A Comparison of Sexual Murderers’ and Rapists’ Pathways: Should We Continue to Classify Both Types of Offender as Simply “Sexual Aggressors of Women”?

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Most people would find it inconceivable that men who kill or sexually assault women have any rational basis for their behaviour. However, scientific research over the last 20 years has developed models of, and empirically validated, a variety of pathways in the offending process of sexual aggressors of women (Hudson, Ward, & McCormack, 1999; Polaschek, 1999; Polaschek & Hudson, 2004; Polaschek, Hudson, Ward, & Siegert, 2001). Recent studies of sexual aggressors against women by Proulx and Beauregard (2014) and Vettor, Beech, and Woodhams (2014) relied upon samples containing high proportions of sexual murderers (32.8% and 37.3%, respectively), but neither compared pathways specific to the offending processes of extrafamilial sexual murderers against women (SM) and rapists (R).

The objective of this study was to determine whether the pathways in the offending process of sexual murderers and rapists are similar. Information on 63 sexual murderers and 121 rapists incarcerated in Quebec (Canada) was collected by two criminologists. Each participant was evaluated using a variety of psychometric instruments. Information on sexual and general lifestyle, precrime and postcrime factors, and modus operandi was collected during a semi-structured interview based on the Computerized Sex Offenders Questionnaire (St-Yves, Proulx, & McKibben, 1994). Two-step cluster analyses, a hierarchical clustering algorithm, and bivariate analyses ($X^2$) were used to identify pathways in the offending processes of sexual murderers of women.

The results suggest that: 1) sexual murderers and rapists have similar personality profiles (anxious, dramatic), but differ in terms of general lifestyle (SM: substance abuse), sexual lifestyle (SM: deviant sexual fantasies, limited range of sexual behaviors with a partner), life context (SM: low self-esteem), and modus operandi (R: opportunistic crime script); 2) both sexual murderers and rapists follow multiple pathways (SM: sadistic, angry; R: sadistic, angry, opportunistic); 3) problematic factors of all types—general and sexual lifestyle, precrime life context, immediate precursors to the crime, modus operandi—were more prevalent among sexual murderers than among rapists. In conclusion, extrafamilial sexual murderers against women appear to have a more deviant profile than rapists, and their inclusion in an undifferentiated sample of “sexual aggressors of women” (i.e. a sample
including both sexual murderers and rapists) presumably raises the deviancy for the sample as a whole. The forensic and theoretical implications of these results will be discussed.

Goals of the Poster Presentation:
1. Compare pathways in the offending process of sexual murderers of women and rapists.
2. Verify the hypothesis that sexual murderers and rapists are characterized by heterogeneous offending processes.
3. Identify the areas in which sexual murderers exhibit a higher prevalence than rapists.