on the rate of sexual offending; (2) the effect of Megan’s Law on recidivism rates of sexual offenders; and (3) the actual costs of Megan’s Law (including implementation and ongoing costs). After
careful review of each component, Zgoba et al. (2008) suggested that Megan’s Law, similar to the previously addressed studies, had no demonstrable effect on the recidivism of sexual offenders and, therefore, the increasing costs of this program may be unjustified.

Although studies have shown that recidivism rates of sexual offenders are low, community members, on the other hand, believe that sexual offenders have high recidivism rates and all sexual offenders have an equal likelihood to re-offend (Brannon, Levenson, Fortney & Baker, 2007; Sample & Bray, 2006). Community members are often misinformed about sexual offenders and do not necessarily understand that each sexual offender is ranked on their level of risk to re-offend.

**Effects of Megan’s Law on Convicted Sexual Offenders**

Although Megan’s Law is perceived to be free of consequences, sexual offenders may also face major challenges after public disclosure. Several studies have found that most sexual offenders suffer negative consequences, such as job loss and housing disruption, due to Megan’s Law (Levenson, D’Amora & Hern, 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). In addition, most sexual offenders reported some sort of psychological distress related to their public disclosure (Levenson et al., 2007). Participants also cited difficulties in finding employment and increased discrimination as significant consequences of Megan’s Law (Brannon et al., 2007; Levenson et al., 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005b).

Other unintended consequences include increased isolation, financial and emotional stress, and decreased stability (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). Nearly 50% of all
sexual offenders subject to public disclosure reported “dire consequences” such as lack of employment, loss of their home and threats of harassment. Levenson & Cotter (2005a) also discovered that nearly 20% had been physically assaulted by an individual who found them on the state’s sexual offender registry.

Surprisingly, nearly 75% of all sexual offenders believed that community notification inspired them not to reoffend but most disagreed that communities were safer due to the implementation of Megan’s Law (Brannon et al., 2007; Elbogen, Patry & Scalora, 2003; Levenson & Cotter, 2005b; Levenson et al., 2007). Sexual offenders also felt that the collection of their DNA was useful and beneficial to the implementation of the law (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000). Many sexual offenders saw this as a safeguard against being wrongfully accused in future proceedings.

Although most sexual offenders thought Megan’s Law was beneficial to their personal situation, they did not think communities were any safer than before this law was implemented. Again, only a minority of sexual offenders believe Megan’s Law had a positive effect on their lives (Levenson et al., 2007). Since convicted sexual offenders are still regarded as the worst members of society, the public offers little to no sympathy for the consequences sexual offenders may experience as a result of this law.

Effects on Family Members of Convicted Sexual Offenders

Similar to the convicted sexual offenders, the family members of these individuals often experience the same unintended consequences of Megan’s Law. In a recent study, Levenson and Cotter (2005b) discovered that nearly 20% of sexual offenders stated that their families had experienced the same and/or similar consequences as the actual sexual
offender. The most significant hardships experienced by families of sexual offenders included financial hardships, housing disruptions, threats or harassment by neighbors or employers, and loss in employment (Farkas, 2005; HRW, 2007; Levenson & Tewskbury, 2009).

Financial hardships were the most significant problem for family members of sexual offenders (Levenson & Tewskbury, 2009). Since convicted sexual offenders tend to have a difficult time finding or retaining employment, it significantly affected the financial status of the family. In addition, housing disruptions also contributed to financial hardships for the family. Due to new housing restrictions for sexual offenders, more and more sexual offenders are forced to live in rural areas, therefore, making it difficult for the registered sexual offender to find and keep employment, meet transportation needs and ensure housing.

Other problems include threats or harassment from neighbors, employers or sometimes complete strangers. According to Levenson & Tewskbury (2009), nearly one-third of the family members had been threatened or harassed for being related to or living with a registered sexual offender. This includes verbal threats and harassment, physical assault and injury, and property damage. Due to these vigilante acts, some sexual offenders and their families were forced to move out of their homes into new neighborhoods. And, unfortunately, some sexual offenders and their family members had to repeat this cycle over and over again.

Other effects on the children of convicted sexual offenders include differential treatment by teachers or classmates, stigmatization, embarrassment and in some cases,
revictimization. Children are often the most sensitive and react more adversely when they first learn that a family member is a sexual offender (HRW, 2007; Levenson & Tewskbury, 2009). In some cases, their school and teacher are informed of the student’s history and relation to the registered sexual offender. As a result, teachers may feel obligated to treat the student differently than the other students. In addition, classmates may discover, from their parents or other students, that the student’s family member is a sexual offender. In most cases, especially during elementary school and middle school, the child may be ridiculed or physically assaulted for his/her relationship with the sexual offender. Other feelings that may occur are stigmatization and embarrassment. Often times, it is difficult for these children to talk about their feelings or clearly explain how they feel.

Family members of convicted sexual offenders are as much of a “victim” of Megan’s Law as the registered sexual offender. They face the same problems, if not more than the sexual offender. Studies clearly depict the repercussions of the release of the registered sexual offender into the communities and the hardships sexual offenders, as well as their families, must overcome. Although these may be problems experienced by both the sexual offender and his/her family, the public tends to disregard these incidents as a problem.

The Media & Moral Panics

The media also plays a significant role in the public’s perception of crime rates, criminals and the criminal justice system (Kappeler, Blumberg & Potter, 2000; Potter & Kappeler, 2006). Most Americans rely on the media as their primary source for
information about crime (Kappeler et al., 2000; Potter & Kappeler, 2006; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Given so many options, the public may see the same incident from various media sources, including newspapers, radio and television broadcasts and the internet. Unfortunately, since the media’s main goal is to sell stories and get higher ratings than the competition, they also tend to overdramatize and sensationalize crimes, or construct crime myths, in the areas they broadcast.

Crime myths, or the society’s view on crime problems and their solutions, are formed by various groups such as the media and the government (Kappeler et al., 2000). According to Kappeler et al. (2000), “the social construction of myths of crime and criminal justice seems to follow a series of recurrent patterns. These patterns allow a disproportionate amount of social attention to be focused on a few isolated criminal events or issues” (p. 4). Although a significant problem may or may not exist, the media tends to treat each incident as an epidemic (Cote, 2002; Kappeler et al., 2000).

The media’s overdramatization and sensationalization of rare events, such as the kidnapping of Jacob Wetterling and the murder of Megan Kanka, create a sense of disorder within the community. This disorder, or moral panic, causes the public to perceive a rare event as an immediate threat to society (Altheide, 2009; Cohen, 2002; Potter & Kappeler, 2006). Both crime myths and moral panics play a significant role in how the public views and understands crime (Cohen, 2002; Kappeler et al., 2000; Potter & Kappeler, 2006).

By increasing the public’s awareness of these rare violent events, the media ensures the marketability and success of its program. Violent crimes create fear and
uneasiness. As a result, the media shapes the public’s view and perceptions of these incidents, as well as influences the way Americans perceive crime in their communities (Freeman-Longo & Blanchard, 1998). Moral panics and crime myths have had major repercussion on the public’s view of crime rates for the past few decades.

Starting in the 1980s, the media spent a tremendous amount of time and resources informing the public on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the community and the available resources for victims (Freeman-Longo & Blanchard, 1998). As more people became aware of this crime, more child sexual abuse cases were reported to the police and the crime rates drastically increased. The media suggested that child sexual abuse was on the rise and warned parents of strangers around their children. Freeman-Longo and Blanchard (1998) suggest that the media had a direct effect on public knowledge of sexual child abuse, therefore increasing the number of reported cases. The media tends to promote a sense of disorder in the community and create the illusion that society is out of control, when in all actuality, crime rates are decreasing (Altheide, 2009).

Continuing in the 1990s, crime rates continued to drastically decline but the media focused on exceptional cases of violence and sexual crimes committed against children (Kappeler et al., 2000; Potter & Kappeler, 2006). Jacob Wetterling and Megan Kanka, both attacked by strangers, were rare acts of violence; but to the media, they were the beginning of an epidemic. The media warned parents to be careful of possible sexual predators around their children. Again, the media misinformed the public on the prevalence of sexual abuse. Welchans (2005) found that most sexual crimes committed
against children are not committed by strangers; in fact, in 90% of sexual abuse cases, the victim knew the perpetrator (Welchans, 2005).

As the public continues to focus on the fear of crime and the safety of children, legislators will continue to push for stricter laws and punishments against violent offenders. Although legislators try to implement policies for the greater good, most decisions are politically driven and self-serving (Sample & Kadlec, 2008). Legislators use emotion rather than logic when making decisions about criminal justice policies. In contrast to academic leaders who suggest more research on the actual causes of crime, legislators are more likely to advocate for reactive stringent punishments for criminals (Kappeler et al., 2000). For example, only one member of Congress voted against the federal passage of Megan’s Law in 1996. Since the public did not want to see another “Megan” happen, they heavily pressured legislators to pass this law.

Another contributing group to the construction of crime myths and moral panics is law enforcement agencies and community members. Redlich (2001) has shown that law enforcement agencies are most supportive of community notification laws and consider the law to be effective and crucial to the public’s safety. Community members, particularly women, also thought that Megan’s Law was important and effective in the prevention of future crimes. On the other hand, other groups such as law students were least supportive of community notification than all three groups. Individuals afraid for their personal safety or those who spend a significant amount of time around convicted sexual offenders are more likely to support registration and community notification of the sexual offender.
When the media focuses on crime and the need for new or more stringent criminal justice policies, the public tends to pay attention to the criminal justice system and its policies (McCorkle, 1993). As a result, individuals who access several forms of media tend to have more knowledge and stronger opinions about public policies (Drew & Weaver, 1990). Individuals who read the newspaper or watch the news more often are more likely to be afraid of crime (Stroman & Seltzer, 1985).

Page, Shapiro and Dempsey (1987) examined television news broadcasters and their opinions of certain policies in relation to the opinions of the public. The researchers wanted to determine if the opinions of the public shifted with that of the news broadcasters. It was determined that there was a relationship, although weak, between the news broadcasters’ views on certain policies and public support. It also found that credible sources such as news commentators and popular Presidents tend to have more influence on the public opinions than that of unpopular commentators and weaker Presidents. For example, a strong, confident public speaker will be more credible than someone who stumbles over his/her words. Confident news broadcasters catch the attention of the listening public and create a sense of credibility that the viewer continues to believe and watch.

Due to the public’s tendency to view several media outlets, most individuals learn about significant political and crime related issues from several sources. According to a study by Katz-Schiavone, Levenson and Ackerman (2008), most participants received their information regarding public policy, such as sexual offender legislation, through
popular media. Unfortunately, the general viewer tends to have misconstrued or negative perceptions of sexual offenders as a result of the stereotypes created by the media (Quinn, Forsyth & Mullen-Quinn, 2004).

Since the media continues to create inaccurate depictions of criminals, the public’s perception of the criminal justice system is essential. In a study regarding the effect of media on the perceptions of Megan’s Law, the researchers found that media exposure and attention to criminal investigations increased the public’s awareness of criminal justice policies but did not affect the knowledge of Megan’s Law (Proctor et al., 2002). The researchers also found that the media greatly influences public opinion and crime policies.

Although the media has greatly influenced the public’s perception and the knowledge of criminal justice policies, the number of individuals accessing the online sexual offender registries is surprising. Studies have shown that most respondents were aware of the available sexual offender registries but few accessed the online website (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Herman & Malesky, 2009; Kernsmith, Comartin, Caun, & Kernsmith, 2009). For example, a survey of college students in North Carolina found over 50% of students had knowledge of the online sexual offender registry but just over one-quarter had actually viewed the website (Herman & Malesky, 2009). Anderson and Sample (2008) also found that most respondents learned about registered sexual offenders in their communities via other means such as family and friends, television and newspapers.
A recent Gallup telephone poll of approximately 1,000 adults also had similar results. Although most states have a public sexual offender registry, only one-third (38%) of respondents knew of the registry and over half of the respondents (58%) were unsure if their state actually had a registry (Saad, 2005). The researchers also found that over two-thirds of Americans thought it was likely that a sexual offender lived in their neighborhood but a less than one-quarter had actually checked their state’s sexual offender registry. Interestingly, men were slightly more likely than women to view their state’s sexual offender registries; respondents with minor children were also more likely to view the registries than those without children.

Similarly, Evans (2007) concluded that individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to access online sexual offender registries; but again, only a minority of respondents, including those with minor children, actually checked the online registries. These studies have found that the media greatly influences the knowledge of criminal justice policies such as Megan’s law, and more educated individuals frequently access online sexual offender registries.

**Criminal Justice College Students & Knowledge of Criminal Justice Policies**

While the general public relies on the media for information, criminal justice college students tend to base their opinion and knowledge on reliable empirical research (Benekos et al., 2002). The general public often receives incorrect or misinterpreted information about the criminal justice system, crime and criminals from the media. Instead of relying purely on mass media, criminal justice college students have better access and more resources to information regarding these policies.
Criminal justice students tend to be more knowledgeable about criminal justice issues and have different perspectives covering a broader range of topics than non-criminal justice students (Tsoudis, 2000). Criminal justice students with higher class level (junior and senior status) are also more knowledgeable than lower class members (freshman and sophomore status) and/or other majors (Bell et al., 2008; Kelley & Stack, 1997; King & Reddick, 2008; Tsoudis, 2000; Vandiver & Giacopassi, 1997). The research suggests that majoring in criminal justice can be an effective way to influence the criminal justice system and increase knowledge among the general public.

Theoretical Framework

Although a criminal justice education may influence the future of the criminal justice system, the knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice majors are essential to understand. Individuals with higher levels of education, such as a college degree, tend to have more liberal views toward crime and punishment than those without (Astin, 1977; Benekos et al., 2002; Tsoudis, 2000). Several studies have suggested that college majors undergo attitudinal changes throughout their college career; this is often referred to as the “liberalizing effect” (Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth et al., 1998; Guller, 1972; McCorkle, 1993; Tsoudis, 2000). In this discussion, the “liberalizing effect” of criminal justice majors refers to less punitive views toward criminals, their punishment and the entire criminal justice system.

Farnsworth et al. (1998) suggest that a liberalizing effect from a college education is weaker for criminal justice majors than other majors and criminal justice students may actually enter college with more punitive attitudes. For example, studies found that
criminal justice majors tend to hold more punitive views that other college majors (Lambert, 2004; Selke, 1980). Conversely, Benekos et al. (2002) argue that there is evidence that criminal justice majors actually undergo changes in their perceptions, but the relationship between the criminal justice education and changes in the respondent’s attitude is not entirely clear.

Unfortunately, criminal justice students may fall error to biased assimilation when taking a stance on a subject. Biased assimilation refers to the tendency for individuals to favor, or have a bias, toward a particular view even though evidence presented proves his/her belief wrong (Greitmeyer et al., 2009; Lambert & Clarke, 2004; Lord et al., 1979). Individuals who hold strong opinions on particular topics, especially controversial social issues, are more likely to be biased toward their personal belief and exhibit “attitude polarization” despite conflicting evidence (Lord et al., 1979).

In a study of college students on their views on the death penalty, Lord et al. (1979) presented evidence proving and disproving the deterrence effect of the death penalty. In the initial stages of the study, the researchers distributed surveys asking individuals about their opinions on the deterrence effect of the death penalty. From this sample, the researchers selected individuals who identified themselves as pro-deterrence and anti-deterrence of the death penalty. The researchers then asked the respondents to read two fabricated studies, one supporting a pro-deterrence effect and another supporting the anti-deterrence effect, and rate if their opinion, after reading these studies, changed. Each fabricated study contained substantial evidence supporting either the pro-deterrence or the anti-deterrence and provided well thought out case studies. In each case, the
respondents became “polarized,” or agreed with studies that solidified their original opinion and rejected those that did not; this is known as “attitude polarization” (p. 2105).

Biased assimilation and attitude polarization can be directly applied to that of criminal justice majors. For example, lower division criminal justice students may not know that the information presented by the media is not entirely true. Therefore, these students will have preconceived notions of inaccurate crime rates, criminals and the criminal justice system when entering college. In some cases, these views may continue throughout their college experience despite the information presented in their criminal justice courses.

It is necessary for criminal justice practitioners, including college students, to be aware of personal biases when forming conclusions and opinions on social issues. In order to better prepare students for their future in the criminal justice field, it is necessary to address the knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice students throughout their college experience. In this study, knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among criminal justice upper division students and pre-criminal justice lower division students at Sacramento State University will be examined.

Hypotheses

This study hopes to prove or disprove the following hypotheses:

- $H_{01}$ – Criminal justice courses will not influence the respondent’s knowledge of Megan’s Law.
• $H_{a1}$ – A higher percentage of criminal justice upper division majors (juniors and seniors) will correctly answer questions on Megan’s Law than pre-criminal justice lower division students (freshmen and sophomores).

• $H_{02}$ – Criminal justice courses will not influence the respondent’s perceptions and/or attitudes of Megan’s Law.

• $H_{a2}$ – A higher percentage of criminal justice upper division majors (juniors and seniors) will have less punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders than pre-criminal justice lower division students (freshmen and sophomores).
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among the public and even criminal justice college students is lacking. This is true even though criminal justice students have better access and more resources to information regarding policies on such topics as Megan’s Law, than the general public (Benekos et al., 2002). It was believed that criminal justice students, especially upper division students, would be more knowledgeable about all criminal justice issues and have more informed perspectives than lower division criminal justice and/or non-criminal justice students (Bell et al., 2008; Kelley & Stack, 1997; King & Reddick, 2008; Tsoudis, 2000; Vandiver & Giacopassi, 1997). It is also true that these college students, particularly lower division criminal justice students, tend to have more punitive views toward crime, criminals and the criminal justice system than non-criminal justice majors (Lambert, 2004; Selke, 1980).

As criminal justice students continue through college, it is essential to determine if the lessons taught to criminal justice majors have an effect on their knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice issues. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have more liberal views of crime and punishment (Astin, 1977; Benekos et al., 2002; Tsoudis, 2000). This attitudinal change throughout a college career is known as the “liberalizing effect” (Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth et al., 1998; Guller, 1972; McCorkle, 1993; Tsoudis, 2000). Although research has shown that many non-criminal justice majors experience this “liberalizing effect,” research for criminal justice majors is lacking (Benekos et al., 2002; Farnsworth et al., 1998).
Further areas of concern include possible biased assimilation and attitude polarization among criminal justice students (Greitmeyer et al., 2009; Lambert & Clarke, 2004; Lord et al., 1979). As a result, criminal justice lower division students may have inaccurate knowledge and perceptions of crime, criminals and the criminal justice system.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among pre-criminal justice and criminal justice students at Sacramento State University. In contrast to earlier research, this research hopes to show that criminal justice upper division students are more knowledgeable about Megan’s Law and have less punitive views of this law than criminal justice lower division students.

**Research Design**

This explanatory study seeks to show a relationship between the respondent’s undergraduate grade level in the criminal justice program and the respondent’s knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law. The purpose of explanatory research is to understand the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Babbie, 2007). In this study, the independent variable is the respondent’s enrollment in one of the two criminal justice major classes (CRJ 004 or CRJ 194). The dependent variables are (1) knowledge of Megan’s Law and (2) perceptions and/or attitudes about Megan’s Law. These variables will be further discussed in subsequent sections of this thesis.
**Human Subjects Approval**

Since this study involved human subjects subject to minimal risk, the researcher was required to obtain approval from the Criminal Justice Division and the University’s Human Subjects Committee before collecting any data (Office of Research Administration, 2009). In February 2010, the Criminal Justice Division-level Human Subjects committee reviewed the researcher’s application and categorized the research as “minimal risk.” Research falling into this category required final approval from the University’s Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) before any data could be collected. In March 2010, CPHS approved the research as “minimal risk.”

**Eligibility**

In order for an individual to be eligible for this study, the respondent must have been at least 18 years of age or older and enrolled in either CRJ 004 – General Investigation Techniques or Society or CRJ 194 – Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice during the Spring 2010 semester. CRJ 004 and CRJ 194 are required courses for criminal justice majors. During this semester, four sections of CRJ 004 and seven sections of CRJ 194 were offered. Each section of CRJ 004 had approximately 75 students; one section of CJ 004 had approximately 115 students. CRJ 194 had approximately 30 students per section.

CRJ 004 is an introductory criminal justice course primarily taken by lower division pre-criminal justice students. Pre-criminal justice students are not allowed to take any upper division courses or become a criminal justice major until the four lower division courses (CRJ 001, CRJ 002, CRJ 004 and CRJ 005) are completed. In contrast,
CRJ 194 is a writing intensive courses restricted to criminal justice majors. Typically this course is restricted to criminal justice seniors but in some cases, criminal justice juniors may be enrolled in this course.

Participants

Two hundred and eighteen undergraduate students (120 men and 98 women) at Sacramento State University participated in the study. The sample was roughly the same in terms of respondents from each class (51.4% CRJ 004 and 48.6% CRJ 194). Of these respondents, 55 percent (n = 120) were male and 45 percent (n = 98) were female. The age range of the respondents was between 18 and 41 years old, with a median age of 22. Of these respondents, 29 percent (n = 63) were pre-criminal justice majors, 62.7 percent (n = 136) were criminal justice majors and the remaining 8.3 percent (n = 18) were undeclared or other majors.

The CRJ 194 class sections primarily consisted of criminal justice seniors (98.1%, n = 104). In this sample, a small percentage of the respondents (1.9%, n = 2) were criminal justice juniors. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents were male (n = 63) and only 40 percent were female (n = 43). In comparison to the CRJ 194 class sections, the CRJ 004 had a more diverse population. Although the majority of the students were pre-criminal justice majors (56.8%, n = 63), the remaining respondents identified themselves as criminal justice majors (27.0%, n = 30), undeclared (2.7%, n = 3) and other majors (13.5%, n = 15). In this sample, most respondents (62.1%, n = 69) were lower division students (freshmen and sophomores); the remaining students (37.8%, n = 42) identified themselves as upper division students (juniors and seniors). In these CRJ 004 class
sections, approximately the same number of males (50.9%, n = 57) and females (49.1%, n = 55) participated.

Sampling Procedure

The study used a simple random sampling procedure of CRJ 004 and CRJ 194 sections offered during the selected semester. The sampling frame consisted of all sections of CRJ 004 and CRJ 194 offered during the Spring 2010 semester; this produced approximately 500 students. In order for the sample to be representative of the population, a sample size calculator found online on the Creative Research Systems website (http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm) was employed (Creative Research Systems, 2010). By using this sample size calculator, an appropriate sample size was identified. Using a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5, the sample calculator determined that a sample size of at least 219 respondents was necessary.

In order to obtain the requisite number of respondents from each course, two sections of CRJ 004 and four sections of CRJ 194 were randomly selected. All the available sections of CRJ 004 and CRJ 194 were arranged into two columns. Using the Sacramento State’s online class schedule, the class sections remained in the same order listed on the website. Each section was numbered consecutively, starting at one, for each class. For example, the CRJ 194 sections were numbered one through seven. Once class sections were numbered, a random number generator (http://www.randomizer.org/form.htm) determined the order in which the class sections would be selected (Research Randomizer, 2010).
**Gaining Access**

In order to gain access to the students, professors from each of the randomly selected sections were contacted. Conversations, either in person or by email, described the proposed research and requirements of participating in the study (see Professor Script, Appendix A). The professors were provided with copies of the class script which outlined the actual verbal instructions to the students, the consent form and the self-administered survey. Upon approval, an agreed upon time to distribute the surveys to the class was established. In cases in which a professor did not grant access to his/her classroom, the researcher went to the next section on the list, and so forth.

**Data Collection**

Due to the nature of this study, a quantitative approach using self-administered surveys was used. The surveys were distributed to the randomly selected class sections during April and May 2010. A total of two sections of CRJ 004 and four sections of CRJ 194 were sampled.

In order to standardize the administration process, a brief script was read in each class (see Appendix B). The script introduced the researcher, the purpose of the study, a brief discussion of the consent form and the survey, and the voluntariness of participation. Since the study involved human subjects, consent from those willing to participate was secured. For ethical reasons, voluntary participation is absolutely necessary in social research (Babbie, 2007). By using the script, voluntary participation and informed consent were highlighted.
After reading the script to the class, a consent form and survey was distributed to each student in the selected class. The consent form was attached to the front of the survey. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, respondent eligibility, sampling procedures, possible risks and discomforts, benefits of participating in the study and issues regarding anonymity and voluntary participation (see Appendix C).

Each student was required to read the consent form before deciding to participate or not participate in the research study. Due to anonymity concerns, the respondents’ names were not requested or included on the surveys. As a result, a signed written consent was not obtained. If the participant chose to participate, s/he completed the attached survey, therefore providing implied consent. If s/he did not meet the requirements to participate (i.e., proper age requirement) or chose not to participate, s/he did not complete the survey. Students that chose not to participate returned their blank survey when surveys were collected. Therefore, non-participants did not influence the remaining respondents’ willingness to participate. In addition, this reduced the chance that the individual choosing not to participate might be embarrassed or singled out by others for his/her decision. The respondents were asked to remove the consent form for their own records.

To allow for the most time to complete the survey, the study commenced at the beginning of class. The respondents were allowed approximately 20 minutes of time to complete the survey; in most cases, respondents were finished in 10-15 minutes. After distributing the surveys to the class, the researcher left the room. Once all respondents had finished, surveys, including the blank forms, were collected. The surveys were
placed in a large manila envelope and left untouched until all class sections completed the survey.

*Strengths & Weaknesses of Self-Administered Surveys*

In comparison to other research designs, the use of self-administered surveys has its strengths and weaknesses. The main advantage of self-administered surveys is that it is generally cheaper than other survey methods (Babbie, 2007). In addition, self-administered surveys tend to be more effective for sensitive issues. For example, perceptions of sexual offenses may be difficult for a respondent to discuss with a complete stranger. Other strengths include the ability to sample large populations, the flexibility of possible survey questions and data analysis and standardization of its implementation.

In contrast, the use of self-administered surveys in research also has its weaknesses. The standardization of self-administered surveys can also be deemed a weakness. For example, questions that are designed for most respondents may actually leave out some of the population. Other concerns include limited answers that cannot be explained or further discussed with an interviewer and tend to be inflexible.

*Instrumentation*

The self-administered survey consisted of a twenty-six questions related to the respondent’s knowledge, attitude and/or perceptions and personal usage of California’s Megan’s Law (see Appendix D). The survey also asked for demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity/race, and educational level. The self-administered survey consisted mostly of closed ended questions. Using an existing survey on Megan’s
Law as a starting point, several questions were modified to fit the needs of this current study (Baker, 2003).

In Part I of the survey, the respondents were asked to answer questions about their knowledge of Megan’s Law and how they learned about this law. This section consisted of eight questions. The first question asked the respondent to identify the class (CRJ 004 or CRJ 194) s/he were currently enrolled. The second question, a contingency question, asked respondents if they had any knowledge of Megan’s Law. If the respondent did not have any knowledge of Megan’s Law, s/he was asked to skip to the final section of the survey, Part IV - Background Information, and answer general demographic questions. If the respondent answered yes to the second question, meaning s/he had knowledge of Megan’s Law, s/he was asked to complete the survey. The remaining questions, consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions, were used to test the respondent’s knowledge of Megan’s Law.

In Part II, the respondents were required to answer eight questions about their perceptions and attitudes of Megan’s Law. Using a matrix, the respondents were asked six Likert scale questions about their perceptions and attitudes of Megan’s Law. The respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). These questions asked about the perceived effectiveness of Megan’s Law, which sex offenders should or should not be subjected to public disclosure, and if Megan’s Law was a violation of sexual offender’s constitutional rights. The remaining two questions were multiple choice questions regarding the likelihood a sexual offender lives in the respondent’s neighborhood and the
respondent’s level of concern involving vigilantism against sexual offenders.

In Part III, the respondents were asked about their personal usage of California’s Megan’s Law Website and family demographic questions. This section consisted of five contingency and/or open ended questions. The first three questions asked respondents about their personal usage of the California’s Megan’s Law Website, such as the number of times and when s/he accessed the website. The two remaining questions asked the respondents if they had any children, as well as any minor children living with him/her. If the respondents had or lived with any children, they were asked to list how many children, their ages and gender of each.

In the final section, Part IV, the respondents were asked general background demographics including gender, age, undergraduate class level, major and race/ethnic background. Although some respondents did not have any knowledge of Megan’s Law and were not required to complete the survey, this section could have been completed by all respondents.

Codebook & Data Entry

Since the researcher collected data through the use of self-administered surveys, the researcher need to create a codebook (see Appendix E). A codebook lists all the variables and describes how each answer on the survey will be coded for data analysis (Vogt, 1999). Variables in the codebook reflect shortened versions of the questions on the survey. For example, CLASS reflected the first question on the survey: “In what class are you currently enrolled?” This dichotomous question was coded as 1 = CRJ 004 and 2 = CRJ 194. For purposes of this study, only closed ended questions were included
in the codebook. All open ended questions were entered into a separate document and will be discussed further in the data analysis.

In the initial stages of the data coding, the data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. This allowed the researcher to check for input errors before uploading to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and conducting data analysis. Codebooks and accurate data coding are essential to data analysis (Babbie, 2007). If the codebook is inconsistent or the data is coded incorrectly, the data analysis will be invalid.

Reliability & Validity

Reliability and validity is essential for any research study. Reliability refers to the replication of similar measures leading to similar results (Babbie, 2007). Validity, on the other hand, refers to whether or not the concept in question actually measures what it is intended to measure.

The reliability of the research is influenced by the sampling technique being used. It is a technique that has been used by many researchers and is considered a reliable method. Due to the standardization of its administration, the reliability of the study increased. For example, the use of a pre-written script to introduce the study to the selected sections and the administration of the same survey to all respondents, the researcher was able to increase reliability.

Although survey research tends to increase the reliability of a study, the validity tends to be weak (Babbie, 2007). Some validity concerns may be related to how the respondent interprets the question on the self-administered survey. In order to increase validity of the study, clear, easily understood, directions and definitions of any terms
were provided. For example, the researcher created questions that were clearly written and easily understood for the general population.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of the study, there are several limitations that must be addressed. The use of self-administered surveys, the limited sample and the respondent’s perception of voluntariness are areas of concern. Due to the nature of self-administered surveys, the research depended on the self-report from each respondent. In some cases, the respondent may have withheld or exaggerated information on the survey. By relying on this information, invalid conclusions about the sample are possible.

Another limitation of the study was the sampling frame. The sampling frame consisted of a small number of students enrolled at Sacramento State University. As a result, the data cannot be generalized to the greater population because the sample population was specific to students enrolled in two criminal justice courses at this institution during the Spring 2010 semester.

Although the respondents were told that their participation was completely voluntary, some respondents may have felt pressured to participate in the study. Although they were told that participation would neither positively or negatively affect their grade in the class, an individual may have felt pressured into completing the survey.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In the initial stages of the data analysis, frequency distributions of all variables were examined. This allowed for the review of each variable and check for errors such as missing values and inconsistent data. Once these issues were resolved, cross-tabulations of the independent and dependent variables were conducted. A total of 11 cross-tabulations were used in the analysis. Table 1 presents all the variables used in the study and its corresponding survey question.

Table 1 - Definition of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFTENREG: Excluding transients and sexually violent predators, how often does a convicted sex offender have to register their personal information with local law enforcement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBDISCL: Which category of sex offender(s) is (are) subject to public disclosure on the California’s Megan’s Law Website?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGLIFE: True or False: In California, convicted sex offenders are required to register their personal information for life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOJTRACK: True or False: The Department of Justice is responsible for tracking registered sex offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISUFINE: True or False: The misuse of sex offender registrant information may result in monetary fines and criminal penalties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLEFFECT: Megan’s Law is an effective means of preventing repeated violations by convicted sex offenders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception/Attitude Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALLDISCL: All convicted sex offenders should be subject to public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website, regardless of their offense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMESOPD: Only serious or high risk sex offenders’ information should be subject to public disclosure on Megan’s Law Website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOEXCLUS: Some sex offenders should be given the opportunity to apply for exclusion from public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILCONST: Megan’s Law is a violation of a sex offender’s constitutional rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOHARASS: How concerned are you that Megan’s Law may lead to harassment of the people whose names are on the website?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to obtain a better understanding of respondents’ knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law, responses were further collapsed into similar categories. For example, Likert scale questions (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure or no opinion, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) were collapsed into three categories: disagree, unsure/no opinion and agree. Other categories, such as multiple choice or true/false knowledge questions, were coded as 0 = incorrect answer and 1 = correct answer. Once these categories were collapsed, both independent and dependent variables were analyzed as nominal level variables. Through the use of the cross-tabulations, a chi-square test for independence was conducted.

The chi-square test for independence determined that there was a statistically significant difference between respondents enrolled in one of the two criminal justice courses and various knowledge and perception/attitude variables. If the analysis rejected the null hypothesis, it was assumed that the two variables were related to each other (Bachman & Paternoster, 2009). If the analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis, the two variables were assumed to be unrelated, or independent of each other.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the two criminal justice courses. The two groups appear to be very different in terms of age, undergraduate class level and declared major. For example, CRJ 004 students tend to be younger (age 18-21), pre-criminal/criminal justice lower division students (freshmen and sophomores). CRJ 194 students were typically older (age 22-25) criminal justice upper division students. In contrast, the two groups tend to be similar in gender and race/ethnicity; most respondents were white/Caucasian males.
Table 2 - Participant Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CRJ 004 (N = 112)</th>
<th>CRJ 194 (N = 106)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate Class Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Declared Major</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Criminal Justice</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or Caucasian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
The major finding in this study is the respondents’ general knowledge of Megan’s Law. Ninety-five percent (n = 207) of the respondents stated s/he had knowledge of Megan’s Law prior to completing the survey. Few respondents (5.0%, n = 11), all CRJ 004 students, had no knowledge of Megan’s Law. Most respondents stated s/he learned about Megan’s Law from criminal justice coursework and/or television. Figure 1 presents the general knowledge of Megan’s Law between the two criminal justice courses. The figure shows that all CRJ 194 (n = 106) students and only 90.2% (n = 101) of CRJ 004 students had knowledge of Megan’s Law. As shown, all respondents that had no knowledge of Megan’s Law were CRJ 004 students.

**Figure 1 - Respondents' General Knowledge of Megan’s Law**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>CRJ 004</th>
<th>CRJ 194</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #1 – Knowledge of Megan’s Law**

In order to test the hypothesis that upper division criminal justice students have more knowledge of Megan’s Law than pre-criminal justice lower division students, six “knowledge” variables were measured. Using the chi-square for independence test with a significance level of 0.05, the knowledge variables were compared to the independent
variable in a series of cross-tabulations. The results of these tests are presented in Table 3. For each variable, the chi-square statistic, the degrees of freedom, its significance value and the sample decision are presented. The sample decision refers to the rejection or failure to reject the null hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Variable</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig (2 sided)</th>
<th>Sample Decision*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFTENREG</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLDISCL</td>
<td>7.088</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>Reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGLIFE</td>
<td>4.096</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>Reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOJTRACK</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISUFINE</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLEFFECT</td>
<td>8.864</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>Reject null</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ 0.05

The results from the chi-square test for the knowledge variables were mixed. Three of the knowledge variables (PUBLDISCL, REGLIFE, and MLEFFECT) were related to one another; therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis. For example, a significant relationship was found ($X^2(1) = 7.088, p > 0.05$) between the respondent’s course and sexual offenders subject to public disclosure (PUBLDISCL). The question asked, “Which category of sex offenders are subject to public disclosure on the California’s Megan’s Law Website?” The correct answer was only high risk and serious risk sexual offenders. Eighty-nine percent (n = 178) of all respondents, regardless of class standing, incorrectly answered this question. Most respondents believed that all sexual offenders (low, high and serious risk) were subject to public disclosure on California’s Megan’s
Law. Despite the low number of respondents who correctly answered the question, a higher percentage of upper division criminal justice students (16.8%, n = 17) were correct than lower division criminal justice students (5.1%, n = 5).

Another significant finding was the respondents’ knowledge regarding the perceived effectiveness of Megan’s Law. Although this question was originally intended to test the respondents’ perception/attitudes of Megan’s Law, this variable (MLEFFECT) actually tested the respondent’s knowledge of Megan’s Law. Research has shown that Megan’s Law is not an effective means of lowering recidivism rates among sexual offenders subject to public disclosure (Brannon, et al., 2007; Sample & Bray, 2006; Zgoba et al., 2008). Using a Likert scale, the respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “Megan’s Law is an effective means of preventing violations by convicted sex offenders.” For this question, a “disagree” was coded as correct and an “agree” or “unsure/no opinion” answer were coded as incorrect. From this analysis, a significant relationship was found ($X^2(2) = 8.864, p > 0.05$) between the respondent’s course and the effectiveness of Megan’s Law. Over 48 percent (n = 51) of CRJ 194 students correctly answered the question. In contrast, only 30 percent (n = 30) of CRJ 004 students answered correctly. This suggests that upper division criminal justice students have more knowledge of sexual offender recidivism rates and the actual effectiveness of Megan’s Law.

The remaining knowledge variables (OFTENREG, DOJTRACK and MISUFINE) were found to have no significant relationship between the variables; therefore, the data failed to reject the null hypothesis. The most interesting finding was the relationship
between the respondent’s criminal justice course and their knowledge of sexual offender registration requirements (OFTENREG). This knowledge variable asked the following, “Excluding transients and sexually violent predators, how often does a convicted sex offender have to register their personal information with local law enforcement.” The chi-square test found no significant relationship ($X^2(1) = 0.940, p < 0.05$) between the two variables. Although most students (68.5%) correctly answered this question, more CRJ 004 students ($n = 71, 71.7\%$) knew the correct answer than CRJ 194 students ($n = 66, 65.3\%$). It appears that slightly more CRJ 004 lower division students know about how often sexual offenders must register than CRJ 194 criminal justice upper division students.

The two remaining variables (DOJTRACK and MISUFINE), both dichotomously measured, tested the respondent’s knowledge of the agency responsible for tracking sexual offenders in California and the penalties for misusing information on the online sexual offender registry. Both variables presented little to no difference between the two courses regarding the knowledge of Megan’s Law. For example, nearly 74% of both CRJ 004 and CRJ 194 knew that the Department of Justice was responsible for tracking sexual offenders in California (DOJTRACK). Similar results were found for penalties and sanctions for the misuse of information found online sexual offender registries (MISUFINE). Although most respondents correctly answered this question, slightly more CRJ 194 students (90.6%) were correct than CRJ 004 students (87.1%).

Although more upper division criminal justice students correctly answered more questions, the data reveals little difference between the knowledge of the two criminal
justice courses and thus class levels. The data presented very few instances in which the criminal justice upper division students had more knowledge of Megan’s Law than pre-criminal justice lower division students, and vice versa.

*Research Question #2 – Perceptions & Attitudes of Megan’s Law*

To test the hypothesis that upper division criminal justice students have less punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders than pre-criminal justice lower division students, five “perception/attitude” variables were tested. In order to determine the level of punitiveness, each perception/attitude question was evaluated to determine what answer (disagree or agree) would be defined as either less punitive or more punitive. For example, respondents who agreed that all sexual offenders should be subject to public disclosure were coded as “more punitive;” in contrast, respondents that disagreed were coded as “less punitive.” As previously stated, the chi-square test for independence was conducted. The results of these tests are summarized in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception/attitude Variables</th>
<th>(X^2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig (2 sided)</th>
<th>Sample Decision*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALLDISCL</td>
<td>21.439</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMESOPD</td>
<td>2.246</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOEXCLUS</td>
<td>10.913</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>Reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILCONST</td>
<td>3.993</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOHARASS</td>
<td>2.287</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>Fail to reject null</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p \leq 0.05*

Similar to the knowledge variables, the results of the cross-tabulations of the perception/attitude variables were mixed. Over half of the variables (SOMESOPD,
VILCONST and SOHARASS) were assumed to be independent of each other; therefore, failing to reject the null hypothesis. The two remaining variables (ALLDISCL and SOEXCLUS) were assumed to be related to each other, therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis.

The most significant finding of the analysis was the level of punitiveness among the two courses and the concern for possible violations of a sexual offender’s constitutional rights (VILCONST). This question asked the respondent to rate if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “Megan’s Law is a violation of a sex offender’s constitutional rights.” Overall, 81% (n = 167) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. These respondents were assumed to have punitive views toward sexual offenders and perceived violation of their constitutional rights. Although most respondents disagreed with this statement, therefore, having punitive views, a higher percentage of CRJ 194 students (83.0%) disagreed with the statement than CRJ 004 students (78.2%).

Another significant finding was the level of punitiveness exhibited between the two courses and the level of concern regarding possible harassment of sexual offenders subject to public disclosure (SOHARASS). Over 66% (n = 137) of the respondents were not concerned about possible harassment of sexual offenders found on the online registry; therefore, holding punitive views of sexual offenders. In addition, a higher percentage of CRJ 194 students (68.9%) were not concerned about harassment of sexual offenders, in comparison to CRJ 004 students (63.4%) that answered the same. This suggests that
upper division and lower division students have punitive views regarding sexual offender harassment.

In contrast, the results of the chi-square test for the remaining two variables (ALLDISCL and SOEXCLUS) were shown to be statistically significant. A significant relationship ($X^2(2) = 21.439, p > 0.05$) was found between the criminal justice course and the level of punitiveness regarding which sexual offenders should be subject to public disclosure on the online registries (ALLDISCL). Respondents who believed that all sexual offenders, regardless of their offense, should be subject to public disclosure were determined to have punitive views. Almost 70% (n = 68) of CRJ 004 students held punitive views of sexual offenders. In contrast, only 46% (n = 49) of CRJ 194 students shared this belief.

The final perception/attitude variable, SOEXCLUS, had mixed results. The respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “Some sex offenders should be given the opportunity to apply for exclusion from public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website.” Respondents who disagreed with this statement were determined to have punitive views. Fifty-three percent (n = 53) of CRJ 004 students and 46% (n = 49) of CRJ 194 students disagreed with this statement. Interestingly, the same number of CRJ 194 students (n = 49) agreed with this statement, therefore, holding less punitive views.

Overall, there were few differences between the punitiveness levels between the two criminal justice courses. In most cases, it seemed that most respondents had punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders. Except for a few cases, it can be assumed
that criminal justice upper division students do not have less punitive views than pre-
criminal justice lower division students.

Chapter 5 will provide further data analysis and discussion of these findings. This
discussion will also include possible explanations for these results, other contributing
factors that may have influenced the results and implications of the study. Suggestions
for further research will be noted.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among pre-criminal justice lower division students and criminal justice upper division students. The findings should be viewed with concern as it was limited to a specific population at Sacramento State University during the Spring 2010 semester and limited data analysis was conducted. These concerns aside, the findings suggest that both pre-criminal justice and criminal justice students have some knowledge of Megan’s Law and have punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders.

Hypothesis #1 – Knowledge of Megan’s Law

It was anticipated the criminal justice upper division students would have more knowledge of Megan’s Law than pre-criminal justice lower division students. Previous research has shown that criminal justice seniors tend to be more knowledgeable of the criminal justice system than freshmen criminal justice students (Bell et al., 2008; Kelley & Stack, 1997; King & Reddick, 2008; Tsoudis, 2000; Vandiver & Giacopassi, 1997). Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the two criminal justice courses and various knowledge variables on three of the six measures. The results of this study indicate that criminal justice upper division students had similar levels of knowledge of Megan’s Law as pre-criminal justice lower division students enrolled in CRJ 004. In some cases, criminal justice upper division students had more knowledge of Megan’s Law than pre-criminal justice lower division students, and vice versa.
The most significant finding was the respondents’ knowledge regarding the public disclosure of sexual offenders on the California’s Megan’s Law Website. This variable, PUBLDISCL, revealed that CRJ 194 students had more knowledge of which sexual offenders are subject to public disclosure on the online registries than did CRJ 004 students. This finding must be viewed with caution as it was further discovered that most respondents (89 %), in spite of class standing, incorrectly answered the question. Between the two courses, more CRJ 194 students (16.8%) answered correctly than CRJ 004 students (5.1%). This suggests that criminal justice students are poorly informed, or fail to retain the information presented, about the assigned levels of risk and the public disclosure of sexual offenders. This may be due to incorrect information presented by the media or entrenchments of preconceived notions of sexual offenders. For example, many may be unaware that nearly 25% of California sexual offenders are excluded from public disclosure on the online registry (CA DOJ, 2009). This misconception may create a false sense of security for individuals seeking information about possible sexual offenders in his/her neighborhood.

Given the fact that most criminal justice majors have flexibility with their coursework, some respondents may not have been exposed to certain criminal justice policies, such as Megan’s Law. For example, Sacramento State University offers one criminal justice course, CRJ 114 – Sex Offenses and Offenders, strictly devoted to the discussion of sexual offenses and offenders. In this course, criminal justice majors would likely learn about Megan’s Law and other sexual offender laws. Students may briefly hear about Megan’s Law in other criminal justice courses such as CRJ 001 – Introduction
to Criminal Justice and Society, but just as likely, this information is mentioned along with other course-related facts rather than discussed with any significance. Regardless, according to the findings, most respondents learned about Megan’s Law through criminal justice coursework and television.

_Hypothesis #2 – Perceptions & Attitudes of Megan’s Law_

It was also anticipated that criminal justice upper division students would have less punitive views than pre-criminal justice lower division students. Previous research has shown that college students tend to hold less punitive views (or more liberal views) toward crime and punishment than those without collegiate experiences; this is referred to as a “liberalizing effect” (Astin, 1977; Benekos et al., 2002; Tsoudis, 2000). Research suggests that this “liberalizing effect” may be weak among criminal justice majors and may actually be a result of preconceived notions before entering college (Farnsworth et al., 1998). Previous research has also shown that criminal justice students tend to have more punitive views of the criminal justice system than other college majors (Selke, 1980).

The results of this study suggest that most respondents had punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders. Except for a few cases, criminal justice upper division students held equal or more punitive views than pre-criminal justice lower division students. Table 4 shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the two criminal justice courses and various perception/attitude variables on two of the five measures.
The respondents’ concern for violations of a sexual offender’s constitutional rights (VILCONST) and possible harassment of sexual offenders found on the online registries (SOHARASS) were also interesting. Most respondents believed that Megan’s Law is not a violation of a sexual offender’s constitutional rights and are not concerned about the harassment of sexual offenders. In both cases, a higher percentage of CRJ 194 students had more punitive views than CRJ 004 students. This suggests that criminal justice upper division students have similar punitive levels about Megan’s Law and sexual offenders as CRJ 004 students, this gainsaying the so-called liberalizing effect.

On the other hand, two variables (ALLDISCL and SOEXCLUS) were found to be statistically significant; therefore, leading to a rejection of the null hypothesis. A significant relationship was found between the criminal justice course and the public disclosure of all sexual offenders on the online registries (ALLDISCL). Nearly 70% of the CRJ 004 students believed that all sexual offenders should be subject to public disclosure. These respondents were believed to have punitive views of sexual offenders. On the other hand, only 46% of CRJ 194 students believed that all sexual offenders should be subject to public disclosure.

These mixed results may be a result of various factors. Criminal justice majors tend to be more conservative and hold more punitive views than other college majors (Lambert, 2004). Furthermore, women/non-whites tend to be more liberal (or less conservative) than men/whites. In this study, most respondents’ were white/Caucasian males. This may have skewed the results as men tend to hold more punitive views of crime and punishment than women.
Studies suggest that criminal justice students may actually enter college with more punitive attitudes than other college majors (Farnsworth et al., 1998). Despite evidence on particular issues, these preconceived attitudes may not change throughout college. As a result, criminal justice students may fall into the errors of biased assimilation and attitude polarization (Lord et al., 1979). For example, individuals who hold strong opinions on particular issues may report a bias toward their own opinion despite conflicting evidence. As a result, any evidence that conflicts with his/her opinion will be deemed insufficient and he/she will, therefore, have a stronger belief to their original opinion.

**Implications of the Study**

For this study, a major area of concern was the general demographics of CRJ 004. Although students enrolled in CRJ 004 are generally pre-criminal justice students, the results show that all undergraduate class levels and various majors were enrolled in this course. Only 60% (n = 66) of CRJ 004 students were actual pre-criminal justice or undeclared students; furthermore, only 62% (n = 69) of the sample were lower division students. The remaining CRJ 004 respondents’ (38%, n = 42) were upper division students majoring in criminal justice, other majors or were undeclared (40%, n = 48). Most respondents defined as “other” were forensic biology majors (n = 11). CRJ 004 is an introductory investigative course, which discusses the use of forensics in police investigations; as a result, forensic biology majors would be expected in this course. Since upper division students were enrolled in both courses during the semester of this study, the results of this study may be skewed.
After the data were collected and various analyses conducted, several variables were removed from the study. Some questions originally were intended to measure one variable but unfortunately, did not actually test what the researcher had planned. In order to increase the validity of the study, several variables were either used to test the other hypothesis (knowledge or perception/attitude) or removed from the study entirely. For example, one question, “How likely do you think it is that a convicted sex offender is currently living in your neighborhood?” (LIKELIHD) was removed. This variable was originally intended to test the perceptions of Megan’s Law but was determined to not actually test either hypothesis.

Due to the lack of data or missing data, some measures were excluded from the analysis. For example, although it was intended to examine the differences between respondents with children and those living with minors and the likelihood to use the California’s Megan’s Law Website, no analysis was conducted. Due to the few number respondents with children (n=11) or living with minors (n = 45), little value was found in pursuing these responses.

Another area of concern was the limited analysis of the data. As can be seen, only a chi-square test of independence was used to measure the various knowledge and perception/attitude variables. For example, the general demographics of CRJ 004 was a major concern but not addressed. In order to address this, the upper division and criminal justice majors could be removed from the data sample and further analysis could be conducted.
Suggestions for Further Research

Additional research on criminal justice students and the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law is necessary. The data in this study were limited to only two criminal justice courses at Sacramento State University during the Spring 2010 semester. Since Sacramento State University is a commuter institution and has a very diverse student population, it is unclear if these results would be found with students in other criminal justice programs on different campuses. In this study, the heterogeneity of the institution may have actually provided a broader spectrum of experiences and attitudes on Megan’s Law than a more homogenous population.

Little research has been conducted on the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among criminal justice students. Further analysis should be conducted to determine if there were other underlying factors that may have contributed to the mixed results from this study. For example, a multivariate analysis of underlying factors such as age, gender, race/ethnicity and political ideology (conservative or liberal views) could be conducted to determine if these factors have an effect on the knowledge and perception of criminal justice students.

Previous research has also shown that individuals were more likely to access sexual offender registries but the number of parents accessing the registries is limited (Evans, 2007; Saad, 2005). Future research should be conducted to determine if individuals with minor children or those living with minor children are more likely to view online sexual offender registries than those without children.
Concluding Remarks

It was expected that criminal justice upper division students will have more knowledge of Megan’s Law, as well as less punitive views of Megan’s Law and sexual offenders than criminal justice lower division students. Although the results of this study were mixed, the data show that CRJ 194 students have equal knowledge of Megan’s Law and tend to have similar or more punitive views than CRJ 004 students. While these findings may be disappointing, the overall results are encouraging in that knowledge about what is a controversial legal policy is at least familiar to this population. In this case, lower division students enrolled in criminal justice courses have as much knowledge about Megan’s Law as do senior-level majors, perhaps the basic parameters and intent of this law are widely known. This study is just one aspect of various studies conducted on the knowledge and perceptions of criminal justice students.
APPENDIX A

Professor Script

Hello, my name is Janelle Bright and I am a Criminal Justice graduate student here at Sacramento State University. I am currently working on my thesis entitled, Knowledge and Perceptions of Megan’s Law among Sacramento State University Criminal Justice Students. The purpose of this research study is to gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among Pre-Criminal Justice and Criminal Justice students at this University.

In order to conduct this study, I hope to gain access to randomly selected sections of CRJ 004 and CRJ 194. Your class (specify: CRJ 004 or CRJ 194, SECTION, TIME) has been selected to participate in this study. Each student in your class will be invited to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire on their knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law.

Each student will receive a consent form and a questionnaire. The consent form will address the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and discomforts, benefits, anonymity concerns and voluntary participation. During my introduction, I will reinforce to the students that their participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If after reading the consent form, the student chooses to participate, s/he will complete the questionnaire. If after reading the consent form, the student chooses not to participate, s/he will hold onto their blank questionnaire until all surveys are collected. All questionnaires will be collected once all participants have completed the questionnaire.

This process, including the introduction of the study and completion of the questionnaire, will take approximately 20 minutes.

I have also included copies of all documents (script, consent form, and questionnaire) for your review. Upon your approval, we will discuss an agreed upon time to distribute the questionnaires.
Hello, my name is Janelle Bright and I am a Criminal Justice graduate student here at Sacramento State University. I am currently working on my thesis entitled, Knowledge and Perceptions of Megan’s Law among Sacramento State University Criminal Justice Students. The purpose of this research study is to gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among Pre-Criminal Justice and Criminal Justice students at this University.

I will be handing out a consent form and a questionnaire to each student in this class. The front page is a consent form and the remaining pages are the questionnaire. Please read the consent form before deciding to participate or not participate in this research study. After reading the consent form, please remove it and keep it for your own records or future reference.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. If after reading the consent form, you choose to participate, please complete the attached questionnaire. If after reading the consent form, you choose not to participate, please hold onto your blank questionnaire until all surveys are collected. All questionnaires will be collected once all participants have completed the questionnaire.

Upon completion of the data collection process, I will analyze the collected data and form conclusions from the results. My thesis, including the results of this study, will be made available in the Sacramento State University Library within one year of its submission to the University.

If you have any comments, concerns or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact me and/or the research sponsor listed on the consent form.
APPENDIX C

Consent to Act as a Human Research Subject

Researcher:  
Janelle Bright, Graduate Student  
Division of Criminal Justice  
6000 J Street  
Sacramento, CA 95819-6085  

Research Sponsor:  
Dr. Sue Escobar  
Division of Criminal Justice  
6000 J Street  
Sacramento, CA 95819-6085  

Purpose of the study: This research study will gauge the knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law among Pre-Criminal Justice and Criminal Justice students at Sacramento State University.

Eligibility: You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older and are enrolled in the randomly selected sections of either CRJ 004 – General Investigation Techniques OR CRJ 194 – Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice during the current semester.

Procedures: You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your knowledge and perceptions of Megan’s Law. The questionnaire is also designed to collect demographic information, including age, ethnicity/race, and educational level. The study will include approximately 300 subjects and will require up to 20 minutes of your time.

Risks and Discomforts: The study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. You could feel uncomfortable with some of the questions; however, you may skip any question you prefer not to answer.

Benefits: You may not personally benefit from participating in this research. The results of the study will help determine if the Criminal Justice Department should increase the understanding and level of knowledge of Megan’s Law among Criminal Justice students.

Anonymity: To preserve the confidentiality of your personal information and responses, your name will not be written or included on any documents. Your responses on the questionnaires will remain anonymous. While individual responses are anonymous, your data will be used for research purposes only, and you will not be individually identifiable in any reports or publications. All research records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office during the duration of the study and only the researcher and the research sponsor will have access to the completed questionnaires. After three years, the researcher will destroy all data, including the completed questionnaires.
**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the researcher.

**Questions:** If you have any comments, concerns or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the researcher and/or the research sponsor at the top of this form.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:** Completion and return of the attached survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research. Please keep this form for your records or future reference.
APPENDIX D

Self-Administered Survey

Directions: Please make every effort to provide complete and accurate information for each question. For each question, please circle the letter or write in your answer on the line provided.

Part I - Introduction

1. In what class are you currently enrolled? (circle) CRJ 004 CRJ 194
2. Do you have any knowledge of Megan’s Law?
   a. Yes
   b. No; please skip ahead to “Part IV - Background Information.”
3. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (circle all that apply)
   a. Criminal Justice coursework
   b. Other major coursework
   c. Employment
   d. Family and/or friends
   e. Newspaper
   f. Radio
   g. Television
   h. Other, please specify:________________________________________________
4. Excluding transients and sexually violent predators, how often does a convicted sex offender have to register their personal information with local law enforcement?
   a. Every month
   b. Every year
   c. Every 2 years
   d. None of the above
5. Which category of sex offender(s) is (are) subject to public disclosure on the California’s Megan’s Law Website?
   a. Low risk
   b. High risk
   c. Serious risk
   d. All of the above
   e. Only b and c

True or False (circle the answer that best applies)

6. T F In California, convicted sex offenders are required to register their personal information for life.
7. T F The Department of Justice is responsible for tracking registered sex offenders.
8. T F The misuse of sex offender registrant information may result in monetary fines and criminal penalties.
Part II – Perceptions & Attitudes

*For the following questions, please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate response.*

SD = strongly disagree  
D = disagree  
U = undecided/neutral  
A = agree  
SA = strongly agree

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. The public has been adequately informed on Megan’s Law.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Megan’s Law is an effective means of preventing repeated violations by convicted sex offenders.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. All convicted sex offenders should be subject to public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website, regardless of their offense.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Only serious or high risk sex offenders’ information should be subject to public disclosure on Megan’s Law Website.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Some sex offenders should be given the opportunity to apply for exclusion from public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Megan’s Law is a violation of a sex offender’s constitutional rights.</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II – Perceptions & Attitudes (continued)

For the following questions, please circle the appropriate response.

15. How likely do you think it is that a convicted sex offender is currently living in your neighborhood?
   a. Very likely
   b. Somewhat likely
   c. Not too likely
   d. Not at all likely
   e. Unsure/no opinion

16. How concerned are you that Megan’s Law may lead to harassment of the people whose names are on the website?
   a. Very concerned
   b. Somewhat concerned
   c. Not too concerned
   d. Not at all concerned
   e. Unsure/no opinion

Part III – Usage

For the following questions, please circle the appropriate response or write in your answer on the line provided.

17. Have you ever accessed the California’s Megan’s Law Website?
   a. Yes
   b. No; please skip ahead to Question 20.

18. About how many times have you accessed the Megan’s Law Website in the past:
   a. Month? ____________
   b. Six months? ______
   c. Year? __________

19. Why did you access the California’s Megan’s Law Website?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

20. Do you have any children (biological and non-biological)?
   a. No
   b. Yes
      i. How many? ______
      ii. What are their gender (male or female) and ages of each?
21. Do you have any children or minors currently living with you?
   a. No
   b. Yes
      i. If so, how many? ______
      ii. What are their gender (male or female) and ages of each?
          __________________________________________________________
          _______________________________________________________

   **Part IV - Background Information**

*For the following questions, please circle the appropriate letter or write in your answer on the line provided.*

22. Gender (circle): Male       Female

23. Age at last birthday: _____ years

24. Undergraduate Class Level:
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior

25. What is your declared major?
   a. Pre-Criminal Justice
   b. Criminal Justice
   c. Undeclared
   d. Other, please specify ______________________

26. Racial/Ethnic Background
   a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American (not of Hispanic origin)
   d. Hispanic or Latino
   e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   f. White or Caucasian (not of Hispanic origin)
   g. Other, please specify ______________________
### APPENDIX E

**Codebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARINAME</th>
<th>SURVEY QUESTION</th>
<th>CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASEID</td>
<td>1000 - CJ 004&lt;br&gt;2000 - CJ 194</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS</td>
<td>1. In what class are you currently enrolled?</td>
<td>1 - CRJ 004&lt;br&gt;2 - CRJ 194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOWML</td>
<td>2. Do you have any knowledge of Megan’s Law?</td>
<td>2 - yes&lt;br&gt;1 - no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJCOURSE</td>
<td>3a. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Criminal Justice coursework)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMCOURSE</td>
<td>3b. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Other major coursework)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPLOYMT</td>
<td>3c. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Employment)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMFRIEN</td>
<td>3d. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Family and/or friends)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWSPAPR</td>
<td>3e. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Newspaper)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADIO</td>
<td>3f. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Radio)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEVISN</td>
<td>3g. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Television)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>3h. How did you learn about Megan’s Law? (Other, please specify)</td>
<td>1 - not circled&lt;br&gt;2 - circled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFTENREG</td>
<td>4. Excluding transients and sexually violent predators, how often does a convicted sex offender have to register their personal information with local law enforcement?</td>
<td>1 - every month&lt;br&gt;2 - every year&lt;br&gt;3 - every 2 years&lt;br&gt;4 - none of the above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBDISCL</td>
<td>5. Which category of sex offender(s) is (are) subject to public disclosure on the California’s Megan’s Law Website?</td>
<td>1 - low risk&lt;br&gt;2 - high risk&lt;br&gt;3 - serious risk&lt;br&gt;4 - all of the above&lt;br&gt;5 - Only b and c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| REGLIFE       | 6. True or False: In California, convicted sex offenders are required to register their personal information for life. | 1 - false  
2 - true |
| DOJTRACK      | 7. True or False: The Department of Justice is responsible for tracking registered sex offenders. | 1 - false  
2 - true |
| MISUFINE      | 8. True or False: The misuse of sex offender registrant information may result in monetary fines and criminal penalties. | 1 - false  
2 - true |
| PUBLKNOW      | 9. The public has been adequately informed on Megan's Law.                    | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| MLEFFECT      | 10. Megan’s Law is an effective means of preventing repeated violations by convicted sex offenders. | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| ALLDISCL      | 11. All convicted sex offenders should be subject to public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website, regardless of their offense | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| SOMESOPD      | 12. Only serious or high risk sex offenders’ information should be subject to public disclosure on Megan’s Law Website. | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| SOEXCLUS      | 13. Some sex offenders should be given the opportunity to apply for exclusion from public disclosure on the Megan’s Law Website. | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| VILCONST      | 14. Megan’s Law is a violation of a sex offender’s constitutional rights.      | 1 - strongly disagree  
2 - disagree  
3 - undecided/neutral  
4 - agree  
5 - strongly agree |
| LIKELIHD      | 15. How likely do you think it is that a convicted sex offender is currently living in your neighborhood? | 5 - very likely  
4 - somewhat likely  
2 - not too likely  
1 - not at all likely  
3 - unsure/no opinion |
| SOHARASS | 16. How concerned are you that Megan’s Law may lead to harassment of the people whose names are on the website? | 5 - very concerned  
4 - somewhat concerned  
2 - not too concerned  
1 - not at all concerned  
3 - unsure/no opinion |
| MLWEBSIT | 17. Have you ever accessed the California’s Megan’s Law Website? | 1 - no  
2 - yes |
| ACMOUTH | 18a. About how many times have you accessed the Megan’s Law Website in the past MONTH? | Number |
| ACSIXMTH | 18b. About how many times have you accessed the Megan’s Law Website in the past SIX MONTHS? | Number |
| ACYEAR | 18c. About how many times have you accessed the Megan’s Law Website in the past YEAR? | Number |
| CHILDREN | 20. Do you have any children (biological and non-biological)? | 2 - yes  
1 - no |
| NUMCHILD | 20a. How many (children - biological and non-biological)? | Number |
| CHLDAGE1 | 20b(i). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| CHLDAGE2 | 20b(ii). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| KIDSLIVE | 21. Do you have any children or minors currently living with you? | 2 - yes  
1 - no |
| NUMKIDS | 21a. How many (children and minors living with you)? | Number |
| KIDAGE1 | 21b(i). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| KIDAGE2 | 21b(ii). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| KIDAGE3 | 21b(iii). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| KIDAGE4 | 21b(iv). What is the age of each child? | Number |
| RESPGNDR | 22. Gender | 1 - male  
2 - female |
| RESPAGE | 23. Age at last birthday | Number |
| CLASSLVL | 24. Undergraduate Class Level | 1 - Freshmen  
2 - Sophomore  
3 - Junior  
4 - Senior |
| DECMAJOR | 25. What is your declared major? | 1 - Pre-Criminal Justice  
2 - Criminal Justice  
3 - Undeclared  
4 - Other |
|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RACETHNI | 26. Racial/Ethnic Background  | 1 – American Indian/Alaskan Native  
2 – Asian  
3 – Black/African American  
4 – Hispanic/Latino  
5 - Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander  
6 – White/Caucasian  
7 – Other |
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