

ASSEMBLING THE CHIMERIC SEX OFFENDER

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Across societies labels rarely are met with the degree of contempt and hatred that has become inherent in the label of “sex offender,” applied to those who offend the morals, ethics, and values of citizens because of the actions (or sexual affinities) in which they are believed to have engaged. In the current article, we examine the diverse ways the sex offender is assembled, drawing on assemblage theory. We examine the signifiers attached to bodies suspected, accused, and convicted of sex offenses and the material connections that come together as part of the chimeric sex offender assemblage. We demonstrate that the arrangement of signifiers and materiality reflects the complex landscape that is expressed in the image of the monstrous sex offender. Our contribution to the literature on sex offenders lies in demonstrating the chimeric nature of the sex offender.

Keywords: *sex offenders, assemblage theory, chimera, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari*

INTRODUCTION

Across societies labels rarely are met with the degree of contempt and hatred that has become inherent in the label of “sex offender.” Indeed, few, if any, labels receive the negative reaction reserved for those bearing the label of sex offender—they who offend the morals, ethics, and values of

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citizens because of the actions (or sexual affinities) in which they are believed to have engaged (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017). It is for this reason that a sex offender offends the norms and morals of social living; their very existence creates fear and disgust among many citizens—particularly those who are believed to prey on the innocent child or ideal victim (Christie, 1986). Not all those believed to be sex offenders have actually committed such an offense—in many cases it is assumed. For those who are so labelled, whatever their actual acts or persuasion, albeit assumed, actual, convicted, or charged, they are always thought to offend the norms of society and, in response, are left in a perpetual state of being “broken,” inferior, and in need of both “repair” and “retribution” (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017). The literature points to the fact that they occupy a devalued position in society—they are deviant and have offended the values of upstanding citizens—and are believed to deserve the harshest punitive measures and to require treatment (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013; Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017; Ugelvik, 2015). They are viewed as a threat to the safety of society, to innocent youth, and are believed, despite arguably lower rates of recidivism, to always be hunting for future victims.¹

Drawing on assemblage theory, we examine the diverse ways the sex offender is assembled (DeLanda, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Specifically, we examine how in the constitution of the sex offender, oft contradictory and volatile elements are assembled that express the chimeric nature of sex offenders. We examine the signifiers attached to persons labelled as sex offenders and the material connections that come together as part of the chimeric sex offender assemblage. We argue that this arrangement of signifiers and materiality reflects the complex landscape that is expressed in the image of the sex offender. Our contribution to the literature on sex offenders lies in demonstrating the *chimeric* nature of the sex offender and what such an assemblage *does* to the lives of those suspected, accused, and convicted of sex offenses.

This article is structured in five parts. In the first section, we offer an overview of assemblage theory and how we are using the concept of assemblage to make sense of the sex offenders in Western societies. In the second section, we use assemblage theory to make sense of the diagnosis of the chimeric sex offender. We then consider the role of sex offender registries

1. For information on sex offender recidivism, see Furby, Weinrott, & Blackshaw (1989); Kruttschnitt, Uggen, & Shelton (2000); and Webster, Gartner, & Doob (2006).

and community notification statutes in the construction of the chimeric sex offender. The fourth main section probes the assemblage of the sex offender in carceral settings. The final section evinces what the chimeric sex offender assemblage does to sex offenders and society.

I. ASSEMBLAGE THEORY AND THE CHIMERIC SEX OFFENDER

The English word “assemblage” is the common translation of the French word *agencement* used by Deleuze and Guattari. It denotes a layout and arrangement of heterogenous elements. Assemblages are to be thought of as the linking of disparate heterogenous content and expressive parts: a composition that acts (Thorburn, 2014). When thinking of assemblages, it is salient to remember not to place primacy on the totalities that emerge nor the component parts that constitute the assemblage because the assemblage is always in an unstable state of *becoming* (Thorburn, 2014). The state of becoming is due to the fact that assemblages gain their distinctness from the arrangements of connection that may exist between components at any time. Moreover, the convergence of constitutive parts that give the assemblage its distinct shape depends on relations of interior relationalities between parts in order to maintain a distinctive assemblage characteristic. Assemblages interact with other assemblages through relations of exteriority to form new assemblages, and are composed of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Not all of these objects are of the same type, thus, assemblages have physical objects, happenings, events, and buildings, but also signs, utterances, and so forth.

Assemblages, as we are employing the concept here, have knobs (DeLanda, 2016). What is meant in saying the concept has knobs is that a given assemblage can be set to different values, that is, the knobs can be turned to set the value of the assemblage. DeLanda (2016) instructs that the “coding parameter is one of the knobs we must build into the concept,” as well as territorialization, a “parameter measuring the degree to which the components of the assemblage have been subjected to a process of homogenization, and the extent to which its defining boundaries have been delineated and made impermeable” (p. 3). He further indicates that the parts matched together to form an ensemble are themselves treated as

assemblages, equipped with their own parameters, so that at all times assemblages are assemblages of assemblages. Due to the fact that every assemblage is made up of such divergent and contingent elements, the whole ensemble, with its matched together components, possesses properties that its individual parts do not have. Said another way, the sum of the ensemble diverges from its individual parts. Moreover, every assemblage has emergent properties: its *virtual* disposition. An assemblage's diagram captures the structure of the possibility space associated with that assemblage's dispositions.

Assemblage theory can be used to explicate how categorizing traits break apart and come together to form subjectivity. Assemblage theory sidesteps the taxonomic approach associated with many approaches to identity. Furthermore, such an approach to identity recognizes identity formation as a process rather than a final product. Identity is a continual process of becoming rather than a state of being. Following a post-humanist approach, examination of identity formation, then, is attuned to how identities emerge, change, take shape, and are shaped by various interactions of elements, human and nonhuman. The assemblage of a given identity must be understood relationally, insofar as each identity is treated alongside other identities. All this being said, how does this relate to the identity of sex offenders? How can assemblage theory be used to make sense of the sex offender identity?

In Greek mythology, the chimera is a fire-breathing hybrid monster, comprised of the parts of more than one animal. It consisted of a lion with a goat's head probing from the back and snake's head on its tail. In contemporary usage of the term, it denotes any mythical or fictional monster that is made up of different parts of manifold animals. The term *chimera* is also used to signify anything composed of disparate parts, elements that do not have a natural affinity. Nevertheless, the chimera is always monstrous, something that induces a plethora of cultural reactions. One of the ways the chimera as monstrosity has been used is in relation to sex offenders (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017). Building on our earlier work, we posit that sex offenders are a *chimeric assemblage* comprised of heterogenous elements that both express something regarding sex offenders and characterize how society reacts to sex offenders, as well as how they see themselves. Various signifiers are assembled in varying intensities on the bodies of sex offenders and reveal how different discourses come together and break apart, depending on the context to which a given sex offender is defined and treated. We avoid the

fixity of accounts of “what is a sex offender?” to focus on the various articulations of sex offenders as shaped across times and spaces. At the same time, the chimeric sex offender is subject to intense processes of homogenization, where the *virtual* monstrous disposition overcodes alternative ways of understanding *actual* sex offenders’ lives.

As a chimeric assemblage, the sex offender bears signifiers tied to perceptions of their criminality, real or assumed. The signifiers attached to sex offender’s bodies are nevertheless discreditable. Whether in the community or in prison, the sex offender is always awaiting their identity to be exposed (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014; Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017), because the sex offender is not accepted in society, will never be accepted, and constantly must strive to “adjust,” even hide, their identity if they are ever to have some moments with some sense of belonging or acceptance in society, ever to feel outside the scope of the “abnormal” in a community. The manifold signifiers attached to sex offenders express something regarding the individual accused; concomitantly, such signifiers *leak beyond* the individual offense of which they are accused. This is to say that in every instance of becoming a sex offender, the oft contradictory signifiers that are attached to the offender express the chimeric sex offender assemblage. In addition, any other signifiers that would lay claim as to those who are labelled as sex offenders beyond being a sex offender become null and void; that is, the signifiers are deterritorialized.

The label of sex offender is also tied to their group identity, perhaps even more so than their individual identity. Sex offender signifiers create an inclusion in the group of predators considered sex offenders—which does not distinguish by crime, conviction, or assumption. Group inclusion intensifies the label of sex offender by suggesting the chimeric assemblage as the ultimate predator, and thereby creates the boundaries of law by representing all that is illegal, immoral, and interpreted as wrong, unjust, and vile (Spencer, 2009). Inclusion in the sex offender group equates all those so labelled to the most hideous of offenses, suggesting all have engaged in said acts despite the lack of truth behind such a claim. Membership in the sex offender group is an element of assemblage in its own right, further shaping the expression of the final chimeric assemblage that makes up the sex offender assemblage—and often as monstrous. In such ways, the stigmas embodied by the label “sex offender” informs their chimeric assemblage—their identity and being is the ensemble of components that together constitute the sex offender identity. Each iteration of the chimeric sex offender

assemblage further contributes—that is, *does* something—to broader societal conceptions of the sex offender and the violence committed against the bodies suspected, accused, and convicted of sex offenses.

The chimeric sex offender assemblage is also comprised of material components or the machinic element of the assemblage. Such an assemblage, like all assemblages, is a collection of machines, codes, objects, buildings, bodies, and signs. Such parts are simultaneously agents, and as such, non-humans that contribute as much as humans do to defining the framework and conditions of action (Lazzarato, 2014). Assemblages face the strata, where they come into being and become organized. They select from the milieu—the surroundings, context, the mediums through which the assemblages work—and bring them together in particular ways (Wise, 2005). With respect to the constitution of the chimeric sex offender assemblage, such assemblages work primarily through institutions that form the strata in which sex offender assemblages function and which brings them together in a particular way. Such non-corporeal relations link the aforementioned signifiers with affect. The assemblages are arrangements of elements that involve processes of taking on particular affectivity and the signifiers that constitute it. In what follows we will illustrate how such assemblages are formed through diagnosis, the law, punishment, and forms of vigilante “justice.”

II. THE DIAGNOSIS

Psy-expertise has played and continues to play a key role in the constitution of the chimeric sex offender. In the mid-nineteenth century, psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing provided a key source of pathologization of behaviors outlined in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The classifications of terms like “sadism” and “homosexuality” and other sexual “perversions” were the main focus of his text. His work has been fundamental to the production of the idea of sexual deviants as different and provides the medical discourse regarding sexual neuroses.

In the contemporary period, some sex offenders are diagnosed as having a paraphilic disorder (in which psychiatric treatment follows) or a paraphilia (in which psychiatric treatment does not follow; i.e., psychiatric treatment is not required) (APA, 2013). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is a manual that reserves the diagnosis of pedophilia for anyone who experiences sexual fantasies, urges, or behaviors toward

nonconsenting adults or minors repeatedly over a six-month period *and* whose desires cause clinically significant psychological distress or affects their ability to participant in society (APA, 2013). To clarify, a pedophile, then, is *not* necessarily a sex offender, nor is a sex offender necessarily a pedophile. However, for one to be a sex offender, the person with the paraphilic disorder, who is part of the chimeric sex offender assemblage, needs to *act* in a way that is legally prohibited “as defined by psychiatry and/or the law” (CSC, 2008). For sex offenders who suffer from such a disorder, they have a clinical diagnosis of a mental disorder. Such diagnostic conceptions are folded into the chimeric sex offender as part of the collective regime of enunciation that reflects the monstrous elements of the assemblage.

While psychiatry and psychology provide a regime of signs that express the monstrous elements of the chimeric sex offender, such a diagnosis also includes particular material components that make up the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Such a diagnosis involves the material arrangements of the psychiatric body, the diagnosed body, and the material arrangements of the psychiatric hospital or office, as well as the diagnosis of speech centered on confession, the assemblage Foucault (1995) so forcibly analyzed. Concomitantly, the body is diagnosed in other ways that express the chimeric aspects of the assemblage. One prime diagnostic technique is penile plethysmography (PPG) or phallometry where bloodflow to the penis is measured, which is utilized as a proxy for measurement of sexual arousal. The methods of conducting PPG involve the measurement of the circumference of the penis with a mercury-in-rubber or electromechanical strain gauge, or the volume of the penis with an airtight cylinder and inflatable cuff at the base of the penis. For sexual offenders, the PPG is used to signify the level of sexual arousal as the subject is exposed to sexually suggestive content, such as pictures, movies, or audio. Such arrangements express the diagnostic assemblage from the penis-penis gauge-pictures/movies components, which, in turn, signify the sickness component of the chimeric sex offender assemblage. The diagnostic assemblage is folded into the larger chimeric sex offender assemblage.

III. THE LAW

Laws targeting individuals who commit crimes of a sexual nature tend to have a face. That is, such laws bear the name of an innocent child harmed

by the hands of a stranger. The face is landscape. It is changeable only in relation to a set of predictable variances and is cultivated by a specific set of agents (advocates, states, etc.), who own, run, and map the landscape. Such a landscape is made to be intelligible only in a certain sense. The notion of the face as a landscape implies that the face is an assemblage that involves arrangement. Faces reflect a landscape both in their positioning and posture, but also how they are arranged in relation to a set of all-encompassing social circumstances (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The naming convention in relation to children invariably evokes feelings of anger toward the perpetrators of crimes against child victims, with the aim of fuelling public panic and a sense of distrust (Petrunik, 2002; Anderson & Sample, 2008). Such emotive strategies further inform the constitution of the sex offender as the chimeric assemblage, within an affective terrain that constitutes sex offender as an enemy of “us.” In this sense, “affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 356). Affects create the negative disposition, laced with fear, disgust, and sadness, toward sex offenders.

Prior to 1994, few US states required sex offenders to register their addresses with police departments. After the abduction of 11-year-old Jacob Wetterling in 1989, the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act was passed in 1994.² The legislation mandated that each State create a registry of convicted sex offenders, thus tracking their addresses (H.R.1683, 1997). Sex offenders across the US were deemed to be of such high risk to community wellbeing that their whereabouts required tracking to prevent further criminal acts from occurring.³ Such registries have evolved, specifically in the US, to make registries publicly available online, making state registry websites a material element of the chimeric sex offender assemblage.

A few years later, on May 17, 1996, Megan’s Law was signed. The law was named after 7-year-old Megan Kanka, who was kidnapped, raped, and murdered by her neighbor, Jesse Timmendequas, in July of 1994. Her

2. In 2003, all US states were mandated to make their registries publicly available online (Levenson, Zgoba, & Tewksbury, 2007). See Pam Lychner Sexual Offender Tracking and Identificaton Act of 1996, S. 1675 (104th Cong.), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/1675>.

3. See also the Pam Lychner Act of 1996 (cited above), which amended the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act (H.R. 1683, 1997).

mother's decree that she would never have let her daughter play outside had she been aware of her neighbor's criminal history resonated with many in the public internationally (Megan's Law, 1996). Thus a panic ensued, in which the notion of the predator next door became inscribed in a modern occurrence—a mother's nightmare had come to life. The sex offender, in this case Timmendequas, was also a murderer, folding this element into the chimeric sex offender assemblage. To rape and murder the innocent, the ideal victim (Christie, 1986), signifies a level of degradation that could only be attributed to the sex offender in their construction of identity that recognizes the violence committed against Kanka. In response, Megan's Law serves to ensure that communities become part of the assemblage and are notified when sex offenders move into their neighborhoods. A means of protecting society, specifically children, said element of the chimeric sex offender assemblage creates an affective community in which the unknown predator is to be feared and subject to varying levels of surveillance.

The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, a federal statute also known as the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, was signed in 2006. The legislation is named after a 7-year-old boy, Adam Walsh, who was abducted, raped, and murdered by Ottis Toole in Florida in 1981 (Almanzar, 2008). The perpetrator was later found to be a serial killer with a history of kidnapping and murder—i.e., a chronic offender. In essence, the circumstances surrounding the Walsh case reinforced the idea of the sex offender registration process, the logic being that if the serial killer who also committed sex offenses was registered, the perpetrator's actions would be linked, and perhaps they would be caught earlier by police, particularly if the registrants are mandated to check in with police at varying intervals. The legislation divides sex offenders into three tiers, the third including those convicted of the most severe offenses who must then update their whereabouts with police every three months and have lifetime registration requirements. In tier two, updates are every six months for 25 years, and in tier one updates are annually with 15 years of registration (SOIRA, 2020).⁴

However, sex offender registration and community notification laws have been found to have little effectiveness in reducing sexual offending (Sandler, Freeman, & Socia, 2008). Specifically, in a time series analysis of

4. Moreover, the legislation denies sex offenders, as well as others with a criminal conviction, entry into Canada without obtaining the proper permit (see Section 36 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, S.C. 2001).

sexual offense arrest rates to examine the difference before and after the enactment of New York State's Sex Offender Registration Act (SORA, 1995), Sandler and colleagues (2008) found no support for the "effectiveness of registration and community notification laws in reducing sexual offending by: (a) rapists, (b) child molesters, (c) sexual recidivists, or (d) first time sex offenders" (p. 284). They conclude that because over 95 percent of sex offenses were committed by first time offenders in their study, registration and notification laws may have little effectiveness in reducing sexual offenses (i.e., the laws fail to meaningfully target repeat offenders; see also Adkins, Huff, Stageberg, Prell, & Musel, 2000; Vásquez, Maddan, & Walker, 2008; Zevitz, 2006). Although the effectiveness of registration and community notification does not impact the ensemble that is the chimeric sex offender, it is the process of registration and community notification that informs the sex offender identity—constituting an assemblage within the greater ensemble. The existence of said laws remove any nuance or specificity in interpretations of sex offenders and instead ensures that the sex offenders are understood as a homogenous monstrous entity—that of a population who has committed the most hideous of sexual crimes, like those of Ottis Toole.

The creation of the registry was not solely a phenomenon in the US. In 2004, the Sex Offender Information Registration Act was assented into law in Canada (SOIRA, 2020). The law's purpose remains to "help police services prevent and investigate crimes of a sexual nature by requiring the registration of certain information relating to the sex offender" (§ 2(1)). Later, the government of Canada, in their commitment to "protecting Canadians and keeping our streets and communities safe," brought forward additional legislation to "better protect children from sexual predators at home and abroad." The Tougher Penalties for Child Predators Act, assented in 2015, demonstrates the distrust and hatred society directs toward sex offenders. The law ensured sentence lengths increased for those with sex-related conviction, intensified consequences for violating conditions of release, ensured that risk to the community of reoffending is considered at sentencing, increased information provided to the registry, and created "a new national, publicly accessible database of high-risk child sex offenders who have been the subject of a public notification in a provincial/territorial jurisdiction" (Government of Canada, 2015).⁵

5. It should be noted that, in Canada, unlike in the United States, only the police can access the registry. Said another way, the public cannot access information about who is on

Community notification laws and the sex offender registry are less motivated by public safety than politics and are highly shaped by the media (Sandler et al., 2008). Although having little deterrence effect, community notification laws operate to both notify and raise concern about sexual predators (Levenson, Zgoba, & Tewksbury, 2007). Both community notification and the registry coalesce as a *ban assemblage* that works to expel bodies from communities. The media reporting and public availability (on the Internet) of those named on the registry (particularly in the United States) manifests a constellation where those bodies labelled as sex offenders are pushed to the margins, often finding it difficult, if not impossible, to secure housing (Spencer, 2009). Indeed, the consequences of the registry are manifold. Sex offenders experience job threats and loss, harassment, and property damage, and their household members suffer (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007). A minority experience housing disruption or varying forms of physical violence, and a majority experience psychological distress after community notification (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). The ban assemblage, which is part of the larger chimeric sex offender assemblage, is unchallenged as its face is arranged such that the face is often laced with tenets of stories of historical occurrences, the piecing together of the experiences of Kanka, Walsh, and Wetterling—three child victims—into the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Such a ban assemblage is animated by particular affects—disgust, shame, and fear—that states use to weaponize and fold the general population into taking part in the regulatory elements of the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Simultaneously, the assemblage is not limited to mobilizing the community to regulate bodies, but folds in technological elements.

Originally developed for military use, Global Positioning System (GPS) electronic monitoring is increasingly used as a criminal justice technology. GPS electronic monitoring is often heralded as a cost-saving alternative to prisons (Payne & Gainey, 2000; Renzema & Mayo-Wilson, 2005; Tonry, 2000). Technological advancements have led to the utilization of GPS satellite-based electronic monitoring systems. Satellites can triangulate the position of a portable tracking device (PTD) attached to an offender to track their location, speed, and direction in real time (Nunn, 2001). The

the registry or where they reside; however, those on the registry are not protected from community notifications or media scrutiny.

technology can designate inclusionary zones (those areas where offenders are allowed to enter) and exclusionary zones (those areas where offenders are not allowed to enter) (Cotter & de Lint, 2009). Movement within exclusionary zones is flagged, and information regarding the location of the offender is communicated to a parole officer, who in turn, physically locates the offender (Nunn, 2001, p. 23). As a ban assemblage, GPS technology is used to control the movements of bodies labelled as sex offenders. It is coupled with legal mandates related to sex offender registration (Armstrong & Freeman, 2011; Dante, 2012) and is the material element that captures sex offenders in the state's grasp.

IV. IN PRISON

In Canada, mandatory minimum sentences and Long-Term Supervision Orders lace the experiences within the criminal justice system for convicted sex offenders. The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) uses the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 2013) in their definition of a sex offender. A sex offender then, is defined as one who has “been convicted of a sexual offence; convicted of a sexually motivated crime; or has admitted to a sexual offence which has not resulted in conviction” (CSC, 2008). In this context, the sex offender has *acted* on a sexual persuasion such that they have violated another individual—a non-consenting adult or a child (who can never consent)—and is then charged and convicted for the offense; such acts include sexual exploitation (e.g., child pornography), forced compliance (e.g., rape), or desire/motivation to sexually violate (e.g., planned or desire to sexually assault or rape) a non-consenting adult or minor. Such descriptors are then flattened to a single signifier—sex offender—that is, in turn, attached to bodies that are convicted of such offenses as they are incarcerated. Such a signifier sets the conditions of entrance to jails and prisons that forms part of the collective regime of enunciation of the sex offender assemblage.

Inside and outside of prisons, sex offenders remain a vulnerable population (Akerstrom, 1986; Blaauw, Winkel, & Kerkhof, 2001; Petrunik & Weisman, 2005). In essence, the resulting assemblage that constitutes the sex offender in society, *in part*, follows the sex offender into prison. In order to deterritorialize—a line of flight from—the imposition of the label of sex offender, and all that is associated with it, bodies signified as sex offenders

may try to enter prison passing as “solid” or a non-sex offender (Schwaebe, 2005; Tan & Grace, 2008)—in essence hiding their crime(s). Such passing is temporary, and the chimeric sex offender assemblage is reterritorialized, as a prisoner’s true convictions can be exposed by staff (whether intentionally or unintentionally), other prisoners (e.g., who can ask someone on the outside to google the prisoner who is passing), or the media (e.g., coverage of trial or parole hearings) (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014). Concomitantly, what is the basis of this reterritorialization? As we have noted earlier, lines of flight from the sex offender assemblage are thwarted and mediated by the normative masculinities striating the spaces of prisons and establishing the hierarchies of male prisoners (see Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014).

Masculinities in prison, although malleable and subject to constitution and re-constitution, remain hierarchal in orientation in an oft hyper-masculine environment (Haney, 2011; Ricciardelli, 2014; Schroeder, 2004). The individual who cannot achieve consensual sex—a quality culturally read as indicative of masculinity—and thus preys on non-consenting individuals is emasculated and thereby placed on the lower rungs of the social ladder. The social hierarchy in prison further subordinates the sex offender because of their crime—preying on the vulnerable, particularly children, ensures the individual holds the lowest of positions on the hierarchy, and those who prey on women are only slightly higher (Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, & Christenson, 1965; Ricciardelli, 2014; Vaughn & Sapp, 1989; West, 1983). The collective hatred directed at the sex offender creates a collectively disposition toward sex offenders. Such affects bond the broader prison population together against the sex offender and form an element of the prison sex offender assemblage.

The sex offender operates as the “external order” necessary to ensure internal order in prison by creating the parameters of acceptable criminality. Akerstrom (1986), for example, found that prisoners viewed sex offenders as outcasts among prisoners, never accepted into the general prison population, and that the nature of their crimes provided a reason for other prisoners to view sex offenders as “less than human” (p. 4). In prison, like in society, the *ban* assemblage of the sex offender serves to expel bodies from the prisoner communities, again pushing sex offenders to the margins in prison living. The hierarchies that exist in men’s prisons leave the ban assemblage again unchallenged, because of the disdain oriented toward the crimes that are elemental to the chimeric sex offender assemblage, constituting such bodies to be regulated and controlled in prison society.

Within the striated space of prisons and jails, the chimeric sex offender assemblage exposes offending bodies to violence and victimization. Scholars, internationally, have found that sex offenders are vulnerable once their convictions are known by other prisoners, and subject to ongoing threats, victimization, and the potentiality for violence (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). Historically, evidence of sex offenders being victimized, even murdered, at the hands of other prisoners is extensive (Groth, 1983). Such violence and victimization demonstrates what prison sex offender assemblages *do* in prisons and jails to the lives of bodies signified as sex offenders.

For these reasons, within most prison environments, sex offenders are segregated, housed in “protective custody” or “vulnerable persons units,” or transferred to an institution that primarily houses those convicted of sexual offenses. The segregation is considered necessary as those convicted of sex offenses are often alienated, ostracized, and targeted for victimization (O’Donnell & Edgar, 1998; Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013; Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014; Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017; Spencer, 2009). Protective custody functions, in most institutions, by segregating prisoners from those with which they are incompatible, but without resorting to isolated living situations (historically, this has been administrative or disciplinary segregation). Incarcerated sex offenders are physically and socially isolated in prison, and their vulnerabilities exist and manifest within the prison’s organization and physical structure, which is elemental to the sex offender assemblage and is part of the constitution of the chimeric sex offender—which is, contradictorily, both predator (to children) and prey (to other prisoners).

The divergent and contingent elements that make up the sex offender assemblage underpin their marginalized position within the prison space. The categorizing traits, rooted in their criminality and emasculated gender positioning, come together to form the chimeric sex offender assemblage: an expression of monstrosity that is a process rather than a product. In this way, the sex offender assemblage develops in prison as prisoners and staff learn about the offenders’ convictions—actual or virtual—that inform the continual process of becoming the chimeric sex offender. The process of becoming is reflective of the processes related to the entrance of bodies into spaces of incarceration, as prisoners—convicted, accused, and/or suspected of sex offenses—are potentially folded into the chimeric sex offender assemblage.

V. THE DIRE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHIMERIC SEX OFFENDER ASSEMBLAGE, OR, WHAT THE ASSEMBLAGE DOES

Perhaps, given the chimeric sex offender assemblage, it is then unsurprising that acts of vigilante justice have been committed against bodies signified as sex offenders, although rare, do occur in society. For instance, in 2003, Lawrence Trant Jr., age 56, attempted to murder eight sex offenders located through a registry in Concord, New Hampshire. He stabbed one registrant to death, Lawrence Sheridan, age 34, and set fire to two buildings, a boarding house and an apartment building, where other registered sex offenders lived. Hunter (2014) reports that 13 people lived in the boarding house, six of which were registered sex offenders; the apartment, however, only housed one registrant, Peter Bruce. Only Sheridan was harmed. The men were targeted for their crimes, based only on their place in the registry, without any concern about the details of the cases. The reasoning for the attempted murders was reported simply as Trant's growing hatred for sex offenders while in prison (Hunter, 2014).

In April of 2006, Stephen Marshall, a 20-year-old Canadian, was branded a vigilante after murdering two persons on the Maine sex offender registry on Easter Sunday. His two victims shows both the scope of difference in who is a registered sex offender, and how the registration itself creates a stigma that ignores the nuances of the crimes. Joseph Gray, age 57, had a 1992 conviction of raping a 14-year-old female along with convictions of indecent assault and battery (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2017; Zoorob, 2012). Gray's convictions are rather unambiguous, his actions are in line with the chimeric sex offender assemblage and leave him most identifiable by his grave action and moral wrong-doing: he victimized the innocent by sexually violating a youth. The challenge, however, arises when we turn our attention the Marshall's other victim, who met the same fate as Gray's victim. William Elliott, age 24, earned his place on the Maine Sex Offender Registry by at 19 year old having sex with his girlfriend at the time. His girlfriend was just shy of her 16th birthday, 16 years of age being the age of consent in Maine. His victim's father, rather unhappy about the situation, pressed charges, which resulted in Elliott serving four months in prison and a ten-year position on the registry (Zoorob, 2012). Marshall turned his gun on himself before being apprehended by police officers in Boston (Armstrong, 2006). Marshall's victims are at opposite ends of the continuum of

what constitutes a sex offender, yet reveal with clarity that the crime behind the label has no impact on the identity the label imposes in society and in prison.

Such acts of vigilante “justice” are also pronounced in prisons. Most recently, for example, Canadian prisoner Jonathan Watson confessed to “beating two convicted child molesters to death with a walking cane while inside prison,” which he called doing “everybody a favour,” and is serving a life sentence (Patrick, 2020). Watson, age 41, was serving life with a first degree murder charge, when he murdered David Bobb, age 48, and Graham De Luis-Conti, age 62, both of whom were convicted for the aggravated sexual assault of a child under age 14. In the United States, Jeffrey Dahmer was convicted of the murder, rape, and dismembering of 15 of his 17 men and boy victims between 1978 and 1991 (Egan, 2019). After surviving one attempt on his life in prison, he was stabbed to death in 1994 by a fellow prisoner. Such forms of violence toward convicted sex offenders reveal what the chimeric sex offender assemblage does in prisons. Overall, such acts of “vigilantism” are part of the landscape of the chimeric sex offender assemblage, an arrangement that ensures that offenders’ victimization is, in some ways, predictable. Such violence illustrates how affects—hate and disdain—and force intertwine to cause the death to bodies convicted of sex offenses.

CONCLUSION: THE VIRTUAL AND THE ACTUAL

A person charged with a sex offense and not yet found guilty, legally, is not yet a sex offender. Yet in society, the mere accusation of engaging in such actions can impose the sex offender label, assembling the sex offender identity and imposing it upon the accused. The value attributed to the sex offender’s crime(s)—the value the knob of the assemblage is set to—is primary in the process of constituting the sex offender identity. The label of sex offender operates instrumentally in ensuring the severity of treatment received by those so labelled in society and in prison. Societal, diagnostic, and carceral signifiers related to sex offenses shape the chimeric sex offender assemblage that ultimately constitutes sex offender identity. The collective signifiers attached to sex offenders and the divergent and contingent elements together possess properties graver than the individual parts. The sex offender, in this sense, also operates as the “external order” necessary to

ensure internal order in society and prison by creating the parameters of acceptable behaviors—physically, socially, morally, and so on.

Due to the positioning that the chimeric sex offender holds, a false assumption remains in society, specifically that “strangers commit most sexual offenses” (Sandler et al., 2008, p. 208). The chimeric sex offender assemblage continuously operates at the virtual level—that sex offenders are strangers in the community and not of the community—and thereby silences the actualities of the sex offender. In the realm of the actual, sex offenses are most likely to be committed by family members, intimate partners, or acquaintances—not strangers. The tension that arises is, simply put, how can the chimeric sex offender also be someone with whom one has close acquaintance or familiar ties—someone to whom another is related? For instance, in the United States, Snyder (2000) conducted a Bureau of Justice study, finding that a staggering 93 percent of victims of child sexual abuse knew their offender. Moreover, as Sandler and colleagues (2008) reported, citing Greenfeld (1997), “approximately 9 out of 10 adult rape or sexual assault victims had a prior relationship with the offender either as a family member, intimate, or acquaintance” (p. 298). The actuality that such offenders are often known to their victims is a perplexing reality given that the person—the sex offender—often transitions in identity from family member or friend to that of the sex offender, with all the signifiers virtually associated with the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Such an assemblage overcodes that such offenders are strangers, roaming and causing harm, not someone who also provides some semblance of care (i.e., a family member) or intimacy (i.e., a partner) or someone who is familiar, even considered kind.

The chimeric sex offender assemblage is articulated in community notification and sex offender registration, which are less motivated by public safety than politics (Sandler et al., 2008). Such laws are constitutive of the “stranger danger” element of the chimeric sex offender assemblage, and operate at the virtual level that, in turn, expresses an inherent risk posed by all strangers in society (Zgoba, 2004). Such laws in actuality cause more harms than benefit, given that they hinder democratic freedoms and rehabilitation by isolated persons convicted of sex offenses. Pratt (2000) argues that public notification and other such strategies in actuality “humiliate, degrade or brutalize the offender before the public at large” (p. 418), which is part of the affective dimension of the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Further, Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker (2007) found that, via an

empirical study of 193 surveyed citizens in Florida, notification is not a successful strategy for reaching the target audiences; the laws did not receive the intended outcomes of increasing the safety of children, although their respondents support the policy and felt safer because of notifications, agreeing that community residents should be informed about any sex offenders living in their neighborhoods (see also Anderson & Sample, 2008). The consequences of the registry for those on it, however, is grave. In actuality, “Megan’s law is experienced by sex offenders as unfair and that it disrupts ties to the community” (Levenson, D’Amora, & Hearn, 2007, p. 600) and as indicated above, contributes to the vigilante “justice” sex offenders experience in their communities.

Such laws form a ban assemblage that keeps individuals labelled as sex offenders—both in society and, by extension, in prison—out of the community and the general prison population, respectively. Such exclusionary processes contribute to the continuous constitution of the virtual chimeric sex offender identity. In addition, the manifold reactions of societies to sex offenders are elemental to the chimeric sex offender assemblage and throw out other interpretations regarding the actualities of those convicted of sex offenses. Prison, an extension of society, follows the same exclusionary processes, pushing those suspected, accused, and convicted of offenses into protective custody, precluding any attempts at passing as “normal” offenders within the hyper-masculine space of the prison. Such failures to pass further contributes to their often-contradictory chimeric identity, as both predator to children and prey to other prisoners who seek to expel them from prison spaces. Regardless of the actual sex offense, the virtual identity encoded in the chimeric sex offender assemblage in both prison and society serves to expose such offenders to violence and death.

In sum, the use of assemblage theory allows us to demonstrate how signifiers, buildings, laws, bodies, and scientific discourses come together to form the virtual identity related to the chimeric sex offender assemblage. Such a virtual identity has grave implications for the lives of those labelled as sex offenders and expresses a broader affective disposition toward those who are part of the chimeric sex offender assemblage, be it in the psychiatrist’s office, in the community, or in prison. Such an assemblage amounts to an erasure of the messy actualities of the sex offenses and sex offenders. While we have engaged in broad theorizing of the chimeric sex offender assemblage in the domains of diagnosis, the community, and prisons, future research and theorizing should probe the specifics of interactions

among elements in these domains and other domains where sex offender identities are constituted.

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