Beyond Fear: The Sex Crimes Podcast

Episode 11: Do Women Do Those Things?!

Hosts: Dr. Alexa Sardina and Dr. Alissa Ackerman

Alissa (00:16):

Mary Kay Letourneau and Debra LaFave are two well known cases of women who sexually abused boys. Accounts like these, highlight that women do sexually abuse children, but also undermine any public understanding of sexual abuse by women. The narrative, these stories provide does not reflect the reality of what we know about this type of sexual abuse. In episode 11 of Beyond Fear, we switched gears again, to focus on this important understudied and often misunderstood issue. In episode nine, Alexa interviewed me because of my expertise on sex crimes, policy, and practice. Today, we flipped the script. For those of you who don't know, Alexa is actually an expert on female sexual offending, and I feel lucky to have the opportunity today to interview her about her work and about female sexual offending. In general, Alexa's dissertation research documented the subjective meanings that women who perpetrated sexual offenses against children assigned to their offenses through in-depth interviews with women convicted of child sexual abuse, Alexa explored the way they organized the offending event, explained and accounted for the motivation for committing child sexual abuse, how they selected their victims, and the strategies they used to keep their act hidden from others.

Alissa (01:37):

As always, this material may be difficult to listen to. It's okay to tune out, listen in short chunks, listen with a friend, or turn us off completely. I'm Dr. Alissa Ackerman.

Alexa:

And I'm Dr. Alexa Sardina and this is Beyond Fear.

Alissa (02:12):

So, Alexa, I guess my first question for you is how did you become interested in studying female sexual offending? Like why did this interest you so much?

Alexa:

So, it's kind of a boring response to this question. Um, so like we've talked about before on previous episodes, I started out wanting to do research around victimization and do work with survivors of sexual violence. Um, eventually my attention turned towards studying those that perpetrate sexual violence. And I happened to be taking a women in crime class in my PhD program. So, like a typical assignment, for

people that don't know, at least in my program, was to identify a gap in the research and design a study. And so, because I was researching sexual violence, I was like, well, females, that commit acts of sexual violence are a pretty understudied phenomenon. And then I just kind of went from there and became obsessed. So it's kind of a boring response, but as I looked into it further and further, I really saw a need for understanding this better and understanding ultimately why women would commit acts of sexual abuse and how we know very little and what we do know oftentimes, or think we know isn't accurate.

Alissa (03:43):

It reminds me of, uh, you know, the line that I always took. I took a really cool class in grad school.

Alexa (03:54):

Dr. Oliver, if you're listening, it's all your fault.

Alissa (03:58):

So, can you talk a little bit about the general lack of information on women who sexually offend?

Alexa (04:05):

Um, yeah, so, you know, it kind of goes along with how we, we know very little about sexual offending in some aspects in general, because sex crimes are under reported. Um, there's reason to believe that people who are sexually abused by women are even less likely to report and that in general women just make up for very few of those officially reported offenses. So, according to the UCR women make up about 3% of the arrests for rape and about 8% of arrest for other sexual offenses. So, based on that information and on available research, it seems that women represent about 10% of the offending population.

Alissa (04:56):

When we look at sex offenses, why is there reason to believe that women make up about 10% of the sexual offending population?

Alexa (05:03):

So like, like I said, we know that sex offenses are generally under reported, but females are also able to go sort of unnoticed in terms of any sexually deviant behavior, because they can really disguise their behavior while engaging in childcare, like bathing and dressing children. Women don't arouse a lot of suspicion. When you see a woman with a child touching a child or playing with a child, your thoughts don't go to is that woman abusing the child? Whereas some activities, if a man is engaged in those activities with a child, it raises eyebrows. So just by the nature of how we view women, um, they are able to sort of fly under the radar when it comes to violating a child sexually. Um, another issue is that female

sexual offending is still oftentimes considered less serious or less harmful than sexual offending that's perpetrated by males. And because of this, it's oftentimes difficult to prosecute these cases because juries are sometimes unwilling to convict females for sex offenses, and then they end up being diverted from the courts. So, all that's to say that it's difficult to count the number, but they're also more likely there's more out there than we, we think there are.

Alissa (06:28):

Why do you think it's so difficult to prosecute these kinds of cases?

Alexa (06:32):

I think it's difficult because really society is sort of geared to assuming that, um, people who perpetrate sexual offenses are males. And I think it's hard for people to view, um, a woman who again, is supposed to be this mother and nurturer, someone that cares for children, as somebody that would harm a child. So, I think that that's, you know, part of the challenge there.

Alissa (06:59):

Yeah. And I guess one of the things that we know is that abuse perpetrated by women can be, and often is just as harmful as abuse perpetrated by men. Um, so I guess I wonder if you could talk about some of the similarities between, uh, women who sexually offend and men who do so as well.

Alexa (07:20):

So, um, as you said, in terms of types of sexual offenses and their severity, um, men who perpetrate sex offenses and women who perpetrate sex offenses are similar, um, there's also similarities across demographics like age and race, ethnicity, education level, et cetera, but there are some significant departures. Um, when you look at the two groups, um, so we know that most people who perpetrate a lot of people who perpetrate sexual violence have been sexually victimized. Um, this is especially true when we look at women who perpetrate, um, sex offenses. Uh, so they typically have very extreme abuse histories and that includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, very extreme and extensive, prolonged abuse histories. They also tend to come from dysfunctional homes are more likely to have psychological problems, including suicide attempts. And they're also more likely to have male victims.

Alissa (08:30):

So that's super interesting, and that we know that men who sexually offend have significantly higher rates of adverse childhood experiences than men in general, and yet women who sexually offend have higher rates of sexual victimization and family dysfunction than men who sexually offend.

Alexa (08:46):

Right. So, they have the most, if you want to kind of think of it that way. Another, probably the most aspect of all of this and the thing that really peaked my interest when I started looking into this literature, is that approximately half of females that perpetrate sexual abuse do so with a co offending male that they're usually in a romantic relationship with. So, this is very different from what we know about males that perpetrate sexual harm.

Alissa (09:18):

Do you have any sense of why they tend to co offend with male romantic partners?

Alexa (09:22):

These women that tend to offend with a co-offending male can be broken up into two broad groups. One is often called the male-coerced offender. So, this is a woman that is in an abusive relationship with her romantic partner. She feels that if she doesn't participate or go through the abuse that she could be harmed, um, it's a relationship that's typified by physical abuse as well. And then there's the male-accompanied type. And this type of co-offending pair-it's more of a partnership in terms of the, uh, level of abuse between the two. So, it's, it has more to do with pleasing a partner sexually than it does have to do with any sort of coercion.

Alissa (10:14):

Are there other reasons why, or are there typologies of, or categories of women who sexually offend outside of those that co-offend with a male partner?

Alexa (10:25):

For a lot of different typologies out there and based on many of them, there's a few overlapping categories. And one is that co-offending, um, type another is what's often referred to as the nurturer. So, people, women that are in a caretaking role, so this could be a teacher, a babysitter. This is something that resembles a "romantic" relationship between the abuser and abused. There's also a grouping that's referred to as the predisposed type. So, this is usually offenders that have psychological issues, a history of sexual abuse. Um, this can include people who have committed incest and these types of offenders typically are characterized by a lot of anger and low self-esteem and a lot of emotional instability as well.

Alissa (11:19):

Is there any sense of which type of category is most common for women who sexually offend?

Alexa (11:30):

So about 50% of the females that are identified by research, uh, that we know of are the fall into that co-offending category. They are the majority of female sex offenders.

Alissa (11:45):

That's really interesting. Um, are there any, so we just talked a little bit about typologies or categories, um, or their explanations for why women sexually?

Alexa (11:57):

Yeah. So, some of the explanations are similar to what we've talked about when we've talked about explanations for sex offending perpetrated by males, and one being that reenactment of sexual abuse. So, they were sexually abused as children. Now they are reenacting the abuse that was inflicted upon them. There are also explanations that have to do with women acting out feelings of narcissism. So, this is oftentimes used as an explanation for women that abused their own daughters. Um, as I mentioned earlier, in terms of co-offending, an explanation for that, when we look at, um, the coerced type a would be an extension of something like battered women's syndrome, um, they're socialized to follow a male accomplice and to please a male partner. There's also a desire for intimacy. This is also oftentimes an explanation for cases like you mentioned, Mary Kay LeTourneau. So, seeing this as a loving, romantic relationship and looking for that intimacy and finding it with an underage male. There are also explanations around economic gain. So, women that engage in the solicitation of minor children, um, also accounts of women being involved in things like child pornography as well. And then there are explanations that involve things like cognitive, behavioral, affective, and contextual factors that would explain, uh, offending behavior as well.

Alissa (13:40):

What came to mind when you talked about a desire for intimacy and cases like, uh, Mary Kay LeTourneau and Debra LaFave and others where teachers abused younger boys, uh, is the issue of cognitive distortions that we talked about right earlier in the season. And we don't often hear them talked about with, uh, women who sexually offend. But that's absolutely the first thing that came to mind that somehow this was a loving, consensual relationship, right. Um, when we know that women are that when we, when we know that children can't consent to those kinds of behaviors,

Alexa (14:17):

Right. And if you've seen interviews with especially Debra LaFave, I think she speaks about the abuse almost like in a giddy way as if she was a teenager when it was happening. Like she, there's clearly some disconnect between what she understands to be that relationship and what that relationship quote unquote actually was, which was abuse.

Alissa (14:45):

Right, right. So, I really want to talk about your dissertation research. Um, you know, as you know, many years ago I had the opportunity to read it and I was fascinated by it. And I'm wondering what led you to the specific study? Can you tell me about data collection and maybe some of the findings of the study?

Alexa (15:06):

So, like I said, I was really interested ultimately in looking at, or trying to compare females who offend alone and females who offend with a co-offending partner, because I thought that was just fascinating and something that you don't, that wasn't out there. I identified a gap, it was a big hole at the time, especially. There's been more research around it over time, but when I was looking there really wasn't much of anything. So, I really wanted to look at what the possible differences were between these two groups and data collection. And all of that proved to be very challenging because there are so few women who are, um, I have either been convicted of a sexual offense or willing to talk about that. It was just, it was very challenging. And so ultimately on my third attempt at data collection that was successful and I was able to go to a women's correctional facility in the Midwest and speak to the women there that were convicted of acts of child sexual abuse. So, to give you sort of an idea, I contacted all of the women in the state that had been convicted of child sexual abuse, and that was 13 women. So ultimately, I ended up, uh, interviewing six of the women that were incarcerated and then one woman who was also on probation. Uh, so the total number of women that I talked to is seven, which was ultimately, um, roughly 40, 46% of the total women incarcerated are on probation and state, um, at that time for acts of child sexual abuse.

Alissa (17:02):

So, can you talk a little bit about the interviews that you conducted?

Alexa (17:06):

Sure. So, the interviews were actually a lot easier in a way than I thought they would be. I didn't have a lot of, there was no one I could I, in my department that had done research on sexual violence and there was no one that had done anything in terms of qualitative research, speaking to people who had perpetrated acts of sexual violence. So, I was kind of going in blind a little bit. So, the interviews were conducted in a private room in the women's correctional facility, and they usually lasted three to four hours. Some of them were longer, this room was sort of hidden from view so that the other incarcerated people couldn't see who was there talking to, who there was concerns that there could be retaliation from the other women inside the correctional facility. If these, this group of women were identified somehow as women who had perpetrated acts of sexual violence against children. So, all of these steps were taken to sort of protect their anonymity as much as possible.

Alissa (18:17):

Can you sort of set the stage of like what it was like, um, being in the room and get uncomfortable with the women that you were going to be interviewing and what did that feel like for you?

Alexa (18:30):

So it was, it was really nerve wracking. Um, it was the first time I'd been to a prison. So, there's that. Um, I actually had been there once before to sort of give my explanation of my research to everybody that was there and to the warden, but I had never been inside, um, the actual prison before. So, um, we were in a very, very tiny room and the women had actually told me that it was off of a room that they used to put people on mental health holds in. So a lady that worked there, she was just in plain clothes would come and have me sit down there, this plastic table. And I had my little recorder and my notebook, and she would, she would bring, um, one of the women in, and I really had no idea what to expect. And I was pleasantly surprised at how forthcoming and open all of them were. They were all very comfortable right away and just willing to answer any of my questions. So, I felt really lucky in that part of it because, uh, that was a concern that they just wouldn't talk to me, but they did.

Alissa (19:47):

So, what were some of your findings?

Alexa (19:50):

A lot of my findings were really just consistent with what we know, things that stood out to me significantly where the abuse histories of these women. So, all of them had experienced child sexual abuse and rape at least once in their lives. And most of their abuse histories were extensive. And I've heard a lot of, you know, we all know here, our listeners know, like I've heard a lot. And some of the things that they told me today are the most shocking things I've ever heard. And, you know, it, it was interesting also because there were two women who would be categorized as co-offenders in the group. And there happened to be one that fit the male-accompanied and one that fit the male-coerced type. So, I call her Linda, the woman who is the male-accompanied type of offender, she was probably, she was my longest interview.

Alexa (20:59):

She's my most detailed interview. She was severely sexually abused as a child, as an adult. And she was incarcerated for a sentence of a hundred years, almost for sexually abusing her two daughters. And when we were talking about the abuse that, you know, she perpetrated with her boyfriend at the time, she said that he had been the one to initiate, abusing her younger daughter. And I asked her why she thought that was okay. And she said, "Well, I was abused used at that age and I'm fine. So, I didn't think it would be detrimental to her". And I just remember thinking, that's just like, it's, it's tragic. It's so tragic

that her abuse history was so severe that that's normal. You know, that was, you know, it was just really, it was really hard and really sad for her, for, for me listening to her.

Alexa (22:05):

And it was really interesting that she got that long sentence, which I think is a function of the fact that she abused her own daughters. The other, a woman who had a, a co-offending partner definitely fit that coerced model. She visibly started shaking when we talked about her husband, who she perpetrated the abuse with, she was very, to that day, terrified of him. Um, and you know, she was, she, you could tell that she was ashamed of what she had done and she was, she still seemed submissive at that point, like when I had the conversation with her, if that makes sense, like she just, you know, was, she still seemed scared of him. So, she really fit that description as well. So when we talked previously on the podcast about cognitive distortions, functioning is sort of a tool that allows a person to deny their role in an offense or minimize the injury they've caused, or somehow justify an excuse their behavior.

Alexa (23:12):

When I was sort of examining the interview data, um, and looking at patterns and their responses about 43% of the women somehow attributed blame to the victim. But the same number said that they committed the offense to please their male co-offender. So, in addition to the two women who had a clear co-offending partner, there was another woman who, whose husband was not incarcerated for any sexual offense. He was never prosecuted a sexual offense, but she was very adamant that he had coerced her into sexually abusing her son. So, although she didn't necessarily have a co-offending partner, she used a co-offending partner explanation, and definitely believed that that that's what happened, uh, in terms of their story. It had been a custody dispute and there was a lot going on there as well. Um, when we talk about a sort of attributing blame to the victim, those instances were, were instances of women who had sexually abused an adolescent and believed that somehow of that adolescent was coming on to them or were, was in a relationship with them, um, was seducing them. And, uh, so that was where some of those cognitive distortions lay.

Alissa (24:51):

You know, some of these women had abused their own children. You just talked about one where it was, uh, an adolescent. Um, I'm not sure the relationship between that adolescent and that adult, um, but for the ones that were abusing children that were not their children, how did they select the children that they abused? Did they talk about that at all?

Alexa (25:12):

So, in two, uh, two of the cases, uh, two of the cases for sure there was that caretaking role. So, Sally, uh, she was the babysitter for the girl next door. And so, after school, this young girl would come over and be at her house. And as Sally describes it, one thing led to another, um, another one of the women had a

young, well, not a young son, but an adolescent son and the person that she abused was a friend of her son's. Um, so in a lot of instances, it's that caretaking matronly, babysitter-sort of role that allows for their victim selection,

Alissa (26:01):

What were some of the strategies they use to keep their acts hidden from others?

Alexa (26:06):

So, it's really interesting is that most of them talked about how they really didn't have to hide it because nobody was paying attention to what was going on with them. So they were very isolated and in very dysfunctional families and, you know, ultimately, almost all of them, except for, um, Linda, who I talked about, who abused both of her children, almost all of the women were relieved when the truth came out, because they had so much guilt about what they had done. Like they knew it wrong and it was eating them up inside. And most of them described feeling a significant amount of relief once it was all out there, which was very interesting.

Alissa (26:55):

Yeah. You talked about how, uh, you know, you've heard a lot, our listeners know that you have heard a lot, and you said that some of the things that you heard are still some of the most difficult for you, what did it feel like to hear those things? What was your reaction to it and how did you deal with that?

Alexa (27:18):

Um, it was, it was challenging because on one level I hear them and see them as victims, as survivors. And so, I instinctively feel this strong sense of empathy and wanting to tell them, I'm sorry for that happened. And I think I did, I probably did say, I'm sorry that that happened to you because I, I am, you know, I was, I still am right. At the same time, it was very difficult to also digest that they had also committed some of these really egregious acts for which they were incarcerated. So, it was hard. It was really hard to not show like too much emotion when, you know, we're having these conversations that are very emotionally charged for, for many reasons. Um, but then, you know, there were also women who were so detached from what had happened to them and their victimization, that it was just, they, like I said, that some didn't make a connection at all between what had, had happened to them and what they had done while others justified it by saying, well, it happened to me and I really didn't think it was that big of a deal.

Alexa (28:41):

So, it was very interesting to see the various levels of processing of their, their victimizations that had, or had not gone on.

Alissa (28:51):

Yeah. So how did you decompress? How did you deal with…?

Alexa (28:58):

I went back to my little hotel room in the middle of nowhere in the snow and watched reality TV. So yeah, that probably would have been wise for me to have some sort of a decompression built in, but really I did like, um, two or three interviews a day, so I'd be there all day doing this and then I'd go home to the little ice box motel and yeah. Carried on. So, it was really when I started doing, like, I did the transcription of all the interviews because my advisors thought it would be a good exercise, me to do my own transcription. Uh, so when I did that, it was like, wow, I digested it more. Then the second sort of the second time around, um, you know, cause you you're listening to the sentences over and over and over and it's so you can't hide from it at that point. And it's, it was tough. It was draining, it was very draining getting through those transcriptions. And it was really heartbreaking also because it seems so preventable so much of it because I, I feel like the, the extensive abuse that they experienced, that's what we're talking about right. Is the whole point of this podcast is if we can prevent this in the first place, you know, that it would be a lot less likely to happen.

Alissa (30:36):

Right. Right. So, I really enjoy talking about your research. I love like geeking out with you about stuff like that. Um, there's also, you know, some research on, um, disparities in sentencing and punishment, uh, for comparing men and women who sexually offend of. So, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

Alexa (31:04):

Yeah. So, um, I guess interestingly or perhaps not surprisingly, um, most studies that compare sentence length of male and females who perpetrated sexual offenses, um, they found when other variables are considered, there's a significant difference in sentence length. So typically, the average sentence length for men who perpetrate acts of sexual violence are longer. So, this kind of implies that even a social institution like the criminal justice system is still reluctant to break those social norms and gender roles. Um, when we see an atypical, uh, gender behavior, it's just atypical for women to behave that way. That's the reasoning and the explanation that we still have women don't do such things. I think that was

a title of an article published a long time ago about, um, women who sexually offend is that women don't do such things or women don't behave that way. We still have those notions in our mind.

Alexa (32:08):

Part of the reason we don't know more about that is because people are still reluctant to report female perpetrated abuse, especially men they're just reluctant to report it. And it's, I think there's a lot of different reasons for that. I think one reason is you're supposed to enjoy it. It's so great to have an older woman want to have sex with you. Right. And so, you're socialized into thinking, well, I've got to like this it's okay. Everybody else would enjoy it. And so, you grow up and you're confused about why this is impacting me when everybody said I should have liked it and that it was okay. You know, that's confusing. And I also think that there's just this, this idea that, that men are less likely to report in general because that's still, you know, sort of the stigma around men coming forward. And that idea of not being masculine or having some sort of gender identities, confusion,

Alissa (33:11):

We could stop some really heinous, violent offenses if we knew about the abuse when it was happening.

Alexa (33:19):

Exactly. Absolutely. So that's, it's important. Then you add the extra layer of stigma of incest abuse, right? So that's even more challenging for a child to come forward about there's more social stigma around it. It's just that extra layer of, you know, that creates so much more of a challenge, I think in terms of having any concrete data about it, because it's so often not talked about. Right. The only last thing that I wanted to say was while I was there, since I was there with these women and had the opportunity to talk to them about what it was like to be a woman incarcerated for a sexual offense, they said a lot of interesting things, but one of the most interesting things that literally they all said was that they wish they had treatment. They did not have access to treatment. Some of them were there when there was still sex offender treatment happening in this correctional facility, but eventually the program was stopped.

Alissa (34:29):

Was it because there were just too few women?

Alexa (34:32):

Yeah. Too few women. And there was just a lack of money to continue on. And these women all wholeheartedly really wanted the treatment because they felt like it was really helping them address, even if they didn't want to address the issues of their offense. It was helping them address these underlying issues that they had that they never talked about. So, their own abuse, their family life and their very disruptive relationships with romantic partners, none of them had a stable relationship with a

romantic partner. So, all of those things were really important to them in addition to some of them, in addition to understanding why they did this. So that was sort of an unfortunate finding that was unexpected for me.

Alissa (35:25):

Can you talk a little bit about treatment for women who sexually offend more generally, like not just necessarily in this particular prison, but, um, you know, there are some of treatment in general for people who sexually offend, and we're going to be talking about treatment in a couple of episodes. Um, but if there are critiques about treatment in general, can you say a little bit about some of the issues with treatment for women who sexually offend more specifically?

Alexa (35:53):

So, one of the main issues, um, for, in terms of treatment for women is that there's very few gendered models of treatment available. So, most of the treatment models are built around what we use for males that perpetrate sexual offenses. Um, and there's nothing, not nothing but very few that are done through a gendered lens. And that concerns me because if we're talking about co-offending, and romantic relationships and things like that, being pathways or explanations for offending behavior, that should be a centerpiece of their treatment experience like unpacking that co-offending relationship. To me that seems central. If we're talking about 50% of all women who are identified as somebody that's committed an act of sexual harm, then there needs to be an emphasis on this co-offending relationship. And where are these men that are in these co-offending pairs? Because we don't have all of these male offenders saying that they've had a female co-offender so what the heck is that all about?

Alissa (37:04):

Do you think that maybe it's because when women are, uh, uncovered that they take the fall, similar to a lot of drug cases that we see?

Alexa (37:14):

Yeah. You know, I wouldn't, that's an interesting explanation for it. I wouldn't be surprised if that was the case or perhaps their perception of what was happening is different than the way a male might be perceiving the situation, which again, would point to a need for different treatment through a gender lens. Um, the other reason I think that that treatment should be different is because we know that women have these extensive abuse histories and that would need to be delved into, I would think a lot in any sort of treatment model for females who've abused, uh, sexually abused anybody. So, yeah. Um, it's yeah, it's just unfortunate that, you know, there's such a limited, um, limited resources available for, for them.

Alissa (38:12):

So, I started the episode by talking about Mary Kay LeTourneau and Debra LaFave. And I'm wondering if we can talk for a moment about cases like theirs, why do you think it's so important that we both shed light on cases like these and not equate them with all cases where women sexually offend?

Alexa (38:30):

Um, so I, I'm glad you bring this up, because it is really important. And Deborah LaFave, she's an example I often use in my class when we get to female perpetrators of sexual abuse, it's important to understand that many women who perpetrate acts of sexual violence are in these caretaking teacher sort of roles. And it's important to understand that the offenses they perpetrate cause harm. I think that's the key takeaway from their stories for me is that we need to understand that sexual harm is sexual harm. And just as there are all types of males who perpetrate sexual offenses, they're all types of females that do as well. So just like there is Mary Kay LeTourneau, there are females who perpetrate acts of sexual violence and who are sadistic and violent in nature in their offenses who harm many, many victims, you know, have multiple victims. So, they're not a homogenous group, you know, there's, there's many types and it's just, we just haven't gotten there. Like we have with males that perpetrate acts of sexual violence. And a lot of that has to do with how we as a society, see women, how the media portrays women, you know, in that sort of sensationalized sexual way. And it's just leads to a lot more confusion amongst the public. But then also people that are being abused by a woman, it leads to a lot of confusion for, for people experiencing them.

Alissa (40:16):

Sure. You know, I've always been intrigued by, um, you know, cases where there are male teachers who abuse female students. Um, and they are treated so differently from female teachers who have used male students, not to mention when you're dealing with a same sex abuse, um, like we just hold them to very, very different standards. Um, and I've always been interested by that. What do you think is the most important thing you want our listeners to know about women who sexually offend?

Alexa (41:00):

Um, I think a couple of things. So one is that there are more women who are perpetrating acts of sexual violence out there than we realize. And it's linked to those myths. We've talked about before the stranger danger myth plays right into the under detection of females who are sexually abused, but I'd also like people to understand that the harm that's perpetrated on the victim is significant. So even if it's, we're talking about the hot 26 year old teacher and this 13 year old boy, even if he thinks it's cool right now, many of these young men grow up to have challenges around dealing with that sexual harm because it is sexual harm. And it can really damage somebody when you have an entire society saying to you, it's cool. It's not that big of a deal. It's not that bad. You should like it. So, I think that that is the

most important thing it's like to validate the harmful sexual experiences that some victims suffer and that are minimized by all of us in a lot of ways.

Alissa:

So, one last question for you, if you could do any study on female sexual offending right now, what would it be and why?

Alexa (42:31):

This is a hard question to answer, but honestly, if I could do anything and if I had unlimited resources and time, I would do my study again, but way bigger. Um, I would want to have a huge sample size of, and compare, really do a comparison of solo and co-offending females and delve really a lot more into that co-offending partnership or relationship, um, and really try to understand what's going on there and what that's all about. Um, I feel like there's, something's happening there, that we don't have a clear picture on. And I think it would go a long way into understanding why these women end up offending sexually.

Alissa:

I have to say, Lex, there's nothing that I love more than geeking out with you about data and research and like understanding the phenomena of, uh, sexual abuse and sexual offender. Uh, and I've really had so much fun talking to you today about your work.

Alexa (44:02):

Anytime!

Alissa (44:04):

We would love to hear your thoughts about this episode, about the podcast in general, and answer any questions that you might have about the topics we've covered or questions about us. So, you can contact us at beyondfearpodcastatgmail.com. And remember you can find our episodes on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and all other podcast platforms. Head over to our website at www.beyondfearpodcast.com for blog posts, resources, readings, and episode transcripts. You can follow us on Twitter @fearcrimes, Instagram @beyondfearpodcast and you can like and follow our Facebook Group called Beyond Fear the Sex Crimes Podcast.