



Sex Offenses and the Men Who Commit Them: An Assessment of Sex Offenders on Probation (Northeastern Series on Gender, Crime, and Law)

Michelle Meloy

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Sex offenders are among the most despised criminals of our time, inspiring more legislation than any other class of violent offenders. Such horrific high-profile cases as those of Polly Klaas, Megan Kanka, Amber Hagerman, and, more recently, Elizabeth Smart, Jessica Lunsford, and Sarah Lunde have fed the media's overrepresentation and exploitation of cases involving unknown or barely known assailants ("stranger-danger"), which in reality constitute only a tiny percentage of all sexual assaults. Nonetheless, lawmakers and judicial personnel have responded to the false public perception that most sex crimes are perpetrated by strangers by enacting many legal policies targeted primarily at stranger offenders, including registration and community notification (often referred to as Megan's Law), AMBER alerts, intensive and/or lifetime probation (community supervision for life), specialized surveillance units, longer prison terms, and involuntary civil commitment. For better or worse, these public safety techniques are often applied to probated sex offenders, regardless of the severity of their crimes.

This book takes a hard look at this recent trend in the criminal justice response to sex crimes. Michelle L. Meloy investigated more than 150 convicted male sex offenders in a large metropolitan area who were sentenced to probation and supervised by a specialized surveillance unit. She interviewed many of these men, seeking information on the catalysts, stigmas, and effective deterrence of sexual violence. Her research is among the first to test a utility-based theory of sexual violence on a group of sex offender probationers. Rejecting the commonly held belief that sex offending is solely the result of a medical psychopathology on the part of the offender, Meloy demonstrates how certain methods of police or community surveillance undermine the ability of sex offender probationers to effectively reestablish themselves as citizens, and she provides an empirically based public policy response to sex offending that offers real promise in terms of deterrence and increased public protection.

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