

REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS:  
SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

by

Karen Elizabeth Gordon

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## ABSTRACT

Using data from the Arizona public sex offender registry (SOR) and interview data from 30 registered sex offenders (RSOs), two probation officers, and one homeless shelter worker, this study addresses RSO housing experiences by placing RSOs at the center of the analysis. First, using a framework of social disorganization, I find RSOs are moderately segregated according to the index of dissimilarity, and tend to reside in areas characterized by lower than average median income and higher than average housing vacancies. The presence of RSOs is another indicator of social disorganization for these neighborhoods. Second, I identify issues faced by RSOs as they search for housing and the strategies they use to obtain housing. Commonly used strategies are being upfront and honest, using the assistance of friends and family members, and finding housing through private owners. Third, I assess the extent to which the RSO label operates to deter interactions or serves as the basis of harassment. Findings indicate that the RSO label can limit interactions between RSOs and others living near them. It also motivates avoidance particularly among those living in areas of low and moderate social disorganization. Many RSOs or their co-habitants have also experienced harassment due to the RSO label. These findings are problematic in terms of RSO reintegration. Lastly, I explore RSO assessments of the SOR. Many RSOs indicate concern over whether the SOR makes all RSOs appear the same. I offer a social process model in which I consider the process of labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination along with the potential for those who are stigmatized to seek out a basis to stigmatize others or distance themselves from others they perceive of as worthy of separation. I conclude by offering policy implications that are focused on the needs of communities and RSO reintegration issues.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While rates of rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse have generally declined since the early 1990s (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007; Finkelhor and Jones 2006; Finkelhor and Jones 2004), both sex offenses and sex offenders in the United States have received renewed legislative attention since the 1990s. In 1990, Washington became the first state to enact sex offender community notification laws. Nationally, however, it took the sexual assault and murder of seven-year-old Megan Kanka by a twice-convicted child molester to focus substantial public and political attention on the issue of sex offender recidivism and to prompt the public to call for federal laws on community notification. Consequently, all states now have public databases for registered sex offenders (RSOs), which are available through a website coordinated by the U.S. Department of Justice and individual state agencies.

A primary goal of sex offender notification laws is to reduce the risk of sexual victimization, but whether this goal is being achieved is questionable and the collateral consequences of such legislation are still largely unknown since much of the academic research addressing sex offenses and sex offenders has come out of a psychological perspective in which treatment programs are assessed and their utility is analyzed (Hanson, Bloom, and Stephenson 2004; Polaschek 2003) or is research that is focused on the causes of sexual offending (Simons, Wurtele, and Durham 2008; Whitaker, Le, Hanson, Baker, McMahon, Ryan, Klein, and Rice 2008; Worling 1995). While this sort of research is necessary in order to better understand potential causes of sex offenses, societal reactions to sex offenses are fundamentally socially situated phenomena and should be studied from a sociological perspective.

Much of the current social scientific research generally provides a conclusion similar to the following: raised public awareness of sex offenders creates anxieties on the part of the community and the registered sex offender. These anxieties potentially lead to sex offender isolation and other circumstances that could potentially make the sex offender more likely to recidivate. A three-year tracking study of over 9,000 sex offenders released in 1994 indicates that while rates of recidivism—being rearrested for a crime within three years of release—of known sex offenders is lower than other known ex-offenders (43% and 68% respectively), compared to non-sex offenders sex offenders are roughly four times more likely to be rearrested for a sexually motivated crime (1.3% compared to 5.3%) within the three year period following their release (Langan, Schmitt, and Durose 2003). This particular group of sex offenders was not yet subject to national registration requirements, however. Studies indicate that under current federal, state, and local laws sex offenders face stigmatization and discrimination in terms of housing and employment (Mercado, Alvarez, and Levenson 2008), barriers due to restrictive housing policies (Levenson and Cotter 2005), geographic exclusion (Grubestic, Mack, and Murray 2007), and barriers to local social capital related to limited financial resources and location in more socially disorganized areas which reduces access to resources and social networks (Burchfield and Mingus 2008). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that RSOs try to escape strict requirements within certain jurisdictions such as anti-clustering bans or other housing restrictions (Hundley 2007).

Society plays a pivotal role in defining and responding to all types of crime (Hagan 1977; Henry and Lanier 1998), including the continued stigmatization of ex-offenders. Social definitions of crime and the criminal sanctions that follow have lasting

political and social consequences for communities and families (Comfort 2007) as well as for offenders who are trying to reintegrate into communities after they are released from jail or prison. Consequences for ex-offenders have been studied quite extensively in terms of employment and informal social controls, conceptualized as controls “that are embedded in the everyday activities and interactions of civil society” (Garland 2001:5), which are at work as ex-offenders try to find employment (Albright and Deng 1996; Bushway 1998; Harris and Keller 2005; Pager 2003; Pager and Quillian 2005; Visher, LaVigne, and Travis 2004). What is less often examined is the issue for housing ex-offenders (some exceptions include Clear, Rose, and Ryder 2001; Visher et al. 2004), especially among a *highly* marked ex-offender population—registered sex offenders on public registries in the United States. The specific way in which convicted sex offenders are publicly marked by the SOR and housing policies directed specifically toward RSOs in many jurisdictions renders them a unique, stigmatized ex-offender population worthy of study as a category. However, the few exploratory studies published on social reactions to sex offenses and sex offenders under the current system of legislation remain under-theorized since they are generally motivated by policy implications rather than specific social processes and the lived experiences of RSOs.

This dissertation addresses gaps remaining in various bodies of sociological literature on RSOs as it builds a crucial understanding of the lived social experiences of RSOs in the context of their appearance on the SOR and in light of housing policies. This research is informed by a small but growing body of sociological research on RSOs and uses a framework of social ecology, social control, and stigmatization to help make connections between the existing bodies of research while examining the residential

situations of RSOs, isolation or exclusion, and social inclusion of RSOs. This dissertation uses data collected from 30 registered sex offenders from Phoenix, Arizona willing to discuss their experiences in a long, opened-ended survey conducted by mail, Internet, or via telephone between May 2012 and February 2013. This dissertation also uses data collected from the Arizona public sex offender registry (SOR) to examine where RSOs are located in Phoenix, Arizona as well as the remainder of Maricopa County, where Phoenix is situated. Combining these sources of data I can begin to address what formal and informal processes contribute to RSO residential locations, the experiences of RSOs within their neighborhoods, and their perceptions of the registry itself. Ultimately, this research builds a theoretical model involving both the macro and micro-level processes and experiences to inform future work.

This chapter reviews the historical context of the control of sexuality and the rise of attention given to sex offenders and their offenses, theories and work in areas of collective efficacy and stigmatized identities, and current sociological research pertaining to RSOs. Reviewing these bodies of literature sets up this research endeavor, which seeks to address the following questions:

Are RSOs located in more socially disorganized areas? What patterns of social disorganization are most closely related to the distribution of RSOs?

How do RSOs select their housing in light of policies and local statutes? What strategies do RSOs use to gain or retain their housing?

What informal social controls and social processes are at work and impact registered sex offender residential patterns? How prevalent is harassment of RSOs and/or their family or household members?

Do areas of high or low social disorganization lend insight into RSO experiences within neighborhood contexts?

How do RSOs view the public sex offender registry? How do RSOs perceive the public registry as impacting their lives?

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To gain a conceptual grounding of how sexuality has been controlled and subject to regulation through policy, it is necessary to briefly review the literature on the history of sexuality in the United States and legislative action to protect children and women and control sexual deviants and sex offenders. Next, I will briefly review the current policies directed toward such populations in the United States. The long history of the social control of sexuality must be examined if we are to understand reactions (social, political, religious, and legal) to sex offenders and the continued collateral consequences one might experience upon receiving the label “sex offender.”

### *Sexuality, Sex Crimes, and Policies: 1900-1980s*

Sexuality is something sociologists argue is socially controlled and regulated. Social norms aid in the definitions of standards for what is deemed normative or acceptable sexual behavior. Definitions of what constitutes “normal” are contingent on cultural contexts as well as prevailing political and social ideologies within a given culture as are methods of dealing with breaches of these boundaries. This is not to say what we broadly label as “sex crimes” today are acceptable by any means, but this line of thinking aids in the exploration of how we came to the point where we now have a public registry for convicted sex offenders yet have no public registry for other types of released

ex-felons. Exploring the lengthy history of public concern regarding sex offenses and policies directed toward sex offenders helps provide the necessary historical context for understanding the emergence of the public SOR, without which this study would not have occurred.

Nearing the 20<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the first half of the 1900s, ideas and definitions of what constituted deviant sexual behaviors became subject to psychiatric and medical inquiry and analysis. Such attention gave way to eras of moral panic and created enough fervor to eventually pass legislation that was intent on separating sex offenders from the rest of society while they were “cured.”

During the period of roughly 1880 to roughly 1925 there was a burgeoning new philosophy set forth by those entwined with the Progressive movement and purity reformers. Sexual morality and abuse became the subject of intense political and social scrutiny. At the same time sexuality was a growing focus in the medical field, particularly among psychiatrists and psychologists. During this period, age of consent laws were changed in most states to reflect changes in ideas about childhood as well as physiological and psychosexual development. See, for example, Robertson (2002) who analyzes the changes in age of consent laws in New York City with respect to morality movements that employed physiological arguments to bolster the claim that the age of consent should be raised. This helped reify notions of psychosexual development.

During the period of 1910 to 1915, the United States began to see the first relatively widespread panic over sexual deviants and sex-related homicides (Jenkins 1998), and legislation and policing strategies targeting sex offenders. Several widely publicized sexually motivated murders during this same period in various states,

including New York, Alabama, and Washington, resulted in a nationwide panic over sex crimes (Jenkins 1998). Alongside this, several states passed legislation mandating indeterminate sentencing for sexual offenders. However, as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)<sup>1</sup> achieved its goals of increasing age of consent and the (short-lived) prohibition of alcohol, the panic over stranger assaults seemed to subside as attention turned more toward incest and child molestation, and attention was focused on organized crime and policing strategies (Jenkins 1998).

It was not until the 1930s, however, that there was an acute focus on the sexual psychopath and an increase in the harshness of the societal response toward all such offenders (Quinn, Forsyth, and Mullen-Quinn 2003). Historian Estelle B. Freedman (1987) notes that during the period from the 1930s through the 1950s arrests for sex crimes rose, but the arrests were typically for minor sex offenses rather than for the violent sex offenses that were being portrayed in the media. According to Freedman's (1987) analysis of Uniform Crime Report (UCR) arrest data, between 1935 and 1956 arrest rates for rape rose from 6.0 per 100,000 citizens to 11.2 per 100,000 citizens, and arrest rates for "other sex crimes" rose from 24.9 to 48.1 per 100,000 citizens. Freedman (1987) also notes periods of sharp increases in arrest rates for rape and other sex crimes; these occurred between 1936-1937, 1942-1947, and 1956-1957. It should be noted that arrest data tell only a partial story, and are a reflection of enforcement but not necessarily a reflection of real increases in particular crime categories. Two of the three periods identified by Friedman are marked with statements issued by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In 1937, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI from 1924

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<sup>1</sup> The WCTU was established in 1874, and was very influential during the Progressive Era. While it still exists today, the lobbying strength of the WCTU does not compare to that which it wielded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

to 1972<sup>2</sup>, maintained a position that “sex fiends” were among the most serious problems facing children, and called for an a war against sex criminals (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Freedman 1987). In a widely popular magazine article published in 1947, J. Edgar Hoover claimed sex crimes were on the rise and Americans were under attack by the “degenerate sex offender” who was being allowed to roam the streets (Freedman 1987:94, citing an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* that appeared on September 26, 1937). Such high-level attention at least partially explains the emergence of sexual psychopath legislation in many states.

Between 1937 and the 1950s the District of Columbia at least 25 states including, New York, Michigan, and California, passed “sexual psychopath laws” despite the lack of consensus about what constituted a sexual psychopath (Sutherland 1950; Tappan 1950). Some states included many non-violent offenses such as peeping and lewdness in their laws; at times statutes included consensual sex acts as well. While there were active voices opposing such measures and stating how the panic was rooted in misconceptions about sex offenders (see Sutherland (1950) and Tappan (1950)), many dominant voices in psychiatry framed sex offenders as abnormal, pathological, and often as psychologically disturbed. This framing greatly influenced the content of legislation and the passage of various laws (Quinney 2001 [1970]; Freedman 1987). States such as New York sought help from psychiatrists in their search for solutions to sex offender treatment and prevention. Freedman (1987), documenting the turn away from incarceration of sex offenders toward civil commitment writes, “In a move that foreshadowed the national

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<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Investigation, started in the early 1900s, was renamed the United States Bureau of Investigation in 1932. For a period of two years, the government had a Division of Investigation. However, due to confusion over bureaus and agents, all investigative arms of the Department of Justice became part of the newly named FBI in 1935. J. Edgar Hoover was also the Director of the Bureau of Investigation and United States Bureau of investigation from 1924 until 1935.

political response to sex crimes, [the Mayor of New York City, Fiorello] LaGuardia [in addition to appointing psychiatrists and criminologists to the Mayor's Committee for the Study of Sex Offenses] instituted an emergency program that transferred accused and convicted sex criminals from city penitentiaries to Bellevue Hospital for medical observation" (94). There was mixed agreement about these patients, however. Karl Bowman, director of psychiatric services at Bellevue, openly expressed his concern over the public panic and over the transfer of minor sex offenders to his hospital. In 1938, Bowman and other prominent psychiatrists attending a symposium on sex offenders warned against new legislation mandating the indefinite institutionalization or the castration of sex offenders. Bowman further argued, despite arrest data, that no real rise in sex crimes had actually occurred (Freedman 1987). Further, Quinney (2001[1970]), Sutherland (1950), and Tappan (1950), all note difficulty of enforcing new legislation as well since there was a lack of clear substantive definitions of "sexual psychopath."

After a brief lull in the panic around the early 1940s (during WWII), over twenty states passed sexual psychopath laws between 1947 and 1955 (Freedman 1987), even as researchers such as Alfred Kinsey began to consider issues of what constitutes "normal" sexual behavior. These new laws allowed for the transfer of convicted sex offenders to mental hospitals or psychiatric wards within prisons for indefinite lengths of time until the offender was deemed "cured." While definitions of sexual psychopaths and their offenses were not very clearly defined within statutes, treatment measures put into place by sexual psychopath laws generally allowed psychiatrists to assume primary roles in the rehabilitative process. Such rehabilitative treatments often included one or more of the following: sterilization, shock treatments, medications, and lobotomy (Freedman 1987).

During the later 1950s and into the 1960s, sexual psychopath laws as well as indeterminate sentencing laws were subject to increased scrutiny. This scrutiny ultimately resulted in a turn toward determinate sentencing. During this same time, America entered into a period of deinstitutionalization of mental health care. Constitutional challenges of confining someone, whether in a mental health setting or in a prison, indefinitely until “rehabilitated” called attention to the right of “due process.” Radical versions of criminology and sociology emerged during this time, and these critiqued the rehabilitative model of prisons and the mental health care system. These institutions were cast as weapons of the dominant classes—used to make non-conformists conform and affording them the rights to hold the non-conformists (e.g. sexual deviants or any other criminal offender) indefinitely if they were not rehabilitated to the standards of the dominant classes (Plattner 1976). The Uniform Determinant Sentencing Act passed in 1976, officially marked the end of the rehabilitative model of incarceration and marking the beginning of an era of determinate sentencing. Nationwide discussions of sexual predators also appear to have died down during this time period in light of institutional changes.

In the late 1980s the widely publicized cases of Washington’s Wesley Alan Dodd and Earl Shrinner, both recidivist sex offenders, generated concern over whether the criminal justice system was effectively treating sex offenders. Since determinant sentencing would not allow for the extension of sentences for “uncured” sex offenders, states could do nothing to keep the men in prison. Dodd was executed by the state of Washington, but Shrinner, after his release from prison, kidnapped, tortured, and killed once again. Shrinner’s acts prompted the passage of state legislation regarding sexually

violent predators who would one day be released from prison. This new legislation outlined community notification standards. Several other states followed suit, passing similar legislation in which civil commitment was once again an option for sex offenders with a known mental disorder. Unlike sexual psychopath laws in the earlier part of the century, civil commitment was intended come after the offender served his or her prison sentence.

### *Emergence of the Public Sex Offender Registry*

Not until the 1990s did the United States see acute national attention once again drawn toward sex offenders, raising the possibility of federal laws targeting sex offenders *and* the needs of communities and victims. In the mid-1990s, a series of federal laws were enacted that mandate the dissemination of information on released sex offenders following the highly publicized Megan Kanka case. In 1994, the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act passed as part of the Federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This Act requires states to establish registries for sex offenders and offenders who have committed sex crimes against children or have kidnapped children. In 1996, the Pam Lynchner Sexual Offender Tracking and Identification Act passed as an amendment to the Jacob Wetterling Act, requiring the lifetime registration of recidivist sexual offenders and those who had committed a variety of aggravated sex offenses. Additionally, in 1996, Megan's Law passed as an amendment to the Jacob Wetterling Act, requiring states to establish community notification standards. States further have the right to set more stringent standards beyond the minimum requirements of the federal legislation. This includes

control over housing and community notification procedures. This recent legislation coupled with the lengthy history of sexual psychopath laws from the mid-20th century marks sexual offending as a major political and social concern in the United States.

While all 50 states now have the mandated public registry website, the specifics of sex offender risk assessment and notification requirements and procedures are set by individual states. Such policies and practices vary widely among states. This variation impacts who appears on the public portion of the registry, why they appear on the registry, and how the process of community notification is handled in some states. Risk assessment refers to the risk of recidivism once the sex offender has served their time and is released, and all states have a three-tier or three-level classification scheme. Level 1 or Tier 1 is reserved for those deemed to be at the lowest risk of re-offense, Level 2 or Tier 2 are said to pose a moderate risk of re-offense, and Level 3 or Tier 3 is reserved for those deemed at the highest risk of re-offense. Some states require all risk levels to appear on the public SOR while other states such as Arizona, the state in which the present research takes place, does not place those designated as Risk Level 1 on the public SOR since they are considered low risk.

The risk assessment or classification systems vary widely between states. While some states categorize sex offenders in risk levels based on the offense(s) committed, in at least a dozen states risk levels are assigned to offenders based on a standardized risk assessment score. This assessment process, while standard within a given state, varies by state. In Arizona, for example, nineteen criteria are used to make the risk assessment profile and the “nineteen criteria that are considered to be significant factors contributing to sex offender recidivism” (Arizona Department of Public Safety 2013). These criteria

include: number of convictions for sex/sex-related offenses (1, 4, or 6 points), number of convictions for (non-sex) felony offenses (0, 2, or 6 points), other sex/sex-related arrests not resulting in conviction (0 or 4 points), age at first conviction for sex/sex-related offense (0 or 3 points), use of weapon in sex/sex-related convictions (0, 4, or 6 points), total number of victims in all sex offenses (0, 1, 4, or 6 points), gender of victims in all sex offense convictions (0, 2, or 4 points), relationship of offender to the victim (0, 2, or 4 points), use of force (0 or 6 points), other characteristics of sex/sex-related convictions (0 or 4 points), length of sex offense history (0 or 4 points), alcohol/drug use (0 or 3 points), mental/cognitive impairment of offender (0 or 4 points), employment history (0 or 3 points), presence of multiple paraphilia/sexually deviant interests (0, 2, or 4 points), felony committed upon previous release from confinement (0, 2, 4, 6, or 8 points), discipline history while in prison (0 or 6 points), chemical dependency treatment while in prison (0 or 4 points), sex offender treatment while in prison or on probation (0, 2, or 5 points) (Stewart, Carlson, and Savage 2000). The offender is then assigned a score which corresponds to a Risk Level. Level 1 may have a score of up to 14 points, Level 2 offenders score between 15 and 39, and Level 3 offences are those with scores 40 and above (Stewart et al. 2000). While the criteria are now standardized, law enforcement officials in Arizona are afforded discretion in whether to accept the recommended risk level or decide whether new information on the sex offender should be considered and the assessment should be redone, potentially resulting in the offender being moved to a different official risk level (State of Arizona Department of Public Safety 2013). Such state-level decisions, as well as the discretion in assessing risk, impact those seen on the

public SOR. Risk Level also often determines forms of community notification that must take place before the RSO is released or moves his or her residence.

Community notification requirements and procedures are associated with risk level of offender, and means such processes are also impacted by how risk is assessed. In many states including Arizona, notification for Level 1 offenders is limited to law enforcement. In the state of Arizona, community notification standards and requirements for Level 2 and 3 sex offenders is uniform regardless of if the offender is considered Level 2 or 3, and includes notification of the:

surrounding neighborhood, area schools, appropriate community groups and prospective employers. The notification shall include a flyer with a photograph and exact address of the offender as well as a summary of the offender's status and criminal background. A press release and a level two or three flyer shall be given to the local electronic and print media to enable information to be placed in a local publication (State of Arizona Department of Public Safety 2013).

Finally, at the time of this writing, at least 22 states have laws prohibiting certain RSOs from living within a specified distance of certain places such as schools, parks, and bus stops, essentially banning sex offenders from living in their midst (Nieto and Jung 2006). While these laws are intended to protect communities, residence requirements also restrict the possible residential locations of RSOs. This potentially leads to "hot spots" or clusters. To prevent RSO "clustering" an Arizona law was passed in the middle part of the last decade which limits the proportion of RSOs allowed to live in a multifamily dwelling. The housing guidelines state, "An adult probation officer shall not approve the residence of a probationer, who is required to register, in any multifamily dwelling unless the number of registered probationers who reside is less than ten per cent of the number

of dwelling units. Not more than one level three offender (pursuant to A.R.S. 13-3826 and 13-3826) shall reside in a multifamily dwelling” (Arizona Supreme Court 2009).

Shortly after the passage of this legislation, policymakers in Phoenix proposed banning RSOs from living within 2,000 feet of parks, schools, bus stops, churches, and anywhere minors might congregate. Policymakers were also considering stiffer “anti-cluster” laws. These proposals sought to ban RSOs from living within 2,000 feet of one another (Katz, Webb, Armstrong, and Kostelac 2006). A study focused on RSO housing and funded by the Phoenix Police Department determined that a 2,000 foot buffer between RSO residences would consume over 80% of the land area within the city of Phoenix (Katz, et al 2006). Any growth in the RSO population would mean increased competition for housing in the remaining 20% of the city. Based on this finding the researchers recommended against the 2,000-foot rule between RSOs. They also found that a 2,000-foot buffer zone around schools, daycares, and parks, depending on the definitions of such places and depending on exactly where the boundary restrictions were set, would eliminate approximately 50% of the city for RSOs (Katz, et al. 2006). Katz et al. (2006) recommended against this restriction as well, and went on to say that the combination of these restrictions with those already in place would mean “there would be no feasible way to disperse the current registered sex offender population throughout the city” (128).

Between restricted zones for schools and anti-clustering bans there could be a net decrease in the willingness of sex offenders to register because they will not legally be able to live in most areas if another RSO is already in the vicinity and/or because of the number of school and parks, costing the city more to track down non-compliant RSOs

and potentially leading to a highly inaccurate registry. Still, partially against the recommendations of the Katz et al. study, in late 2007 Arizona adopted a law that stipulates that no RSO “convicted of a dangerous crime against children as defined in section 13-705 or who has been convicted of an offense committed in another jurisdiction that if committed in this state would be a dangerous crime against children as defined in section 13-705, who is required to register pursuant to section 13-3821 and who is classified as a level three offender pursuant to sections 13-3825 and 13-3826 to reside within one thousand feet” of a private school or childcare facility as these are defined by the Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) 15-101 and 36-881 (Arizona State Legislature 2014a). Some of the dangerous crimes against children as described in A.R.S. 13-705 involve a non-minor who is convicted of first degree sexual assault of a minor age 12 or younger or sexual conduct with a minor age 15 or younger, kidnapping a child for the purposes of prostitution, prostitution of a minor, sex trafficking a minor under the age of 15, and child molestation (Arizona State Legislature 2014b). Those living within that distance prior to the passage of the law are grandfathered in, and other exceptions are granted in accordance with the statute including a ten-year (post-incarceration) offense-free clause. Finally, while RSOs are required by law to register, there are already a large number of RSOs on the SOR with “Failure to Register” (FTR) offenses listed and a large number listed as “absconders” – those who either failed to register or can no longer be found where they registered. During data collected from the SOR for this study, for example, 306, nearly 15%, of all RSOs within Maricopa County had at least one FTR offense listed. There were also 207 RSO absconders at the time of data collection. While registration is a legal requirement, clearly not all RSOs register, and increased housing

barriers may cause further registration complications. SOR inaccuracy, according to the Katz et al. (2006) study may range from 61-71%, which was *before* these new restrictions went into effect (1).

The array of impacts of RSO housing measures on neighborhoods and RSO dispersion after the new regulations passed remains to be seen. To date there are also very few studies that attempt to document the experiences of RSOs. The present study is one way to reexamine the Katz et al. (2006) study and some of what has occurred since their initial study of Phoenix. The present study will broaden the scope of examination by extending beyond policy examination to include meaningful connections to sociological theory. Social disorganization and the process of navigating a stigmatized identity are central points of analysis within this study, and this study builds a social process model to better understand stigmatized identities within neighborhood context.

## THOERY

### *Social Ecology, Collective Efficacy, and Crime Control*

The roots of the study of social disorganization can be traced to Shaw and McKay's (1942) study of delinquency in Chicago and their attempt to make sense of variable delinquency rates around the city. They posited that crime rates around the city were likely related to neighborhood characteristics and neighborhood dynamics. They argued that economic deprivation was linked to crime – not as a direct effect on its own, but as a complex relationship involving high rates of residential turnover and racial and ethnic heterogeneity since recent immigrant populations were able to afford housing in areas with economic deprivation and turnover. These three factors operated to disrupt neighborhoods, which accounts for crime variations in Shaw and McKay's study. Shaw

and McKay also conjectured that these disorganized areas were less able to regulate behavior and more likely to lead to the passing along of delinquent traditions.

Many researchers today still use Shaw and McKay's framework of social disorganization to guide their inquiries into residential patterns and trends, and researchers continue to utilize the various characteristics associated with the initial indicators proposed by the original work. These include economic deprivation characteristics such as poverty rates, median income, and home values; characteristics related to residential stability such as owner occupied housing rates, housing vacancies, and 5-year residential patterns; and characteristics related to neighborhood heterogeneity such as the proportion of foreign-born residents or the proportion of non-white residents. (See, for example, Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel 2006; Tewksbury, Mustaine, and Covington 2010.) One study suggests disorganization is no longer mediated by race (Hannon and Defina 2005). However, a variety of studies continue to use indicators related to racial and/or ethnic composition of neighborhoods or immigrant composition. These studies find these indicators as useful and significant predictors for RSO residence patterns (Mustaine and Tewksbury 2011) and when assessing patterns related to high concentrations of RSOs (Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel 2006; Suresh, Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Higgins 2010).

Finally, within studies of social disorganization, disorganization is considered as a continuous variable in which certain areas are described as least or most socially disorganized. The continuum is related to the overall context of the given research area and generally discussed in relation to the overall averages of various indicators used. (See, for example, Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel 2006).

A more recent turn in social ecology proposes that an abundance of resources and social network ties accompanied by communities that are more socially organized should suppress criminal infractions and lead to communities with lower crime rates. Sampson and Groves (1989) define social disorganization as “the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and to maintain effective social control” (777). Structural barriers such as poverty interfere with the ability to develop formal and informal ties, and those within more cohesive communities are theoretically better equipped to control crime in their neighborhoods through increased supervision, informal friendship networks, and their participation in formal organizations (Sampson and Groves 1989; Shaw and McKay 1942). Using data from the 1982 British Crime Survey, Sampson and Groves (1989) noted that community structural characteristics including low socio-economic status, family disruption, residential mobility, and racial heterogeneity are mediated by aspects of community social disorganization including weak friendship networks, unsupervised teens, and low organizational participation. Their study was the first study to examine the relationship between macro-structural variables and dimensions related to social networks that may operate to reduce delinquency, and this laid the foundation for later work on collective efficacy.

Linking ideas from social ecology and notions of informal social control, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997), provide a framework for understanding collective efficacy. They define collective efficacy as “the capacity of a group to regulate its members according to desired principles—to realize collective, as opposed to forced, goals” (918). Collective efficacy links social cohesion to shared expectations of the collective or neighborhood. This is differentiated from formal social control or

regulations that are linked to criminal justice agencies and institutions such as courts and police (Garland 2001). The ability for neighborhoods to use informal social controls stems from the differential organization of neighborhoods (Sampson et al. 1997). More socially disorganized neighborhoods are negatively associated with strong collective efficacy through fear, a lack of trust and solidarity among residents, and an unwillingness or reduced ability to intervene in a variety of situations. As such, more socially are theoretically subject to higher crime rates. One may also consider the point that if areas do have higher rates of housing turnover, neighbors are potentially less likely to invest themselves into getting to know one another and controlling their surroundings. Additionally, in areas with higher rates of housing vacancies, residents may have less opportunity to form bonds that would lead to the formation of a sense of social cohesion. Theoretically, social cohesion may be reduced as neighbors perceive differences between themselves and others in the area along racial or ethnic lines.

Within the scope of RSO policy, part of the goal of community notification is to prevent future victimization. Individuals are supposed to proactively protect themselves against outside risks such as those presented by RSOs by using the official registry as a prevention tool. On a neighborhood-level, collective efficacy functions to keep certain undesirable people and phenomena away from one's own neighborhood by creating an environment that does not welcome whatever or whoever is deemed undesirable by the collective. An implication is that neighborhoods that are more socially organized can exercise their sense of cohesion to block RSOs from residing within their neighborhoods or at least monitor the RSO closely. This should reduce the collective's sense of risk as they attempt to meet their goal of a "safe" neighborhood. Simultaneously, the collective

is able to express what is undesirable, thus shaming the RSOs. Chapter 3 explores data from the SOR.

### *Shaming, Stigmatization, and Identity*

While stigma and shaming are not new concepts to the discipline of sociology, a reexamination of shaming processes has come to the fore in the last two decades as sociologists and criminologists alike have sought to understand the reintegration processes faced by released offenders. During this same period, “name and shame” measures have come into widespread use in the U.S. There has been a veritable clash between evidence over what works to reintegrate offenders in the long term and populist notions about what is best for communities. McAlinden (2008) writes,

Contemporary state-led and popular responses to sex offending may have a number of disintegrative effects. Far from achieving the goal of successful social reintegration, measures such as registration and notification and novel probation conditions, in common with popular ‘name and shame’ campaigns may only serve to label and stigmatise the offender and isolate them from the rest of the community (130, citing Winick 1998).

In addition to vigilantism and physical harassment, other negative impacts of naming and shaming occur on four interrelated levels outlined by McAlinden (2008) as follows:

1. Hindering reintegration and rehabilitation through job or housing discrimination.
2. Increasing the RSO’s “sense of isolation, may ultimately increase the chance of subsequent delinquent behaviour as a coping mechanism;” providing the sense that it is “easier to live out this label than to try to break free from it.”
3. Isolating the offender from mainstream society, which could force them to associate with other similarly marginalized individuals. Such individuals might learn new techniques of offending.
4. “If an offender becomes known or ostracised in the area where he lives he will not be deterred from future crime.”  
(McAlinden 2008: 130).

As such, naming and shaming (in the case of the RSO, public notification and

registration) is inconsistent with Braithwaite's (1989) concept of "reintegrative shaming" and resembles what he classifies as "stigmatic shaming"—shaming in a way that isolates offenders and fails at community-structured rehabilitation is essentially disintegrative in nature. Braithwaite (1989) maintains, "Shaming is the most potent weapon of social control unless it shades into stigmatization" (14). Stigmatic shaming can resemble social control by essentially exiling the ex-offender from the realm of normal social interactions; its potential negative impacts cannot be interpreted lightly. While a goal of sex offender legislation is awareness to reduce victimization, involvement in the criminal justice system could operate in a way that may increase likelihood of re-offending over time (Braithwaite and Daly 1994; Hudson 1998; McAlinden 2008). Therefore a theoretical understanding of stigmatization is necessary to build an understanding of the underlying processes of isolation or acceptance, and thus of the utmost importance when examining the processes of RSO reintegration or isolation and laying claim to how the processes of stigmatization could theoretically operate as a *disintegrative* force and ultimately increase rates of recidivism

In Erving Goffman's (1963) seminal work, *Stigma*, he uses the term stigma "to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (3). Like most social processes stigma requires the presence of another or the perceived presence of another. In fact, Goffman conceptualizes stigma as a "language of relationships, not attributes" (3). Goffman calls on us to understand society's role in creating stigma in its three forms: overt deviations such as deformities, deviations in personal traits such as criminal background, and traits of groups such as nationalities. Stigma is a fundamentally social designation created by reflections of what constitutes normal or acceptable in terms of appearances and traits or

characteristics within a given society. He writes, “[a]n attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself” (1963:3). Without an audience there is no comparison and thus no interpretation of what constitutes normal or stigmatized behavior and attributes.

The stigmatized individual faces what Goffman refers to as a “double perspective”—the plight of the *discredited*, that is, the person who assumes their status is known, and the plight of the *discreditable*, or the assumption that those persons the individual encounters neither knows of their stigmatized status nor readily perceive it. Thus there is an element of *perception* the stigmatized must deal with in their daily social interaction amounting to whether and to what degree they can answer the following: Do you perceive others as knowing your stigmatized status, and can and do others perceive your stigmatized status?

Drawing heavily on Goffman’s ideas of stigma and some of his connections in *Stigma*, Link and Phelan (2001) further conceptualize stigma. They posit that there are four aspects of stigma that should be taken into consideration as researchers of stigmatized identities. The first aspect is the labeling of salient differences, which they describe as being a process of social selection. The process of labeling requires an oversimplification of groups or categories that reduces within group variability. They also note that labeling is contingent on time and place by noting that what are socially salient attributes can and do change over time. They call on sociologists to consider how categories arise and how they are sustained. Link and Phelan (2001) second aspect of stigma is stereotyping rooted in the undesirable label. The label itself becomes the basis

for “linking a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that form the stereotype” (Link and Phelan 2001:369). The third aspect is the process whereby groups separate “us” from “them.” They note, “Evidence of efforts to separate us from them are sometimes directly available in the very nature of the labels conferred. Incumbents are thought to be the thing they are labeled” rather than something they have (Link and Phelan 2001:370). They provide an example of referring to someone as schizophrenic rather than referring to them as a person with schizophrenia. The last aspect to consider is the loss of status and accompanying discrimination. Link and Phelan (2001) aptly note that without considering status loss and discrimination, the stigmatized label itself cannot take on the meaning we generally assign to it in the absence of such discussions.

Current conceptions of identity distinguish between social identities—identities that are related to social categories and are often ascribed – and personal identity. In some ways, due to the public nature of the RSO label, the RSO label itself can be seen becoming a part of an achieved and an ascribed identity. There is the obvious fact that one ultimately did something to earn their place on the SOR, but the designation of RSO and the classification of one’s Risk Level as an RSO are involuntary and somewhat subjective. Thus, in this regard can become part of the RSO’s social identity. In other ways, the RSO may be required to assume a particular role in interactions, perhaps that of the ex-felon trying to locate housing who needs to be aware of structural constraints placed upon him and state his conviction background.

Goffman (1963) breaks his discussion of stigmatized identities into three facets – social, personal, and ego identity. These designations are useful conceptual tools in understanding the identity process for the potentially stigmatized RSO. Goffman’s notion

of the “social identity” allows us to understand the process of stigmatization in interactions and within formal and informal communities and organizations. Here, the “normals” and the stigmatized might anticipate contact and learn how to avoid contact, which could have far-reaching consequences for both parties, but especially the stigmatized. The mere avoidance of social interaction can lead to other socially undesirable, stigmatizing and discredited attributes, a phenomenon that is acknowledged to exist among some RSOs in preliminary studies, and a phenomenon that is understood to potentially increase one’s risk to offend and possibly re-offend. Thus social avoidance or engagement becomes important to the understanding of the process of isolation and acceptance. Because of the national sex offender registry requirements, there is a possibility that RSOs are discredited prior to their social interactions or that they *perceive* that they are discredited. RSO perceptions about their discredited status, their neighborhood interactions, and experiences with harassment are explored in Chapter 5.

Goffman’s notion of “personal identity” is tied to the control of information. When the differentness is *not* apparent or known before social interactions, the person (here, the RSO) is a discreditable rather than discredited person. If one has the ability to control and conceal aspects of his or her real social identity, then they might be able to “pass” undetected. While the RSO might be rendered visible by the registry to those who choose to use it or to those who receive community notification flyers, there are no outward markers or “visible defects,” to use Goffman’s terminology, to generally mark the RSO population, or any ex-offender population for that matter. The question then becomes whether the RSO assumes his or her RSO identity is known simply due to the notification process and/or the public registry. This question is explored in Chapter 5.

Finally, “ego identity” allows us to contemplate how the RSO may feel about their stigmatized status and its management. From this perspective we can begin to call into question what Goffman refers to as the “basic self-contradiction of the stigmatized individual,” or how the RSO thinks they are no different from other humans while others see them as different (1963:109). Chapter 6 addresses how RSOs discuss the utility of the SOR, how they perceive the public RSO identity impacting their lives, and the ways in which some RSOs try to distance themselves from other RSOs. While an understanding of social and personal identity processes speak to others concerns and definitions about the stigmatized individuals (the RSO) examining all three, social, personal, and ego identity should allow for a more complete understanding of micro-level processes and the dynamics between the RSOs perceptions, their lived experiences, and their assessments of the SOR and other RSOs.

Theoretical concepts pre-dating Goffman’s writing on stigmatized identities and identity management lend insight into the process by which society impacts and influence the self. Cooley (1902), in *Human Nature and Social Order*, describes the looking-glass self in which, by virtue of reflected appraisals – a sense of self that is derived from how we think others may view us and judge us – we are able to see ourselves from the point of view of others. We internalize the views we think others have of us. Mead (1967[1934]) in *Mind, Self, and Society*, addresses the way in which we are able to take on the so-called role of the other – the perspective of the generalized other that allows one to take on the attitudes and expectations of others in the community or group. Mead (1967[1934]) writes, “The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called ‘the generalized other.’ The attitude of the

generalized other is the attitude of the whole community” (153). Seeing oneself from the point of view of the generalized other serves as a source of self-control.

While Goffman’s theory of social stigma addresses various aspects of the management of a stigmatized identity, and Cooley and Mead (1967[1934]) lend insight into the role society plays in the development of the self, Stryker’s broader identity theory offers additional insights into the connections between micro-level experiences and identity performances and social structures more generally (Stryker 1968). Stryker’s identity theory posits that we can have as many identities as we have structured relationships. Moreover, identities are a critical link between the individual and society because identities are designations used by individuals in relation to where they see themselves in a particular context (Stryker and Serpe 1982).

Stryker’s (1968) identity theory proposes that our identities are organized into a salience hierarchy, a means of organizing our identities “and defined as the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations” or “defined as the differential probability among persons of a given identity being invoked in a given situation” (560). According to Stryker, structural constraints can determine which identity or identities are drawn out. Stryker and Serpe (1982) write, “Whether or not that behavior will, in fact, occur will clearly depend on the way that salience of an identity interacts with (1) defining characteristics of situations (such as the degree to which the situation permits alternative identities to be expressed), and (2) other self characteristics (such as self-esteem or satisfaction). ... While presumably affected by features of situations per se, [the salience hierarchy] is a product of prior interactions which has an independent effect on behavior in those situations” (207).

The higher an identity ranks in the hierarchy, the more likely the behaviors associated with that identity will occur. Take, for example, an RSO who is attempting to locate rental housing, but who faces various legal and probation constraints that help dictate where they can live. It is likely the RSO identity, simply appearing on the SOR, will need to be disclosed at some point during their quest for housing simply by virtue of what is required by their probation officer(s). What forms this takes might be as simple as stating their offense on a housing application, or announcing and attempting to explain their circumstances to a prospective landlord. Thus, one may pose the question of the likelihood of those appearing on the SOR needing to invoke their RSO identity as they search for housing. If the status is not stated, a simple background check will highlight the status of the RSO. Additionally, the RSO identity might be activated for the RSO in instances of harassment. By virtue of appearing on the SOR and having people within their immediate neighborhood notified of their presence, an RSO may be “called out” calling on the RSO to behave in specific ways, like avoiding future interactions or trying to remain calm so they are not further penalized. Alternatively, if others do not know of the RSOs identity, the RSOs identity, because it is not a visible identity and might not need to be made known, may not be salient in all situations or interactions.

Another aspect of Stryker’s identity theory is that of commitment. Commitment is described as the “degree that one’s relationships to specific others depend on one’s being a particular kind of person,” (Stryker 1968:560). Stryker (1968) says commitment has two dimensions. One dimension is extensivity of commitment or “the number of relationships entered by virtue of an identity,” and the second is intensivity, or “the depth of the relationships entered by virtue of an identity” (Stryker 1968:561). Many RSOs

have a number of relationships focused on the fact that they are a released and registered sex offender – therapists, probation officers, at the very least. These relationships are beyond the scope of the present study. However, commitment to the RSO identity in certain contexts (this identity defined at the moment as simply as appearing on the SOR), may have little to do with commitment to the RSO identity, and more to do with how others view the RSO within the neighborhood context and the social role(s) RSOs might be assumed to play. In some ways the RSO identity and their presence in a given locale perhaps creates a greater salience and commitment to a “vigilante neighbor” identity for someone else. Additionally, while an RSO’s status as an RSO on the SOR might be disclosed on an application for rental housing or employment, this has more to do with the structural conditions in which they must operate. The identity they might be attempting to portray is not that of the RSO, rather that of an individual who has a situation from the past they need to make known in order to appear as an honest, reformed individual in need of housing or a job. Stryker and Serpe (1982) write, “commitment affects identity salience which in turn affects role-related behavioral choices” (208). Thus, commitment to an honesty person identity in the context of a situation affects the salience of the RSO identity, forcing the RSO to play out the role as an honest ex-felon and structuring some of their behaviors.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *RSOs: Social Disorganization and Residential Restrictions*

As theories about the operation of formal and informal social controls, stigmatization, and social ecology would predict, there is some evidence from recent

studies that RSOs tend to be concentrated in more socially disorganized neighborhoods in at least a few large cities (Hughes and Burchfield 2007; Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel 2006; Suresh, et al. 2010).

Mustaine et al.'s (2006) study of neighborhood characteristics and the concentration of sexual offenders confirms that sex offenders are more likely to be found in neighborhoods that exhibit characteristics of social disorganization such as high crime rates, poverty, and lower housing costs compared to other neighborhoods within their four county study area in Florida and Kentucky. Mustaine, et al. (2006) conclude that RSOs may not actively choose to live in such neighborhoods to avoid stigmatization or out of choice and attraction to these areas. They conjecture that phenomenon might be related to the fact that "living in disorganized and disadvantaged areas is an imposed consequence of being an RSO, rather than a choice designed to increase one's opportunities to reoffend" (346). This begs the question of what issues RSOs may face and the experiences they have as they make housing decisions. The implication of this is not only that RSOs might lack the resources to live in more socially organized areas, but that they themselves stand as an indicator of social disorganization – much like other traditional indicators such as housing vacancy rates, rates of poverty, or rates owner occupied housing – if this is a pattern that persists across study areas and over time. Moreover, the concentration of RSOs in areas with a reduced ability to exercise informal social controls centered around a community ideal of controlling or keeping tabs on those with stigmatized identities could potentially lead RSOs living in differently organized areas to have vastly different experiences by allowing RSOs living in highly socially

disorganized areas to not be subject to as many informal social controls, such as direct assault, surveillance, avoidance, or verbal threats.

Formal residence restrictions, buffer zones, or enforced boundaries directed toward RSOs are a focal point of much of the current research on RSOs and communities. A study of RSO residence restrictions in Chicago found that there is a very limited area currently available to RSOs, and show available areas are generally limited to disadvantaged neighborhoods (Hughes and Burchfield 2007). By implication, housing restrictions that appear equal have an unintended consequence of creating even more social disorganization in a given neighborhood. Suresh et al. (2010) argue that restrictive housing policies tend to force RSOs into more socially disorganized areas – areas that generally have fewer parks and schools – and this may undermine “spatial justice” for these neighborhoods.

A study in New Jersey found RSOs are discriminated against in terms of housing and housing and hardships related to housing restrictions (Mercado et al. 2008). Thirty-four percent of their respondents were refused rentals by landlords, which notes the difficulties many RSOs may face regardless of residence restrictions. Over half (54%) of the RSO respondents in this study indicated difficulties finding housing they could afford outside restricted zones (Mercado et al. 2008).

Mustaine et al. (2006), in their study of RSOs in Florida and Kentucky and RSO presence in socially disorganized areas, note the importance in geographic differences between various study locales in terms of culture, economics, and residential variations. It makes sense to continue to explore geographical areas in other locations like the southwestern United States. Still, most of the current published sociological research on

RSOs, residential restrictions, and social disorganization has taken place in the eastern half of the United States or in the upper Midwest. One notable geographic exception is a study conducted in the city of Phoenix, Arizona during the heated debate over proposed laws regarding residence restrictions and anti-clustering measures in 2005.

At the request of local authorities, in one segment of their six-part study Katz, et al. (2006) were specifically probing for “hotspots” or clusters of RSOs around Phoenix and making projections of how dispersion policies like buffer zones may operate in Phoenix. They found RSOs to be more commonly located in the downtown corridor and advised against foot buffer zone policies that would not allow RSOs to live within 2,000 feet of one another or schools, daycares, or other locations in which children may congregate.

Another segment of their study focused on the perceptions of RSOs and used a highly structured survey instrument given during a face-to-face interview. Their response rate was approximately 19% (N=100). They found that residence restrictions and economic hardship meant many RSOs felt it was difficult to find and maintain affordable housing. The utilization of a highly structured interview instrument did not allow the RSOs to speak freely about various topics under consideration such as the purpose of the SOR and structured categories about perceptions and consequences of being an RSO. While these types of data are incredibly useful and inform the current research, such data do not necessarily examine the issue of RSO perceptions and experiences from the point of view of RSOs, rather categorizations and an agree-disagree or other Likert-type scaled categories limit the reporting to academically constructed categories. Examples of this from the Katz et al. (2006) study include these evaluation statements: *The sex-offender*

*registry is a good thing, and I am being unfairly punished by being on the sex-offender registry.* The response categories detailed in the study findings include “agree or strongly agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” and “disagree or strongly disagree.” The majority of RSOs responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with those statements, but response categories such as those listed leave out the possibility for explanation.

Finally, to date, no known published studies assess the question of whether RSO’s location in highly socially disorganized areas is a product of choice or attraction based on their familiarity with such settings or a result of poverty both before incarceration and after registration. Studies such as those conducted by Mustaine et al. (2006) and Burchfield and Mingus (2008) lend some indirect insight into this hypothesis and suggest that RSOs are relegated to socially disorganized areas rather than actively choosing them and that they do face various sources of discrimination. One meta-analysis study of juvenile sex offenders found that juvenile sex offenders often come from low and moderate income, maladaptive families (Graves, Openshaw, Ascione, and Ericksen 1996). Still, sex offenders are a heterogeneous group – varying widely by race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status (Shaw 1999; Ryan, Miyoshi, Metzner, Krugman, and Fryer 1996). There is evidence, too, that offenders who return to disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to recidivate than those who return to more affluent areas (Kubrin and Stewart 2006).

### *RSOs and Social Control*

Studies on RSOs routinely find this population is subject to myriad social controls beyond the public sex offender registry – ranging from housing troubles, employment

difficulties, informal community controls, and relationship troubles (see Brown, Spencer, and Deakin 2007; Burchfield and Mingus 2008, Grubestic, et al. 2007, Levenson and Cotter 2005; Mercado, et al. 2008; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2011a; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2011b; Mustaine, et al. 2006). An early study in Wisconsin lends insight in community responses to the release of RSOs, and perhaps hints at an underlying cause of such forms of social control. Zevitz and Farkas' (2000a and 2000b) study of community notification meetings in Wisconsin report that while residents respond positively to the sex offender release notification, they often express anger over the release of the RSO into their neighborhood. If the anger residents feel toward RSO release manifests itself as a proactive collective response, it could function to prevent an RSO from residing in a certain area. Findings from these studies and other more recent studies on RSOs indicate theories of social ecology and informal social controls are consistent experiences of RSOs and the communities and neighborhoods in which they reside.

Findings from Mustaine and Tewksbury's (2011b) study on informal community social controls and RSOs indicate RSOs are subjected to a vast array of informal community social controls that the authors of the study regard as not simply being collateral consequences of formal social controls such as the registry, but as *additional* forms of social control. In Mustaine and Tewksbury's (2011b) exploratory study of 231 RSOs in Oklahoma and Kansas, 77% of the RSOs have experienced a direct sanction (i.e., loss of friend, lost a job). Over half of the RSOs have experienced disapproving expressions (i.e., harassment, treated rudely, threatening mail), and over 67% had experienced at least one observational/surveillance social control (i.e., staring, being recognized as an RSO). This study finds few differences between offenders with adult

victims versus offenders with child victims and the types of informal social controls the RSOs experience. Their findings did not address how or if the types of informal social controls are mediated by level of neighborhood social disorganization.

To date there are very few published interview or qualitative studies using open-ended questions to assess the experiences of RSOs with regard to various forms of social control. One notable study by Burchfield and Mingus (2008) interviewed male registered sexual offenders (N = 23) in central and northern Illinois. Their interview study of RSOs finds that some, but not all, perceive barriers to social capital were due to limited financial resources and their location in neighborhoods with fewer resources (Burchfield and Mingus 2008). Many also faced barriers of limited local social capital networks, or not having friends and family members living near them to offer assistance and not knowing their neighbors. Knowing others near you can aid in job location, for example. While their response rate was low (15%) as tends to be the case among this population, their findings indicate that these men all suffered from a lack of local social capital—not having close friends or relatives nearby and not knowing their neighbors—and that this was resultant of *individual*, *local*, and *formal* barriers related to shame, residential mobilization or vigilantism, and parole and registry restrictions. Importantly, one-third of those interviewed indicated their tendency to self-isolate or socially withdraw. RSOs in this sample restricted their interactions with others including family, friends, and neighbors largely as a way to minimize the sense of stigma they felt. They also restricted these interaction in effort to reduce the likelihood of others learning of their sexual offender classification, and thusly decrease the likelihood of losing their job, harassment, and/or mobilization against them. Finally, several offenders interviewed in this study

expressed concern over the sense of shame such a label would have on their families through indirect association with the registered sexual offender.

Mercado, et al. (2008) surveyed 138 male RSOs in New Jersey (response rate of 9.5%), and found that many perceived that community notification and residency restrictions had adversely impacted their ability to find employment and housing and had negatively impacted their social relations within the community. While findings about employment barriers are not surprising based on previous assessments of the damage a criminal record can cause (Albright and Deng 1996; Bushway 1998; Harris and Keller 2005; Pager 2003; Pager 2007; Pager and Quillian 2005; Visher, et al. 2004), the perception that the practice of overt notification about the criminal past has negatively impacted the RSO is important. While many ex-offenders must disclose criminal history to potential employers, the RSO population is unique in that this particular ex-offender status can be so overtly marked. This can make it impossible in many cases to hide the criminal status from virtually anyone. A simple Google search of a name can pull up an RSO's registry information – where they live, what broad category their sex crime(s) falls into, and their risk level. This is obviously not the case with other types of ex-felons unless a more thorough background check is conducted.

Tewksbury and Lees' (2006) interviews with 22 RSOs (response rate of 12%) located in Kentucky found RSO experiences centered around employment difficulties, harassment, relationship troubles, and their feelings of vulnerability and stigmatization. They conclude that while the experiences of RSOs are at least similar to those of other offender populations, the intensity and extent of the experiences were greater than what is reported in research on populations of other types of criminal offenders.

Ultimately, many of the studies cited here likely suffer from response bias in addition to poor response rates. It may be that RSOs who have a complex understanding of the myriad issues faced by those with stigmatized identities are more likely to participate in these studies. It may also be that those who have had negative experiences participate in these sorts of studies in an attempt to give-voice to a very marginalized and small population. Ultimately those who are solicited but do not participate may feel uninterested in having to put their RSO identity and potentially their past under an academic microscope. Others may be unwilling to risk their sense of anonymity and lack trust for anyone remotely affiliated with the criminal justice establishment. Regardless, because sample sizes are generally limited and response rates are typically very small, it is likely there is something unique about those who do take the time to participate in these research studies and something else that filters out a large number of potential respondents.

## ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

This study focuses on social disorganization in conjunction with RSO residence patterns and RSO experiences and perceptions of informal and formal social controls. This work will speak to the small but growing body of literature on RSOs – both their experiences as well as social disorganization – as well as contribute to the bodies of theory on social disorganization, collective efficacy, and stigmatized identities. Social disorganization is a running theme throughout this research. It is used as a means to discuss not only where RSOs live, but used in chapters discussing RSO perceptions and experiences as a means to think about how neighborhood context may or may not shape

RSO experiences and perceptions. Collective efficacy primarily comes into play during discussions of RSO experiences with harassment and their perceptions of avoidance within their neighborhood context. It is hypothesized that RSOs in the least socially disorganized areas are more likely to experience forms of harassment and perceive avoidance more often simply based on the proposition within collective efficacy that areas that are more socially organized have a stronger sense of community and a greater willingness and ability to control their neighborhood environment. So while highly socially disorganized areas are at a disadvantage by virtue of containing higher proportions of RSOs, RSOs in areas of low social disorganization are at a potential disadvantage if experiences of harassment and a sense of isolation interfere with one's ability to reintegrate and fully rehabilitate. Finally, identity theory and theoretical work on stigmatized identities helps frame discussions of RSO housing location strategies, perceptions of how they are treated, and how RSOs discuss the SOR.

The next chapter explains data used throughout this dissertation including methods of data collection, methods of analysis, and the study population. Chapter three uses SOR data to answer the question of where RSOs live and how or if RSOs are a viable indicator of social disorganization. Chapter four builds an understanding of how RSOs find their housing and the strategies some RSOs use to find and retain their housing. Chapter five assesses RSO experiences and perceptions of harassment and their interactions within their neighborhood areas. Chapter six discusses RSO perceptions of the purpose of the SOR as well as how they view the SOR as influencing their experiences. The final chapter summarizes overall findings, offers a social process model, assesses policy implications, and offers future avenues for researchers.

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data from the public sex offender registry (SOR) and open-ended question survey and interview data were collected to explore issues related to registered sex offenders (RSOs) and social disorganization as well as RSO experiences. This chapter describes the location of the study area, SOR data collection, RSO data collection, the interview/survey schedule, and how the RSO data were analyzed.

### LOCATION OF STUDY

The location of the study is in central Arizona – in Maricopa County, which is also the location of the largest city in the state, Phoenix. Part of the rationale for this location is rooted in the fact that most studies of RSOs have taken place outside the American southwest in cities such as Chicago and Miami, and it makes sense to see whether results from eastern locales hold true in other areas of the country. Phoenix is also an ideal urban location because it is home to the largest proportion of RSOs in the state and has variation among neighborhoods by various elements of social disorganization such as poverty rates, housing vacancies, income levels, and owner-occupied housing unit rates. Another rationale for selecting this study area is the fact that the city of Phoenix has recently passed an “anti-clustering” ordinance limiting the population of RSOs in multi-family housing to ten percent or less and no more than one Level 3 RSO in a single complex. Recently, a buffer zone law restricting most Level 3 RSOs from living within 1,000 feet of a school or daycare also went into effect. This measure passed despite recommendations against it by a team of researchers at Arizona State University who had studied the RSO population in 2005 (see Katz, et al. 2006).

Indeed, the housing of RSOs was coming into question at the same time I was beginning to lay the groundwork for this study, adding the opportunity to assess RSO's perceptions and experiences with the new ordinances and laws. At the same time, due to Arizona's somewhat less restrictive housing laws compared to many other locations used in previous studies, Phoenix is assumed to be more immune to some of the spatial distribution restrictions created by strict housing ordinances that apply to most if not all RSOs in some cities in the U.S. Thus, Phoenix is a good location to assess whether RSOs may stand as an indicator of social disorganization, the topic covered in chapter four. A final rationale for this location is proximity to the researcher, which provides easier access to the study population in the area.

#### SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY DATA

On June 1, 1996 Arizona implemented community notification laws. This means the Arizona Department of Public safety must notify the community of anyone released as of that date. According to A.R.S. 13-3827, "The purpose of the internet sex offender website is to provide sex offender information to the public" (Arizona State Legislature, 2011a), and A.R.S. 13-3821 details what is to be included in the online registry (Arizona State Legislature, 2011b). The details included on the public sex offender registry (SOR) are the offender's name, address, age, current photograph, the offense committed, and notification (risk) level. The offender's race, weight, eye color, hair color, and sex are also included on the Arizona SOR. In essence, a single listing on the registry looks much like a standard driver license with the obvious exceptions being a very brief description of the offense, risk level, convicting jurisdiction information, and a small map showing

the offender's registered address and the addresses of nearby schools and daycare facilities.

Arizona has approximately 14,500 RSOs (Arizona Department of Public Safety, 2013a). The vast majority of RSOs do not appear on the public registry because they are determined to be Level 1 in terms of re-offense risk. The total RSO Level 2 and 3 population was 2,054 in July 2009. Level 2 and 3 RSOs accounted for .054% of the total population of Maricopa County in 2010 and .09% of the total population of Phoenix. According to the downloaded data from DPS, there were 3,912 Level 2 and 3 RSOs in the state of Arizona during the data collection period in July 2009. Roughly 52% of all Level 2 and 3 RSOs in Arizona in July 2009 lived within Maricopa County, and 30.7% of all Level 2 and 3 RSOs in Arizona lived within the city of Phoenix in July 2009.

The registry is updated every weekday as information must remain current. RSOs are required to submit within 72 hours of moving (excluding weekends and holidays) their new address. Those who are homeless are required to register as transient every 90 days. Within a three-day period of receiving updated information, the sheriff in the jurisdiction forwards pertinent information to the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) who then updates the database within three days (Arizona State Legislature 2011c).

The public registry in Arizona contains all Level 2 and 3 RSOs; Level 1 RSOs are not subject to appearing on the registry in the state of Arizona. Within the registry the user must manually search for an RSO by name, address, zip code, electronic ID (screen names, email address(es), social networking information, etc.), or by absconder status.

Once the user decides how to search, the database returns results based on the search criteria. The registry is available at: [http://www.azdps.gov/Services/Sex\\_Offender/](http://www.azdps.gov/Services/Sex_Offender/).

As discussed in the previous chapter, each state is allowed to set their own means of determining risk of re-offense and community threat. In the state of Arizona, risk-level determination is done on a case-by-case basis by a panel of experts according to 19 criteria that the state has determined to be factors contributing to sex offender recidivism and the risk the RSO might pose to the surrounding community. These risk factors were outlined in Chapter 1. The DPS statement on risk level determination in Arizona reads as follows:

Prior to an offender's release or sentence to probation, the agency that had custody of the individual completes a risk assessment screening profile. This instrument evaluates nineteen criteria that are considered to be significant factors contributing to sex offender recidivism. Each criterion is given a score, which is then totaled to arrive at the recommended risk level. All criminal justice agencies must use the standardized Arizona Risk Assessment, however, occasionally law enforcement discovers information which can affect an offender's risk level. As such, law enforcement is given the discretion to either accept the recommended risk level or complete another risk assessment (Arizona Department of Public Safety 2011a).

Such state level decisions as well as the discretion in assessing risk impacts those seen on the public SOR.

The search method used for registry data collection was zip code. Each zip code within Maricopa County had to be searched separately. I created my own searchable database in a spreadsheet format, which contains all information on Level 2 and 3 RSOs within Maricopa County at one time point in July 2009. The database I created contains: zip code, race, sex, risk level, offense category or categories, county and state(s) of

conviction, whether the RSO resides at a verified address, homelessness status, and whether or not there was a current photograph posted on the public registry.

Besides a searchable, free online registry provided by DPS, DPS makes the entire public registry for the state of Arizona available for purchase for \$25.00. I purchased the list in July 2009 and searched the online registry manually to re-verify information from the public free registry on RSOs within the boundaries of Maricopa County. I found the searchable spreadsheet I created offered a more complete and less repetitious snapshot of the public registry. The registry data I collected is used in Chapter 3, assessing RSO residence alongside level of social disorganization.

Sex offender absconders (N=207), those whom officials have lost track of and who are presumably evading the authorities, were not included in the final data analysis because there is no way to ascertain if they reside within the county or not. RSOs who did not have verified addresses were, however, included because they have registered as living within the county, but had not yet had their listed address verified by DPS. Lack of address verification is not uncommon given the number of RSOs, limited DPS resources, the ability of RSOs to move residences, as well as the annual re-verification process DPS carries out regardless of whether the RSO has moved.

#### ZIP CODE LEVEL DATA

The analysis of social disorganization in Chapter 3 utilizes data from my search of the SOR as well as 2010 U.S. Census data, American Community Survey (ACS) 2007-2011 5-year estimate data, and Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Stabilization Program data from 2008, the most recent years at the time the analysis was

completed for which data are available. Poverty rate, housing vacancy rates, proportion of non-white residents, and median income were obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2007-2011 5-year estimates at the zip code level. Owner occupied housing rates, Zip Code Tract Area (ZCTA) land areas, and ZCTA population totals were obtained from 2010 Census data. Foreclosure data is from the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) neighborhood stabilization program (NSP) data on 2008 foreclosure starts at the census tract level. Using Crosswalk files, tracts were converted into zip codes. From here rates within the zip code were averaged to create an overall average for the zip code. Each variable was selected for its relationship to the three major dimensions of social disorganization – housing stability, racial heterogeneity, and economic deprivation. Data are used in a regression analysis to assess how well structural variables can predict the ratio of RSOs in ZCTAs.

## QUALITATIVE DATA AND ANALYSIS

### *Registered Sex Offenders*

Qualitative methods are often best suited for examining social processes (Silverman 2005), and well suited for understanding social processes and experiences where there is limited information. Qualitative methods are also useful in instances where it is difficult to operationalize and measure certain phenomena. Data for chapters detailing RSO experiences come from a systematic random sample of RSOs residing within Phoenix, Arizona from May 2012 through February 2013 who completed an open-ended survey or were interviewed by telephone. The decision to limit the area from which RSOs were sampled is based on my findings of social disorganization trends

discussed in Chapter 3 to allow for variation along the dimension of level of social disorganization of neighborhoods. It also serves to limit findings to a single urban area rather than create complications with a small sample from both urban and rural areas of the county and among a population who may not be subject to the same statutes or ordinances.

While the number of RSOs listed on the public registry varies from day-to-day due to routine updates, there were 1,217 listed RSOs within the study area at the start of data collection in May 2012 compared to 1,204 listed as living within Phoenix on the registry in July 2009 when registry data were collected. Since RSOs are a mobile population much like any other population, there is no reason to assume the registry data from 2009 are similar or dissimilar to registry data in 2012.

The Zip Code for each registrant on the registry was used to associate them with a Zip Code Tract Area (ZCTA). There are 43 Zip Codes located within the study area. ZCTAs were identified as being low, moderate, or high in social disorganization based on 2000 U.S. Census data on median income poverty rates and 2010 U.S. Census data on home ownership rates and home vacancies and comparing these rates to the rates of the city. These were the most current years for which there was available data at the ZCTA-level during the time the research was conducted. These characteristics were selected since they represent aspects of housing stability and economic deprivation discussed within the framework of social disorganization theory. The aspect of racial heterogeneity was excluded from classification due to concerns that it was highly correlated with income, poverty rates, and homeownership rates. Initially, there was also concern that disorganization is no longer mediated by race (Hannon and Defina 2005). Racial

heterogeneity, however, is used in the quantitative portion of the analysis within Chapter 3.

Designation of level of social disorganization was defined as how well a particular ZCTA fit or did not fit with the averages for the entire study area—the city of Phoenix. If, for example, the poverty rate in a ZCTA was lower than the average poverty rate of the city, it fails to meet one of the criteria for high social disorganization. Table 1 explains the social disorganization categorization used to inform study solicitation.

Of the 41 ZCTAs in the study area with available data on the indicators of social disorganization, 11 were identified as high (above average) on all four indicators of social disorganization. Eight ZCTAs were identified as moderately socially disorganized by meeting two out of four of the criteria for high social disorganization. Ten ZCTAs were identified as low in social disorganization. The remaining ZCTAs were excluded as a basis of survey-interview case selection due to a mixture of three out of four indicators of social disorganization that designated these areas as being moderately high or moderately low in social disorganization (see Table 1).

ZCTAs were categorized by level of social disorganization—areas of high, moderate, and low social disorganization (Table 1). This categorization process was used to inform case selection during the study solicitation process. During the period of May 2012 through February 2013 a total of 198 RSOs were randomly selected from the current list on the public registry from each of the high, moderate, and low socially disorganized ZCTAs using a random numbers table. The intention was to drawing an achieved sample of 25-50 RSO participants. Sixty-six RSOs were contacted from each category of social disorganization discussed previously. If the RSO selected was listed as

homeless or without an address, he or she was skipped since they would not be able to receive a study solicitation. Leaving out homeless RSOs has certain study implications, however. This particular group likely faces a unique set of issues and has potentially endured different forces of discrimination and harassment than other RSOs. Separate studies of homeless RSOs should be conducted to assess similarities and differences between different segments of the RSO population.

**Table 1.** Indicators of social disorganization and ZCTA designation.

<b>Level Social Disorganization</b>	<b>Number of ZCTAs</b>	<b>Categorical Definitions of Social Disorganization Relative to City Averages</b>
<b>High</b>	11 (26.8%)	Below average in owner-occupied housing units, above average housing vacancies, above average poverty rate, below average median household income
<b>Moderate/High</b>	7 (17.1%)	Meets 3 out of 4 criteria for high
<b>Moderate</b>	8 (19.5%)	Meets 2 out of 4 criteria for high or low
<b>Moderate/Low</b>	5 (12.2%)	Meets 3 out of 4 criteria for low
<b>Low</b>	10 (24.4%)	Above average in owner-occupied housing units, below average housing vacancies, below average poverty rate, above average median household income
<b>Total</b>	41 (100%)	--

*Note:* Two of the 43 ZCTAs were excluded because they do not have data on all included social disorganization measures.

Data were collected by mailed and online open-ended question surveys and phone interviews. While mailed and online surveys and phone interviews are not ideal research tools and come with certain limitations, ultimately the methods used reflected the need of researcher safety as well as participant confidentiality. As a lone woman in my early 30s at the time of the study conducting face-to-face interviews with known RSOs was not advised by a Department of Public Safety official. Despite the limitations, the use of

open-ended questions provides a forum for participants to fully express their experiences in their own words. This allows for a rich dataset and a more accurate portrayal of the respondent's point of view. Phone interviews were audio recorded for later transcription.

Participants were contacted by mail using the address information listed on the SOR. Each study solicitation contained a formal letter inviting the participant into the study and allowed them to choose the format of their participation – telephone, Internet survey, or mailed paper survey – if they chose to participate. Care was taken to stress that they would remain anonymous and to assure confidentiality. Each letter was hand-signed, provided contact information for the researcher, and advised the potential participant to call or email with any questions, comments, or concerns about the study. Each solicitation also contained a link to the Internet-based survey and a phone number and email address to request a mailed survey or to schedule a phone interview. A United States Parcel Service P.O. Box in the study area was rented to both ensure the safety of the researcher and the anonymity of the respondent by lessening the prospect of stolen mail or mail being misdirected to someone else's residence or workplace mailbox.

The study involved six separate waves or rounds of mailed study solicitations between May 2012 and February 2013. Due to cost of the mailings being born by the researcher, the data had to be collected over brief periods of time on a wave basis. During each wave the same number of participants were solicited from each level of social disorganization. So, for example, if ten RSOs were solicited from areas of low social disorganization, ten were also solicited from areas of moderate and high social disorganization. If no response was received within two and four weeks of the initial solicitation, a follow-up postcard with the survey link and researcher contact information

was mailed. The response window was six weeks for each wave. At the conclusion of each wave or round, the need to conduct additional recruitment was assessed based on the need to reach a certain number of participants (Bailey 2007) and a saturation point – the point at which evidence becomes repetitious (Ragin 1994). Bailey (2007) suggests that qualitative studies should obtain at least 20 participants. This criterion was not met until September 2012 at the conclusion of the third wave. The second criterion of a saturation point– was reached in December 2012 at the conclusion of the fifth wave. To verify saturation, one additional wave or round of recruitment began in January 2013.

Of the 198 study solicitations, 30 responses resulted in completed surveys either by mail, phone, or online making the official response rate 15.2%. While low, this response rate is typical of this population and similar studies conducted over the last several years where typical response rates are between 9.5%-20% (see, for example, Burchfield and Mingus 2008; Tewksbury 2005; Tewksbury and Lees 2006; Tewksbury and Zgoba 2010; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2011b). However, because the response rate is low, it does jeopardize the true randomness of the sample. One RSO who was solicited called and left a message thanking me for the opportunity, but stated he simply did not have time to participate. It is likely others faced similar circumstances. Others still perhaps were not interested in discussing the topics at hand. It is also possible that others may not have spoken English well enough read study materials and respond. It is also a possibility that those who did ultimately respond were those more likely to feel like they had a stake in the study or had faced issues as an RSO and felt inclined to voice their experiences.

An issue faced during data collection was that many of the initial study solicitations were returned as undeliverable (N = 24 or 12.1%). When a solicitation was returned as undeliverable, the registry was re-checked to verify the address of the RSO. In all but one case the address listed on the registry matched the returned solicitation. The one case in which the address of the returned solicitation did not match the RSO was no longer listed on the Arizona SOR despite Arizona being a lifetime registry state. This issue suggests the potential of the registry being out of date, incomplete, or RSOs not residing in the stated location according to the United States Postal Service carrier. Thirteen solicitations were returned as undeliverable from areas classified as highly socially disorganized. There were five solicitations returned as undeliverable from moderately socially disorganized areas, and six were returned as undeliverable from the least socially disorganized areas. A study of RSOs in Phoenix, Arizona by Katz, et al. (2006) found that the majority (61.9% to 70.8%) of RSOs likely do not reside at their stated residences, so undeliverable solicitations are not surprising. In effect, 174 solicitations are assumed to have actually reached a potential respondent making the response rate 17.2%; in reality it is impossible to tell if half or more of those solicited did not reside at their stated residences as Katz et al. (2006) found during their study of RSO residence patterns in Phoenix.

Table 2 details the responses by method of response and level of social disorganization. Two respondents elected to be interviewed via phone. A VOIP phone number was set up for the purposes of this study as a method of contact and as a method of interview for those electing to be interviewed by phone rather than filling out the open-ended survey online or by mail. Fourteen asked for and completed a mailed survey.

Finally, 14 completed the survey online. Those in more highly and moderately disorganized areas were more likely to respond by mail. Those in areas of low social disorganization tended to respond online. This difference is likely due to unequal Internet access. The low response rate by phone may be an indication of the skeptical tendencies of the RSO population toward researchers or unwillingness to use cellular phone minutes for a potentially lengthy call.

**Table 2.** Method of Response by Level of Social Disorganization

<b>Method of Response</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Online</b>	<b>Mail</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Level of Disorganization</b>				
<b>High</b>	0	1	5	6 (20%)
<b>Moderate</b>	2	4	6	11 (40%)
<b>Low</b>	0	9	3	12 (40%)
<b>Totals</b>	2 (6.6%)	14 (46.7%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (100%)

Depending on the preferred method of study participation, the consent process varied. Consent forms were mailed with paper-copy survey requests, read and agreed upon verbally for phone interviews, and given prior to survey access for Internet surveys. Six potential respondents who requested mailed paper surveys never returned the survey they requested, even after a follow-up reminder postcard was mailed.

The open-ended questions probed RSOs for their experiences with housing, friendships, familial relationships, harassment and discrimination, employment, probation, and perceptions of the public registry. Demographic questions were at the end of the survey. At the conclusion of the survey or interview each RSO was presented with the opportunity to address things that did not come up during the interview or survey they

felt were relevant or that I should know. At no time were RSOs asked about the offense(s) they committed to land them a place on the SOR; however, some elected to talk about their offense(s).

In order to encourage an open dialogue RSOs were given a set of open-ended questions as well as open and closed ended demographic questions. Respondents were given an unlimited amount of space in which to answer the open-ended questions when responding by mail and online. The two phone interviews lasted 60 minutes and 25 minutes respectively. All participants were mailed \$10 cash compensation for their time within ten days of their participation; two participants declined compensation.

Table 3 details the characteristics of the sample. Of the 30 RSO respondents in the sample, all were male. Of the 2,054 Level 2 and 3 RSOs in Maricopa County in July 2009, 2,014 were male (98%) and 40 were female (2%). For the city of Phoenix, Arizona, located wholly within Maricopa County 24 are female (2%) and 1,180 are male (98%). The median age of those in the study sample is 51 with a range of 31 to 78 years. The average age of those in the sample is 49.83 years whereas average age of those on the registry within Maricopa County in July 2009 was 44 years. Of the respondents in this study, 76.7% (N = 23) self-identified as non-Hispanic White, 10% (N = 3) Hispanic, 10% (N = 3) Black, and 3.3% (N = 1) Asian. Of Level 2 and 3 RSOs listed on the public registry within Phoenix in July 2009, 80.6% were White (includes Hispanic; the Arizona SOR does not make a distinction between White-Hispanic and non-Hispanic White), 13.9% were Black, 4.4% were Native American, and .5% were Asian. The racial composition of the sample population approximates the racial composition of the registry population. The 2010 Census indicates that population of Phoenix was 65.9% White,

6.5% Black, 3.4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2.2% American Indian (the remaining 22% of the population were categorized as having two or more races, unknown, or not reported) (U.S. Census 2013b). Of the respondents, 23.3% (N=7) were homeowners at the time of the survey. In terms of education, 43.3% (N = 13) of the RSOs report having a high school diploma or GED, 33.3% (N = 10) have at least some college-level education, 13.3% (N = 4) have an Associate's degree, 6.7% (N = 2) have a Bachelor's degree, and 3.3% (N = 1) have a graduate or professional degree. Thirty percent (N = 9) participants are married, 26.7% (N = 8) are divorced, 40% (N = 12) are single, and 3.3% (N = 1) are in a domestic partnership. In terms of income, 13 reported having an income of less than \$15,000 annually. Seven reported having an income between \$15,000 and \$24,499 annually. Two reported making between \$25,000 and \$34,999 annually. One RSO reported making \$35,000 to \$44,999 a year. Four reported making \$45,000 to \$54,999 annually. One RSO reported making \$55,000 or more annually. Therefore, most RSOs in this study had an income of less than \$25,000 per year. Of the 30 RSOs, 11 were classified as having weak social ties to friends and family, 15 had moderate social ties (strong connection to either friends or family), and four were classified as having strong social ties – exhibited by close relationships with friends and family members. Finally, 14 (46.7%) participants reported having children (step or biological); five talked about living with their minor children currently, five reported having adult-aged children (three lived with their adult children), and the remainder reported their children did not live with them but did not specify if they were adult or minor children.

**Table 3.** Description of Study Sample

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Offenders</b>
Sex (Male)	100%
Race (White Non-Hispanic)	76.7%
Average Age (Years)	49.83
At Least Some College	56.7%
Home Owner	23.3%
Married	30%
Average Years on Registry	11.79
Registry Notes Crime Against Minor	60%

\* Two RSOs did not provide the number of years they have appeared on the SOR.

Each participant was asked about the length of their registration. The average number of years on the registry among respondents is 11.79 years with a range of 4 months to 16 years; six participants have been on the public SOR since the inception of federal sex offender registration requirements and the development and implementation of Arizona's public SOR in 1996. Four RSOs had been on the SOR 0-5 years, six had been on the SOR 6-10 years, 11 had been on the SOR 11-15 years, and the remainder for more than 15 years. Two of the 30 participants did not know how long they had been on the registry, and are therefore not included in the average.

The SOR notes different types of sex offenses, but does not provide detail about the crime(s) committed. Each participant is categorized as either having committed an offense against a minor or not having committed an offense against a minor based on the information provided on the SOR. Eighteen (60%) of the respondents had crimes against minors noted on the public version SOR. Again, participants were not questioned about their offenses or asked to comment on them although three (10%) did mention them in some regard.

*Interviews with Probation Officers and a Homeless Shelter Worker*

Three additional interviews were conducted as part of this study. These interviews were with two probation officers and one worker at a local homeless shelter.

In July 2012, I filed the research paperwork for interviewing officers at the Arizona Adult Probation Department. I received approval to conduct interviews with the department until late November 2012. However, as a stipulation of the approval, I had to contact the commanding officer to have them send out an email with my study solicitation and contact information. Ultimately, only two probation officers contacted me and allowed me to interview them between December 2012 and January 2013. Interviewing these officers provided crucial insight into the validity of some of the claims of RSOs as well as much needed perspective on community management of this population. Ultimately this information stands as a source of internal validity. Interviews with probation officers were conducted by phone or face-to-face in the location of their choosing. Interviews were audio recorded and a semi-structured interview format was followed. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and were transcribed by me. The information obtained in these interviews is included throughout this dissertation.

Additionally, one brief, semi-structured phone interview was conducted in August 2012 with a worker at a homeless shelter in the study area. This shelter had previously accepted RSOs, but this was no longer the case starting in October 2009 according to the worker I interviewed. This interview was approximately ten minutes in length and was audio recorded and transcribed. Some of the information obtained in this interview is contained in Chapter 3.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

I transcribed all 30 of the surveys and interviews with RSOs, the two interviews with probation officers, and the interview with the worker at the homeless shelter. Quotes used in the chapters are verbatim to allow the participants' intended meaning to be conveyed with only minor modifications made for clarity. These modifications are noted with brackets. Quotations from phone interviews omit stuttering and redundancies. Pseudonyms are used for every participant to maintain confidentiality.

After the transcription of surveys and interviews transcripts were read multiple times to assess common themes across the surveys and interviews (Marshall and Rossman 2006). This research centers heavily on housing, relationships, perceptions of the registry, and issues encountered by RSOs. Data were manually coded for descriptive and topical themes as well as theoretical or analytical themes related to the theories guiding the research including stigmatization and social disorganization. Themes were identified based on these general categories of questions and which allowed for guided attention throughout the coding process to produce a coding scheme sensitive to not only connections relevant to theory, but to allow for codes relevant to processes, evaluations, and values of the respondents (Saldaña 2009). For example, with regard to the general theme of housing, themes of issues with securing housing, retaining housing, strategies to attain housing were identified. With regard to stigma various types of neighborhood interactions (or lack thereof), harassment within the neighborhood on the part of the RSO or their family or household members were identified.

## THE HOUSING AND FORECLOSURE CRISIS IN PHOENIX

Because this study focuses on residential issues and the housing of RSOs, it is necessary to address the housing crisis that coincided with this research. Phoenix, Arizona was one of the hardest hit cities in the United States during the recent foreclosure crisis. RealtyTrac, one of the leading foreclosure research firms, calculates the rate of foreclosures in a given area by dividing the number of foreclosed properties by the existing number of homes; other firms such as CoreLogic divide the number of foreclosed properties by the existing number of mortgages resulting in what is called a foreclosure inventory (Hansen 2013). Regardless of the calculation used data highlight a clear picture of the magnitude of the foreclosure crisis in Phoenix emerges.

During 2010, the peak of the foreclosure crisis nationally, the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale metropolitan area ranked fourth in the nation with its 7.27% foreclosure rate (Bay 2011). The Phoenix metropolitan area also had the highest reported number of bank repossessions (REOs) in the country in 2010 with 55,372, which was up 17% from 2009 (Bay 2011). By the end of 2012, the foreclosure rate in Phoenix fell to 3.09%, the 17<sup>th</sup> highest rate in the nation (RealtyTrac 2013). In March 2013, at the end of a 12 month period, the foreclosure inventory in the Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale area had dropped to 1.2%, down 1.7% from the year prior (CoreLogic 2013).

The housing crisis period coincides with study data collection. The impact of the housing and foreclosure crisis on data collection is a difficult question to examine, but at least one study participant noted he lost his house during the widespread, high magnitude crisis in Phoenix.

Another point to consider is strain on the rental markets in and around Phoenix during the crisis. As families lost their homes, many likely ended up staying in the area and renting homes and apartments. A few unexamined questions in this research are worth of consideration for later research: First, do landlords prioritize or rank potential tenants or do they tend to rent to the first person or family that can pay the deposit and rent and provide proof of income? Second, if landlords do prioritize how do they prioritize or examine individual-level factors like income, RSO status, rental history, and so forth? Finally, does one's registered sex offender status drop one out of the running for a rental home or apartment when there is another viable renter or even when there is a less financially viable renter who does not have a stigmatized status? Increased competition among renters might adversely impact those with a stigmatized status when there is a large enough pool of non-stigmatized renters. Still, one must also take into consideration points that RSOs bring up in this study – they often look for places to rent that do not require a background check, or they “out” themselves preemptively in their search to find places to rent. If an RSO finds a landlord who does not require a background check, prioritizing financials still occurs, but consideration of the stigmatized status may not.

## SUMMARY

I collected qualitative data from 30 RSOs, two probation officers, and one homeless shelter employee between May 2012 and March 2013 in addition to data from the public sex offender registry in July 2009. The research design allowed to me engage questions on RSOs residential patterns, social disorganization, RSO experiences, as well

as the housing and management of RSOs on probation. The open-ended nature of the surveys and interviews with RSOs and semi-structured interviews with probation officers allowed each participant to discuss their own experiences.

### CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION AND DENSITY OF LEVEL 2 AND 3 REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS WITHIN PHOENIX, ARIZONA<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter various methods are used to examine the segregation of the Level 2 and 3 RSO population across Phoenix, Arizona, the distribution of RSOs across Zip Code Tract Areas (ZCTAs), and indicators of social disorganization to predict ratios of RSOs (registered sex offenders) in ZCTAs in order to gain a better understanding of where RSOs reside and whether indicators of social disorganization can be used to predict ratios of RSOs.

There are several ways to measure residential segregation of mutually exclusive populations (Massey and Denton 1988). This segment of the study employs the use of the most common and suitable of these measures: the index of dissimilarity ( $D$ ). In addition to the index of dissimilarity, I also examine other factors within the study area to understand the distribution of the Level 2 and 3 registered sex offender (RSO) population in Phoenix, Arizona. These include density per square mile, percent of the total RSO population within given geographical units, and the percent of the total unit population comprised of RSOs. Finally, I examine the potential link between indicators of social disorganization including median household income, poverty rates, vacant housing units, owner occupied housing units, foreclosure rates, the proportion of non-white residents, and racially dissimilar populations to more fully inform the dynamic between these elements of social disorganization and where RSOs reside.

Previous studies have linked RSOs to socially disorganized neighborhoods as well

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<sup>3</sup> An early version of this chapter was published as an article in 2013. While this chapter has since been revised, edited, and added to, substantial portions of the article are used here. See: Gordon, Karen Elizabeth. 2013. "The Registered Sex Offender Population as a Marker of Social Disorganisation." *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. 52(5):527-542.

as to personal, social, and housing difficulties. Research has demonstrated that RSOs are more likely to be found in socially disorganized areas characterized by high crime rates, poverty, lower housing costs, unemployment, vacant housing, and lower median household income (Suresh, et al. 2010; Mustaine, et al. 2006). Suresh, et al. (2010) contend that restrictive housing zones by schools and parks force RSOs into more socially disorganized neighborhoods which undermines “spatial justice” for these neighborhoods. Other studies indicate that RSOs face stigmatization and discrimination in terms of housing (Mercado, et al. 2008), employment (Brown, et al. 2007; Mercado, et al. 2008), barriers due to restrictive housing policies (Levenson and Cotter 2005), geographic exclusion (Grubestic, et al. 2007), barriers to local social capital related to limited financial resources and location in more socially disorganized areas (Burchfield and Mingus 2008), and varied levels of punitive attitudes by gender and social class regarding perceived rates of recidivism (Brown, Deakin, and Spencer 2009). Based on previous findings, it makes sense to pose the question of whether RSOs might be a valuable indicator of the level of neighborhood social disorganization.

## DATA

Data used in this chapter were taken from the Arizona Sex Offender Registry (SOR) in July 2009 using the collection methods outlined in Chapter 2. Information from the SOR most relevant to the topic of social disorganization is the stated RSO’s Zip Code. With regard to one specific area of the city it was necessary to examine the listed registered addresses of RSOs. While it is assumed that the listed street address and Zip Code were accurate on the registry, there are problems with this assumption. A study by

Katz, et al. (2006) found that the majority of RSOs (approximately 61-71%) in Phoenix might not actually reside at their stated residences. In the qualitative portion of this study approximately 12% of the study solicitations were returned as undeliverable, which may be an indication that the SOR is inaccurate. This does not, however, translate to the RSO not living within the stated Zip Code, nor does it presume they do live within the stated Zip Code.

In July 2009, there were 1,204 Level 2 and 3 RSOs listed on the public registry within the study area. This is defined as Zip Codes wholly or mostly located within the Phoenix, Arizona city boundaries. Homeless RSOs, because they had an associated Zip Code on the registry, were included in this study. Other data on Phoenix, Arizona included in this chapter are from the 2010 U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2007-2011 5-year estimates, and the Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Stabilization Program data on foreclosures.

While the Census Bureau's use and assignment of ZCTAs are not always an exact match of the United States Postal Service (USPS) use or assignment of Zip Codes, they are accurate representations of that land area and were developed to deal with the inadequacies of USPS Zip Codes in Census data tabulation and generally represent the majority of USPS Zip Codes (US Census Bureau 2011a; U.S. Census Bureau 2011b). Therefore, ZCTAs are well suited for examining the land area encompassed by a Zip Code designated by the USPS and fit well for the purposes of this study since one may search the public sex offender registry using a single Zip Code.

## METHODS

The index of dissimilarity ( $D$ ) examines the evenness or unevenness of mutually exclusive groups' distribution across defined geographic sub-units (e.g., Zip Code, Census tracts) that comprise a defined geographic area (e.g., a metropolitan area, counties). The index of dissimilarity is a valuable tool in understanding population segregation in so far as it indicates relative segregation reliably when examining two mutually exclusive groups such as Level 2 and 3 RSOs and non-RSOs. The minimum value is zero (perfect integration or balance) and the maximum value is 1 (complete segregation). In the analysis, the index may be interpreted as a percentage of the RSO population that would need to relocate to another Zip Code Tract Area within the metropolitan area to achieve spatial balance. The value of this index is statistically independent of the relative size of the groups used in its computation (Massey and Denton 1988).

The question of whether Level 2 and 3 RSOs in Phoenix, Arizona are segregated can be partially answered by calculating the index of dissimilarity. The index of dissimilarity is commonly used in sociological studies of residential segregation racial or ethnic groups. The same idea can be applied to examining the potential residential segregation or uneven distribution of the Level 2 and 3 RSO populations within a given geographic area.

Suppose the following:

$x_i$  = the total Level 2 and 3 RSO population of the  $i$  geographic unit, e.g. ZCTA 85003

$X$  = the total Level 2 and 3 RSO population of the large geographic entity for which the index of dissimilarity is being calculated, e.g. Phoenix, Arizona

$p_i$  = the total non-RSO population of the  $i$  geographic unit, e.g. ZCTA 85003

$P$  = the total non-RSO population of the large geographic entity for which the index of dissimilarity is being calculated, e.g. Phoenix, Arizona

To calculate the index of dissimilarity measuring the segregation of RSOs from non-RSOs:

$$D = (.5) \text{SUM } |(x_i/X - p_i/P)|$$

The total population of Phoenix, Arizona, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, was 1,445,632 (U.S. Census Bureau 2013b); however, the total population counts using Phoenix ZCTAs analyzed in this study is 1,320,630. There is variation in the totals due to the fact that not all ZCTAs lay wholly within Phoenix. This study uses ZCTA information for those starting with 850XX, those that are defined as lying primarily within Phoenix, Arizona.

Other useful data are considered within this study and will be used to inform conclusions about neighborhoods and social disorganization within the study area. Among these are: the percent of the population RSOs within a locale, the density of the RSO population within the land area each ZCTA represents, and the overall percent of the study area's RSO population within the given area. Each of these simple calculations provide a more detailed picture of a given ZCTA to be considered alongside U.S. Census data on specific markers of social disorganization.

Finally, a multivariate linear regression analysis is used in order to assess the relationship of various elements and characteristics of social disorganization to the ratio of RSOs relative to the expected average of RSOs the city. This type of analysis is useful for assessing the strength of a variable's relationship to the independent variable of

interest and its ability to predict ratios of RSOs.

## RESULTS: INDEX OF DISSIMILARITY

The index of dissimilarity ( $D$ ) is .3789. In other words, approximately 38% of the population of Phoenix – either Level 2 and 3 RSOs or non-RSOs – would need to move residences to evenly disburse the populations across areas of the city. Index values under .3 indicate low segregation, values of .31-.6 indicate moderate segregation, and values exceeding .6 indicate high levels of segregation (Massey and Denton 1993). The Level 2 and 3 RSO population within Phoenix is moderately segregated. The overall index of dissimilarity presents a broad and somewhat limited picture of the city.<sup>4</sup> One ZCTA, 85007, stands out as having a large RSO population and contributing a disproportionate amount to the overall index of dissimilarity. The obvious question that arises is why this ZCTA stands out. This question is addressed in subsequent sections. Other measures such as density of RSOs per square mile and proportions of RSOs within ZCTAs lend more insight into patterns occurring within the city. These measures are discussed below.

## RESULTS: ZCTA-LEVEL MEASURES

Other measures of RSO residence patterns in ZCTAs include their overall proportion in a ZCTA, RSO ratio to the city average, RSO density per square mile within a ZCTA, and RSO total population percentage within specific ZCTAs. Each of these aspects lends critical insight into the distribution of the RSO population in ZCTAs given the RSOs population's small size relative to the non-RSO population (see Appendix A

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix A notes the absolute values for  $(x_i/X - p_i/P)$ , and these values attest to some degree of the unevenness of the RSO population across the various ZCTAs.

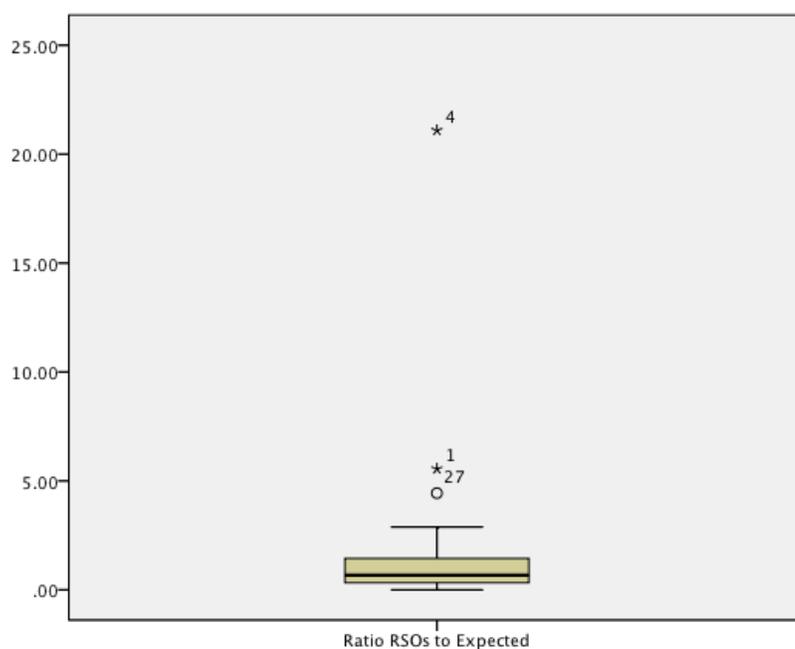
for ZCTA-level densities).

Examining RSOs as a percentage of each ZCTA's overall population provides some perspective regarding the small size of the Level 2 and 3 RSO populations in comparison to the overall population of each ZCTA, yet shows that some areas within Phoenix are subject to above average proportions of RSOs (see Appendix A). Level 2 and 3 RSOs as a percentage of each ZCTA with an RSO population ranges from .01% at the lowest end to 1.90% of a ZCTA at the highest end. The RSO population as a percent of the overall population count for ZCTAs included in this analysis is .09%, so while some ZCTAs have fewer RSOs than what is expected based on their proportion to the city population, one ZCTA has 21 times the amount of RSOs, but most ZCTAs have levels generally near the city-wide average (Figure 1). Of the 43 ZCTAs in the study, 13 (30.2%) ZCTAs have a higher overall percentage of RSOs within the ZCTA, 2 (4.7%) of the ZCTAs are at the .09% benchmark or average, and 28 (65.1%) ZCTAs are below the expected average of .09%. The median for the ratio of RSOs to the expected city average is .67 and the interquartile range is 1.23 (Figure 1). While most ZCTAs are at or below average in terms of the overall RSO population, just understanding the phenomenon in terms of proportions still does provide a complete picture of the RSO population and potential structural variables that are operating within ZCTAs.

RSO density per square mile within a given ZCTA speaks, of course, to the density of RSOs within each ZCTA based on the land area of the ZCTA. Each ZCTA represents a geographic land area within the city boundaries. Within the study area, the land area of each ZCTA varies from approximately two square miles to 74 square miles with a median of 9.001 square miles. Generally speaking, ZCTAs farther from the city center

have larger land areas. RSO density per square miles in ZCTAs with an RSO population in 2009 ranges from .04 per square mile to 59.15 per square mile with a median of 2.2 RSOs per square mile and an overall study area average of 2.33 per square mile. Of the 43 ZCTAs included, 21 have above the 2.33 average of RSOs per square mile. While most ZCTAs are below the .09% average in terms of RSO to total ZCTA population proportions, approximately half of the ZCTAs contain higher than average densities of RSOs.

**Figure 1.** Boxplot of Ratio of RSOs and Expected City Average of .09%.



Another method of examining the RSO population within ZCTAs is by comparing the percent total of Level 2 and 3 RSO populations in Phoenix within each ZCTA. For ZCTAs with an RSO population, these range from .08% to 22.17% of the RSO population (see Appendix A, Supplementary Data). Table 4 shows the variation in the proportion of RSOs. Fully 67.5% of ZCTAs in the study area contain less than 2% of the total Level 2 and 3 RSO population in the study area, and 32.5% of ZCTAs contain more

than 2% of the total Level 2 and 3 RSO population, again showing how some ZCTAs are subject to higher proportions of the RSO population.

**Table 4.** Proportion of Total RSO Population in ZCTAs

Total Proportion RSO Population	Frequency Count ZCTAs	% ZCTAs
<1%	14	32.5%
1-1.99%	15	35.0%
2-2.99%	5	11.6%
3-3.99%	3	7.0%
4-4.99%	2	4.7%
5-5.99%	1	2.3%
6-6.99%	1	2.3%
7-7.99%	1	2.3%
>8%	1	2.3%
TOTAL	43	100%

Returning to the outlier from the previous section, 85007 once again stands out from the other ZCTAs with regard RSO proportion to total ZCTA population, RSO density, and the percentage of the total RSO population. Over 22% of all RSOs in this study lived within the 85007 ZCTA, which is just over 4.5 square miles in terms of total land area, leading to an RSO density of 59.15 per square mile. To aid in the understanding of *why* certain variations of RSO density and RSO proportion of a particular ZCTA population exist, it is necessary to explore patterns related to social disorganization as well as resources within a given area.

Upon closer examination of compiled registry data, it became apparent that a substantial proportion of RSOs within 85007 resided at one of two locations. Both of these locations are addresses of homeless shelters run by the same organization that, up until December 2009, knowingly accepted RSOs. Fully 43.8% of the RSOs within this ZCTA were registered at one of these two locales despite only 3% of the RSO population

within the ZCTA being labeled as “homeless” on the registry; with a shelter address, RSOs were not marked as homeless. While 22 of the 43 ZCTAs included in this study had at least one homeless RSO according to public registry information resulting in just 3.2% of RSOs on the registry labeled as homeless, 85007 had proportionally more than any other ZCTA when taking their residence in the shelters into account.

A shelter staff member interviewed in August 2012 who was hired after December 2009 when shelter policies changed had this to say:

We’re still working on what to do with all these guys, but parole and probation officers keep sending them to live on the corner by the shelter even though we can’t accept them any longer.

Later in the conversation the informant disclosed that a lack of resources was a fundamental issue, and that only one shelter he knew of in the County, located in a suburb of Phoenix, was still accepting a limited number of RSOs. Officials directing RSOs to this particular area likely contributed to the large number of homeless and shelter-dwelling RSOs within the ZCTA at the time of data collection. The staff member did not know what prompted the shelter policy change in 2009.

During a recent check of the registry in November 2013, there were 253 RSOs in 85007, still the highest proportion of RSOs in the city. Fifteen of the 31 listed homeless RSOs in 85007 were registered to a street corner next to one of the shelters, and somehow 23 RSOs are listed as living one of the two shelters that closed their doors to RSOs.

Interviews with two probation officers conducted in December 2012 and January 2013 who work solely with RSOs also provided some insight into the issue of homeless RSOs and the continuation of high proportions of RSOs in 85007 even after the shelters

closed their doors to RSOs. One officer who started working as a probation officer after the shelters changed their policies has this to say:

I've heard that there was an issue with a sex offender like offending in a shelter, and so... I've only heard so I don't know if that's true and that's why they said "no more."

The other probation officer did not seem to know exactly what happened either, but shared a different reason and had additional insights to offer regarding what happens when an RSO is homeless:

When I started this caseload [the shelter] took them. And then the Levels changed I think and then overflow took them. Then overflow [homeless shelter] said no and now they have nowhere to go. So probation has sort of adopted this, "If you're homeless we can get GPS put on you" .... we say, "Unfortunately we can't lose you in the community so we're going to give you a GPS unit and we can go find you." And then it becomes, "Well where can you register?" And I believe the Sheriff's department won't accept 12<sup>th</sup> and Jackson [...] you can't register homeless on that street corner, and that's when we scramble and sort of everything else goes on hold. Like the treatment aspect, I'm not even worried- I mean I am, but you're blinders are on housing.

While the reason for the shelters changing their policies about RSOs is unknown to these two probation officers, the fact remains that during the time of data collection and even well after the policies changed there are still a large number of RSOs in one specific area.

The second probation officer had additional insights into why there is a large RSO population in one ZCTA. The officer suggested that the ways properties are zoned in this area of the city is part of the equation.

[T]here's also um a push from um PD and law enforcement to not have so many registered sex offenders in that area. I went to a committee that they said, I think, there were 250 registered sex offenders within 2 or 3 miles of [the shelters] and so um, it's sort of not fair because included in that is the [name of residential hotel] and the [name of residential hotel] and several places that are zoned commercial where a lot of people live. So it's not really- are they all homeless or is it that that's where some of the cheapest entry-level housing is? [...] I think the [name of residential hotel] is a

\$130 a week for a roof over your head and you really can't find much cheaper without a job or some type of employment history either so it's a really big problem.

Thus, while the shelters changed their policies and there are now fewer RSOs who live in these shelters and fewer marked as homeless in this ZCTA, the number and proportion of RSOs between 2009 and 2013 remains relatively unchanged.

While the index of dissimilarity suggests RSOs are moderately segregated in the city of Phoenix and proportions and densities of RSOs at the ZCTA level suggest that certain areas have much higher or lower densities and proportions of RSOs than others areas, scatterplots and regression analysis present a clearer picture of various elements of social disorganization that predict patterns of RSO ratios relative to the city average of RSOs.

## HYPOTHESES

Recall that Shaw and McKay's initial theory and research proposed that economic deprivation, (represented in this study by median income), racial heterogeneity (here represented by the proportions of non-White residents and proportions of racially dissimilar residents), and residential instability (here represented by foreclosure rates, proportion of owner occupied housing, and proportions of vacant housing). Each set of hypotheses is rooted in Shaw and McKay's theory of social disorganization and draw on myriad studies on social disorganization that use similar indicators to understand social disorganization.

*Hypotheses: Neighborhood Residential Instability*

It is expected that as foreclosure rates increase, owner-occupied housing proportion decrease, and housing vacancies increase the neighborhood's residential stability declines with housing turnover. With this increase in instability, the ratio of RSOs to the expected average will increase. Theoretically, the neighborhood and individuals within the area may lose the ability to control the area. This would allow stigmatized populations such as RSOs to enter without much resistance.

*H1:* If foreclosure rates increase, the ratio of RSOs relative to the expected average will increase. Stated differently, as foreclosure rates in an area rise, areas will have a greater likelihood of higher than average ratios of RSOs.

*Null:* Foreclosure rates have no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

*H2:* As owner-occupied housing proportions decrease, the ratio of RSOs relative to the expected average will increase. Stated differently, higher owner occupied housing proportions are expected to decrease the ratio of RSOs relative to the expected average.

*Null:* Owner-occupied housing proportions have no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

*H3:* Areas with higher proportions of housing vacancies are expected to have above average ratios of RSOs. Stated differently, areas with lower proportions of housing vacancies are expected to have lower than average ratios of RSOs.

*Null:* Housing vacancy proportions have no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

*Hypotheses: Racial Heterogeneity*

Some studies use proportions of non-Whites as a means to test the dimension of racial heterogeneity. Theoretically, social cohesion and the ability to control who is living amongst them may be reduced as neighbors perceive differences between themselves and others along racial and ethnic lines.

*H4:* Areas with greater proportions of non-White residents will have higher ratios of RSOs.

*Null:* Proportions of non-White populations have no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

*Hypotheses: Economic Deprivation*

Finally, it is expected that as median income decreases and poverty rates increase the ratio of RSOs to the expected average will increase. Theoretically, the more economically deprived an area is, the less resources people have to devote to protecting neighborhoods or investing in housing.

*H6:* As median income increases, the ratio of RSOs to the expected average will decrease.

*Null:* Median income has no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

*H7:* As poverty rates increase, the ratio of RSOs to the expected average will increase.

*Null:* Poverty rates have no relationship to the expected ratio of RSOs.

ANALYSIS

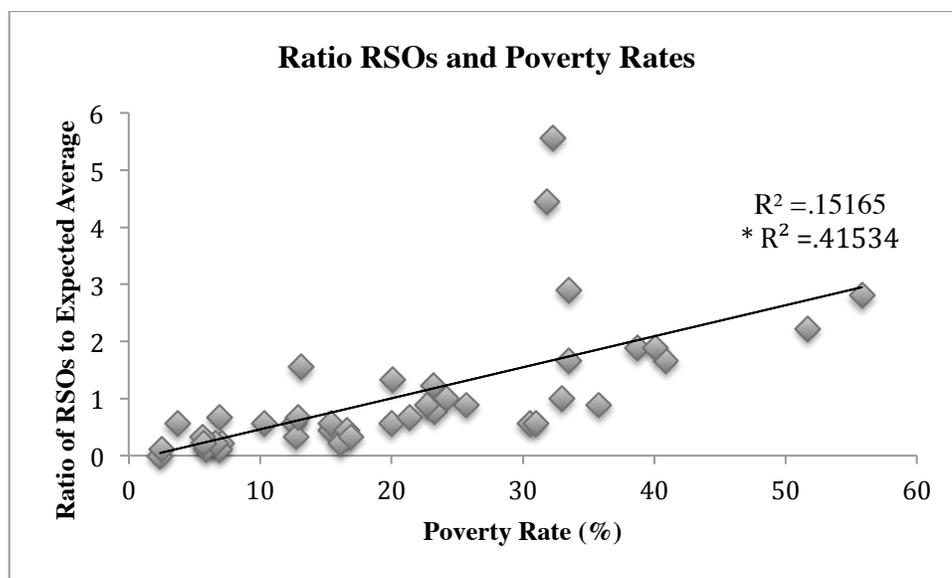
Scatterplots were created for each variable and its relationship to the ratio of RSOs to visualize data and assess correlations between the ratio of RSOs to the expected average of .09% at the city-level and structural variables. These variables include poverty rates, median income, owner occupied housing rates, housing vacancy rates, foreclosure rates, and proportion of non-white residents.

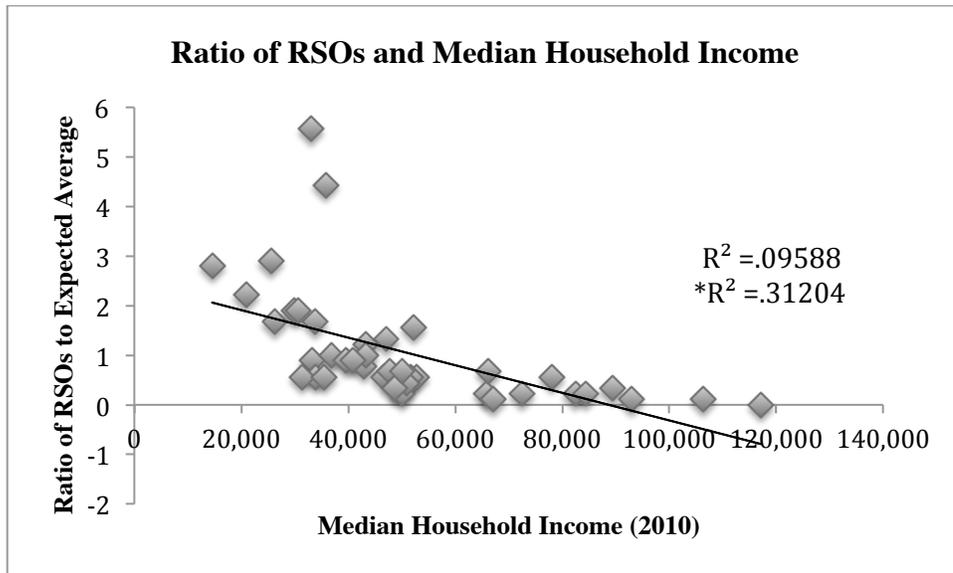
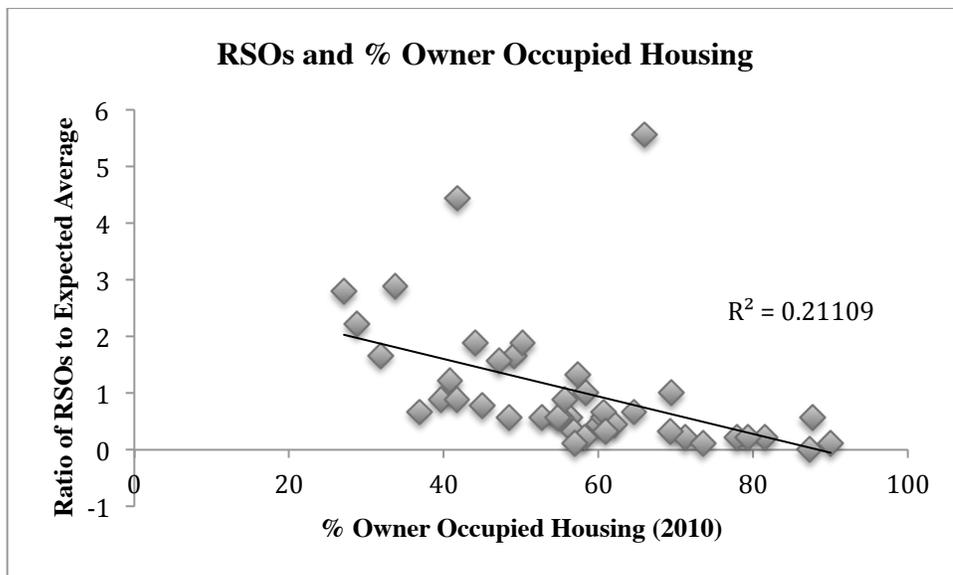
Each scatterplot is below. The R-squared value for all cases is reported. An R-squared value was calculated in which the extreme outlier case of 85007 has been removed. These values are noted with an asterisk on the plots. Each of the scatterplots depicts the line without the outlier of 85007.

The overall R-squared values range from .016 for foreclosure rates (Figure 6) to .152 for poverty rates (Figure 2). Once the outlier was removed the R-squared values increased to from .152 to .415 for poverty rates (Figure 2), .096 to .312 for median income (Figure 3), .095 to .211 for proportion of owner occupied housing (Figure 4), .148 to .401 for proportion of vacant housing (Figure 5), .016 to .104 for foreclosure rate (Figure 6), and from .089 to .223 for proportion of non-white residents (Figure 7). The R-squared values suggest that the structural and economic variables each have a weak to modest relationship to the ratio of RSOs in ZCTAs.

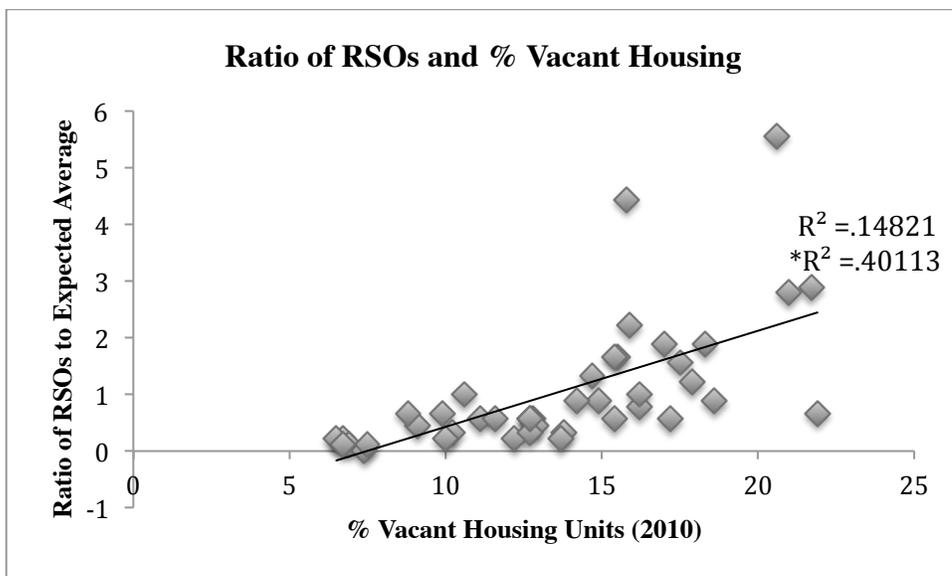
While the correlations are weak to moderate even with the extreme outlier excluded, each hypothesis can be accepted with caution and each null hypothesis can be rejected. While each variable's relationship to the ratio of RSOs compared to the expected average, correlations exist in the expected directions.

**Figure 2.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Poverty Rates

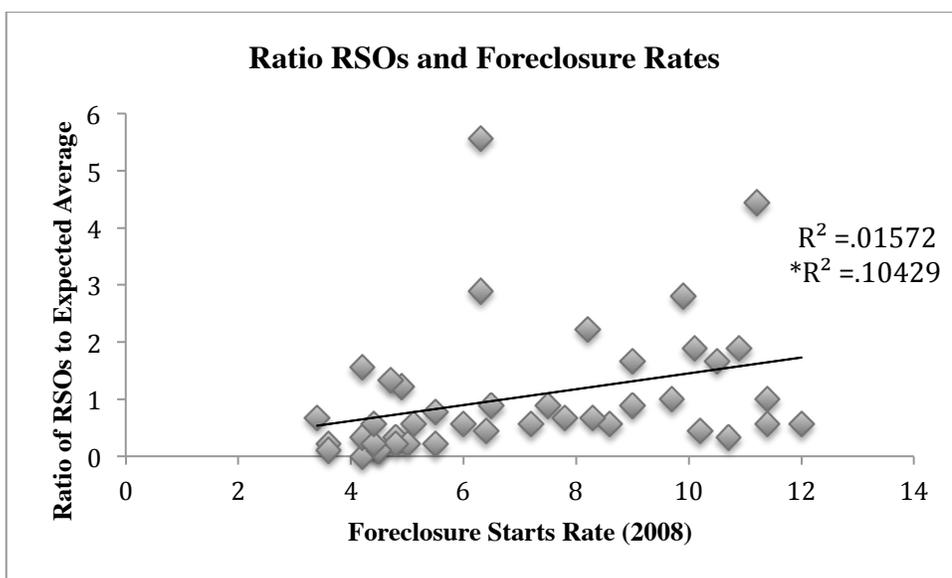


**Figure 3.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Median Income**Figure 4.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Proportion of Owner Occupied Housing

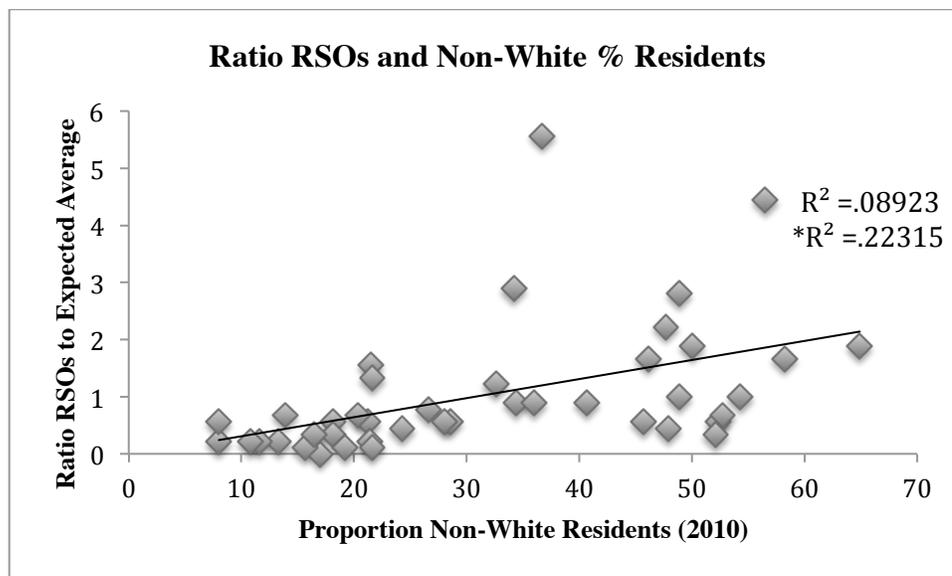
**Figure 5.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Proportion of Vacant Housing



**Figure 6.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Foreclosure Rates



**Figure 7.** Scatterplot Ratio of RSOs and Proportion of Non-White Residents



To further assess the relationships between the variables and the ratio of RSOs regression analyses were conducted. The regression analysis did not exclude the outlier. All independent variables were re-coded, and, with the exception of racial dissimilarity, each was re-coded using nested means. Nested means classification requires the calculation of the overall mean. Then data are classified by calculating the means of the two categories. Finally, the dependent variable of the ratio of RSOs to their expected average was categorized based on a ratio range and whether this range was above or below the expected average. The first category contained ratios of 0-.25, the second category .26-.5, the third category contained ratios of .51-.75, the fourth contained ratios of .76 to 1, and the fifth category was anything that exceeds the citywide average of RSOs.

Since many of the proposed variables are at least conceptually related, there is the threat of multicollinearity. This threat needed to be assessed because it affects the coefficient estimates of those variables that are collinear. One method of assessing this threat is to look at the correlation matrix. Allison (1999) notes that this method can be misleading because the coefficients may not be very high but a threat could remain and be serious. A better method to directly test for multicollinearity is to regress the related independent variables on one another (Allison 1999). Regressing poverty rates on median income yielded an R-squared value of .831 and an adjusted R-squared of .827. These two variables have a very strong linear relationship, which makes sense. If poverty rates are high in a given area, one can generally expect median income to be lower. To remedy this issue in the regression analysis, a variable may be excluded (Allison 1999). Here, the poverty rate variable was excluded from further analysis.

Other variable pairs did not display multicollinearity. Regressing the proportion of vacant housing on foreclosure rates yields an R-square .079 and an adjusted R-squared of .056. While seemingly related, more foreclosures can theoretically lead to increases in vacancies (of course that also depends on the stage of foreclosure); the relationship between these two variables is weak. Finally, regressing owner occupied housing rates on foreclosure rates also showed a weak relationship with an R-square of .102 and an adjusted R-Square of .081. This pair was tested based on the notion that higher rates of foreclosure may negatively correlate with the proportion of owner-occupied housing.

### *Regression Results*

Table 5 presents the results from four regression equations. Each equation has approximately the same adjusted R-squared value. None of the r-squared or adjusted r-squared values are especially high, suggesting only a moderate fit.

Based on the dimensions of Shaw and McKay's initial theory, which continue to inform studies on social disorganization, Equations 3 and 4 not only have the best fit, albeit by a very small margin, but also fit best on a theoretical level given that these equations include at least one measure in each of the three key dimensions of racial heterogeneity, housing stability, and economic deprivation. The R-squared value for Equation 3, which includes the variables of median income, vacant housing, and proportion of non-white residents is .778, and the adjusted R-squared is .761. Equation 4, which includes variables of foreclosure, median income, vacant housing, owner occupied housing, and the proportion of non-white residents has an R-squared value of .785 and an adjusted R-squared value of .756.

In all four regression equations, median income and vacant housing were the only variables with statistical significance. In all four equations presented in Table 5 vacant housing was significant at the .01 level. As indicated in Table 5, median income was statistically significant at the .01 level in Equation 1 and 2. The dimension of racial heterogeneity, whether operationalized as the proportion of non-Whites or as the amount of racial dissimilarity, was not statistically significant. Proportions of owner occupied housing and foreclosures rates were also not found to be statistically significant. Overall, vacant housing and median income are the best predictors of the variations in the ratios of RSOs compared to the citywide average of RSOs.

Correlations were in the expected directions for each variable and have a relationship to the dependent variable. However, the null hypotheses cannot all be rejected because the only statistically significant variables are median income and housing vacancies. As median income increases, ratios of RSOs generally decrease. Fewer housing vacancies in a given ZCTA are also associated with declines in ratios of RSOs. Also as expected, as owner-occupied housing proportions increase, ratios of RSOs generally decline, and as foreclosure rates increase ratios of RSOs generally increase. However, it should be noted that in Equation 4 the statistical significance of foreclosure rates was only .622, .227 for median income, and .33 for proportions of owner occupied housing. Finally, higher proportions of racial minorities (non-Whites) are associated with increased ratios of RSOs and areas with more racial heterogeneity (low proportions of racially dissimilar populations, whether White or non-White) are associated with higher ratios of RSOs, but not to a significant degree. Racial composition of ZCTAs has only a weak relationship to the dependent variable. In terms of racial dissimilarity, the significance level in Equation 4 was only .126, and in Equation 3 the significance level of the non-White residents proportion variable was only .12.

Overall, the economic indicator (median income, which recall was closely related to poverty rates) and the housing instability or turnover variable (housing vacancies) were the variables that have the strongest relationship to the dependent variable and stand out as the best predictors. A reason for this could be simply that areas with generally high rates of housing vacancies may simply take whatever occupants apply for apartments or home for rent in these areas. As far as income goes, economic strain and areas of lower median incomes are likely have fewer local resources and lower collective efficacy that

may operate to keep RSOs out of a given area as effectively as higher income areas. Additionally, RSOs who face employment issues may be effectively priced out of housing available in areas with higher median incomes.

**Table 5.** Regression Results.

Variables	Equation 1		Equation 2		Equation 3		Equation 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Owner Occupied Housing Foreclosure	--	--	-.134 (.179)	-.097	--	--	-.176 (.178)	-.127
Median Income	-.409** (.112)	-.372	-.374** (.122)	-.341	-.244 (.151)	-.222	-.202 (.168)	-.184
Vacant Housing	.808** (.141)	.583	.734** (.173)	.530	-.821** (.139)	.593	.702** (.177)	.506
Non-White	--	--	--	--	.240 (.151)	.187	.336 (.215)	.262
Constant	2.633		3.034		1.43		1.999	
R-Square	.764		.767		.778		.785	
Adjusted R-Square	.752		.749		.761		.756	

NOTE: N = 43; *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; *Beta* = standardized regression coefficient

\*\* p-value < .01

## DISCUSSION

There was a large homeless RSO population within the one particular ZCTA, 85007, during the registry data collection phase. This outlier became apparent throughout the stages of data analysis and necessitated further investigation.

According to registry data there was at least one homeless RSO in 22 of the 43 ZCTAs; however, 85007 had the vast majority of homeless and a large number living in shelters that were not labeled as being homeless (because they reside at the shelter).

Potential inaccuracies on the registry during data collection might not yield a complete

picture of the homeless RSO population in Phoenix, but the registry does lend insight into some of the potential difficulties faced by the RSO population. It should also be noted that psychological stress stemming from housing instability could potentially increase re-offense risk (Hanson and Harris 1998). While that point is beyond the scope of this research, it stands to reason that this presents a particularly problematic circumstance for an already troubled population, troubles for those responsible for monitoring this population, and problems for the greater community.

Level 2 and 3 RSOs are moderately segregated according to the index of dissimilarity. While this measure is helpful for assessing segregation of this population across the city, the index of dissimilarity in this study functions as a starting point to understanding RSO segregation and residential issues. A more complete picture of neighborhoods is gained by examining density and proportions of RSOs between ZCTAs and further insight is gained by using regression analysis to understand how well various indicators of social disorganization predict above average RSO populations across ZCTAs.

While this study is limited to just one city, findings here reaffirm what has been found in previous studies by Suresh et al. (2010) and Mustaine et al. (2006) -- that more socially disorganized neighborhoods tend to have higher densities of RSOs. Using criteria set forth in Chapter 2 that were used to solicit interviews from RSOs, over 90% of highly socially disorganized areas contain above average RSO densities as well as above average proportions of RSOs. These same areas contained the majority (61.1%) of the total RSO population despite less restrictive housing policies in Phoenix as compared to Chicago, the city used in Suresh et al.'s (2008) study.

RSOs themselves do not necessarily cause social disorganization, but appear to be a further indication of social disorganization when considered as a stigmatized population. RSO housing choices are likely mediated by economic and social circumstances related in part to their RSO status. If there are social and economic penalties for being an RSO, their choices will continue to be limited, relegating many RSOs to more socially disorganized areas and potentially driving these areas into further disrepute. An implication of this is that areas that are more socially disorganized often do not exercise mechanisms of informal social control and collective efficacy. Findings here suggest willingness to accept Level 2 and 3 RSOs into socially disorganized areas. Despite the fact that convicted sex offenders tend to re-offend at lower rates than other types of offenders these areas could potentially be subjected to more sexual offenses by previously convicted RSOs simply by virtue of having higher populations of Level 2 and 3 RSOs than other areas. This could contribute negatively to the social landscape of the affected neighborhoods and contribute to spatial injustices hinted at by Suresh et al. (2010).

Aside from standard indicators of social disorganization that include racial heterogeneity, economic instability, and housing instability, another indicator of social disorganization may be stigmatized populations such as RSOs. This could be operationalized using densities of RSOs, proportions of RSOs relative to the non-RSO population, or ratios of RSOs relative to the total RSO population of a larger geographic area. A final point to consider here is that RSOs may contribute to further neighborhood erosion if people outside these areas elect to not live in these locations because of the presence of RSOs.

There are several useful ways to assess RSOs' residential patterns. The index of dissimilarity is a useful tool to assess RSO segregation in a city such as Phoenix, Arizona. RSO density within a given area, and economic indicators of social disorganization are better tools for assessing RSO residential patterns across a city.

RSOs as a stigmatized population represent another potential indicator of social disorganization. Their presence is related to many traditional indicators of social disorganization. Areas with more economic instability and housing instability were related to higher ratios of RSOs relative to the citywide average of RSOs.

It is important to explore RSO experiences within various neighborhood types as well as their personal perspectives on the SOR. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, level of neighborhood social disorganization is discussed and used to help contextualize findings with the understanding that neighborhood structure may influence some of what RSOs experience.

## CHAPTER 4: HOUSING

This chapter focuses on the registered sex offender (RSO) experience of finding housing and the strategies RSOs use to find housing within Phoenix. Much like the housing choices that non-RSOs face, the housing choices of RSOs are likely mediated by finances, proximity to work or family, and so forth. Still, RSOs face a more cumbersome process involving probation officer approval (if they are on probation), residence restriction categories they might fall into such as not being allowed to reside near a park or school in some cases, density or anti-cluster laws, as well as landlord and community controls such as apartment complexes having “crime-free”<sup>5</sup> policies or HOAs not approving housing sales or rentals to RSOs due to their community’s written policies.

Many recent studies focus on detailing many of the fairly new *formal* housing restrictions such as boundaries around schools, parks, and bus stops and how this limits the residences of RSOs in certain jurisdictions. (See, for example Grubestic and Murray 2007; Hughes and Burchfield 2007; Suresh, et al. 2010). Suresh, et al. (2010) argue that restrictive housing zones force RSOs into more socially disorganized neighborhoods, undermining “spatial justice” for these neighborhoods. Findings in the previous chapter indicate that RSOs are more likely to be found in more socially disorganized areas, and it was argued that RSOs may stand as potential indicator of social disorganization.

Mustaine, et al. (2006) found evidence that RSOs do not actively choose to live in socially disorganized neighborhoods. Theoretically, it makes sense that many RSOs

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<sup>5</sup> Phoenix Police has a three-part formal certification process for multi-family dwellings to help residents, owners, and managers keep illegal activity and drugs off of their property. It is called the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, and, as of 2008, had 1,400 registered properties and 149,800 rental units (Smokey 2008). Certification involves a seminar, security checks, and a crime prevention meeting. An intended goal is to provide safer properties and help sustain property values. Certification as a crime-free dwelling involves being able to block felons from living on the premises.

might be relegated to areas with higher degrees of social disorganization given that these areas are often lower in collective efficacy and may not have the collective ability or collective desire to keep such “undesirables.” Socially disorganized areas are also generally the least expensive to live within. This can be attractive to newly released ex-criminal populations without many resources and for those who have difficulty finding or retaining employment. Furthermore, more socially disorganized areas often contain fewer schools and parks than areas of less social disorganization, and, depending local or state statutes, schools and parks are often areas with restrictive buffer zones around them that prevent some RSOs from living near them. As findings in Chapter 3 highlight, more RSOs in Phoenix are found in areas marked by more indicators of social disorganization.

Katz, et al. (2006) found RSO “hotspots” or clusters within Phoenix and higher concentrations of RSOs in areas that are known to be more socially disorganized such as the downtown corridor. There are now restrictive laws in Phoenix, but unlike some jurisdictions in the United States, not all RSOs in Phoenix are subject to the same restrictive requirements. Still, restrictive laws likely restrict the residences of many RSOs in some meaningful ways, and the intention of the laws in various jurisdictions in the United States. At the same time, however, RSO housing choices within the area are not entirely rooted in policies based on boundaries or buffer zones around schools and daycares; choices can depend on designated Risk Level as well as previous offenses. Probation officer decisions, conditions of probation and treatment, determined Risk Level, as well as the decisions of the RSO help guide RSO housing. As discussed in Chapter 1, what does apply uniformly to all RSOs in Phoenix is the so-called “anti-

clustering” or “density” laws, which restricts the number of RSOs living in a multi-family housing dwelling that is zoned residentially.

The question: *What issues do RSOs face beyond restrictive policies when locating housing?* remains largely unexplored by researchers as they generally focus on housing restrictions that may or may not impact every RSO depending on the jurisdiction. Strictly focusing on the policies leaves out an important piece of the puzzle – the RSO and the choices he or she makes as they navigate the social and legal aspects of their housing situations. Thus, the questions this chapter addresses are as follows: What difficulties do RSOs face beyond residence restrictions in securing housing? What strategies do RSOs utilize as they search for housing?

Data in this chapter center on two predominant themes from the open-ended surveys taken by 30 RSOs in Phoenix, Arizona: RSOs facing issues locating and retaining housing and strategies used by RSOs to locate viable housing options. Each of these themes is discussed in turn in the following sections.

The first section of this chapter examines the issues encountered by RSOs when looking for housing. The second section of this chapter closely examines the strategies used by RSOs as they search for housing. I argue that the RSO label functions as a form of identity insofar as one is labeled publicly by appearing on the sex offender registry (SOR) and has to disclose this under circumstances in which one's background comes into question such as when policies ban RSOs and when strict application and background checks are used. The RSO's understanding of such issues give rise to the strategies used by RSOs when they are looking for viable housing.

## LOCATING HOUSING

RSOs were asked to explain experiences related to finding and retaining housing both before and after becoming an RSO. One of the prompts posed to RSO participants was: *Have you ever had difficulty finding housing or have you needed help finding housing?* Asking RSOs to describe any experiences with housing difficulties since they first appeared on the SOR followed this question. RSOs were also asked to assess their sense of personal safety, living conditions, and interactions with landlords.

Of the 30 RSOs in this study only six (20%) stated they have experienced *no* difficulties either with finding or keeping housing as an RSO. In each of these six cases the RSO had been on the registry for at least 7 years, indicating that their perspectives at the time of participating in this study are not simply a product of being newly registered lacking ample time to face barriers; this subset of RSOs in the study have never seen the RSO status as a barrier. Of the six, one has lived with his immediate family since his release, and two bought houses upon their release from prison and treatment. The fourth respondent mentioned that while he had trouble finding housing, he felt it was due to the recession wiping out his savings rather than something he could directly trace to his RSO status. The final two respondents indicated that they have had no issues locating housing because they explain their RSO status upfront to potential landlords in effort to avoid trouble. Two of the six participants who have experienced no difficulties currently reside in areas of low social disorganization, three are in moderately socially disorganized areas, and one is in an area categorized as being highly socially disorganized. This variation potentially points to the variability in experiences across different types of neighborhoods and among those who can afford housing in different areas.

Most RSOs in this sample perceive and experience a variety of issues related to finding and/or retaining housing that they feel are attributable to their RSO status. Of the 24 (80%) participants who have experienced housing-related difficulties, all referenced forces of discrimination or limitations in some ways – either apartment complexes not allowing them or simply not calling them back about applications after a background check, neighbors complaining and sometimes harassing them to the point where they may move, and apartment or housing locating agencies not wanting to assist them due to their RSO status. Interestingly, only one of the participants made mention of the residence restrictions such as limiting the number of RSOs in multi-family housing that went into effect in passing, but did not reference these restrictions as having a negative impact on him. Only two participants specifically referenced probation officers having to approve of their housing, but this was not brought up as presenting a problem for them, rather they framed it as helpful.

One of the two probation officers I interviewed also mentioned difficulties RSOs face finding housing. From this officer's perspective, the difficulties lie in the stigma faced by RSOs. When I posed the question about difficulties RSOs face as they re-enter society, the officer remarked,

There's a lot of stigma that goes a long with it, the registration that comes out. It's sort of hard to get somebody into a house or an apartment that has that because they have to disclose that. The whole neighborhood is gonna get flyer'd because it's not fair to the landlord or whoever to get that [unknowingly]. So I would say that housing and getting a job are the hardest just because of the conviction.

The officer went on to comment on measures in place that can help RSOs find housing if an RSO is facing problems or needs to verify if s/he can live in a certain location.

We have a gentleman that works for the probation department that handles density, so density is that law that says you have to be less than 10% and so... anytime we have an address [name of officer] checks it out. So [officer] goes to the assessor's website and [officer] goes to all these different places to make sure it meets those laws and then [officer] enters that information into a database so we can keep track of where our people are. And so if we have a guy and say he wants to live from [lists an area of the city], and he has \$500, we'll give him [officer's] phone number because [officer] can look in [the] database say, "In that price range here's people who have rented to people with your type of conviction before." So [officer] can give them a heads up, but apartment complexes are always changing and they're always requalifying for crime-free housing, they have new renters, they have new... So we know a few places that are zoned commercially that are exempt from that law that we can send them to. So like hotels, the new ones, or there are some places downtown, there's one out on [lists location]. There's emergency housing, but some of the sort of nicer places, we have [an officer] that can help us. And of course whatever they can find as well. If they're willing to have that conversation with the landlord and we'll approve it based on the area, then have at it.

So, while the housing issue is a concern, the probation department does have a resource for RSOs to consult if they seek out assistance. However, housing may or may not be to an RSO's liking.

RSOs were asked to describe living conditions, but most RSOs did not directly address that question. Further, while there was no direct question asking RSOs to comment on how they see their RSO status impacting their standard of living, in three instances RSOs volunteered information stating that their RSO status and their issues locating housing compromised their living standards. Other RSOs indirectly address living standards by discussing employment issues and harassment experiences. This finding suggests these RSOs would likely choose to live elsewhere if they felt they could.

Lucas, the sole RSO who discussed attempting to enlist the help of a housing agency had this to say about his experiences finding housing as an RSO:

I have had tremendous difficulty finding housing. Not one single agency that helps people find homes or apartments would take me as a client. As a result, I lived for a while in a seedy 'kitchenette' place which was really an old hotel [that was] converted into studio apartments. I finally got a place by buying my own home. I lost my home a year ago, but found an understanding couple with a rental home who were willing to rent to me. [Lucas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

This indicates that his RSO status initially caused him to lower his standards for housing.

Similarly, Samuel lends insight into how his RSO status has impinged on his social class standing by impacting where he is allowed to live:

[Finding a place is] nearly impossible unless you have the money to buy a place. If you have to find an apartment and would still like to live within the 'social type class' you grew up in such as mine – upper middle – it's not going to happen. I've had to make unwilling sacrifices on my place of residence. ... I came from living in a now multi-million dollar house to a \$425 a month apartment complex known for renting to sex offenders. [Samuel, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Difficulties finding housing are not out of the ordinary. Calvin, an RSO currently residing in an area of low social disorganization, presents the issue this way:

Unless I can purchase a house... [or] locate and convince a trusting and fair roommate, or be lucky enough to have a family that can help, no apartment or HOA run neighborhoods will ever be an option for me to live in despite having a great job and being free from state obligations. [Calvin, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

The problem for at least some RSOs is not affordability of housing, rather it is the lack of readily available options despite having adequate financial resources. Some RSOs who have other resources to draw upon such as family members face other difficulties.

Both Samuel and Calvin bring up an interesting point about housing difficulties and home buying. Presumably sellers and banks do not have a stake in the issue of RSO housing. At the same time, however, buying a house or condominium unit does not exempt an RSO from housing statutes pertaining to RSOs such as buffer zones or density

restriction in multi-family housing. Additionally, even when buying, RSO housing still must receive probation approval. Finally, RSOs, even if they do own their home, are not immune from harassment.

Even with the assistance of others, the RSO status can present issues for the RSO and those with whom they live. For three of the participants with families, the RSO label seems to directly hurt their ability to retain stable housing, which is itself disruptive and can impact one's quality of life and their standard of living if they cannot find housing similar the home they leave behind. Carl comments on his difficulties when he was released as well as what occurred when he moved in with his wife:

I could never live in any apartment complexes, and when I met my wife – her landlord wanted her to move out of the house she was living in when the landlord was advised of my registry. [Carl, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Another participant, Justin, in a lease-to-own situation, encountered issues with his residence when neighbors started calling the probation department to complain about a registered sex offender in their midst. He explains the issue as one he and his wife feel they have no control. He indicates it ultimately will force them to move and give up their stake in the house. He explains the situation:

While I was serving my sentence my wife found a house lease to own. Probation approved the location, and I was able to move in right upon release. Neighbors were nice. All was good. Four months later [notification] flyers went out. Some neighbors freaked out, called probation over and over, and the neighbor said that I was 'too close to the housing pool, and they needed to do something about it.' So, since the neighbor freaked, I have to find a new house to buy. ... It was in a perfect location, good area. Now I have to find another perfect house and re-register, and [have a] possible probation transfer... and keep up with all the sex offender guidelines. Probation basically said if the neighbor wouldn't have complained about the pool..., I would have been just fine. ... [The] supervisor of probation strongly suggests I move. [Justin, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

One RSO noted that while he had not had trouble *finding* housing as an RSO, he had been evicted on two separate occasions for not disclosing his RSO status to the landlords. When asked if he has ever had trouble finding housing or faced any difficult situations he wrote the following:

Never had a problem. Except twice in Phoenix, both times after moving in[to] [an] apartment. I was served [an] eviction [notice] because I did not inform owners/management about my background. [Brian, RSO, resides in an area of high social disorganization]

Even with adequate resources these RSOs and their families have felt the impact of the RSO status, and experience housing difficulties that are beyond their control even while remaining within the guidelines of their probation. Whether a function of landlords not approving of RSOs or communities not approving of RSOs, these respondents perceive their difficulties to be directly related to their RSO status. Chapter 6 explores how some of these difficulties also relate to their overall sense of belonging and their perception that the RSO label compromises their ability to live normal lives.

Harassment can become a burden for RSOs wishing to remain in a particular location and RSOs can become a burden to their families. Reggie, an RSO currently living in an area of low social disorganization with his wife, explains his experiences with harassment and how employment difficulties he traces to his RSO status have influenced where he has lived and his dependence on his family. Employment difficulties, because employment is related to what one can afford for housing, also impacts one's standard of living.

[When I was released] I started out living in my mother's home as she passed while [I was incarcerated]. Then I met my wife and we lived in her house until we lost it. ... We lost our home due to me not being able to get a job. ... Most employers do background checks and won't even interview

me. Each residence I lived at, including this one, I had to call police and get a harassment order [of protection] against neighbors. Once registered, neighbors sta[r]t [harassing me]. ... Being a registered sex offender, I take no chances. ... I can tell you that a major percentage of offenders only survive through their families, thus burdening their those families to major extents in many cases. [Reggie, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

The issue of harassment will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter. Within the context of this chapter harassment experiences represent an additional source of strain on the RSO and their families. Ultimately this strain could force them to attempt to relocate. Depending on the new neighborhood the cycle may repeat itself.

Sixteen (66%) of the 24 RSOs who stated they had experienced issues locating housing at some point noted that part of the issue was getting through the application process and the background checks involved in renting housing. Matt, an RSO residing in an area of low social disorganization, explains:

It was difficult finding housing when disclosing that I am a registered sex offender. Not just the usual [or] what you might expect. When [I] disclosed [my RSO status and] after everything was going through fine, [I was] told my application needs ‘more reviewing’ [but I was] never to be called again. [Current residence] is one of the only places that did not do a background check. [Matt, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

William shares an experience with a similar issue:

It’s hard to live anywhere nice because of the background checks. ... I cannot live in certain housing complexes. I got denied in [area of city] because of my sex offense. I was really upset because I paid the \$30 credit check and they told me no. [William, RSO, resides in an area of high social disorganization]

Finally, Thomas points to the issues of apartment complex policies as well as roommate difficulties when pursuing other affordable housing options.

It is challenging to say the least. I am forced to look for owners who are renting as most management companies blackball sex offenders, and just finding a room to rent when you have to register the entire house usually

detracts [from] potential roommates. [Thomas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

RSO housing options are limited by background checks and apartment complex policies, which influences where they will ultimately reside if they cannot afford or do not desire to purchase housing. Added to this is the issue of registration. Even pursuing other viable living options like living with roommates or family members might be difficult when people are presented with the prospect that their address will appear on the SOR.

Neighbors, landlords, roommates, pressure and harassment from neighbors, and various housing statutes as well as restrictions by apartment complexes and HOAs can limit the housing options for RSOs and create difficulties for their families. In each of these scenarios, RSOs recounting their experiences point to forces external to their personal finances that restrict them and ultimately influence where they reside. RSOs indicating trouble finding housing indicated a lack of available housing options, resulting in many RSOs looking for housing options through private parties and apartment complexes that are less likely to have “crime-free” policies or those that conduct background checks and will not rent to known felons. Due to the difficulties and issues 80% of the RSOs in this sample experienced, many of these RSOs discussed their strategies for managing housing issues they have faced.

#### STRATEGIES: MANAGING HOUSING HURDLES

While not directly asked to discuss their strategies for locating housing, an emergent theme in RSO responses became the strategies RSOs use to manage the difficulties they have faced while searching for housing or trying to retain their housing.

Twenty-three (76.7%) of the RSOs in this study discuss strategies they use as they search for housing.

The strategies used by the RSOs in this sample are wide-ranging and often used in combination with one another. These strategies include being upfront with property owners or landlords about their RSO status (N = 9), finding private owners from whom to rent (N = 8), temporarily staying or living with friends or family in places they own (N = 5), specifically avoiding apartment complexes (N = 3), avoiding housing that requires any sort of background check (N = 2), and making use of probation officer recommendations (N = 2). Finally, three of the RSOs who own homes noted that buying a house was a means to avoid issues or difficulties finding housing, so buying is a strategy as well. Three of these strategies are interrelated. Privately owned rental housing units are less likely to require a background check, and are often not apartment complexes, and therefore may not be subject to multi-family dwelling restrictions. According to Jake, an RSO homeowner in an area of low social disorganization, states:

I own my own house, but have been harassed because of being on the registry. Renting was almost impossible. Before I bought my house it was almost impossible to find housing [because] nobody wanted to rent to me. Even if they liked me and were willing, they did not want problems with the community [members] and said ‘No.’ This motivated me to buy. [Jake, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

Whether seeking to rent from a private owner, simply being upfront with landlords, or buying housing, RSOs use a variety of strategies when locating and maintaining their housing.

### *Honesty*

The most common strategy was being upfront and disclosing their RSO status to attempt to ward off any negative assumptions by remaining “closeted.” This strategy was

used by nine (39.1%) of the 23 RSOs who mentioned having strategies for locating and retaining housing. Each participant using this strategy has appeared on the public SOR for at least 5 years with a mean of 14.1 years and a median of 15 years on the registry. Eight of the nine identify as white, five have a high school level education, and four have some college education. Seven using the honesty strategy indicated that they have incomes of \$15,000 a year or less (a total of 13 RSOs indicated this income amount), one indicated an income of \$25,000-\$35,000, and one chose not to disclose his income. The age range of these nine varied from 32 to 71 years of age. Five identified as being single or divorced, three are married, and one indicated that he lives in a domestic partnership. Finally, four indicated they have no clear strong social ties to friends or family, one indicated he does not have friends but has close relationship to his brother, and three indicated they have close familial and/or friendship ties. Interestingly of the four who were classified as having strong social ties, three indicated using the honesty strategy when finding housing. The use of this strategy may be related to their ability to disclose personal information within their relationship circles. Finally, two of the nine indicated that they have experienced no housing problems at all as they have used this strategy since their release. One of these RSOs noted simply:

I have not [had issues]. I simply explain my situation and everything is ok.  
[Ted, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

The remaining seven participants using the honesty strategy noted having prior housing problems, but still deploy this as a strategy with both landlords and area residents.

Wayne, an RSO in an area of moderate social disorganization who has had issues with neighbors confronting him about his RSO status in the past, explains his rationale for using this strategy:

When I bought my home I went and knocked on some doors to tell neighbors about me being a sex offender so there wouldn't be any questions or concerns when the fliers went out. I figured it was best they learn it directly from me. [Wayne, RSO resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Another RSO who has been on the SOR since the public version started in the mid-1990s explains his rationale for using honesty as well as how he came to live in his current residence through the help of a friend:

I found honesty was the best policy with a landlord. It seem[s] to work for me. I have a very good friend that helped me find this place... It's not the best, but it's livable and dry. I will probably stay. I am known by most people here and accepted. [Nate, RSO resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Similar responses from other RSO renters fell generally along the lines of, "I found honesty is the best policy for me."

Honesty is one method by which an RSO can potentially insulate him or herself from negative judgment before or after applying for a place to live or from harassment on the part of neighbors. It also functions as an attempt to create some sense of understanding among landlords and/or neighbors. RSOs have an understanding that the notification flyers will eventually be mailed out in their area of residence; some choose to be proactive and notify neighbors and others who rent are proactive by informing their landlords upfront.

### *Privately Owned Housing, Apartment Complexes, and Background Check Avoidance*

The second most common strategy mentioned was looking for or finding housing through private owners. Eight (34.7%) of the 23 participants who brought up strategies for locating housing mentioned going through a private owner at some point. As mentioned previously, this strategy can also be a means to avoid apartment complexes

and the strict background checks apartment complexes often use to eliminate ex-felons from the pool of potential applicants.

Two RSOs, Matt and William, discussed the background check process at apartment complexes in the previous section of this chapter. In their cases they ultimately ended up renting from private owners to avoid background check elimination.

Dennis, an RSO from a moderately disorganized neighborhood, explains how he found housing by explaining his situation, locating a private owner, and how he does not plan to move in the near future due to difficulties finding housing in the past.

I can't keep roommates. Once they find out I'm a registered sex offender, they want out the door. ... I was homeless for a period of time, [and] finally found someone walking down the street who was looking to rent his house. [He] rented the house saying he didn't care about the subject's past, just that he could pay the bills and was upfront and honest. I don't want to move; it's too hard to find a place that will take [RSOs]. It's the label that kills ya. [Dennis, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

For Dennis the best strategy is to be honest, go through private owners, and not attempt to move around so he does not have to deal with more notification flyers being sent out. In this particular anecdote, the landlord seemed to prefer the RSO was upfront about their status.

Another participant, Blake, also noted his difficulties and a similar strategy involving being upfront about his status and going through a private owner:

I used to never have problems [finding housing]. Now... I got turned down by every apartment complex I went to. I finally found a private owner [of] a house that would give me a chance. [Blake, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

While both Blake and Dennis note difficulties with housing, they dealt with initial housing issues by seeking out private owners.

Restrictions encountered at large apartment complexes are in stark contrast to renting a unit or home through a private owner. Not only might one face a background check at a large apartment complex that will immediately eliminate any ex-felon from the application pool, the bureaucratic and corporate nature of such complexes might serve as a limitation to RSOs when other non-RSOs are likely to apply for the same unit and due to the somewhat impersonal feel at many of the “mega” apartment complexes. Finally, many apartment complexes seek certification with the city for being “Crime-Free Multi-Housing,” which would be in jeopardy if they were to accept RSOs since the program is known to discourage renting to known felons (City of Phoenix 2013; Smokey 2008).

### *Family*

Another strategy used by RSOs is to enlist the help of family. Five RSOs either currently lived with their family members or had a family member provide shelter at some point in time after their release while they looked for other options. Two inherited housing from their family members when family members passed away during their incarceration. Inheriting housing is not a planned strategy, or included in the tally above, but it did help one RSO who was able to retain the house. By virtue of inheritance, he has not faced difficulties locating housing.

Alex, an RSO in an area of low social disorganization, explains his current housing situation in the context of previous difficulties:

As far as housing issues, I was not able to find an apartment to rent. ... My stepfather purchased the condo in which I currently reside. [B]efore we bought this condo... I was living with my mother and stepfather. [Alex, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

In some cases such as Alex's, there did not seem to be many options aside from living with his family initially. Only one participant using the family strategy related his experiences directly to not being able to afford any other housing since he is unemployed.

### *Probation Recommendations*

Most RSOs in this sample indicated they are not presently on probation. Of the 30 RSOs in this sample, 12 (40%) stated that they are currently on probation. Two RSOs said they made use of probation officer recommendations to find housing. Paul, commenting on his housing issues and how he found his current residence, explains how this recommendation has played out for him:

[I've been] turned down for housing many times. Now I live in a run down complex and pay more rent than anyone else here. I was referred here by probation. At least there are no drugs. Previous places I lived [had] drug users. [Paul, RSO, resides in an area of high social disorganization]

Both RSOs using recommendation of probation reside in areas of high social disorganization. Unlike Paul, the other RSO who made use of probation's recommendation, Barry, commented, "I like my house," indicating that he is at least satisfied with his current living situation.

A probation officer interviewed in the course of this study indicated that housing issues among RSOs are not uncommon, and that often the best place for an RSO to start is with private landlords. The officer also indicated there is a careful line probation officers must be aware of as well. The officer said,

We have to be careful to that we don't advocate, for the appearance of impropriety – "You can have a house here because we work with that guy" so we can't, we can't pack places full of sex offenders because that's not fair either. So it's a delicate balance of "how can we help you...?" Because if you said, "I need a place to live" I can give you a list of like

five places... the [lists two locations] and this place, but they're not always the best places either. So you know, private renters, people who own homes, that sort of thing are where to start. Cuz they can be a little more forgiving because they can- they'll actually see your face and discuss it. I always say, "Here's my business card, give that to them if they have any questions. Obviously I need your permission, so say Joe Blow landlord is gonna call me so please tell them whatever they want" just so I don't give out too much information. But I'm always willing to talk to them. My partner has gone- we've met with them; we'll go wherever and talk to whoever to try to get these guys a house because if they don't have a place to live, we can't really expect them to be successful in anything else.

Probation officers, while a resource for RSOs as they are monitoring them, also must be careful of how they help. Ultimately they are not advocates, but supervisors. At the same time, in the course of supervision housing is recognized as a means of successful reintegration of RSOs.

While only two of the 12 who stated they are on probation expressed consulting with probation to find housing, there are good reasons to do so. When on probation, probation must check into the housing. Making use of their recommendation might expedite this process. It may also help the RSO avoid paying fees for background checks that he or she may not pass due to the standards or policies of the landlords or management.

## DISCUSSION

Most RSOs in this sample face a number of issues beyond residence restrictions that influence their housing options. Their expressed experiences involve apartment complexes not allowing them or simply not calling them back about applications after a background check, neighbors complaining and sometimes harassing them to the point where they may move, landlords telling the RSO and their families to vacate, and

apartment or housing locating agencies not wanting to assist them. In some instances RSOs referenced feeling as though their RSO status now impacts their social class standing by forcing them to rent places they dislike. In other cases, issues arise around the application and background check and related to apartment complex policies that ban RSOs. For others still, the issues they face seem to be more related to harassment of neighbors and landlords wanting the RSO and their families to move.

RSOs deploy a variety of strategies as they search for housing. The variety of strategies reflects the myriad issues faced by RSOs as they search for viable housing options. Those deploying the upfront and honest strategy are, in some ways, attempting to ward off negative judgment by offering an account of their circumstances as a means to secure housing from those who might otherwise be unwilling to rent to them. Seeking out private owners or family or friends to live with, does, in some way, attest to this process as well. Private owners, since they are more likely to be directly engaged in the rental process and any sort of background check, provide the RSO the ability to state their RSO status and potentially bypass strict judgment that can occur in a more bureaucratic or corporate rental setting. Similarly, renting from or living with friends and family provide the RSO a means to insulate themselves from rental issues that seem to be widespread among this population. Finally, making use of probation officer recommendations is one way to ensure swift and viable housing; however, the housing may not match the living standards of the RSO.

A particular finding of interest that warrants further discussion is that of RSOs who use the honesty strategy. Recall nine of the 23 who discussed housing strategies used honesty, and this was the most common strategy used. Recall also that Stryker and Serpe

(1982) write, “commitment affects identity salience which in turn affects role-related behavioral choices” (208). The defining characteristics of housing situations, at least for a number of RSOs who are seeking housing rentals, seem to be been honesty and disclosure. The RSO label and some of the constraints placed on RSOs, such as requirements of probation officers and commonplace background checks, almost demand some RSOs to adopt behaviors consistent with someone who sees himself as an honest and reformed ex-felon. Commitment to an honest ex-felon identity in the context of a situation affects the salience of the RSO identity, forcing the RSO to play out the role as an honest ex-felon and structuring some of their behaviors and the disclosure of their RSO label while at the same time managing the stigmatized identity through disclosure. The reason for this might be rooted in previous experiences where one has faced difficulties while looking for housing and is trying to save time. At the same time this also might be a means to manage one’s ego identity – how and RSO see themselves as not being different from others while others continue to see them as different (Goffman 1963). This identity navigation process is also related Goffman’s notion of personal identity and the control of information. Because of the threat of background checks and due to community notification some RSOs volunteer themselves to assume the role of the discredited by stating the invisible stigmatized identity at the outset of interactions. Interestingly, stating that one has an RSO status *is* controlling the information insofar as it controls how it arrives – verbally from the RSO rather than by a community notification flyer or a phone call from a probation officer. This control of information and this strategy seem to help deflect some negative treatment such as not getting a rental unit or home.

This chapter has explored RSO experiences with housing issues and the strategies they deploy when searching for housing as part of the navigation of the RSO identity. The RSO identity, apartment complex policies banning RSOs, application and background check processes, informal social control by landlord and neighbors, and the RSO understanding of such issues give rise to the strategies used by RSOs when they are looking for viable housing. The complexity of the RSO identity is underscored by the stigmatization evident in some of the issues they encounter as they attempt to locate and retain housing and further underscored by the need to deploy specific strategies when locating housing. Perhaps nothing exemplifies this more than the issues of avoidance of social interactions as well as harassment, the topics of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: AVOIDANCE AND HARASSMENT

The focus of this chapter is on registered sex offender's (RSO) avoidance of social situations, interactions with neighbors, as well as their experiences with neighborhood harassment. Previous researchers have noted that RSOs are subject to myriad informal social controls within their communities as a consequence of the public sex offender registry (SOR) such as various forms of harassment, loss of friends, and not knowing neighbors (Burchfield and Mingus 2008, Mercado, Alvarez, and Levenson 2008; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2011b; Tewksbury and Lees 2006). This chapter examines these forms of social control from the point of view of the RSO and within the context of offense category (against a minor or not) as well as level of neighborhood social disorganization.

In Erving Goffman's (1963) notable work, *Stigma*, he conceptualizes stigma as a "language of relationships" because "[a]n attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself" (3). The term stigma is used "to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (3). Stigma requires the presence of another actor or the perceived presence of another; without an audience there is no basis of comparison between stigmatized and "normal" identities, and thus no interpretation of what constitutes normal or stigmatized behavior and attributes. Within interactions, Goffman notes that the stigmatized individual faces a "double perspective"—wherein the discredited, stigmatized person assumes their status is known, and the plight of the discreditable – the assumption that those the stigmatized individual encounters neither knows of their stigmatized status and

cannot readily perceive it. A stigmatized individual, therefore, must deal with perceptions within their daily social interactions. RSOs, due to the process of community notification and the public sex offender registry (SOR), likely assume those around them know of their stigmatized status. Additionally, avoidance on the part of those in the neighborhood and/or by the RSO sets up the potential for a weakening of social integration of the RSO, which could ultimately result in re-offense if the overall effects are disintegrative (McAlinden 2008). Widely practiced avoidance by those within the community enacts a form of informal social control that suggests to the RSO and their family that they are not welcome. Similarly, negative interactions rooted in the fact that one of the actors, the RSO, is discredited and stigmatized based on their RSO identity, is a form of social control. As such, it also serves to limit the RSO's positive engagement within their community.

Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) theorize that different types of neighborhoods are either more or less able to activate social controls; that is, areas with more social organization are more able to regulate their neighborhoods through common values. An important aspect of social disorganization is the inability to control the neighborhood environment through collective efficacy. Recall collective efficacy is defined as, "the capacity of a group to regulate its members according to desired principles—to realize collective, as opposed to forced, goals" (Sampson, et al. 1997:918). Areas with more social disorganization and weaker collective efficacy are thought to be less able or willing to exercise informal social controls. Within the context of stigmatized identities such as RSOs, RSOs may, as a marker of social disorganization, reflect an inability for members of particular areas of communities to regulate those around them.

That is, in areas of high social disorganization, RSOs may find more acceptance or apathy for their presence. In areas of low social disorganization RSOs may find more resistance to their presence.

This chapter advances a more complete exploration of RSO experiences by addressing the following questions: *Do RSOs perceive that those in their neighborhoods know of their RSO status? Do RSOs avoid social contact generally and/or specifically with those in their neighborhood area? What forms of informal social controls do RSOs and their families experience within their neighborhoods? Does neighborhood social disorganization play a role in RSO experiences with neighborhood harassment or interactions? Does having an offense against a minor listed on the SOR lead to different experiences with neighborhood harassment or interactions?*

#### *RSO Identity: Perceptions and Avoidance of Social Contact*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 80% of the RSOs in this study mentioned some sort of strategy for finding and/or retaining housing. At the same time, many continue to face issues related to their status where they reside or in their neighborhoods. All 30 participants said they know their neighbors know about their RSO status or that they assume their neighbors know about their RSO status because of notification flyers or the SOR. Previous research, however, indicates that residents do not generally know of RSO presence in their neighborhood (Burchfield 2012; Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, and Kernsmith 2009). Interestingly, a study by Burchfield (2012) also found that while the majority of residents are unaware of an RSO's presence, residents who perceive their neighborhood is high in informal social control assume their neighbors will tell them of

an RSO's presence. Kernsmith et al. (2009) found that the perception of a safe neighborhood, low interest in the SOR, and not having children are also related to less use of the SOR.

Regardless of whether neighbors know of the RSO's status or not, the RSO's perception that their status is known is what matters in the mind of the RSO. Due to the notification process and the existence of the SOR, the RSO assumes the position of an already discredited person prior to any interactions based on the perception that their neighbors already know about their stigmatized status. The SOR and the notification process take what was previously an unmarked status and make it possible to be known. RSOs were asked about their avoidance of social situations as well as their interactions with neighbors.

As a potential consequence of the perception that their identity is known most stated they avoid at least some social situations. Eighteen (60%) state they avoid at least some social situations due to their RSO identity (Table 6). One way to examine and assess RSO social avoidance is to assess their experiences based on the category of their registerable offense listed on the SOR. Mustaine and Tewksbury (2011b) study of RSOs' experiences with various forms of social controls and offense categories (offense(s) against minor versus offense(s) not against minors) found very few differences with RSOs experiences with social control by type of offense. The question of the influence of offense category, however, is still very much open to debate since there is very little published research on this topic.

RSOs in this sample with an offense listed as having occurred against a minor are more likely to state they avoid some social situations. Seventeen (56.7%) of those in this

sample have an offense on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor. Fully 70.6% (N = 12) of those who had offenses on the SOR listed as being against a minor state they avoid at least some social situations, compared to six RSOs who do not have offenses on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor who avoid at least some social situations.

With regard to areas with higher or lower rates of social disorganization and offense categorization, general social avoidance was most prevalent among those living in areas of low social disorganization (Table 6). Ten of the 12 (83.3%) RSO participants in areas of low social disorganization state some sort of social avoidance. Among those with an offense against a minor on the SOR living in areas of low social disorganization, seven of the eight RSOs (87.5%) versus three of four (75%) without offenses listed against a minor on the SOR stated they avoided at least some social situations. None of the six RSOs in areas of high social disorganization express a general avoidance of social situations. Rates of social avoidance in areas with moderate social disorganization are slightly lower but similar to rates within areas of low social disorganization. Sixty-seven percent of those in areas of moderate social disorganization express avoidance of at least some social situations in general due to their RSO status.

While the sample size is small, trends in data indicate an offense against a minor and level of neighborhood social disorganization may only minimally, if at all, impact patterns of social avoidance among RSOs living in areas of low and moderate social disorganization. It seems that those in areas of lower social disorganization are more likely to avoid some contact regardless of offense types. Why this might be the case may lie in how RSOs are treated in differently organized areas. The idea here is that areas of

low social disorganization may have a better sense of common community values and be better able to control their neighborhoods based on a higher sense or degree of collective efficacy. While there are potential structural disadvantages for those living in a more socially disorganized neighborhood, there are potential advantages. One advantage might be a reduced sense of ostracism by those within the neighborhood. Some RSOs speak directly about their avoidance of certain social situations, which lends insight into the variation of RSO experiences.

One participant who had physical threats made against him in his neighborhood and has only limited interactions in passing with neighbors made the following comment about how his RSO status impacts him socially:

I find myself avoiding people out of shame. I have given up hope for a relationship. I find myself wondering if someone knows. [Alexander, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Alexander's sense of himself is rooted at least in part in how he thinks others view him. It is a reflected appraisal – a sense of self that is derived from how we think others may view us and judge us (Cooley 1902). This is also rooted in a general perspective of others, or what Mead (1967[1934]) referred to as taking the role of the other. Our sense of other's evaluation leads to feelings about ourselves (Cooley 1902). The RSO label and what someone else might associate with that label are sources of shame and embarrassment for Alexander. This ultimately influences how he thinks of himself and how he behaves. While Alexander did not describe instances where the RSO label has prompted any backlash against him, the perception he carries is that by virtue of being an RSO warrants his exclusion. For this particular RSO, avoidance of social interactions transcends the neighborhood area and enters into his social life, ultimately keeping him

from having a relationship out of shame and persistent evaluation of social perceptions about his status.

**Table 6.** Frequency Distribution of RSOs who Avoid Social Situations by Level of Social Disorganization and Offense Type

Level of Social Disorganization and Offense	Avoidant	Totals
Low, Offense Against Minor	7 87.5%	8 100%
Low, Offense Not Against Minor	3 75%	4 100%
<b>Low Totals</b>	<b>10</b> <b>83.3%</b>	<b>12</b> <b>100%</b>
Moderate, Offense Against Minor	5 71.4%	7 100%
Moderate Offense Not Against Minor	3 60%	5 100%
<b>Moderate Totals</b>	<b>8</b> <b>66.7%</b>	<b>12</b> <b>100%</b>
High, Offense Against Minor	0 0%	2 100%
High, Offense Not Against Minor	0 0%	4 100%
<b>High Totals</b>	<b>0</b> <b>0%</b>	<b>6</b> <b>100%</b>
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>18</b> <b>60%</b>	<b>30</b> <b>100%</b>

Two RSOs mention their general avoidance of social situations in the context of not wanting to feel threatening to others, and one noted how his avoidance has evolved during his time as an RSO. Lucas frames his avoidance of situations as “self-discrimination” as he states:

I mostly self-discriminate by not putting myself in positions where people can feel uncomfortable or threatened if they learn of my past. [Lucas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Much like Alexander, Lucas is also aware of how others might view him. The perception here is that others fear RSOs, which dictates his behavior.

Another RSO, Samuel who did not disclose how long he has been an RSO, notes his evolution of thought on avoidance of social situations over time.

At first I didn't leave my apartment, [and] didn't want to make new friends. But as time went on, I stopped caring about it. The only time when it becomes a major issue is when I move and have to re-register and they send fliers out. Then I have to start the whole 'get to know me, I'm a decent guy routine.' Then [I] have to try to figure out who is ok with it [the RSO status] and who isn't. [Samuel, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Each of these anecdotes indicates that the RSO label can present itself as troubling in social situations. Additionally, in each of these examples participants are aware of how others may view RSOs and adopt pattern of behaviors that incorporate an understanding of how they think others may view them.

### *Neighborly Interactions*

Participants were asked to describe their interactions and frequency of interactions with neighbors. These data are summarized in Table 7. While 60% of the sample avoids social situations at least some of the time, a slightly higher proportion have no interactions with their neighbors. Twenty (67%) of the participants said they do not interact with their neighbors at all. Nine of the twelve participants within areas of low social disorganization, six of the twelve participants in areas of moderate social disorganization, and five of the six participants in areas of high social disorganization state they do not interact with neighbors. Therefore, with this sample it does not appear that neighborhood social disorganization is a contributing factor in RSO interactions with

neighbors. This is in stark contrast to what was found in 2011 study of 17,000 Americans where it was found that at least 73% of those surveyed interact with their neighbors on a monthly basis, and that the majority of that interaction is face-to-face (State Farm 2013). The low rates of interaction in this study may be a function of the stigmatized (the RSO) perceiving their status is known to others. In turn this may mean they are less likely to attempt interaction with neighbors.

**Table 7.** Frequency Distribution RSOs Interacting with Neighbors by Level of Social Disorganization and Offense Type

<b>Level of Social Disorganization and Offense</b>	<b>Interacts Totals</b>	
Low, Offense Against Minor	1	8
	12.5%	100%
Low, Offense Not Against Minor	2	4
	50%	100%
<b>Low Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>25%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Moderate, Offense Against Minor	5	7
	71.4%	100%
Moderate Offense Not Against Minor	1	5
	20%	100%
<b>Moderate Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>50%</b>	<b>100%</b>
High, Offense Against Minor	1	2
	50%	100%
High, Offense Not Against Minor	0	4
	0%	100%
<b>High Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>33%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Considering the types of interaction may make the type of offense matter. In terms of neighbor interactions, those in areas of low social disorganization and who have an offense against a minor are the least likely to interact with neighbors (Table 7).

Ten (58.8%) of the 17 RSOs in this sample who are listed as having an offense against a minor state they do not interact with their neighbors (Table 7). Further, some RSOs express *feeling avoided* by their neighbors. Six (20%) RSOs in the entire sample, all living in areas of low social disorganization, specifically state they feel they are avoided by their neighbors, which might be indicative of a form of social control related to neighborhood organization. Five of the six RSOs who think their neighbors actively avoid them also have an offense on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor. In one case, avoidance extends to other household members as well. An RSO participant had this to say:

New neighborhood relationships are all but impossible. ...My wife is shunned by one couple even attempting to retrieve the mail. This is in a somewhat high rent neighborhood. I can only imagine how bad things could get. [Damon, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

The perception of active avoidance was a phenomenon unique to areas of low social disorganization among RSOs in this sample.

Nine (30%) participants in the study sample state they only have limited social contact with their neighbors. Limited contact most commonly meant only a quick “hello” in passing such as when one was out checking their mail. One participant indicated being friendly with his neighbors to the degree that he regularly hangs out with some of them. This RSO, who resides in a moderately socially disorganized neighborhood explains, however, that his interactions with neighbors are not what they would necessarily be if he was not an RSO:

I used to be more open and friendly towards my neighbors. Now being on the registry I tend to be more withdrawn and introverted. I still try to maintain my friendly nature, but it isn't the same anymore. [Samuel, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

This indicates how his RSO status impacts how he feels about interactions he has with neighbors. Even in instances where RSOs might interact with their neighbors they might still feel as though something is different for them since having to register as a sex offender.

While 67% of the RSOs in the study sample avoid at least some social situations in the neighborhood, just one RSO stated a very extreme form of avoidance in that he did not even want to exit his house to take out the trash.

I'm afraid to take my trashcan out to the road. I don't even get the mail.  
[It's] hard to even wash or work on cars, which is one hobby I love doing.  
[Eric, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

In some instances, avoidance by RSOs can be fairly extreme while in others it seems relatively routine and rooted in not wanting to expose themselves or others to discomfort. It should be noted here that Eric has been on the registry for less than a year. He is the only RSO in this study who had appeared on the SOR for less than 3 years at the time of participation in this study. The aspect of length of time on registry may moderate how much avoidance some RSOs perceive as they learn to navigate the stigmatized identity in various social settings or within their neighborhoods. This should be explored in future studies. It may also be useful to examine how RSOs navigate their status as an RSO over time. Within the scope of this study, however, Eric's comments lend further insight into modification of behavior that seems to stem from a sense that others do not like RSOs and wish them harm.

Another RSO, comparing his pre-RSO status and residence with his current RSO status and current residence noted the following:

My last house was amazing. I was friends with all the neighbors. Everyone talked and helped each other out. I lost [that] house after my arrest.

Everywhere I've lived since then while being on the registry all the neighbors ignore me or avoid me. They won't wave or talk to me. At all. [I] feel hated. [Dane, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

In both of these instances the participants indicate that forming relationships with neighbors does not feel possible. While the perceptions of their status being known could potentially influence the RSOs to disengage or perceive avoidance, another participant suggests it is the process of community notification that contributes the reality he experiences.

When I first moved in my neighbors would talk and say hello as they passed me by. Since the letter of my registration circulated a few months after moving in, they no longer say hello in passing, and some just give me an absurd look like they think I will rape them or their children. [Matt, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

While there is the perception neighbors know about their RSO status, there is also the reality of community notification processes, which, arguably, means at least some neighbors know about the RSOs presence if they were living nearby at the time the public notifications were mailed.

What these accounts and experiences with interactions and avoidance suggest is that the RSO label and their assessments of how others view RSOs sometimes lead to experiences that are inconsistent with experiences prior to their offense and their registration. Whether RSOs are outright avoided by neighbors or simply perceive they are being avoided, the effect on the RSO in terms of framing themselves and their identity as an RSO can be deemed a consequence of their status being known or thinking it is known among those around their neighborhood. Perception or reality, the RSO identity is powerful enough to structure interactions in a basic day-to-day setting such as one's neighborhood. The RSO identity itself is a consequence not only of committing the sex

offense, but of registration requirements as well. The label and identity itself is an element of social control, and the perceptions of the RSOs constitute social control related to the assumption their identity is known. The interactions, or lack thereof, with neighbors constitute an informal social control in some cases, particularly where the RSO feels as though they are avoided by others. The process is one where some RSOs take the role of the other to understand the RSO label. Subsequently, these RSOs modify their behavior based on this assessment from the perspective of the other and the ways they perceive people treating them. For some RSOs, the end result is avoidance based on their ability to take the role of the other or reflected appraisals, and avoidance based on perceptions they are being avoided – a phenomenon likely rooted in reflected appraisals as well as reality for some. Another way to assess RSO experiences with social control in their neighborhoods is through the experiences of harassment within their neighborhood areas.

### *Harassment Experiences*

Participants were asked to detail experiences with neighborhood-based harassment and discrimination they felt were due to their appearance on the registry, which were categorized generally as “harassment” in Table 8. As noted in Table 8, 11 (36.7%) of the total sample described these experiences, while 7 of 17 (41.2%) RSOs who had offenses listed on the SOR as being against a minor described these experiences.

Those in the least socially disorganized areas in the study were more likely to have experiences with harassment or discrimination based on their RSO status. Nearly 50% of those living in areas of low and moderate social disorganization cite experiences

with harassment within their neighborhoods. None of the offenders in this sample who reside in areas of high social disorganization cite experiences with harassment.

**Table 8.** Frequency Distribution RSOs or Their Family Members Experiencing Harassment by Level of Social Disorganization and Offense Type

Level of Social Disorganization and Offense	Harassed	Totals
Low, Offense Against Minor	5	8
	62.5%	100%
Low, Offense Not Against Minor	1	4
	25%	100%
<b>Low Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>50%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Moderate, Offense Against Minor	2	7
	28.6%	100%
Moderate Offense Not Against Minor	4	5
	80%	100%
<b>Moderate Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>41.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
High, Offense Against Minor	0	2
	0%	100%
High, Offense Not Against Minor	0	4
	0%	100%
<b>High, Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>36.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Harassment experiences are related to avoidance patterns and lack of interaction with neighbors. Seven of the 11 (63.6%) who have experienced harassment within neighborhoods also cite general avoidance of some social situations, and 10 of 11 (91%) state they do not interact with neighbors. Regardless of whether harassment precedes avoidance or mediates whether the RSO will interact with neighbors, this pattern indicates that harassment, avoidance, and lack of interaction with neighbors seem to go hand-in-hand in this small sample.

Negative experiences with harassment and discrimination within the neighborhood were wide-ranging from moderate to severe. Those RSOs who discussed their experiences with moderate neighborhood harassment generally did so by citing general accounts such as the following:

I have had some issues with a couple [of] neighbors where I currently reside. With one it almost became physical. I did not feel safe with him living next door to me. He has since moved. Another neighbor was just a gossip and she made my life hell. [Alex, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Severe experiences in areas with low social disorganization included having windows shot out, tires slashed, windshields smashed, being shot at, and physical threats. More moderate negative experiences within neighborhoods ranged from gossip spread among neighbors and landlords in two instances, garbage repeatedly thrown into the yard over a fence in one case, and epithets related to RSO status being yelled by neighbors in another case. The most extreme case of harassment among those in the sample was from an RSO who lives with his family in an area of low social disorganization and who feels as though he and his family are avoided by neighbors.

We are basically avoided by most neighbors. [We] have had a few windows shot out, some tires slashed, some windows broken. [Damon, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

Not all types of harassment are directed toward the RSO; rather, RSOs' children are sometimes harassed because of their parent's RSO status. Two RSOs from areas of low social disorganization commented that while they have not been threatened or harassed because of their status, their children have been harassed, taunted, and bullied at neighborhood schools because of it. Two RSOs from moderately socially disorganized areas described instances of harassment and bullying of their children at schools after the

notification flyers were mailed. Carl, who has not been directly harassed due to his status but has children who have been impacted, explains what has happened in light of his registration:

My children were harassed and disfriended [sic] when parents found out about my registry. . . . I couldn't even walk my kids to school to a safe [distance] for them. [Carl, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Another RSO whose children have been harassed due to his status made the following comments when asked about the impact of the SOR and his sense of belonging within the community:

My children being picked on or made fun of because their father is a registered sex offender. Situations where I may have a voice [or] opinions [like the] PTA for my children's school that I would love to participate in. I don't [participate] so as to not make more issues for my kids. [Matt, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

In both of these instances the harassment of the RSO's children results in some disruption to the RSO's life and has operated to restrict some of what they would like to do. The harassment of the children or other family members of RSOs is a form of social control.

Forms of harassment such as those mentioned above are forms of social control. Each, whether gossip or direct threats, operates to make it known to others and/or to the RSO that his presence is known and that it is disliked. The children of RSOs as a subject of direct harassment also serves the purpose of those within a given area exercising social control over the RSO and their family members, reinforcing disdain and stigmatizing the RSO. As an end result of moderate forms of harassment and being avoided by neighbors one RSO made the following assessment:

I don't fee [like] part of the community. I feel like a leper. Forever shunned by the community. [Dane, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Even when RSOs have not experienced harassment within their neighborhoods, some still state concerns over the prospect of harassment. One RSO who has not been harassed comments:

I feel like a target. I live in fear for my life since the murders [of RSOs] in Washington state. [Paul, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Harassment or even the perception of the prospect of harassment can be quite powerful forms of social control for RSOs.

The differences with experiences of harassment and discrimination found by neighborhood type support theories of collective efficacy and social disorganization. No participants in the most socially disorganized areas described having experiences with harassment or discrimination due to their RSO status. This finding is consistent with both theory and studies on community involvement and ex-criminal populations. This phenomenon as at least a partial function of lack of community social control.

### *Discussion*

RSOs in the study sample face a variety of social issues ranging from avoidance of interaction in general, avoidance of neighborhood interactions, perceptions of being avoided by neighbors, and experiences of harassment within their neighborhood area. The fact that many RSOs state they avoid at least some social situations could be partially a product of probation conditions, but only two RSOs framed their avoidance as being related to such conditions. At the same time, these two RSOs expressed that their avoidance goes beyond the requirements set for them by stating they avoid situations so they do not create discomfort for others or for themselves. Avoidance is a means of both

self-control on the part of the RSO and social control both associated with formal conditions and informal processes. This can be understood using the insights of both Cooley (1902) and Mead (1967 [1934]) in which individuals see themselves how they think other see them and make assessments about the world based on the perspective of the generalized other. Further, Goffman's (1963) notion of the social identity applies here as well. Those who are stigmatized and those who are not stigmatized anticipate contact with one another and learn how to avoid it. This study does not include participants from neighborhoods beyond the RSO, future studies should probe non-RSO residents about interaction patterns and avoidance patterns to assess whether RSO perceptions are grounded in an objective reality.

All RSOs in this sample perceive that neighbors know of their RSO status due to their registration on the SOR and/or community notification requirements. The RSOs assume the position of an already stigmatized individual within their neighborhood and beyond, with some even going as far as to state they find themselves wondering who knows and who does not. Even RSOs who have not been directly or indirectly harassed due to their status sometimes comment on the sense of shame and stigma they feel that causes them to wonder about their personal safety. The sheer potential that the RSO identity is known becomes a force of social control for many RSOs.

The distinction between RSOs with offenses on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor(s) and those who do not have an offense listed on the SOR as having occurred against a minor may not be the most useful distinction, but level of neighborhood social disorganization seems to be somewhat useful for assessing some patterns found in this study. In this sample, those with offenses against minors listed on

the SOR are only slightly more likely to avoid some social situations than RSOs without offenses against minors. In terms of harassment experiences, RSOs with offenses on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor(s), the evidence here is mixed. In areas of low social disorganization, 62.5% of RSOs with offences against minors listed on the SOR have had harassment experiences related to their status compared to just 25% of RSOs in the same type of neighborhood without an offense on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor. In areas of moderate social disorganization, the opposite is found. Just 40% of those with offenses listed as having occurred against a minor express experiences of harassment within their neighborhoods, while 80% of the RSOs in areas of moderate social disorganization who do not have an offense listed as having occurred against a minor express experiences of harassment. These patterns may be a function of differently organized neighborhoods or partially a product of a small sample. Regardless, most RSOs within areas of low and moderate social disorganization avoid some social situations, and nearly half have experiences with neighborhood harassment. None of RSOs from the areas of high social disorganization in this sample express that they avoid social situations or express experiences with harassment. Theoretically, this is what is expected – those residing in areas with low collective efficacy and high social disorganization should not experience the pressure to avoid social situations or experience harassment at the same rates as a result of a stigmatized label because those within the neighborhood are less able to or willing to exert control over less desirable residents.

Another consequence of the public labeling and registration of RSOs occurs within neighborhoods and impacts the landscape of neighborly interactions. Recall as

well that most RSOs, 67% in this sample, do not interact with neighbors even on a limited basis. Further, the 20% of RSOs in this sample stating that they think they are actually avoided by their neighbors are all residing in areas of low social disorganization. Direct avoidance by neighbors constitutes a form of social control that suggests the person being avoided is unwelcome.

The latent functions of labeling become social avoidance and restricted or strained interactions, but this effect seems to be moderated by factors related to neighborhood social organization. RSOs not interacting with others may mean less potential to groom a future victim and the SOR may lead some RSOs to perceive they are being watched by more than just the local authorities might appear to be a positive effect. The end product of weak social bonds, the public RSO label, and self-stigmatization may be disintegrative. Some researchers and theorists have noted that weak social bonds and stigmatization may actually serve to increase one's likelihood for re-offense (Braithwaite and Daly 1994; Hudson 1998; McAlinden 2008). While re-offense is beyond the scope of this study, it is a serious point to consider as it has serious consequences for both the RSO, potential victims, and for the broader community. Removing the possibility for successful social interactions or at least non-negative may isolate the offender to an extent where it could undermine therapies and (re)integration. If this is indeed true, in a somewhat contradictory way, those RSOs in areas with higher degrees of social organization and higher collective efficacy might be more prone to re-offense. The very social forces that operate to constrain various types of neighborhood crime, and, in some way, keep RSOs or other types of ex-offenders out might end up playing a role in re-offense of an already labeled RSO. By virtue of neighborhood structures and interactions within them, this is a

troubling picture. In areas of high social disorganization, an RSO may be led to feel less ostracized, presumably a good thing for reintegration by virtue of the potential to form stronger social bonds in the area. At the same time, due to weaker forms of collective efficacy, the RSO may have more opportunities to re-offend as people are less guarded or concerned with the presence of the RSO. Additionally, in areas of higher social disorganization there may also be an underlying issue of lack of information about an RSOs presence. Despite the fact that RSOs have lower rates of recidivism than most other ex-felons, those in areas of high social disorganization may not know there is a potential threat living nearby simply because those living in areas of high social disorganization generally move residences more frequently. Of course there is the option of using the public SOR on the Internet. However, as previous research demonstrates, many people fail to make use of this source of information (Kernsmith et al. 2009, Burchfield 2012).

Regardless of non-RSO use of the SOR, the question that remains now is how the SOR is perceived by RSOs generally and within the context of their own lives, the topic to which I turn next. Understanding this particular piece of the puzzle will allow a more complete picture of RSOs experiences and the perceived necessity of the SOR from their unique vantage point in light of many of the experiences they have with finding housing and neighborhood acceptance or harassment. It will also shed more light on the process of stigmatization and “othering” that can occur even amongst those on the registry.

## CHAPTER 6: REGISTERED SEX OFFENDER'S COMMENTARY ON THE REGISTRY'S PURPOSE

This chapter addresses how registered sex offenders (RSOs) perceive the purpose of the public sex offender registry (SOR) generally, and how they perceive the SOR within the context of their own lives. Whether RSOs who are on the SOR view the purpose of the registry in a generally positive light or negative light advances the understanding of both the process of “othering” that seems occur even amongst the RSOs themselves and the way in which the positive framing of the purpose of the registry can be reconciled with some of the negative personal experiences expressed by many of the RSOs in this study.

The three questions or prompts posed to RSOs are the sources of data for this particular chapter are: *In your opinion, what is the purpose of the registry? Describe any feelings you have about the public sex offender registry. (Example: It is good because \_\_\_\_\_. It is bad because \_\_\_\_\_.) How has the registry helped you or hurt you in terms of your sense of belonging in the community?* The purpose of posing these questions was to gauge perceptions of the purpose of the registry (punitive, helpful for the community, and so on) and assess the extent to which the RSOs view the SOR as having both positive and negative functions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there may be bias within the study sample in terms of those who opted to participate. There may also be social desirability bias in terms of RSOs desiring to construct a response they feel will fit well with predominate beliefs about the SOR.

The findings in this chapter reveal that the majority of the 30 RSOs in this sample view the purpose of the SOR in a positive light. Still, none of the RSOs in the sample saw the SOR as serving a positive function in their own lives. Thus there is a disjuncture between the SOR serving a positive purpose for the general society and what the RSO experiences and perceives in his own life. Further, many RSOs expressed concern over the public's perception of RSOs as being a uniform group, and some engaged in a process in which they attempt to distance themselves from categories of offenders they perceive as being more dangerous or threatening than themselves. In many cases the SOR is seen as serving a positive function for society, but it is also something generally understood as negative for RSOs.

#### *Purpose of the Sex Offender Registry*

Eighty percent, all but six of the thirty RSOs in this study, have at least some positive remark about the purpose of the SOR. Still, many try to balance the pros of the SOR for society with the drawbacks of the registry for themselves. The following anecdotes are examples of how RSOs attempt to balance the purpose of the SOR with the impact on RSOs, and are illustrative of the general themes encountered in this study. In each the RSO offers up an overall assessment of the SOR and its purpose.

At/on face value it's to keep people informed on the most dangerous predators. But underneath it there are some who use it as a way to keep us from being useful members of society again. ... And I think it's a means to keep us separated from the rest of society. [Gary, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

[It is there] to notify the surrounding neighborhood where sex offenders live. I guess it is good. Can't really argue why it would be bad, unless people used it to hunt sex offenders down, which has happened. [Samuel, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

It's good because the public needs to know. It's hard on us [RSOs]. But, we did what we did, so we just have to deal with it. [Blake, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

It's good. There some bad people out there. It's for the safety of the community, and I agree that it needs to be done. [Brian, RSO, resides in an area of high social disorganization]

Ostensibly [it is there] to allow caretakers of children to be aware of potential threats in their neighborhood. [Lucas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

[It is] to keep the public informed about any dangerous offenders. It does have its place, but it seems to be misused/over-used. In my opinion (unsupported by any hard facts) it seems they place some people on it that don't need to be. [Raul, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Each of these anecdotes indicates some general positive function or purpose of the SOR as understood by RSOs on the SOR. Themes within the collected data generally framed the SOR as positive for society in that it can help create awareness. However, some RSOs also illustrated an understanding of the potential negative consequences and sometimes question the intent and reach of the SOR.

Two RSOs mentioned the SOR as a means to keep RSOs from re-offending, a positive function. Raul, an RSO, comments on it's ability to keep people from re-offending, yet he still draws upon the personal consequences of being listed on the SOR.

It does make sure you won't reoffend! But... it's not always a good solution. It can cause hardships in housing and possibly employment. Therefore, it should be used with discretion. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. [Raul, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Tanner, making similar observations to Raul about re-offending and potential negative consequences, notes his idea of the purpose before going on to explain the issues it may create beyond the individual life of the RSO:

[It is] mostly for the officials to keep track of sex offenders for crime investigation. Second, [it is] a deterrence for borderline offenders [to keep them] from reoffending. Third, public notification is not as effective as if flyers were not sent out because I fear that some people may let their guard down if they live in a sex offender free neighborhood. I was a sex offender long before I was caught. ... The only problem I have with flyering [sic] [for] the non-predator or serious sex offenders is that it creates secondary victims like family members, roommates, and kids. [Tanner, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Thus, even while these men see the SOR as potentially stopping some RSOs from reoffending, they still contextualize that commentary within a framework of positive functions and negative consequences.

Two RSOs in the study argued that while the SOR serves a positive function they should not be on it.

[The SOR is] to let the public know about pedophiles, rapists in their neighborhood. To put their faces out there so the public knows. I don't think it's fair in my case though. It's good because it lets the public know what's their possible neighbor. It's bad because I have to register for the rest of my life and my charge is petty. I should be taken off. [William, RSO, resides in area of high social disorganization]

Similarly, another RSO responds that while the SOR is a good thing and he has not experienced difficulties because of it, he does not think he should be on it because he sees himself as being a different person than when he was first caught.

It is good for the severe charges, but I feel I am very different now and it isn't necessary. [Ted, RSO, resides in area of moderate social disorganization]

Six RSOs overtly state the purpose of the SOR is a negative one overall. All six of those seeing it as negative argue that the SOR is a continuation of punishment. One RSO, using this framework and who has not been harassed due to his RSO status, offered the following:

To continue to punish sex offenders after they are released and off supervision. It has little to do with public safety seeing as sex offenders have some of the lowest recidivism rates. [Thomas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Another RSO, who has also not been harassed, argues that it is a continuation of punishment that has negative consequences for RSOs such as being victimized due to their appearance on the registry.

[The registry is] a further punishment from the entire society so law enforcement doesn't have a guilty conscience if something goes wrong ("we told you so"). [I] can't find any good in it. Should be for law enforcement only to keep tabs on us, not [the] entire society. Sets us up for targeting. Even murderers, who I think create a bigger danger than [an] already known sex offender. [Justin, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

Reggie, an RSO who has experienced harassment and feels as though his neighbors avoid him, offered a list of reasons why the purpose of the SOR is negative and the negative impact he sees the SOR having on families while also having a negative impact on the broader community by creating paranoia and a false sense of security. He offers up this list and commentary about the negative impacts he perceives:

1. Public paranoia. Public outrage.
2. Lifetime punishment of my crime. Double Jeopardy.
3. To give public a false sense of security.
4. To present to the public as though something is being done.
5. To separate those with and without felony convictions.
6. To create income for state officials, i.e., law enforcement, probation workers, drug facilities, doctors hired by or on contract with the state, etc.

It's bad because it takes a toll on families who never committed a crime. It separates (or can) families. It is bad because it takes away my ability to change and be a contributing member of society. It is bad because the double jeopardy clause the law was enacted under states clearly if a person is not mentally ill they are no more dangerous than any other criminal. Yet I'm still punished. It is bad because it prevents me from providing for my family. [Reggie, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

Dane, commenting directly on the purpose of the SOR, feels it does not adequately meet the intentions of policymakers and might create further harms.

I feel it serves no real purpose or does not serve its intended purpose. I feel it actually creates a greater likelihood to re-offend because of the difficulties it creates to integrate back into society. Some guys I have seen just give up – feeling it's hopeless and violate probation or commit a new crime. [Dane, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

In contrast to Raul and Tanner, the two RSOs who see the SOR as possibly preventing some RSOs from re-offending and as a deterrence tool, Dane sees it as a source of issues that might compel some to re-offend or commit a new type of crime.

Ten percent (N =3) of the RSOs expressed concern over the accuracy of the information on the SOR and the community notification flyers. This RSO mentioned the possibility that the SOR is out of date within the context of attempting to explain the purpose as well as the problems with it.

It [the registry and notification processes] only helps out the community, not the ex-offender. [The good thing it is that] the neighborhood is being notified about someone who did something bad. [The bad thing about it is that] most notifications... are not up to date. [Ryan, RSO, resides in an area of moderate social disorganization]

Two other RSOs within the study claimed the offenses listed on the SOR or within flyers were incorrect for them specifically despite not being asked about their offense(s) at any point during their participation. The question of accuracy of the SOR is beyond the scope of this research, but it does lead to a question of why the offense listings on the SOR might matter to the RSO or to others in the community. Many RSOs in this study engage in a dialogue that questions how they are perceived and whether or if people understand there are differences between types of RSOs, the topic of the next section of this chapter.

*RSOs Are Not All the Same*

While not directly asked to make an assessment of how they think the broader society views RSOs, many RSOs offered their perception of RSOs as well as concern over how society sees RSOs as all being the same. Seven of the 30 RSOs (23.3%) in this study noted their concern over the perception that RSOs are all the same. Five of these seven RSOs reside in areas of low social disorganization; of these five, four have been harassed within their neighborhoods. The other three who expressed these views have not been subject to neighborhood harassment of any kind.

Each RSO who offered up their concerns over the public's inability or failure to distinguish between types of RSOs on the registry also offered up their insights into both the positive and negative functions of the SOR. The following anecdotes are illustrative of each of the seven RSOs who expressed their concerns over how RSOs are seen as a uniform category by the general public alongside their commentary regarding the purpose of the SOR.

[The SOR] is good because it allows the public to know who has been convicted of some forms of sexual offense against a minor. It's also a negative thing because of the preconceived notions that go along with being on the registry. While some are deserved, all cases are not the same, but once you are registered you are viewed as the same as the next offender when that may be the furthest thing from the truth. [Matt, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

It is good because it does inform the public of the whereabouts of child molesters and violent rapists. It is bad because not all sex offenders are child molesters or violent rapists. [Alex, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

I think it is both good and bad. I do believe some offenders will re-offend. I knew a lot of repeat offenders in prison. But I also think it is bad because people who have really dealt with their issues are put in the same boat with incorrigible offenders, and painted with the same brush. Also, people

don't distinguish between levels of offense behavior, all they know is that you are designated a sex offender by the law. [Lucas, RSO, resides in an area of low social disorganization]

Overall, the failure of the public to distinguish between types of RSOs could in part be a product of the SOR itself. It does not offer much information about the RSO aside from a basic offense category and information on the RSO's whereabouts. To RSOs who have experienced harassment, which four of these seven have, perhaps there is a heightened sense of other's interpretations of what landed them on the SOR. These same four RSOs also have offenses on the SOR as listed as having occurred against a minor, potentially this combination of factors might lead some RSOs to make the assessment that society generally sees RSOs in a similar light.

#### *The Personal Side of Appearing on the Sex Offender Registry*

Finally, 27 of the 30 (90%) RSOs in this study say the SOR has had some sort of negative personal impact on them as they responded to the question of how being registered has helped or hurt their sense of belonging. The following anecdotes are the typical themes that RSOs discussed as they responded to these questions, which generally ranged from self-conscious and depressed to feeling as though the law removes ones ability to attempt to live a normal life in which one can provide for their family.

I am more wary of establishing relationships in general, as it is very easy for someone to just Google my name and find out about me.... The registry fails to explain the value of sex offender treatment nor does it account for those who have been in treatment. ... As such, it can unduly alarm some folks who have not received any disclosure prior to seeing the on-line registry. [Bob, RSO, area of moderate social disorganization]

I've had an old friend call me out of the blue, and ask why I was on the list. It more or less affects me personally. A day hasn't gone by where I haven't thought about it. And whenever I think about it, it brings me

down, and depressed. Kinda like an annoyance that won't go away.  
[Samuel, RSO, area of moderate social disorganization]

No positive or negative effect other than always looking over your shoulder cause people know where you live. ... It's made me feel like I don't belong in the community at all. [Blake, RSO, area of moderate social disorganization]

The main negative I see is in how I feel about myself. I live a life full of shame, and let it effect my life to the point where I feel I'm just better off being alone. [Alex, RSO, low social disorganization neighborhood]

There are no positive effects. Crime hasn't decreased. I challenge anyone to state a positive effect of me being on that registry. I'm not complaining, I'm being honest. I just want to work and provide for my family, and feel like this law has deliberately caused me to not be allowed to do that.  
[Reggie, RSO, resides in area of low social disorganization]

However, the above responses indicate that not all ramifications of registration laws lay squarely within societal responses and structural consequences; there are impacts on the self-concept of the RSO.

### *Discussion*

The findings in the chapter indicate RSOs have a nuanced way of thinking about the SOR. Generally, RSOs see the positive impacts of SOR for society, yet many RSOs in this study are cognizant of potential deficiencies with the SOR – whether these are inaccuracies in the SOR itself, feeling like they do not deserve to appear on the public portion of the SOR, or feeling as though the SOR serves as a basis for ongoing punishment.

Eighty percent of the RSOs in this study see the registry as serving a positive function for society. Seeing the positive side and stating the positive side of the SOR may be a result of social desirability bias. Still, many RSOs, even in their framing of the good

side of the SOR, seemed to discuss the SOR in ways that indicate they are well aware of the pros and cons of the SOR. While the vast majority could find something good to say about the SOR did not prevent them from spending more of their time responding to the negative aspects of the SOR for them personally or for the community.

Within their commentary, many RSOs described feeling as though they do not deserve to appear on the public SOR. This be understood in terms of how RSOs feel about the RSO label being applied to them, and how they interpret other RSOs from the perspective of the generalized other. Drawing on Goffman (1963), the RSO label itself related to the stigmatization of personal traits that deviate away from normative behavior in society. Recall that in Goffman's (1963) definition of stigma he refers to stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and which reduces the stigmatized individual "to a tainted, discounted" person (3). The public nature of the RSO label makes it quite salient. Further, in the minds of the generalized other, negative attributes are associated with the label. As some RSOs in this study also allude to, the label itself creates an overgeneralized stereotype that all RSOs are the same and have all committed an offense that is equally horrific. As society created the categorization of RSOs and the SOR, what has occurred in the minds of some RSOs in this study is a separation of "us" from "them" – non-RSOs from RSOs.

Several RSOs offered insights into the way they perceive society as seeing all RSOs as a uniform population. Again, it is worth noting that four of the seven RSOs in this study who discuss this issue reside in areas of low social disorganization. Five of these seven RSOs also have offenses against minors listed on the SOR. In some ways, this finding would make more sense if the RSOs who feel this way did not have offenses

against minors as the general tendency is to place RSOs in the context of offenses against minors. However, the fact that these RSOs do have offenses against minors and state concern over the fact that RSOs are seen as similar might be a product of how they have been addressed (e.g. having people assume they committed an act of child molestation when this may not be the case). Future researchers interested in this question should seek out patterns within broader samples of RSOs for their perceptions of how society views them alongside the RSO's offenses, experiences with harassment, and the assumptions they have encountered as being a part of this population.

Another important point in this chapter is that of one's sense of discrimination and their ability to link this sense of discrimination to the SOR. Recall from Chapter 1 that Link and Phelan (2001) propose four components of stigma – labeling, stereotyping, othering, and the loss of status accompanied with discrimination. Ninety percent of the RSOs in this sample had a sense that the SOR has had a negative impact in their lives. The very real impact on one's self concept – depression, looking over one's shoulder, a hard time establishing relationships – all signify a sense of loss in one's social standing. Recall one RSO, Dane, even goes as far as conjecturing that the SOR creates difficulties during the reintegration process, which may lead one to re-offend. Some RSOs engaged in a discussion of the negative side of the SOR beyond the context of social and structural implications. These RSOs indicate that the SOR impacts their self-concept – how they see themselves – and has had an impact on their lives.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Sex offenses have been the subject of legal and social scrutiny for decades, but most recent political and social attention has directed the focus toward known sex offenders. This attention culminated in a national public sex offender registry (SOR) in the 1990s and a variety of state and local policies governing how communities should be notified of the presence of registered sex offenders (RSOs). Now that almost two decades have passed since the SOR and some of various notification policies went into effect, social scientists are well positioned to study a variety of social issues related to the RSO population within a variety of contexts.

This dissertation positioned RSOs at the center of analysis, closely examining the SOR and the housing experiences of a small sample of known Level 2 and 3 RSOs in Phoenix, Arizona. Placing the RSOs rather than existing policy at the center of the analysis allows the array of RSO experiences related to the RSO identity to come to the forefront within the context a of neighborhood social organization or disorganization typology.

Findings throughout this study are also useful for policy considerations. Community issues related to the RSO population but beyond the individual RSO identity and experience must be taken into consideration in light of some of the findings of this research.

### *Summary of Study Findings*

The typical Level 2 or 3 RSO in Phoenix during July 2009 was a white male with an average age of approximately 44 years. Within Maricopa County and Phoenix, most

RSOs on the SOR in July 2009 were Level 2 – those posing a moderate risk of re-offense – and most on the SOR committed an offense in Maricopa County.

RSOs are quite densely concentrated in certain areas, and RSO homelessness, at least at the time of data collection, is an issue in one particular area of the city. The index of dissimilarity was useful in assessing the segregation of RSOs within the city. RSOs were found to be moderately segregated within the city of Phoenix, Arizona. Across Zip Code Tract Areas (ZCTAs), areas that see higher concentrations of RSOs tend to be more socially disorganized – areas with higher rates of poverty than the local average, areas with higher rates of housing vacancies than the local average, areas with lower rates of home ownership than the local average, and areas with lower than average median income. Within this study, RSO density per square mile and proportion of RSOs to non-RSOs within a given area are reasonable indicators of social disorganization. Within regression analysis, higher proportions of RSOs are significantly correlated with median housing and vacant housing units. As median incomes in ZCTAs increase there tends to be lower proportions of RSOs in the area. As housing vacancies increase there tends to be higher proportions of RSOs, likely in response to landlords' desire to fill available housing and the product of cheaper housing within these areas. The presence and concentrations of stigmatized populations like RSOs may be another indicator of social disorganization to consider alongside the traditional indicators of racial heterogeneity, economic deprivation, and housing stability. Finally, homelessness among RSOs is an issue that has yet to be usefully addressed by local or state officials.

Due to formal housing policies and negative social attitudes, most RSOs in this study used one or more strategies to find and maintain their housing. These strategies

were typically being upfront and honest by disclosing one's RSO status to prospective landlords, seeking out privately owned homes to rent rather than seeking out housing at an apartment complex with a required background check, living with friends or family, or using the help of a probation officer. Such strategies are necessary for RSOs facing difficulties beyond housing restrictions.

All RSOs in this sample said they presume that their neighbors knew their RSO status, which in many cases seems to structure some patterns of behavior both on the part of the RSO and on the part of those around them. At the very least, many RSOs perceive the label impacts how they are treated. Many RSOs say they avoid at least some general social contact, and most RSOs in this sample did not interact with their neighbors. Many of these are RSOs who have offenses on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor, which likely influences with whom they are allowed contact by virtue of probation conditions. Additionally, most of those living in areas of low social disorganization stated they avoided at least some social contact, and most in areas of low social disorganization said they did not interact with their neighbors. However, the majority of RSOs in this sample, regardless of level of neighborhood social disorganization, did not interact with their neighbors, which is quite different from the vast majority of Americans (State Farm 2013). There were a total of ten (33%) RSOs who reported interacting with neighbors. Seven of these ten had an offense on the SOR listed as occurring against a minor, and five of these RSOs reside in areas of moderate social disorganization. Among the 17 RSOs in this study with offenses on the SOR listed as occurring against a minor, approximately 41% interact with their neighbors. This is in contrast to only three of the 13 RSOs without offenses on the SOR listed as occurring against minors who interact

with their neighbors. Still five of the six RSOs who think their neighbors avoid them have offenses against minors list on the SOR. Not insignificantly, 60% of the RSOs living in areas of low social disorganization remarked that they feel as though their neighbors avoid them. This is a phenomenon that was unique to areas of low social disorganization in this sample, and 83% of them had an offense on the SOR listed as having occurred against a minor. Future research should seek to clarify whether or not there are any clear correlations between offense types, types of interactions, and neighborhood social disorganization.

Some of the family members of RSOs have experienced harassment related to their RSO status, and social avoidance and harassment experiences seem to go hand-in-hand. Most RSOs who have experienced harassment or have had those they live with experience it on their behalf also avoid some general social contact or do not interact with their neighbors. While harassment may not be a necessary condition for one to practice avoidance, harassment may be a sufficient condition.

Experiences of harassment were wide-ranging from moderate to severe. In extreme cases, there were experiences with physical threats and property damage or bullying of their children. In more moderate cases, the experiences were limited to gossip or rumors. Harassment in its myriad forms is a means of social control directed toward the RSO. Significantly, experiences of harassment were limited to areas of low and moderate social disorganization. In areas of low social disorganization, harassment experiences were more common among RSOs with offenses against minors. In areas of moderate social disorganization harassment experiences were more common among RSOs without offenses listed against minors. For now, this remains an unexpected

finding, but it may be an indication that those issuing the harassment failing to make distinctions between different types of sex offenses and simply target RSOs.

Alternatively, this may be a product of a small sample. Future research should assess whether this is an established pattern that warrants further explanation.

Finally, many RSOs balance their appearance on the SOR in a broad context in which they see the utility of such a measure, but also see and experience potential pitfalls related to such a measure. The majority viewed the SOR in a positive light within the context of it serving a positive purpose in society, yet none of the 30 men in this sample saw the SOR as serving a positive function in their own life. Many perceive the SOR as a disruption to their ability to live their lives and move on from their offense. Further over 20% of the RSOs sought to create a distinction between themselves and RSOs they deemed as being of lesser status than themselves as they expressed concerns that the general public fails to see the distinction between different types of RSOs.

Findings from this study demonstrate that RSOs should not simply be seen within the context of the SOR, but at individuals embedded within the context of their neighborhoods who often face common issues related to their RSO identity. Findings also indicate that a nuanced approach to stigmatized identities must be considered from the perspective of the stigmatized population. Their perspective lends insight into how the label placed on them functions in terms of structuring some of their thoughts and assessments of themselves from the perspective of the generalized other, and how the label functions as it becomes more salient in certain encounters.

*Contributions to Social Theory*

Segments of this research speak directly to theories of social disorganization and collective efficacy. Findings here confirm some of the basic principles of these theories in that socially disorganized areas had higher densities of RSOs and contain the largest shares of the overall Level 2 and 3 RSO population within Phoenix. These findings are similar to findings of previous research. While future research should continue to examine these trends and work to further specify neighborhood types, given the findings here and the findings of previous research, a highly stigmatized and known population such as RSOs seem to be a useful lens for examining social disorganization in various urban settings. While the relationship between RSOs and social disorganization is complex and likely related in some ways to their financial status (with yet another layer of complexities due to employment hardships faced by ex-offender populations), it does make sense to investigate RSOs as an indicator of level of social disorganization within a neighborhood. Elevated rates of RSOs, much like more traditional economic indicators, can be both a product and symptom of underlying neighborhood ecological issues and social processes occurring beyond the individuals residing within these areas.

Regarding collective efficacy, tight-knit communities are better able to control the neighborhood environment while neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty and mobility are generally seen as less equipped to control the neighborhood environment due to a lack of ability or willingness to organize around common goals. Structural elements of social disorganization lend insight into variations and patterns we see in terms of neighborhood social control – such as the harassment of RSOs and/or their household members. Findings in this study support principles of social disorganization and

collective efficacy where harassment is concerned. While RSOs seem to be an indicator of social disorganization, they are also a population that appears more likely to be harassed and/or avoided in areas of low and moderate social disorganization. These are areas that are theoretically stronger in terms of collective efficacy and exacting various forms of social control on undesirable individuals or situations. While this finding is consistent with what is proposed by theory, it lends itself to a contradiction. While RSOs may experience fewer social problems in areas of higher social disorganization, they may face more structural issues within these areas. Additionally, they likely add some degree of stigma to an already troubled area. It may also be that weaker forms of collective efficacy may not control RSO behavior if such control is needed. In areas of lower social disorganization, structural barriers to greater collective efficacy are weaker, and RSOs seem to experience more harassment in these areas, which is a problematic finding. The problem is that harassment and perceived avoidance may weaken one's ability to reintegrate. These have a disintegrative effect, and others have noted that these phenomena may contribute to recidivism (Braithwaite and Daly 1994; Hudson 1998; McAlinden 2008).

In terms of labeling as well as sociological understandings of stigmatized identities, the men in this study represent a marginalized population who use a variety of means to navigate the stigmatized identity. Goffman's ideas about stigmatized identities are thorough in that they consider the myriad of possibilities beginning with the idea that society establishes the boundaries or categories for normal and deviant behavior. The control of information, at the heart of Goffman's concept of social identity, is somewhat limited for RSOs due to the SOR and community notification practices. Still, some RSOs

attempt to control the *means* by which others – a prospective landlord, for example – receive that information by “outing” themselves prior to notification or background checks. In terms of the ego identity, many RSOs seem to adopt a framework of ambivalence, that is, taking on the views of the non-RSO toward RSOs while not seeing themselves as different from non-RSOs. This was evident in the ways RSOs responded to questions about the purpose of the SOR, often framing it as something positive for society, which in many ways aligns them with non-RSOs. This is also evident in the denial their attachment to any sort of social identity or affiliation with other RSOs. In this process they are taking the role of the generalized other, able to assess RSOs they deem to be more dangerous or threatening to society, but also reflecting on themselves. Throughout the various chapters of this dissertation, RSOs commented about negatives aspects of being an RSO – housing issues, relationship troubles, avoidance of interactions, perceptions they are being avoiding, harassment, depression, fear, shame, and so forth. They understand how society often views RSOs and have internalized some of these views. While it is difficult to assess whether RSOs avoid contact specifically because their sense of the generalized other tells them to avoid contact by virtue of being labeled and RSO, some RSOs do express avoidance and feelings consistent with this sense.

There is also the interplay between macro and micro level phenomena to be considered. Stigmatizers do not act uniformly across various types of neighborhood organization, nor should we expect individual or group responses to be invariable. There is likely a link to elements of neighborhood social organization that may operate to unify

the collective enough to encourage gossip about the stigmatized or other types of harassing behavior.

There is a social process model that can be derived from this research and theoretical insights. Public opinion and extreme circumstances helped inspire the birth of the SOR, community notification, and the RSO category. This places a label on the released offender who is subject to formal social controls including laws and probation requirements in addition to increased public attention. The RSO assumes the role of the stigmatized as he shops around for a place to live, work and resume life, assuming that in many situations those they encounter already know of their RSO status or will be able to find out readily. This role is even adopted in cases in which the RSOs disclose their status since they must disclose the status in order to present themselves as being an honest or upfront ex-felon. In other words, their RSO identity is an identity that is salient in a number of potential situations they encounter. The label is permanent and it is carried around, continually brought up if they re-locate, apply for a job or a place to live that requires a background check, or in the process of having to decide whether to preemptively “come out” to those they encounter.

Beyond the label, there are stereotypes to contend with as well as assessments of negative past behaviors. RSOs perceive others avoiding them at fairly high rates in this study, depending on the level of social disorganization in their neighborhood. In some instances, RSOs avoid certain types of social contact – a product in some cases of formal restrictions placed on them, and sometimes a product of self-imposed exile. In other instances, RSOs perceive that they are turned away from potential living situations based on their RSO status. Some RSOs and family members, as a reaction to their RSO status,

have experiences with moderate to severe harassment within neighborhood environments, an exercise of informal social control that can serve to further isolate the RSO. These experiences are not only symbolic of an “us” versus “them” mentality, but are clear instances of discriminatory behavior and a testament to the differential statuses in a given context. The neighborhoods that seem more likely to be able to express that the RSO is unwelcome or at least under scrutiny are more likely to be better socially organized. Those RSOs in areas of greater social disorganization are not immune to the social reactions of others within or outside the neighborhood context, but these areas, according to theory, are less able to exercise informal social controls that express to the RSO they are indeed stigmatized. An additional layer of discrimination is that many RSOs self-sanction, which suggests that some RSOs internalize the beliefs of non-RSOs. Finally, some RSOs also feel they are seen as being a uniform group, but attempt to make distinctions of their own and apply the perspective of society to other RSOs. This suggests further internalization of the message that RSOs are worthy of distinction and separation.

The process starts with society influencing categorization. We must remember that RSOs, a group that is labeled, stereotyped, separated by an “us” versus “them” mentality, reduced in status, and subject to discrimination are also influenced by society, seek to further clarify these categories at the same time many also see themselves through the perspective of the generalized other. Perhaps in effort to reintegrate and reattach to the broader community this is a necessary part of the process – further separating oneself from those who are, in the eyes of a more knowledgeable generalized other (the RSO by virtue of living a stigmatized status), able to make more nuanced distinctions between

subsets of the RSO population. Of course, this process is capable of repeating itself on a smaller scale to a seemingly infinite degree, but it does allow for a more comprehensive understanding to how stigmatized identities are social designations that shape group dynamics and influence behavior. It also lends insight into the ongoing process of creating stigmatized statuses.

There is also another cycle occurring in the lives of individual RSOs. This cycle is one of release, finding housing based on potential restrictions, housing availability and affordability, community notification, and community reaction. If community reactions are strong and consistently present within a neighborhood setting, some RSOs may choose to re-enter the cycle by moving, causing a new notification process, and new neighbors who may or may not react negatively to their presence.

### *Policy Recommendations*

Policymakers often forget that while a population like RSOs may not be deemed likeable or broadly accepted, policies direct at these men and women may sometimes lead to serious, detrimental social consequences that may impede their successful reintegration into society. If the ultimate goal is to balance the rights of the general public to know with the right of the ex-offender to live life outside of prison, we must continually seek to understand how and where we might fail both the public and the ex-offender. Findings within this study indicate that some, certainly not all, RSOs face some experiences that may be detrimental to reintegration – indicating how this process can sometimes fail the offender *and* the community.

To gain a better understanding of neighborhood dynamics and the successful reintegration of RSOs, law enforcement officials, local activists, academics, and

policymakers should be mindful of the relationship between the traditional indicators of social disorganization and RSOs. Gaining an understanding of what social forces lead to higher concentrations of RSOs in areas that are the least socially organized will allow community officials to understand how certain neighborhoods are more disproportionately burdened by certain phenomena and may not have the closeness or stability as a neighborhood to realize common goals while bearing the burden of a variety of spatial injustices. While some RSOs may seem to be treated “better” in some of the more socially disorganized areas simply by virtue of being overlooked or not being harassed, the fact of the matter is that RSOs may prove to be a further detriment to certain neighborhoods if their presence is a deterrent to potential residents or commerce. Again, if there is to be a balance between offender rights and community rights, issues like this must be taken into consideration. Simply passing anti-cluster measures as Phoenix has does not seem to operate to disperse RSOs more uniformly. Furthermore, housing dispersion becomes a moot point when there is such a high concentration of homeless RSOs in certain areas of the city due to a lack of affordable housing for recently released RSOs or a lack of resources for those who may struggle to reintegrate into a work and home situation.

While many RSOs do not experience harassment, many seem to face issues related to community reactions in more socially organized areas. More should be done to educate the general public about different types of RSOs and the associated risk level designations. Additionally, harassment of RSOs should be something that is taken seriously by local officials as isolation and feelings of animosity help neither the RSO’s reintegration nor the community’s ability to understand their own rights and voice

concerns in an appropriate means. Finally, community officials need to take into consideration the fact that more socially disorganized areas may have concerns about the presence of RSOs and the disproportionate representation of RSOs in certain areas, but they may fundamentally lack the resources and cohesion to voice their concerns to the powers that be.

#### *Limitations of the Current Study*

There are limitations to the current research. First, the study sample of the qualitative portion of this study is small, and findings are not generalizable beyond the RSO population in this particular city because of the variation in formal policies directed toward the RSO population. While the study population in the qualitative portion of this study was randomly selected, the response rate, like other published studies of the RSO population, was low. However, there is no reason to think that the RSOs that did participate in this study are atypical. Other somewhat similar studies found similar patterns of experiences of RSOs and similar housing patterns. At the same time, these studies are subject to similar sources of selection bias.

Secondly, the research design does not allow one to infer information about neighborhood dynamics. While part of this study does deal with RSO experiences within their neighborhoods, it is important to keep in mind that the study was one-sided. Again, there is no reason to think participants over or understated their experiences within their neighborhoods.

Finally, the research design does not allow inferences regarding the effect of an RSO's experiences with avoidance or harassment. Theoretically, such experiences can

have devastating consequences for the ex-offender and the community as these forces can operate to isolate and perhaps give way to patterns of recidivism. Still, a limitation here is that only released RSOs, and there is no way to assess whether they will reoffend. The population of RSOs who are released and *then* re-offend would need to be a data source to understand exactly how experiences of avoidance and harassment may possibly positively correlate with feelings of isolation and re-offense patterns.

### *Future Research*

Future research should advance the understanding and potential utility of using RSOs as an indicator of neighborhood social disorganization. In an effort to create a more complete understanding of the impacts of restrictive housing laws and isolating what legal, economic, and social factors push some RSOs into more socially disorganized areas, future research should examine housing difficulties in various locations that do and do not have restrictive housing laws. Additionally, future research should consider RSO economic status both prior to and after conviction and release to better understand individual housing decisions within the broader context of the communities.

Further research is also necessary to understand how the general public views neighborhoods with higher concentrations of RSOs. It should also assess whether people in various types of neighborhoods use or used the registry to make informed decisions about where they currently live. If community members do use the registry to inform housing or other decisions, this may impact neighborhoods in terms of perceptions and in terms of whether or not certain areas or potential residences are avoided at least in part due to the presence of nearby RSOs. What, if anything, does the presence of RSOs within a given area symbolize for potential future and current residents since registry data in the

U.S. is easily accessed? Investigating this type of question would lend further insight into patterns RSOs experience in their lives as well as lend insight into how community members deal with the RSO population. It would compliment this study by placing community members at the center of the analysis.

### *Summary*

This study placed RSOs at the center of analysis in effort to take their subjective experiences as RSOs as a serious point of inquiry. Findings indicate that RSOs are more heavily concentrated in areas with higher social disorganization. Many RSOs in areas of low to moderate social disorganization experience being avoided and sometimes harassed. RSOs experience the SOR as a part of their lived status and one that can become activated in social settings and as they look for housing or encounter others in their neighborhoods. Placing RSOs at the center of analysis helps refine ideas about stigmatized criminal identities in conjunction with macro-level forces.

## APPENDIX A

**Appendix A. Supplemental Data: Population Distribution in ZCTAs**

<b>ZCTA</b>	<b><math> (x_i/X - p_i/P) </math> used to Calculate Index of Dissimilarity</b>	<b>RSOs as % of ZCTA Population (2010)</b>	<b>RSO Density per Square Mile</b>	<b>RSOs as % of Total Level 2-3 RSO Population</b>
<b>County</b>	--	0.05%	0.22	--
<b>City</b>	--	0.09%	2.33	--
85003	.03196	0.5%	24.46	3.9%
85004	.00706	0.26%	6.37	1.08%
85006	.02290	0.2%	13.07	4.23%
85007	.21132	1.9%	59.15	22.17%
85008	.02894	0.15%	8.41	7.14%
85009	.02672	0.15%	14.33	6.65%
85012	.00264	0.14%	4.1	0.75%
85013	.00300	0.07%	3.77	1.16%
85014	.00286	0.11%	6.22	2.16%
85015	.00442	0.08%	5.94	2.41%
85016	.01074	0.05%	1.99	1.5%
85017	.02456	0.17%	12.40	5.4%
85018	.01230	0.05%	1.53	1.41%
85019	.00020	0.09%	5.87	1.83%
85020	.00758	0.12%	4.27	3.16%
85021	.00194	0.08%	4.61	2.58%
85022	.02096	0.03%	1.71	1.33%
85023	.01366	0.04%	1.51	0.91%

**Appendix A.** Supplemental Data: Population Distribution in ZCTAs (continued)

<b>ZCTA</b>	<b><math> (x_i/X - p_i/P) </math> used to Calculate Index of Dissimilarity</b>	<b>RSOs as % of ZCTA Population (2010)</b>	<b>RSO Density per Square Mile</b>	<b>RSOs as % of Total Level 2-3 RSO Population</b>
85024	.01230	0.02%	0.18	0.42%
85027	.01230	0.05%	1.28	1.49%
85028	.01112	0.02%	0.3	0.25%
85029	.01442	0.05%	2.2	1.74%
85031	.01056	0.05%	3.45	1.16%
85032	.03544	0.02%	1.29	1.33%
85033	.01740	0.05%	4.27	2.16%
85034	.00832	0.25%	1.23	1.16%
85035	.01930	0.4%	3.33	1.58%
85037	.01974	0.04%	1.96	1.33%
85040	.01938	0.17%	4.82	4.07%
85041	.00086	0.09%	3.02	3.99%
85042	.01104	0.06%	1.53	1.91%
85043	.01478	0.03%	0.47	0.75%
85044	.02374	0.01%	0.35	0.42%
85045	.00000	0%	0	0%
85048	.02192	0.01%	0.15	0.25%
85050	.01528	0.02%	0.27	0.33%
85051	.00146	0.08%	5.38	2.82%

**Appendix A. Supplemental Data: Population Distribution in ZCTAs (continued)**

<b>ZCTA</b>	<b><math> (x_i/X - p_i/P) </math> used to Calculate Index of Dissimilarity)</b>	<b>RSOs as % of ZCTA Population (2010)</b>	<b>RSO Density per Square Mile</b>	<b>RSOs as % of Total Level 2-3 RSO Population</b>
85053	.00656	0.06%	3.26	1.41%
85054	.00068	0.06%	0.33	0.25%
85083	.01198	0.01%	0.1	0.08%
85085	.00822	0.03%	0.19	0.42%
85086	.02480	0.02%	0.1	0.5%
85087	.00244	0.05%	0.04	0.25%

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