Modernized female sex offender typologies: Intrapsychic, behavioral, and trauma related domains

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Abstract: The authors utilize a meta-analysis of the literature and grounded theory strategy to dissect some of the most widely utilized female sex offender typology studies of the past several decades. A historical account of the process of female sex offender classification is detailed, and emerging research on the implications of trauma in the behavioral trajectories of offenders is incorporated into the study. The analysis uncovers considerable similarities between the identified, empirically validated clusters of typologies and allows for constructing a single modernized cluster of three basic typologies, each containing intrapsychic, behavioral, and trauma-related domains. Findings are presented, and three typology designations, Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic, are detailed and explain how they were empirically developed. Implications for utilization and considerations for further development and validation are presented.

Subjects: Theoretical Criminology; Criminology and Criminal Justice; Criminology & Delinquency; Clinical Social Work; SocialWork and Social Policy; Social Work Law; Social Work Practice; Forensic Social Work

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article explores historical conceptualizations of female sexual offending and outlines three modern typologies of the phenomenon. The Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic offender typologies are detailed extensively. The authors provide intrapsychic, behavioral, and trauma-informed domains in the description of each typology and help unpack the history of female sexual offending. The typologies can be used in diagnostic assessment and treatment, criminal investigation, and a multitude of service delivery and public education areas to explain further the unique and complicated realities of female sexual offending, which are often far different from what people are shown in the mainstream media.
Keywords: female sex offender; sex crimes; gender; sexual assault; FSO; sexual offending

1. Introduction
Female sexual offenders (FSOs) are drastically unrepresented in the criminal justice system. Studies have suggested that females commit 15–20% of sexual offenses (American Humane Association, 1987; Faller, 1996). One explanation among the studies of female sexual offenders that have been accepted is that FSOs have significantly more extensive personal abuse histories than their male counterparts (Strickland, 2008). According to the CDC’s Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, it was discovered that approximately 25% of females and 16% of males who reported that they were abused as a child advised that at least one of their sexual offenders was female (Center for Disease Control, 2013). FSOs tend to offend both male and female genders of various ages (Freeman & Sandler, 2008). While FSOs have victims of a wide range of ages, their offenses trend toward younger children, which causes a particular set of problems for those victims, such as neurological, behavioral, and other significant outcomes (Center for Disease Control, 2013; Perry, 2000). Extensive trauma histories and a lifetime of victimization patterns are vital characteristics that FSOs share.

For this article, we will be looking at several clusters of typologies that have been put together by different authors and different research studies over time. This article defines typology as a single grouping of traits that explains the developmental history or behavioral trajectory of a particular type of female sexual offender. Each typology will have its individual and specific unique traits. These traits make up the typology, and a grouping of typologies makes up a cluster. Our specific typologies have traits organized in domains, even though the others do not. Domains are groupings of traits inside a typology specific to that typology. Table 1, which is seen below, further illustrates the terminology definitions for this article.

1.1. History
Over the past thirty years, many have set out to categorize female sexual offenders and their behavioral types because while the literature suggests the little knowledge that we know about female sexual offenders, we do know that female and male sex offenders do not share typologies (Pflugradt & Allen, 2010). One of the first typologies and one of the most cited for female sexual offenders was created in 1991 by Mathews, Matthews, and Spitz and was based on clinical interviews and psychometric testing from a female sex offender treatment program (Mathews et al., 1991). Matthews, Matthews, and Spitz created three major categories: The Teacher/Lover, Predisposed, and Male Coerced. Later in 2004, Vandiver and Kercher used a hierarchical linear model and cluster analysis to assess the relationship between offender and victim characteristics.

| Table 1. Project Terminology |
|-------------------------------|
| **Term** | **Definition** | **Example** |
| Typology | This grouping of traits explains the developmental history and/or behavioral trajectory of a particular type of FSO. | Our typologies are: Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic |
| Traits | Traits make up a typology. They are individual and specific to each typology. | • Victim viewed as a partner  
• Victim’s average age  
• FSO has a low probability of rearrest  
• FSO exploits victims |
| Cluster | A grouping of typologies. | Mathews, Matthews, and Spitz or Vandiver and Kercher |
| Domain | Grouping of thematic traits inside a single typology. | Intrapsychic traits Behavioral traits Trauma traits |
to create their female sexual offender categories, which are The Heterosexual Nurturer, The Noncriminal Homosexual, The Female Sexual Predator, The Young Adult Child Exploiter, The Homosexual Criminals, and The Aggressive Homosexual Offender (Vandiver & Teske, 2006). Sandler and Freeman created six categories in 2007 after they studied female sexual offenders from New York State (Sandler & Freeman, 2007). The six categories they created are The Crimelessly-Limited Hebephile, The Crimelessly-Prone Hebephile, The Young Adult Child Molesters, The High-Risk Chronic Offenders, The Older Non-Habitual Offender, and The Homosexual Child Molester. Finally, Wijkman et al. (2011) completed a study based on the types and frequency of offenses from their Dutch sample and designed the three typology categories: The Once-Only Offender, The Generalists, and The Specialists.

The second typology explored is behavioral. The first to organize categories for this typology was Ferguson and Meehan in 2005. They used hierarchical linear modeling and cluster analysis to develop the FSO behavioral typologies based on three patterns related to perpetrator characteristics, victim age, and use of force (Ferguson & Meehan, 2005). The categories were organized as Cluster 1, Cluster 2, and Cluster 3. Gannon, Rose, and Ward developed three primary pathways to female sexual offending by utilizing Gannon’s earlier Descriptive Model of Sexual offending (Gannon & Rose, 2008; Gannon et al., 2010). The categories they developed are The Explicit Approach, The Directly Avoidant, and The Disorganized Offender.

The most recent typologies to be explored are related to trauma. Harrati, Coulanges, Derivois, and Vavassori created four categories in 2018. This was done after four main themes emerged from their thematic analysis, consistent with the characteristics and motivations of the sexual assault (Harrati et al., 2018). The categories for this cluster include Desire for power, Sadism, Extreme anger, and Quest for self-affirmation, which are categorized based on the nature of the sexual violence, the characteristics and motivations of the sexual violence, and the biographical features of the male or female sexual offender. Their typologies were developed for both male and female sexual offenders.

1.2. FSO abuse histories
One specific indication of the probability of abuse against others in adulthood is a personal history of sexual abuse (Warren & Hislop, 2008). Strickland (2008) suggests that sexually deviant interest in children may have been developed because the female sex offender suffered extreme sexual abuse. Furthermore, Strickland found from her study with incarcerated females in Georgia that women incarcerated for sexual offenses had higher rates of significant childhood trauma, including sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and physical neglect, than those incarcerated for nonsexual offenses. It has been suggested by the research of Hunter et al. (1993) that female sex offenders tend to have experienced sexual abuse at a much earlier age than that experienced by male offenders. This includes being molested by male and female perpetrators, by multiple individuals over an extended time, sexual arousal from one of their victimizations, and the start of their offending behavior within five years of their first victimization experience (Hunter et al., 1993). Sexual abuse was not the only abuse that was found to be significant in female offenders’ past. Female sexual offenders were more likely to have experienced physical and emotional abuse by their siblings and biological parents and have an education level below 12th grade than incarcerated females who did not commit a sexual crime (Laque, 2002).

1.3. Myths
Various myths regarding female sexual offending exist today. One specific myth is that female sex offender were uniquely diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, but Strickland (2008) found it prevalent among both female sexual offenders and male sexual offenders. Another common misconception is that females are not primary perpetrators. However, multiple studies across time have identified females as primary abusers in up to 20% of sex crimes cases (Lewis & Stanley, 2000; McLeod, 2015). The general public is not alone in having a hard time believing that women would sexually offend. Mental health professionals have also been affected by myths and biases.
Research suggests that practitioners are frequently hesitant to question or believe information related to female involvement in under age sexual abuse (Saradjian, 1996). A list of myths developed by Longdon (1993) includes:

- Males are the only gender who sexually abuse
- The only way females sexually abuse is if they are accompanied or coerced by a male
- Gentle, loving, or misguided “motherly love” are the ways women sexually abuse
- Females do not abuse other females
- If a female abuses a female, then they will be a lesbian
- Sexually abused children will sexually abuse others as an adult
- If a person claims a female sexually abused them, they are only fantasizing or lying.
  - If a male claims that they were sexually abused by a female, they have sexual fantasies, and if they were abused by their mother, they have incestuous desires.
  - If a female claims they were sexually abused by another female, they are confused.
- Adolescents are the only victims of female sexual offenders
- It is not sexual abuse if a 30-year-old female abuses a 13-year-old male. If a 30-year-old male abuses a 13-year-old female, it would be sexual abuse.
- It is not sexual abuse if a mother has sexual relations with their son who is in his late teens or early twenties—it is consensual sex between two adults
- If sexually abused by a female, it is worse than if sexually abused by a male

1.4. Victims
Frequently, female sexual offenders are both victims and abusers (Fazel et al., 2008). McLeod’s study over FSOs completed in 2015 found a distinct preference for female victims by female sexual offenders. This reinforces that FSOs are more diverse than males in their victim’s gender. Additionally, this same study found that female sex offenders are more likely than males to be listed as the child’s parent. FSOs are more than four and a half times more likely to be the perpetrator when the victim is a biological child of the offender. FSOs are also more likely to be offenders when the child is their adoptive child or the FSO is listed as the child’s caretaker. Other typical victim characteristics among FSOs found in this study include the following:

- A child experiencing drug-use-related problems is three times more likely than expected to have a female abuser
- A child with a physical disability is also three times more likely
- A child who has previously been a victim of any kind of abuse or maltreatment is nearly twice as likely to have a female abuser
- A child identified as mentally retarded, having emotional problems, experiencing learning, physical or other medical disabilities is twice as likely to have a female perpetrator
- A child who has issues of domestic violence associated with their family is nearly two and half times more likely to have a female perpetrator

1.5. The impact of trauma
As previously mentioned, childhood trauma and abuse have been linked to the background of FSOs, and FSOs are more likely to have experienced physical and emotional abuse as children themselves (Laque, 2002). According to Warren and Hislop (2008), one of the best predictors of abuse against others in adulthood is having a personal history of sexual abuse. McLeod (2015) found that a previous history of child abuse or maltreatment was twice as likely among female sexual offenders. This study found that FSOs have higher trauma, abuse, and sexual victimization levels in their histories.

Another factor when understanding the impact of childhood trauma is if the trauma occurs during periods of development (Cross et al., 2017). The timing of the trauma can impact the course of the neurobiological development by having brain sections develop at different rates, primarily if
the trauma occurs during periods of early development, and these neurobiological changes can impact various cognitive and emotional processes, such as emotional regulation, that are crucial for development (Cross et al., 2017). This suggests that FSOs may have experienced trauma at a young age contributing to their lack of boundary skills and emotional regulation.

In a study with 47 female sexual offenders from outpatient and secure sex offender treatment programs across the United States, Levenson et al. (2014) examined their participants’ ACE scores. Their study found that out of their 47 participants, half had experienced sexual abuse. Furthermore, 41% listed four or more ACEs, while only one in five stated they experienced zero. Their research with ACE scores and FSOs suggests that a higher ACE score is linked to younger victims, further supporting how childhood trauma can impact an individual.

In 2018, Harrati, Coulanges, Derivois, and Vavassori used 35 court cases and 13 interviews with female sexual offenders to assess their biographical details, such as past traumas, education, family histories, and criminal characteristics such as their motivation for the criminal act. Based on their research, four major themes emerged for trauma typologies: Desire for Power, Sadism, Extreme Anger, and Quest for Self-Affirmation. The typologies reflect the impact of the mistreatment and traumatic experiences of the FSO sample. Their study suggests that there may be a possible connection between traumatic experiences during childhood and adolescence and the current sexual violence of the FSO. Furthermore, the results from their study suggest the importance of examining posttraumatic stress symptoms in abused children as well as common emotional or behavioral problems, examining the resilience of the child after experiencing trauma, and the importance of examining if experiencing abuse is likely to lead to that child imitating the abuse as parents.

2. Materials and methods

Over several decades researchers have worked to develop female (specific) sex offender typologies empirically. McLeod et al. (2021) described how these typologies could typically be organized into psychodynamic or behavioral perspectives and that many of the typologies appeared to have significant overlap. The primary goal of this project is to take the next step in that assessment with a qualitative investigation of the most frequently utilized female sex offender typologies to empirically identify the most salient themes and combine them to create one modernized cluster of typologies that encompasses both psychodynamic and behavioral perspectives, along with embracing more recently developed trauma-informed literature.

The research question herein is, “According to the empirical literature, what are the primary female sex offender typologies, and what are the psychodynamic, behavioral, and trauma-informed components of each?”

Researchers identified multiple empirical typology clusters from the literature to explore this question. While these were primarily psychodynamic and behavioral, trauma-related data was also gathered by examining previous studies on female sexual offending behaviors. This includes examining newer research that has been released on trauma and how trauma is a factor for FSOs. The research was pulled from previous work by McLeod, as well as searching for updated information on typologies through multiple international peer-reviewed databases. Grounded theory was utilized to organize the typologies' components and thematic analysis of the literature to identify centralized themes of the identified female sexual offender typologies. Grounded theory refers to the qualitative research process for which a systematic analysis is conducted to identify and organize themes from the data (Lingard et al., 2008).

For all the below-listed typology clusters, each typology became its own individual case and was separated to become independent of the cluster from which it originated. The primary components describing each typology were bulleted and used as the descriptors for that specific case. For example, Figure 1 represents one typology pulled from the 1991 cluster developed by Matthews, Matthews, and Spitz. In this example, the “Teacher/Lover” typology becomes the case to be examined and organized.
Figure 1. Typology Trait Example

based on the traits displayed in that case. The other typologies in this cluster were analyzed as to their independent cases. Further, each cluster of typologies was broken down into cases to assess what themes could collectively emerge through coding all of them independently. This enabled the researchers to systematically take the existing typologies of the past few decades and recognize similarities to modernize and construct one holistic typology cluster for female sexual offenders.

Three researchers independently assessed each case and its data, coded them, and reorganized them (the cases/typologies) based on applicable themes. Each researcher then sorted their themes and the descriptive traits associated with each into psychodynamic and behavioral components for each newly developed typology (these were the overarching new typologies created through the themes developed from the historic typology clusters used to create the cases). After this, the researchers came together to compare findings and cross-check themes to develop a final modernized cluster of FSO typologies based on the collection of empirically validated typologies that have come before. Then, each typology was aligned with presenting components from the existing trauma-informed literature for a final product that spanned all three domains.

2.1. Data
The data from the utilized typologies are available in appendices A through G. Below is a brief description of the historical development of each of the utilized clusters.

Multiple typology clusters have been created over the years for female sexual offenders. One of the first to do this was Matthews, Matthews, and Spitz in 1991. Their typologies were based on psychometric testing and clinical interviews with female sexual offenders in a treatment program (Gannon et al., 2010). Their empirical data assessment allowed them to construct three specific typologies in their cluster. These included the teacher/lover, the predisposed, and the offenders. While some behavioral aspects are noted in their typology descriptions, the focus leaned more toward understanding the psychological characteristics of female sexual offending.

After Matthews, Matthews, and Spitz created their typologies in 1991, Vandiver and Kercher created another female sexual offender typology cluster in 2004 2011. Based on a sample of 471 female sex offenders who had been convicted in Texas of a sexual crime, Vandiver and Kercher used hierarchical linear modeling and cluster analysis to assess the relationship between offender and victim characteristics (Wijkman et al., 2011). In this cluster of typologies, specific emphasis was placed on the gender of the victim. Out of six listed typologies in the cluster four (the heterosexual nontarmer, the noncriminal homosexual, the homosexual criminal, and the aggressive homosexual offender) paid reference to the assumed sexual preference of the offender as a vital part of their designation and identity. This study also contained what was categorized as behavioral and psychodynamic components in the description of each typology.

In 2007, with a sample of 390 registered female sexual offenders from New York State, Sandler and Freeman sought to replicate the previously mentioned work of Vandiver and Kercher (Gannon & Rose, 2008). Using similar statistical modeling methods, six distinct typologies were created that differed from those of Vandiver and Kercher, even though they found their sample to be demographically like that of Texas. While the traits of these typologists do provide insight into this sample’s behavioral and psychodynamic tendencies, the study leans toward the psychological, as demonstrated by the introduction of terminology such as hebephile in two of the six renamed typologies. These designations again reinforce the researcher’s paradigm as one originating more from intrapsychic qualities than specific behaviors.
In 2011, based on the types and frequency of their Dutch sample, Wijkman, Bijileveld, and Hendricks created a three-tier typology of female sexual offender behavior (Beech et al., 2009). Their typologies of the once-only offender, the generalists, and the specialists, appear to retain some of the influence of their predecessors but also begin a push toward classifying female sexual offending as a behavior rather than an identity.

Ferguson and Meehan developed behavioral typologies organized by the size of group membership for female sexual offenders in 2005. They used hierarchal linear modeling and cluster analysis to develop their typologies based on three distinct patterns related to perpetrator characteristics, victim age, and use of force (Ward & Keenan, 1999). This study suggests that the use of force over the timespan is escalated, meaning when the offender is younger, they are more likely to use coercion. In contrast, older offenders are more inclined to be physically forceful (Ward & Keenan, 1999).

In 2010, Gannon, Rose, and Ward created three primary pathways to female sexual offending using Gannon’s earlier Descriptive Model of Sexual Offending to examine a twenty-two-person sample (Gannon & Rose, 2008; Gannon et al., 2010). With findings suggesting explicit, avoidant, and disorganized approaches to offending behaviors, this cluster of typologies focused almost exclusively on the behavioral traits and experiences of the sample.

3. Results
Using Grounded Theory, the researchers identified centralized themes from the data. From this process, three distinct typologies, Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic, emerged and are detailed in Table 2. When analyzing and coding the different typologies created over the years, the researchers observed how various empirically validated typologies overlap significantly. After reviewing and coding each historical typology, the researchers then reorganized them by the emergent themes. The data analysis suggests that female sexual offenders can be categorized into three distinct types, each of which contains intrapsychic, behavioral, and trauma-related domains. The three typologies are outlined in Table 1 and further discussed below.

3.1. Relational offenders
In the intrapsychic domain, two primary themes emerged from the data for the relational offender typology. The strongest of these themes centered around how the offender does not see their behavior as morally wrong and intends no harm to the victim. In fact, they believe what they are doing is a demonstration of kindness or love and that they are not engaging in harmful behavior, even when that behavior is knowingly illegal. The second central theme for this typology centers around the offender’s drive. Relational offenders engage in illegal behavior to pursue emotional connection and partnership with their victims. Data that supports these themes were found in saturation across multiple historic typologies.

In the behavioral domain, multiple themes also emerged. The strongest of these themes centered around how victims of these offenders were more likely to be adolescents. Further, these types of offenders are less likely to commit other crimes. They are also less likely to be rearrested after being charged with a sexual offense. The data showed significant trends in a lack of self-regulation associated with personal relationships and boundary development. The relational offender is less likely to use physical force or intentionally manipulative behavior. Instead, they believe themselves to be in an actual romantic relationship with their victim and behave accordingly.

The trauma-informed literature suggests that perhaps trauma in the lifespan of the relational offender may not have been as significant or complex as that experienced by the predatory or chaotic offender. For the relational offender, the primary complications of experienced trauma manifest through inappropriate boundary development. This is specifically related to intimacy and romantic relationships. While they could have a history of trauma from various events across their lifespan, it would not be uncommon that they experienced significant trauma in or around the time of their adolescence.
Table 2. Modernized Female Sex Offender Typologies

| Modernized Female Sex Offender Typology Cluster | Relational | Predatory | Chaotic |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|---------|
| **Intrapsychic Traits**                       | • Does not see their behavior as wrong, intends no harm toward the victim | • Lack of empathy and drive for power and control through exploitation | • Views self as powerless | • Justifies participation with cognitive distortions |
| **Behavioral Traits**                        | • Victims are more likely to be an adolescent | • Looks for/exploits vulnerable victims | • Present life dysfunction and generalized criminality | • Most likely to have co-offender | • More diversely aggressive |
| **Trauma Related Traits**                    | • Trauma is likely not as significant as Predatory and Chaotic | • Trauma was extensive and prolonged during their early childhood, and that trauma had an impact on connecting with other humans | • Childhood trauma and present life dysfunction | • The idea of being powerless stems from trauma |
|                                               | • Boundary development, specifically around intimacy | o Trouble seeing the humanity in victims | | |
|                                               | • Experienced trauma as an adolescent | | | |

Childhood trauma can have lasting consequences, including neurological development. Changes in early development are significant because early brain development influences neurological development later in life, suggesting that if there are changes in early development, it has lifelong consequences (Bosquet Enlow et al., 2012). In their study, Bosquet Enlow et al. (2012) found that children exposed to trauma had significantly lower intelligence based on their scales, mainly if the trauma occurred during the first two years. Furthermore, early childhood trauma can affect inhibitory control/working memory (ICWM; Cowell et al., 2015).

3.2. Predatory offenders
The typology designated as the predatory offender is the one that would most closely resemble that seen in male sex offenders. The primary emergent theme associated with the intrapsychic traits of the predatory offender is centered on a lack of empathy. Diagnostically, this could resemble antisocial personality disorder, narcissism, or even psychopathy. A desire for power and control drives the predatory offender. They are more likely to intentionally exploit their victims and view those they hurt as either less human than themselves or with more indifference than the other typologies.

Behaviorally, the data suggest predatory offenders are more likely to seek out and groom vulnerable victims for their exploitation. They are more often than the other typologies to take on a leadership role in the abuse of others and are more likely to be rearrested for sexual-related offenses. The predatory offender is more likely to begin their offending behavior at an earlier age.
and even in the same timeframe as their victimization in other circumstances. Several references in the data suggested the predatory offender would be most likely to recruit and sell children in sex work and intentionally sexually abuse children, and others, for their own sexual gratification.

The trauma-informed literature would suggest that the predatory offender has an extensive abuse history that has contributed to their predatory behavior. This abuse history is more likely to have begun in early childhood and transitioned into hardship and trauma experiences across the lifespan. Cowell et al. (2015) found in their study that early childhood maltreatment significantly lowered the child’s ICWM score but that it is a significant predictor for their ICWM and how often they experienced maltreatment. Those who experienced chronic maltreatment had lower ICWM scores than those who experienced an isolated experience. The impact of this trauma is likely significant and inhibits the ability of the predatory offender to connect with others emotionally. This type of offender likely has trouble seeing the humanity in their victims and has an extensive history of other behaviors which take advantage of people for one’s own personal gain or presumed safety.

3.3. Chaotic offenders
The third typology in this project is that of the chaotic offender. The historical data would suggest the chaotic offender view themselves, intrapsychically, as a victim in their own right. They believe themselves to be relatively powerless in their situation and the circumstances of their lives. Through this flawed perception of their own degree of power and control in their personal life, they justified their participation in sexual abuse acts with a myriad of cognitive distortions. These could include but not be limited to a belief that the partner with whom they are offending is a different person than their behavior would suggest. Their distortions allow them to continue in their behavior by justifying away the moral conflict that they feel.

In the behavioral domain, it would be more likely for the chaotic offender to have a higher degree of general life dysfunction and dissatisfaction. The data would suggest they are far more likely to be in violent adult relationships and the most likely of all the typologies to commit their crimes with a co-offender. The data for this typology also suggests their levels of aggressiveness are highly diverse, with some of the chaotic offenders taking higher or more prominent roles in the abuse and some playing far smaller parts with their co-offenders. This particular typology would also be more likely to engage in a variety of different criminal behaviors and to have a significant history of interaction with the criminal justice system for non-sex crimes related issues. They are likely to re-offend for various crimes but are not as likely to sexually re-offend as the predatory offender.

The trauma-informed literature would suggest high levels of dysfunction in the homes of origin for the chaotic offender. The impact of their trauma experience likely influences their belief that the disorganization of their life is typical and the best they could attain. Trauma also likely influences their ideas around powerlessness and their inability to change their personal situation. According to (Dugal et al., 2018), those who experienced childhood trauma have been linked to psychological, intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood because of their emotional and cognitive processes, such as emotional dysregulation and communication abilities. The trauma they have experienced likely influences the types of adult relationships and the levels of abuse they experience in those relationships.

4. Discussion
Various typologies have been created over the years, beginning in 1991 by Mathews, Matthews, and Spitz. Throughout the years, different studies have been done, and new typologies have been created focusing on psychodynamic and behavioral reasons for the criminal acts by female sexual offenders. Most recently, trauma has come to the forefront, and research has been conducted on the importance of trauma and its relation to female sexual offenders and their criminal acts.

One significant finding from this study is how the categories overlap, including how trauma overlaps with both psychodynamic and behavioral typologies. Trauma is essential because the
findings suggest that the FSO’s background history played a significant role in their development. The impact of childhood trauma and maltreatment can lead to problems with development, including emotion dysregulation, avoidance, and emotional expression (Gruhn & Compas, 2020). In their study, Gruhn and Compas found a significant association between maltreatment and emotion dysregulation. This supports the findings that childhood trauma plays a significant role in development, suggesting that trauma plays a role in the backgrounds of female sexual offenders.

The table created above, Table 2, illustrates the centralized themes from this study. Three typologies exist, Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic. Each typology is influenced by three factors, Intrapsychic, Behavioral, and Trauma-related. All three typologies experienced childhood trauma. Relational experienced the least significant amount of trauma compared to Predatory and Chaotic. Relational FSOs offend impulsively and believe what they are doing is not wrong. This is likely because of their early childhood trauma that impacted their boundary control and emotional regulation. Predatory FSOs suffered from significant childhood trauma leading them to lack empathy toward others. Predatory FSOs are most likely to take a leadership role in the sexual offense and struggle to see victims as humans. This is most likely from the extensive, prolonged trauma they suffered as children, which impacted their emotional regulation and expression. Chaotic FSOs not only suffer childhood trauma but also have ongoing trauma in their present life, leading them to the idea of being powerless.

Applying a trauma-informed perspective to female sexual offenders is relevant to continuing research because chronic trauma and higher ACE scores can leave a lasting impact on a child that carries over to adulthood. The trauma from their childhood can impact their interpersonal skills, creating maladaptive coping skills and possibly leading to them initiating the abuse they experienced as children in their adulthood. Trauma-informed care for female sexual offenders is important in their progress in correctional facilities or treatment programs.

5. Conclusion

While this project helps to modernize typologies of female sexual offending typologies, it is not without limitations. Among the most important limitations to note is that little empirical research on female sexual offenders and female sexual offending behaviors exists, particularly in comparison to male offenders. Often, when the scholarship is focused on female offending behavior in general, the basis for those introspections is rooted in assumptions as validated in research on males. Thus, even when the scholarship is intrinsically focused on female-connected experiences, it is often influenced by data derived from men. The scholarship on female sexual offending typologies is no different.

Further, even as this project has aimed to intentionally move away from gendered conceptualizations in favor of behavioral, intrapsychic, and trauma-based research, the grounding for this project remains connected to our historical understanding of the phenomenon in all its biased complexity. Also important to consider is the limitation related to the absence of significant literature in recent years. One of the primary benefits of this piece of scholarship is the infusion of evidence-based research related to the impact of trauma on behavioral development. Interestingly, the lack of this research across the past several years, which provides the space for the contribution of this article, also serves as a limitation.

To address these limitations and build on this research, a great deal of further investigation is needed. One of the primary research areas to move this piece of scholarship forward would be connected to further empirical validation of these typologies across a diverse sample of women and circumstances. As the criminal justice system continues to evolve and mechanisms of the carceral system adapt to emergent community needs, further research is needed to assess the fidelity of lived experiences to those proposed in the above-listed typologies. As these typologies are evaluated for consistency, research should also focus on their application across various contexts. For example, research will be needed to assess the efficacy of offender-based treatment and behavioral interventions across typologies (Relational, Predatory, and Chaotic).
Even with the above-listed limitations and calls for further research, the topologies developed in this project have great promise for application in a broad spectrum of contexts. These topologies can help criminal investigators identify and intervene on behalf of vulnerable and victimized populations. These topologies can also be utilized in various treatment contexts, both with those who have hurt and offended children and those who have experienced abuse and maltreatment at the hand of sexually violent women. These topologies also hold great promise in their application to both the community and court systems about the realities of female sexual offending and the diversity of experiences that can be found in these types of situations. This research holds great promise in moving forward the conversation around female sexual offending and modernizing the way we conceptualize and categorize these types of behaviors.

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### Appendix A

**Matthews, Matthews, and Spitz—1991**

| Typology                | Traits                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Teacher/Lover       | • Victim is viewed as a partner  
                           • Generally, the FSO intends no harm toward their victims  
                           • FSO personal histories include substantial physical and emotional abuse  
                           • FSO considers her offending to be true romantic love  
                           • Victims are adolescent with the intent of having an egalitarian relationship  
                           • FSO struggles to understand that their acts are criminal |
| The Predisposed         | • FSO targets victims who are their own biological family or other children to whom they have ready access  
                           • The victims are normally isolated from adult contact  
                           • FSO personal histories include substantial sexual abuse in childhood—particularly by their family members, not unusually by multiple offenders, and including both by people both inside and outside their family  
                           • FSO was highly promiscuous during adolescence  
                           • FSO claims they do not enjoy sexual contact |
| The Male Coerced        | • In their personal relationships, FSO presents as powerless, passive, and submissive  
                           • Traditional, patriarchal, gender role ideations are typically endorsed by FSO  
                           • When alone, they view themselves differently  
                           • FSO describes the person they fell in love with as a different person than the abuse partner |

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### Appendix B

**Vandiver and Kercher—2004**

| Typology                | Traits                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Heterosexual Nurturer | • Of their sample, this was the largest group  
                           • FSO average age was 30  
                           • Most likely to be involved with adolescent males who were the average age of 12  
                           • FSO tended to seek an emotional connection with their victim and more of an egalitarian relationship |

(Continued)
| Category                          | Characteristics                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Noncriminal Homosexual       | - Victims are of the same sex (female)                                                                      |
|                                  | - Least likely to re-offend                                                                                 |
|                                  | - FSO average age was 32                                                                                    |
|                                  | - Victims average age was 13                                                                                |
|                                  | - FSO described the relationship with their victim as mutually satisfying                                   |
|                                  | - This group is least likely of all the groups to commit forcible sexual assault                             |
| The Female Sexual Predator       | - This group is the most likely to recidivate sexual crimes                                               |
|                                  | - FSO average age was 29                                                                                   |
|                                  | - Victims average age was 11                                                                               |
|                                  | - Gender of victims were 60% male and 40% female                                                           |
| The Young Adult Child Exploiters | - FSO average age was 28 (youngest average age)                                                            |
|                                  | - Averaged the fewest number of arrests                                                                    |
|                                  | - Victims average age was seven-years-old                                                                  |
|                                  | - Victims were related to the offender about half of the time                                              |
|                                  |   - Mothers who were molesting their biological children alone and with co-offenders were included         |
| The Homosexual Criminals         | - 73% of their victims were female—showing a preference toward same-sex victims                             |
|                                  | - Highly likely to recidivate                                                                              |
|                                  | - Highest average number of arrests                                                                       |
|                                  | - Offender average age of 32                                                                              |
|                                  | - Victim average age of 11                                                                                 |
|                                  | - Crimes included high levels of “forcing behavior,” including sexual performance and child prostitution, and at least a portion of these crimes appeared to be financially motivated as opposed to sexually related |
| The Aggressive Homosexual Offender| - FSOs are older                                                                                            |
|                                  | - Preference toward same sex victims                                                                       |
|                                  | - Average age of [adult] victims were 31                                                                  |
|                                  | - Commonly linked with domestic violence                                                                  |

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### Appendix C

**Sandler and Freeman—2007**

| Typology                        | Traits                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *The Criminally-Limited Hebephile* | • FSO average age of 32  
• Victims average age of 14  
• Primarily male victims (70%)  
• Low probability of rearrest |
| *The Criminally-Prone Hebephile* | • FSO average age of 25  
• Average victim age of just under 15  
• 66% of the time there is a preference toward male victims  
• High probability of rearrest for not only sexually involved cases, but also for drug-related and other offenses |
| *The Young Adult Child Molesters* | • FSO average age of 28  
• Average victim age of four-years-old  
• Typically, no previous arrests  
• Preference toward female victims 52% of the time |
| *The High-Risk Chronic Offenders* | • Highest number of arrests and rearrests  
• FSO average age of just under 31  
• Average victim age of five-years-old  
• Preference toward female victims 56% of the time  
• Highest representation of non-white FSOs of all six clusters (38%) |
| *The Older Non-Habitual Offender* | • Little to no documented criminality outside the registration for their sexual offense  
• FSO average age of 51  
• Average victim age of 12 |
| *The Homosexual Child Molester*  | • Smallest cluster in this analysis  
• FSO average age of 44  
• Victims were 91% female  
• Average victim age of five-years-old  
• High rate of drug-related arrests |
### Appendix D

#### Wijkman, Bijlleveld, and Hendricks—2007

| Typology                        | Traits                                               |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| The Once-Only Offender         | - FSO has only one known offense                     |
|                                | - FSO has no priors                                  |
|                                | - FSO has no recidivism                              |
| The Generalists                | - FSO is criminally diverse                         |
|                                | - History typically includes violence and drug-related crimes |
|                                | - FSO is currently charged with a sex crime          |
|                                | - Likely to generally recidivate                     |
| The Specialists                | - FSO is likely to have committed multiple sexual offenses |
|                                | - FSO has a tendency to have limited nonsexual criminal behavior |

### Appendix E

#### Ferguson and Meehan—2005

| Typology | Traits                                                                                                                                 |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cluster 1| - FSO average age is 26                                                                                                               |
|          | - Victims average age is under the age of 12                                                                                           |
|          | - Verbal coercion is more likely than physical force                                                                                |
|          | - Very rare, but this group of FSOs are most likely to murder their victims                                                          |
| Cluster 2| - FSO average age is 30                                                                                                               |
|          | - Highest rate of prior criminal convictions                                                                                        |
|          | - This group is most likely to use physical force                                                                                     |
| Cluster 3| - Victims are most likely between the ages of 12 and 16                                                                               |
|          | - FSOs have high diversity in use of force patterns                                                                                  |
Appendix F

Gannon, Rose, and Ward—2010

| Typology                  | Traits                                                                 |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Explicit Approach     | • This was the largest group of the sample (50%)                       |
|                           | • Women who intend to offend, explicitly develop their plan of attack, and direct their behaviors accordingly |
|                           | • Women are motivated by their goals which include sexual gratification, intimacy, revenge or humiliation, and money |
| The Directly Avoidant     | • May not initiate a sexual offense, but were directed, coerced, or, manipulated by a male accomplice or co-offender |
|                           | • Present as passive or dependent and have been reported as being groomed for the sexual crime |
|                           | • Have been abused physically and/or emotionally by their co-offender |
|                           | • Present with cognitive distortions regarding their co-offenders and victims |
|                           | • Present with cognitive distortions regarding their own participation and offending behaviors |
| The Disorganized Offender | • Did not intend to offend                                             |
|                           | • Minimal planning for the offense                                     |
|                           | • Severe self-regulatory failure is related to their offending as well as impulsivity |
|                           | • Goals are linked to intimacy                                         |
