Book section:

ESSAYS AND REVIEWS

Static-99 Sex Offender Risk Assessment Course (SOAP100), Offered By the Justice Institute of British Columbia, http://www.jibc.ca/ccjd/sexOffender.htm, $467 (Canadian).

REVIEWED BY
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Forensic psychologists and psychiatrists are frequently called upon to help assess the likelihood that a particular person will commit future acts of sexual violence (Campbell, 2004; Doren, 2002; Witt & Conroy, in press). Three plausible approaches to risk assessment have been described (Hanson, 1998) and to this point research has not shown any of the methods to be empirically superior to the others (see DeClue, 2005, commenting on Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). Two of the three approaches, the *pure-actuarial* and the *adjusted-actuarial* approaches, employ an actuarial instrument in the prediction process. In the *pure-actuarial* approach, the evaluator considers a pre-determined set of risk factors and follows a pre-determined formula for weighing the combination of factors. In the *adjusted-actuarial* approach, the evaluator begins with an actuarial instrument but then may or may not adjust the estimated risk after considering additional variables not included in the actuarial instrument.

One of the most used and most researched actuarial instruments for predicting sexual re-offense is the Static-99 (Hanson & Harris, 2000; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). One study found it to be the "most frequently and most intensely employed instrument" for sex-offender risk assessments (Archer, Buffington-Vollum, Stredny, & Handel, 2006, p. 88). The Coding Rules were updated in 2003

(Harris, Phenix, Hanson, & Thornton, 2003). The authors of the Coding Rules attempted to be as specific as possible, to anticipate difficulties in scoring the Static-99 and to provide detailed examples. They have largely succeeded, and they are to be commended for their work.

But even though the Coding Rules provide good instruction in how to score the Static-99, evaluators in the field often have questions about how to score the instrument in a particular case. One evaluator who posed Static-99 scoring questions to the Internet list psylaw told me that he received a wide range of answers to each question, and I suspect that his experience is far from unique. When I have suggested that evaluators undergo training presented by an expert in scoring the Static-99 (such as one of the co-authors of the coding rules), I have been told that such training opportunities are few and far between. That is a shame, because proper selection, data input, and scoring of actuarial instruments is essential if such instruments are to be used (see DeClue, 2002, 2005).

But here comes, to save our day, an online course in scoring the Static-99. R. Karl Hanson, Ph.D., who is both a co-developer of the Static-99 and a co-author of the current Coding Rules, delivers this online training using videotaped segments. Necessary materials, including the Coding Rules and handouts, are also provided online. The learning experience is facilitated by an instructor who is experienced with sex offenders and risk assessments.

The course is designed for professionals conducting risk assessments with sexual offenders, including probation officers, parole officers, police officers, institutional classification officers, forensic social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. The course website promises, "Although it is primarily directed to those with no prior experience with Static-99, the course would also be suitable to current users of Static-99 seeking an opportunity to refine and consolidate

their expertise." I found that to be true. I have previously participated in group training provided by one of the authors of the current Coding Rules and I have scored the Static-99 in approximately 200 cases, but I still found this course to be a very useful review.

As promised, the course uses a variety of audiovisual tools (mainly Dr. Hanson lecturing, PowerPoint, and pdf documents) to present the material. Participants practice scoring the Static-99 based on material presented in vignettes. Participants can pose questions to the instructor and an online "class discussion" ensues. A final test is presented, and participants who get 80% of the items correct pass the course.

I recommend this course to anyone who uses, or plans to use, an actuarial tool to assist is assessing future risk of sexual violence.

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