

## ***BETTER TOGETHER***

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

**F-37**

### **Diversity in Sexual Murderers**

Symposium Chair: Eric Beauregard, PhD  
Simon Fraser University

Sexual homicide constitutes probably one of the most unusual forms of sexual crimes. Given that sexual homicides comprise such a small percentage of violent crime and trends indicate that they are becoming more rare, why is there a need to study this specific type of homicide in the first place? First, crime seriousness surveys have shown tremendous public concern over sexual homicide, assigning it the second highest seriousness rating among over 200 crimes. Although rare, sexual homicide provokes fear in the community, probably due in part to the potential brutality and gruesomeness of the acts but also to the apparent randomness of victim selection. Second, because of the low base rate of sexual homicide, gaining valuable and reliable knowledge about these crimes and offenders has proven to be very difficult. Much of the early research conducted on sexual homicide has been clinical in nature, involving more often than not small convenience samples. Thus, accumulating knowledge that can inform effective clinical and correctional interventions has been problematic. Finally, these behaviourally rich cases tend to present in a fashion that differs from other forms of violent crime. Each case may vary in terms of the modus operandi and ritualistic behaviour exhibited, causing each case to appear unique. Considering all these previous points, the aim of this symposium is to shed some light on the diversity of sexual murderers. The diversity of sexual murderers will be examined through existing typologies, the choice of victim type, and the psychopathology of these offenders. Each presentation will offer a new perspective on the issue of diversity in sexual homicide as well as suggest potential clinical and theoretical implications.

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## **Organization Versus Disorganization in Subtypes of Sexual Murder, and in Research Approaches**

Tamsin Higgs, DForenPsy  
Université de Montréal

Clinical case formulation, intervention, and risk prediction is aided by person-oriented, as opposed to variable-oriented approaches to understanding similarities and differences within a given population. That is, there are advantages for understanding criminal behaviour using the configurations of factors offered by a typology. In the sexual murder literature, there are a number of widely cited, influential typologies. For example, the organized/disorganized dichotomy identified by FBI agents in the late 1980s. This presentation will act as a guide from the seminal FBI work, through what will be argued to be an important and informative, but disorganized field of study, to the current empirically supported understanding of diverse types of sexual murderer, ending by signposting future directions in sexual homicide research.

Empirical work underpinning current understanding of the heterogeneity among sexual murderers will be presented in the form of systematic review results. This will provide a synthesis of the most recent and scientifically grounded endeavours in this area of sexual violence research, while also contextualizing the research presented in the following parts of the symposium within contemporary views of sexual murder.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to describe strengths and weaknesses in published descriptions of subtypes of sexual murder.
- Learners should be better able to explain the empirically supported distinctions between subtypes of sexual murder.
- Learners should be better able to identify factors important for clinical case formulation with perpetrators of sexual murder.

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## Sexual Murderers of Children: Psychopathological and Modus Operandi Factors

Jean Proulx, PhD  
University of Montreal  
Jonathan James, PhD Candidate  
University of Montreal  
Mélina Siwic, MSc Candidate  
University of Montreal  
Eric Beauregard, PhD  
Simon Fraser University

There is a scarcity of comparative studies on sexual murderers of children. Three studies have compared sexual murderers of children to sexual aggressors of women. In the former group, the prevalence of deviant sexual fantasies, prior convictions for non-contact sex crimes, consumption of pornography, compulsive masturbation, and social isolation was higher than in the group of sexual aggressors of women. Despite the value of these comparative studies, they were based on a limited number of sexual murderers of children ( $N = 61$ ). Consequently, the aim of the current study was to replicate and extend the previous ones. The total sample includes 66 adult male sexual murderers (26 of children, 40 of women). In our sample, sexual sadism and homicidal fantasies were less frequent in sexual murderers of children than in sexual murderers of women. Psychopathy was quite prevalent in both types of sexual murderers. Finally, the prevalence of psychosocial problems (social isolation, feelings of rejection, family problems) was lower in sexual murderers of children than in sexual murderers of women. These results obtained in a sample from France differ in many ways from those obtained in Canadian and German samples. The role of cultural factors is a possible explanation for these discrepancies.

### Learning Goals:

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to clarify the diversity among sexual murderers.
- Learners should be better able to explain the psychopathological and modus operandi factors that are specific to sexual murderers of women.
- Learners should be better able to explain the psychopathological and modus operandi factors that are specific to sexual murderers of children.

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## **Aren't They All Psychopaths? Revisiting the Link Between Personality and Sexual Homicide**

Eric Beauregard, PhD  
Matt DeLisi  
Simon Fraser University

Previous studies have suggested that considering the nature of the crime of the sexual homicide offender (SHO), they had to present psychopathic personality. Although several studies found a high prevalence of psychopathic personality in SHOs, other studies have also found that these offenders were characterized by other personality disorders as well (e.g., Borderline, Schizoid). However, in order to establish a link between the personality and sexual homicide, it is crucial to include a control group in the analyses. To our knowledge, except for one study (Sauvetre & Proulx, 2007), no studies have included such control group. Moreover, to test the real contribution of personality on sexual homicide, it is important to control for other factors as well that we know are capable to distinguish between SHOs and nonhomicidal sex offenders (NHSOs), once again, something that has not been done thus far. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to examine the personality profile of the SHOs, by comparing them with a group of violent nonhomicidal sex offenders (VNHSOs) and a group of NHSOs on clinical diagnostics of personality disorders. Moreover, the study takes into account various crime characteristics that have been found in previous studies to distinguish those sex offenders who kill from sex offenders who do not kill, namely some pre-crime factors (i.e., alcohol, drug, and pornography prior to the crime) as well as factors related specifically to the criminal event (i.e., victim selection, weapon used, intrusive sexual acts, victim forced to commit sexual acts, and humiliation of the victim). Findings show that the personality profile of SHOs is comprised primarily of Schizoid and Borderline Personality Disorders, and these offenders were significantly likely to select a victim, use a weapon, and use drugs and alcohol before their offenses, but less likely to force their victim to engage in sexual acts or humiliate them. The comorbidity of Schizoid, Borderline, and Antisocial Personality Disorder features presents unique personality dysfunction that facilitates the lethal sexual violence of SHOs relative to their non-homicidal sexual offender peers. Implications of the results both at the theoretical and clinical levels will be discussed.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to clarify the personality profile of sexual murderers.
- Learners should be better able to explain the role of personality in the severity of sexual crimes, specifically leading to lethal violence.

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- Learners should be better able to understand the connection between personality and various crime characteristics in the commission of a sexual homicide.

**Eric Beauregard** is a Professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University (Canada). Before obtaining his PhD in criminology from the University of Montreal, Dr. Beauregard was working for Correctional Service of Canada where he was responsible for the assessment of sex offenders. Over the last 15 years, he has published over a hundred publications in the field of sexual violence. His research interests focus on the crime-commission process, decision-making, and the criminal investigation. He currently leads a research project on sexual homicide in Canada.

**Tamsin Higgs** is a UK registered Forensic Psychologist. She completed her doctorate in forensic psychology at The University of Nottingham, UK, and is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, working with Professor Franca Cortoni, at the International Centre for Comparative Criminology, University of Montreal. Dr. Higgs has published nine peer-reviewed articles and co-authored three book chapters, and alongside her postdoctoral research, she is currently working on further publications on the subject of sexual violence and the treatment of sexual aggressors.

**Jean Proulx** is a professor in, and the Director of, the School of Criminology at the University of Montreal, and Researcher at the International Centre for Comparative Criminology at that university. Since 1987, he has also been active, both as researcher and forensic psychologist, in treatment programs for sex offenders at the Philippe-Pinel Institute of Montreal, a maximum security psychiatric institution. His main research interests are the pathways in the offending process, personality profiles, and sexual preferences and recidivism risk factors in sexual murderers, rapists, paedophiles and incest offenders. Over the last 30 years, he has published 10 books, and more than 150 book chapters and peer-reviewed articles in French and in English.