

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women who remain in relationships with registered sexual offenders: Analysis of forum discussion

Emma Jones | David C. Giles 

Department of Psychology, University of Winchester, Winchester, UK

Correspondence

David C. Giles, Department of Psychology, University of Winchester, West Hill, Winchester SO22 4NR, UK.
Email: david.giles@winchester.ac.uk

Abstract

Registered sexual offenders (RSOs) are inevitably on the receiving end of much negative evaluation within society. By association, individuals in close relationships with RSOs may experience what Goffman (1963) [*Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon & Schuster Ltd.] termed ‘courtesy stigma’, through which they are also negatively evaluated. The present study explores this phenomenon in the contemporary context of online discussion. Drawing on recent methodological developments in the microanalysis of online data, three specific threads from online parenting forums are examined, each opening with a specific account of their dilemma by women in intimate relationships with RSOs. Analysis of the sequential interaction within each thread demonstrates the way that stigma is performed by online parenting communities and how individuals manage that stigma as the interaction unfolds. We conclude that partners of RSOs, unlike family members, can mitigate courtesy stigma by ending the relationship, but otherwise risk being ostracised by community members.

KEYWORDS

digital culture, discussion forums, ethics, online communities, online interaction, parenting, sex offenders, stigma

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2021 The Authors. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

1 | INTRODUCTION

What happens to an individual when their intimate partner is convicted of sexual offences? In addition to the usual problems that accompany the partners of people with criminal convictions, the nature of that person's offence carries with it an additional burden, particularly for someone linked to them romantically (Blake, 1990). In the present study, we focus specifically on female partners of registered (male) sexual offenders (RSOs), and their interactions with members of online communities. What happens when a woman in this situation describes her experiences in the context of a discussion forum? Given the anticipated negative responses from other forum users, how do they frame and account for their decision to maintain the relationship in spite of their partner's offence? And how do those other forum users respond to their accounts?

We chose to frame our study via the concept of stigma, and more specifically the type of stigma that attaches to people associated with the stigmatised individual, defined as 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1963), stigma-by-association (Kulik, Bainbridge, & Cregan, 2008), or secondary stigma (Frost, 2011). In Goffman's original conception, courtesy stigma occurs when 'the problems faced by the stigmatised persons spread out in waves of diminishing intensity among those they come into contact with' (Goffman, 1963, p. 30). This process has been observed in various cases of stigma, for example, the families of children with a disability, where the same prejudices directed at the children lead to their parents becoming isolated and prone to declining mental health (Green, 2003). Other researchers have found that people associated with stigmatised individuals are often attributed the same stigmatising characteristics, for example, employees of a company providing health and community support to sex workers (Phillips, Benoit, Hallgrimsdottir, & Vallance, 2012).

There is a high level of stigma attaching to criminal offenders generally: even after serving a sentence, they are discriminated against in areas such as citizenship, housing and employment (Moore, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2016), as well as suffering general negative attitudes from the community as a whole (Rade, Desmarais, & Mitchell, 2016). Sex offence carries additional stigma, largely for reasons that are linked to taboos around sex that persist in education and other areas even today. Cubellis, Evans, and Fera (2019) argue that sex offence acts as a 'master status' for these individuals, overriding all other identifying characteristics of the individual. The same authors found that simply being on the register functioned as a stigma by itself. Courtesy stigma extends to anyone associated with the offender, including employers, landlords and the offender's children. Movement restriction and community notification procedures mean any sexual offence history can be easily accessible to community members (Lieb, Kemshall, & Thomas, 2011). Vigilante attacks are not uncommon, especially if the victim of the offence was a child (Cubellis et al., 2019).

Given the taboo around sex offence, it is therefore not surprising that anyone involved romantically with the offender will receive a considerable amount of courtesy stigma, especially where children are involved. Women in such relationships are often perceived as relinquishing their maternal responsibilities of protecting their child when they choose to remain in relationships with RSOs (Strand, 1990). Traditionally, research in this area has tended to focus on the perceptions of offenders themselves rather than the lived experience of their partners, but a number of recent exceptions have redressed the balance somewhat (Cahalane, Parker, & Duff, 2013; Iffland, Berner, Dekker, & Briken, 2016).

A common criticism of stigma research is that it is frequently constructed as an individual, cognitive phenomenon rather than one that takes place in specific social contexts (Link & Phelan, 2001; Yang et al., 2007). Recently there have been attempts to explore stigma more as a social practice, often with the effect of distinguishing ingroups and outgroups in a community context (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). Taking a social constructionist perspective, Lester and O'Reilly (2021) examine stigma as specifically a discursive practice, constructed through language. This way, stigma can be regarded as something which is performed, 'occasioned and contingent on what interlocutors make relevant in social interaction' (Lester & O'Reilly, 2021, p. 55).

In the present study, we examine the performance of stigma within the forums of two popular parenting websites, Mumsnet and Netmums. Mumsnet is a very influential platform used by parents, primarily mothers, to

discuss a wide range of topics involving their children, relationships, conflicts and experiences whilst being a parent (Giles, 2016; Mackenzie & Zhao, 2021; Pederson & Smithson, 2013). It is a rewarding source of verbal online data for social psychologists because its members are renowned for being confrontational, and therefore the interactional dynamics of the discussion are particularly rich (Mackenzie, 2017; Matley, 2020). As a result, we anticipated it being a valuable site of stigma performance.

The unit of analysis in the present study is the actual discussion thread, which contrasts with most of the research utilising discussion forum data in the social sciences. Typically, researchers extract topic-relevant posts using appropriate search engines and data scraping tools, and conduct their analyses from the resulting database (or 'corpus') of posts (Kinloch & Jaworska, 2021; Webster, 2019). This may be appropriate for analyses that are primarily linguistic or just broadly thematic, where researchers' objective is to compile the largest possible pool of examples. However, this approach does not enable them to examine the posts within the interactional context in which they were initially generated. Our interest in interactional dynamics, and the application of conversation analytic techniques to online data (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester & Reed, 2015; Meredith, 2019; Paulus, Warren, & Lester, 2018), led us to focus on the context itself in order to explore the processes by which stigma becomes operationalised in online communities.

1.1 | Research questions

- How is 'courtesy stigma' performed as a social practice through the online interaction between partners of RSOs and parenting communities?
- What additional benefit derives from studying this interaction within threads as a whole rather than as decontextualised texts?
- Based on the small dataset analysed here, are there ways in which the partners of RSOs, and the parenting community, could minimise the practice of courtesy stigma?

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Data collection and analytic procedure

Data consisted of three specific discussion threads obtained from the Mumsnet and Netmums parenting forums. Activity on each forum is monitored by administrators with the authority to remove posts and comments which do not adhere to the forum's guidelines. The discussions are visible to all Internet users but it is necessary to become a registered member in order to post.

2.1.1 | Mumsnet

A site search of key terms such as 'sex offender' and 'relationships' was conducted in order to identify threads relevant to sexual offending and relationships. The results generated a number of threads which varied in length and detail, although it was found that the title of the opening post (OP¹) was the most effective way to determine their relevance. Opening posts (OPs) have a special significance in forum research (Giles, 2016, 2017; Stommel & Koole, 2010) because they set the agenda for the thread as a whole. Although on some forums, discussion within a thread may stray off topic, topic relevance is often enforced by site moderators, and Mumsnet in particular reinforces it by reproducing the OP in its entirety at the top of each page in the thread (a page consists of 20–25 posts). The two threads chosen for analysis both had reference to their 'significant other' and the Sex Offenders Register,

indicating there was a relationship between the OP author and the offender, and that the latter had committed a sexual offence. Each thread was then assessed on the amount of responses to the opening post to ensure there was enough data for an in-depth analysis. Thread 1 consists of 300 comments, and thread 2 consists of 185.

Netmums is a similar platform to Mumsnet, focused on its discussion forum where users post on various topics of interest to parents. A similar search using the forum's internal system identified the most relevant thread titles for analysis. The average thread consisted of 100 comments. The thread selected as most appropriate for analysis (Thread 3) was made up of 45 comments.

The data in this stage were analysed according to principles set out in Giles (2016) and Giles (2017) for the analysis of specific threads in online forums. These principles derive in part from conversation analysis, but adapted for the very different requirements of online interaction (Giles et al., 2015; Giles, Stommel, & Paulus, 2017; Meredith, 2019; Paulus et al., 2018). For example, many features of conversational structure that depend on users' language, such as turn-orientation and topic relevance, are built into the format of the discussion thread. Even matters such as address are often explicit in online interaction. Other intrinsic features of forums not present in conversation are things such as time (each turn/post is accompanied by a timestamp and the discussion can stretch across days or months), and the rhetorical use of verbatim quotation, hyperlinks and other references to content elsewhere on the Web (Giles et al., 2015).

The goal of the present analysis was to observe the performance of stigma over the course of the threads: the language and dynamics used by community members and how this shaped the nature of the interaction between the members and the OP, and in particular how it influenced the contribution of the OP herself. While in a broad methodological sense, discourse analysis might appear to meet these goals sufficiently (e.g., Jowett, 2015), our specific focus on the discussion thread as a unit of analysis allowed us to explore the unfolding of these processes over time, rather than studying isolated portions of interaction removed from their immediate dynamic contexts.

2.2 | Ethical considerations

By collecting data within the public domain, the research adheres to the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and is consistent with the ethical practices of the British Psychological Society (2018). As the data are taken from publicly accessible forums and involve sensitive topics, we have anonymised the authors as far as possible by assigning them codes according to their place in the dataset. No attempt was made to seek consent from any individuals for the use of the data for research purposes. As many researchers of online communities have argued, the practicalities and ethical considerations of attempting to gain consent from forum users (who may no longer even be community members) is 'neither possible nor necessary' (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017, p. 195).

3 | DESCRIPTION OF THE THREADS

The analysis begins with a summary of each of the three threads that were selected for analysis, focusing on the OP's story, the initial reactions of the community, the OP's response to those reactions and the eventual outcome of the interactive sequence.

3.1 | Thread 1: 'My husband is on the Sex Offenders Register'

This thread was posted on Mumsnet between 31/10/08 and 08/08/17 and consists of 185 posts. The first reply arrives within three minutes and, apart from a brief revival ('bump') 9 years later, 178 of the posts are from the first 2 weeks. The OP is a detailed account in 404 words of the author's situation. Her fiancé was arrested at work for

downloading child pornography; convinced the offence was committed in error, she has since married him, but he has reoffended and she is now determined to end the relationship, though experiencing some difficulty actually carrying this out. It concludes with the request: 'please help me'.

The first reply is sympathetic, beginning 'you poor thing – how awful...' After three replies, the OP responds with further detail (notably, she has a 15-year-old son). Throughout the 2 weeks when the thread is most active, the OP posts frequently, thanks community members for their advice (even though a small amount of it is highly critical of her behaviour), and provides considerable detail about her thoughts and emotions. It is clear that she is taking the advice seriously and is making an effort to act upon it (i.e., to finally end the relationship). Her final post (at the end of the two-week period) concerns her need to find a new washing machine, and concludes 'I can manage without him and I will'.

3.2 | Thread 2: 'Found out dp [darling partner] is on the sex offenders register'

This thread was also posted on Mumsnet, between 10/02/14 and 15/02/14, and consists of 296 posts. It is a faster-moving thread than the first, with 36 posts arriving in the first 20 minutes, and the majority of posts in the first few hours. The OP is 130 words long and describes the author's 'shock' at discovering that her current partner is apparently on the SOR after being convicted for a relationship with a 15-year-old girl pupil at the school where he had been a teacher. She is concerned because she has teenage daughters herself although she offers some mitigation: the partner has been 'great with my family' and the offence happened '[a] few years ago'. The first reply (after 3 min) asks the OP 'do you know it's definitely him', to which she replies 'its defo him seen photos'. There follow a number of further enquiries for more information, among increasingly critical posts, some of which the OP responds to (e.g., to counter accusations that the man was deliberately targeting mothers, saying that his last girlfriend was childless).

After an hour the OP responds for the final time. Increasingly hostile posts follow, including a number that refer to previous threads by the OP in which she has raised concerns about her partner, and one in which the author claims to have reported the thread to MumsNet administrators for allegedly violating their guidelines. There follows much debate as to the authenticity of the OP and whether she is in fact a 'troll' (someone who deliberately courts trouble in a forum).

The following day, an administrator posts that they have investigated and found no problem, warning members about their conduct. The hostile posts continue for a while, debating the appropriate point in a relationship at which one can refer to the other as a 'partner', mixed with the occasional sympathetic comment, and appeals to the OP to return to the thread 'to tell us what you are doing'. Towards the end of the period, the posts become generally more supportive, criticising others for 'troll hunting' and, in some cases, providing more considered advice, although not one recommends anything other than immediate separation from the 'partner'.

3.3 | Thread 3: 'Social services involved'

This thread, from the Netmums forum, consists of 45 posts from 13/01/14 to 04/09/17. The first response occurs 13 minutes after the OP and all but four of the posts occur within the first week. There are then two very brief revivals of the thread, one in July 2014 and the other in September 2017. The OP is a 132-word account of the author's dilemma: she is pregnant with her RSO partner's baby and social services appear to have asked her to decide between living with her partner without the baby, or alone with the baby. The post concludes 'I need advice or help'. Initial responses to the OP are requests for further information, particularly whether the OP was aware of the offence prior to becoming pregnant (and what the offence was). After an hour the OP has failed to reply to these posts, and subsequent posts become slightly more critical in tone. Nevertheless, there are several supportive posts.

Some ask what kind of advice the OP is requesting; one even asks the OP to 'pm' her (contact directly). One asks 'where is the OP?' After a week it becomes clear that the OP is not going to return, and the thread falls silent apart from two brief exchanges by members who have presumably not taken account of the previous timestamps (indeed the first 2017 post was by a member who had just joined the community).

4 | FURTHER ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this stage of the analysis, we examined a number of specific sequences within the threads that we believe illustrate the process by which stigma is performed within a community such as a parenting forum. Although it would be ideal for readers to see the entire thread in its context, for reasons of space we present here a small number of selected entries in sequence. The timestamps and sequential order number should give the reader an idea of the larger interactional context within which each post was authored.

Extract 1 comes from the first 10 min Thread 1 and contains several responses to the OP's account of her partner's two episodes of child pornography possession. Many of the early posts concern judgements about the partner's guilt and the OP's attempt to mitigate his offences, largely by her claim that the child images were accidentally downloaded while her partner was accessing 'legitimate' adult pornography. Community members are mostly unconvinced by this claim and the OP's apparent acceptance of it. One could argue that this is the performance of courtesy stigma: by defending his actions the OP is indirectly blamed for the offence. This is borne out by members' preoccupation with technical details (post 3's mention of '78 images', post 11's query about police procedure, post 15's scepticism over the access to child porn). Post 14 directly encapsulates the process of courtesy stigma: 'trick me once, shame on you, trick me twice shame on me'. The implication in these, and many later posts, is that the OP is almost as guilty as her partner for not immediately denouncing his behaviour.

Extract 1 (OP at 13:33)

13:37, post #3: sorry but 78 images seems a lot, considering its a mistake hmm. Go with your gut, its normally right. Do you have kids?

13:42, post #11: How likely is it though, that you get done twice for 'accidently' having child porn?

Wouldnt his memory stick been permanently confiscated or wiped by the police? Do they really just hand your stuff back with the offending stuff still on it?

13:43, post #14: Trick me once, shame on you, trick me twice shame on me.

I would not feel happy to share my life and my son's life with someone has been twice put on a sex offenders list.

13:43, post #15: what kind of idiot sits and looks at porn at work? Every office I have ever worked in you would get sacked for that anyway so he obviously has no judgment whatsoever, even if he isn't a peado. I really doubt that if you look at ordinary adult porn, even hardcore stuff, it comes with free child porn as some kind of BOGOF offer. He looked at that on purpose.

13:44, post #16: If child porn came attached to normal porn, think how many men would be caught with it!

It becomes clear as the thread unfolds that the OP has little choice but to terminate her relationship if she is to continue to interact with the community on amicable terms. The advice is repeated in several of the subsequent posts: 'It is definitely time to ask him to leave' (post #18). 'I do think you are very very right to finish the relationship' (post #19). 'I sincerely hope you cut off all contact with this vile man' (post #27) and 'run for the hills, and enjoy your Fifties without him' (post #28).

In the longer term, OP in thread 1 is gradually exonerated as the thread unfolds over the two-week period. There are a number of reasons for this. The blame attached to the OP is mitigated, partly by her use of self-shaming language ('call me stupid'... 'for some stupid reason' in post 1; 'I'm being so bloody stupid' in post 22), and partly because, as the thread continues, she is evidently making a serious attempt to end the relationship. The OP also performs some important emotional work, apologising to other members for having 'bothered you all', and reporting

emotional responses ('there are tears streaming down my face as I write this'). But one of the most important features of this particular thread is that the OP remains engaged with the thread throughout, responding to criticism but also demonstrating evidence that she has taken members' advice (by ending the relationship).

The second extract concerns a somewhat different approach to stigma performance, and comes from thread 2. We have selected only the posts that refer to the act (post 76, from community member A) of reporting the OP for allegedly breaching the Mumsnet forum guidelines, 39 min after the thread began, following a series of fractious exchanges around the identity of the OP's partner and the nature of his offence (he was sacked from a teaching job following an inappropriate relationship with an underage student). A's explanation (in post 92) for reporting the OP is not clear ('controversial dilemmas' being a mainstay of the Mumsnet forum), but there is something of a backlash against the OP following a series of links to earlier forum threads. The implication here is that the OP has had previous doubts about her partner's background and that the 'shock' she reports in her initial post (of finding him on the sex offenders' register) may not be authentic.

Extract 2: shifting to another stigma in order to protect community boundaries.

22:16, post #76 (from A): reported.

22:22, post #87: why did you report A?

22:26, post #92 (from A): Because this is the latest in a series of controversial dilemmas about the new boyfriend.

22:27, post #95: ...why was this thread reported A?

(...a number of posts just consist of links to previous threads started by the OP...)

22:32, post #106: ...A if you are suggesting the OP is a troll, I do hope you are right.

22:42, post #121 (from B): Reading OP's previous posts, I'm with A.

22:43, post #125: ...with B.

22:45, post #128: Reading the previous threads I'm with whoever reported the thread....It's got all the hallmarks.

(...Flurry of posts, several blocked by moderators, around the procedures of reporting members...)

22:49, post #143: Oh no, did I fall for one? FFs.

22:52, post #144: I think some posters announce their reporting so that if the OP (not saying this one is or isn't) is a hairy handed under the bridge dweller that they will know members are on to them and hopefully take their sick twisted mind somewhere else to play games. Or I could be wrong.

Post 106 is the first to use the word 'troll', and this new identity is made increasingly relevant in many of the posts that follow (we can probably assume that the blocked posts between 22:45 and 22:49 were less subtle variations on this theme). While there are a number of supportive posts around this time (and others criticising the members who reported the OP), the critical tone of the thread shifts from the OP's partner to the OP herself. By invoking a new, stigmatised identity, the community members have effectively bypassed the need for 'courtesy' in this instance.

In the long run, the OP is eventually exonerated by the Mumsnet moderators who are unable to find anything in her contributions that justifies suspending the thread (or her account), and many of the later comments reflect on what they perceive to be harsh treatment. However, unlike the OP in thread 1, the OP does not return to the thread and one is left with the sense that she has been successfully ostracised within the community.

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Three discussion threads from parenting forums were examined to explore the community reaction to partners of RSOs ostensibly requesting help in relation to a personal dilemma. Although all three OPs received a considerable amount of critical and even hostile comments, the threads differed notably in relation to the eventual outcome of the discussion. The OP of thread 1 maintained contact throughout and with her final post appeared to have

successfully resolved her dilemma; the OPs of threads 2 and 3 both 'disappeared' (i.e., failed to contribute further) early in the discussion, and were subject to increasing hostile and abusive posts.

We have taken for granted the fact that our OPs would be the subject of courtesy stigma (Cubellis et al., 2019) and so our analysis focused on the way that this stigma is performed in an online parenting community where most members will not share the OPs' experiences and may hold strong opinions about the morality of forming, or maintaining a relationship with an RSO. While the opening posts are all manifestly help-seeking requests, and so the sharing of such stories requires delicate handling. In almost every single case, whether replies were hostile or supportive, they recommended, unequivocally and unconditionally, that the OP end the relationship with her partner. The OP in thread 1, who contributed regularly to the discussion, appears to have followed this advice.

In the two less successful threads, the OPs invited hostility from the community by challenging the advice and offering mitigating circumstances for their relationship (such as, the partner had not just targeted her as a mother). Despite the disappearance of OPs from threads 2 and 3 there were, nevertheless, a number of (cautiously) supportive posts towards the end of the threads, suggesting that members were concerned for the OP and wondered why they had retreated from the discussion.

Overall, these findings suggest that this kind of courtesy stigma, while powerful in the wider community of parents, can be managed if the individual displays sufficient humility and contrition in the face of criticism, and follows community members' advice (or provides some kind of account that indicates this). However, this advice (at least in the examples analysed) is overwhelmingly in favour of ending the relationship, which may not necessarily resolve the dilemma the partner is facing. One might speculate that the OPs in threads 2 and 3 disappeared from the thread because they did not wish to follow this course of action, and feared even greater hostility if they continued the discussion.

It might be argued, then, that the kind of courtesy stigma experienced by partners of RSOs is different from that of family members, whose blood relationship with the RSO is permanent. Romantic partners have a means of reducing that stigma, albeit only by dissociating themselves with their partners. The OP in thread 1 concludes by discussing her plans for buying a new washing machine, almost as part of a cleansing ritual. However, the sanctions for remaining in the relationship may actually result in greater stigma compared to those with blood ties to the originally stigmatised individual (such as the families studied by Green, 2003). The actions of community members in thread 2 suggest that the failure to comply with this advice will lead to the partner being permanently ostracised (here, through an unsuccessful attempt to isolate the OP as a 'troll' who would be punished by the forum managers). For partners in this particular dilemma, it would seem that a general online parenting forum is probably not the best place to seek a sympathetic audience.

6 | CONCLUSION

This analysis of courtesy stigma as a social practice allows us to identify a number of elements that influence the performance of stigma across the lifespan of a discussion forum thread. The first is that early responses to the 'troubles-telling' opening posts can be supportive, and the maintenance of that support may depend on how the OP herself responds to those early posts. The second is that there is overwhelming pressure for the OP to end the relationship with the RSO. Only where that appears to be the course taken is the OP able to enjoy any relief from the stigma.

The focus on a small number of single threads as units of analysis does carry inevitable limitations to what can be claimed about the phenomenon under investigation. Here it could be argued that the reactions to the OPs may simply reflect the specific nature of their dilemmas. For example, the most positive thread concerned the download of illegal pornography, which may be considered less stigmatising by the parenting community than actual physical contact with children. The harshest outcome concerned a teacher who had been dismissed for inappropriate

relations with a 15-year-old pupil. These factors should be considered alongside the specific dynamics of the threads that have been focused on in this analysis.

Having said that, we believe the value of our methodology lies in its ability to observe social life unfolding from one moment to the next, as contributions to the thread shape the dynamics of the interaction over time. This has enabled us to gain an insight into the outcome of the interaction for the individuals involved that would otherwise be glossed over by reducing the individual posts to elements in a large corpus in the interests of identifying broad trends. We would argue that this microanalytic focus adds important detail to the overall picture of online community life.

ENDNOTE

¹ The abbreviation OP refers to both the Opening Post of a thread and to the Opening Poster, the individual who has posted it (and who is thereafter a continuing discussant across the thread as a whole). Hopefully this is not confusing to readers – the context should make it clear whether it refers to the post itself or its author.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID

David C. Giles  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2838-1338>

REFERENCES

- Blake, J. (1990). *Sentenced by association: The needs of prisoners' families*. London, England: Save the Children.
- British Psychological Society. (2018). *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. Retrieved from <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-ethics-and-conduct>
- Cahalane, H., Parker, G., & Duff, S. (2013). Treatment implications arising from a qualitative analysis of letters written by the nonoffending partners of men who have perpetrated child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 22*(6), 720–741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2013.811138>
- Cubellis, M. A., Evans, D. N., & Fera, A. G. (2019). Sex offender stigma: An exploration of vigilantism against sex offenders. *Deviant Behavior, 40*(2), 225–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1420459>
- Frost, D. M. (2011). Social stigma and its consequences for the socially stigmatized. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*(11), 824–839. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.17519004.2011.00394.x>
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). (2018). *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*. Retrieved from <https://gdpr-info.eu/>
- Giles, D. C., Stommel, W., Paulus, T., Lester, J., & Reed, D. (2015). The microanalysis of online data: The methodological development of 'digital CA'. *Discourse, Context and Media, 7*(1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2014.12.002>
- Giles, D. C. (2016). Observing real-world groups in the virtual field: The analysis of online discussion. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 55*(3), 484–498. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12139>
- Giles, D. C. (2017). How do fan and celebrity identities become established on Twitter? A study of 'social media natives' and their followers. *Celebrity Studies, 8*(3), 445–460.
- Giles, D. C., Stommel, W., & Paulus, T. (2017). The microanalysis of online data: the next stage (introduction to special section). *Journal of Pragmatics, 115*, 37–41.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Ltd.
- Green, S. E. (2003). "What do you mean, 'what's wrong with her?'" Stigma and the lives of families of children with disabilities. *Social Science & Medicine, 57*, 1361–1374. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(02\)00511-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(02)00511-7)
- Iffland, J. A., Berner, W., Dekker, A., & Briken, P. (2016). What keeps them together? Insights into sex offender couples using qualitative content analyses. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 42*(6), 534–551. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2015.1079757>
- Jowett, A. (2015). A case for using online discussion forums in critical psychological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(3), 287–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1008906>
- Kinloch, K., & Jaworska, S. (2021). 'Your mind is part of your body': Negotiating the maternal body in online stories of post-natal depression on Mumsnet. *Discourse, Context & Media, 39*, 100456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100456>

- Kulik, C. T., Bainbridge, H. T. J., & Cregan, C. (2008). Known by the company we keep: Stigma-by-association effects in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 216–230.
- Lester, J. N., & O'Reilly, M. (2021). The social construction of stigma: Utilizing discursive psychology for advancing the conceptualisation of stigma in mental health. *Stigma and Health*, 6(1), 53–61.
- Lieb, R., Kemshall, H., & Thomas, T. (2011). Post-release controls for sex offenders in the US and UK. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 34(3), 226–232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2011.04.006>
- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualising stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363–385. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363>
- Mackenzie, J. (2017). 'Can we have a child exchange?' Constructing and subverting the 'good mother' through play in Mumsnet Talk. *Discourse & Society*, 28(3), 296–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516687417>
- Mackenzie, J., & Zhao, S. (2021). Motherhood online: Issues and opportunities for discourse analysis. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 40, 100472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100472>
- Matley, D. (2020). "I miss my old life": Regretting motherhood on Mumsnet. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 37, 100417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100417>
- Meredith, J. (2019). Conversation analysis and online interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 52(3), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2019.1631040>
- Moore, K. E., Stuewig, J. B., & Tangney, J. P. (2016). The effect of stigma on criminal offenders' functioning: A longitudinal mediational model. *Deviant Behavior*, 37(2), 196–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2014.1004035>
- Paulus, T. M., Warren, A. N., & Lester, J. N. (2018). Using conversation analysis to understand how agreements, personal experience, and cognition verbs function in online discussions. *Language@Internet*, 15, 1. Retrieved from <https://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2018/paulus>
- Pederson, S., & Smithson, J. (2013). Mothers with attitude – How the Mumsnet parenting forum offers space for new forms of femininity to emerge online. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 38, 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.03.004>
- Phillips, R., Benoit, C., Hallgrimsdottir, H., & Vallance, K. (2012). Courtesy stigma: A hidden health concern among front-line service providers to sex workers. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 34(5), 681–695. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2011.01410.x>
- Rade, C. B., Desmarais, S. L., & Mitchell, R. E. (2016). A meta-analysis of public attitudes toward ex-offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 43(9), 1260–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854816655837>
- Stommel, W., & Koole, T. (2010). The online support group as a community: A micro-analysis of the interaction with a new member. *Discourse Studies*, 12(3), 357–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445609358518>
- Strand, V. C. (1990). Treatment of the mother in the incest family: The beginning phase. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 18(4), 353–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00754836>
- Stutterheim, S. E., & Ratcliffe, S. E. (2021). Understanding and addressing stigma through qualitative research: Four reasons why we need qualitative studies. *Stigma and Health*, 6(1), 8–19.
- Sugiura, L., Wiles, R., & Pope, C. (2017). Ethical challenges in online research: Public/private perceptions. *Research Ethics*, 13(3–4), 184–199.
- Webster, L. (2019). "I am I": Self-constructed transgender identities in internet-mediated forum communication. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 256, 129–146. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2018-2015>
- Yang, L. H., Kleinmann, A., Link, B. G., Phelan, J. C., Lee, S., & Good, B. (2007). Culture and stigma: Adding moral experience to stigma theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64, 1524–1535. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.11.013>

How to cite this article: Jones, E., & Giles, D. C. (2021). Women who remain in relationships with registered sexual offenders: Analysis of forum discussion. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2558>