



Sexual Murderers

A Comparative Analysis and New Perspectives

Edited by
Jean Proulx, Éric Beauregard,
Maurice Cusson and Alexandre Nicole

Translated by Steven Sacks

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SEXUAL MURDERERS

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PREFACE

Sexual murderers quite rightly attract significant public attention. Indeed, they are among the most consistently noted sexual offenders to appear in the public media. As a result, considerable attention has been given to those offenders in the professional literature. Unfortunately much of this literature, until quite recently, reflected no more than the untested opinions of clinicians who had worked with these men (and they are almost all men, a point not all authors attend to). As a more empirically based literature has appeared, it has become clear that many of the purportedly distinguishing features of these offenders do not distinguish them from other sexual offenders. This, in fact, is the essential and most important feature of the evidence reported in Proulx et al.'s excellent book.

Sexual murderers, as Proulx et al. make clear, are a mixed group, a fact often overlooked in empirical studies. The FBI researchers, who have been among the foremost authors on this topic, characteristically include serial sexual murderers, sexually sadistic murderers and sexual murderers with just one victim where there is no evidence of sadism. Proulx et al. sensibly distinguish these groups and focus all but one of their studies on the single-victim sexual murderers by comparing them with nonmurderous sexual aggressors (i.e., rapists of adult women). Their other study compared sadists with nonsadistic sexual aggressors.

The *Introduction* to this book provides an excellent overview of the results of the Montreal studies of sexual murderers, revealing, as noted above, that these men have far more in common with sexual aggressors who do not murder than a reading of the prior literature would imply. The Montreal studies also reveal that the murder of a victim occurring in the course of a sexual assault has various causes (e.g. to silence the witness, an expression of rage, a response to victim resistance and as a result of sadistic impulses). However, the Montreal group generated a 'decision tree' revealing that four features are strongly predictive of the occurrence of murder during a sexual crime: pre-crime anger; a stranger victim; offender has a weapon; and victim resistance. This latter feature is quite disappointing, since feminists at one time advocated training women to fight back in the event that they

might be sexually attacked, and presumably fighting back reduces the tendency of victims to blame themselves for the abuse.

The valuable chapters by the Montreal group of researchers are followed by two outstanding contributions by the Birmingham group, whose studies produced findings essentially matching those of the Montreal researchers. The addition, in the Birmingham reports, of a comparison between sexual murderers and rapists on demographic features and psychometric results adds to the overall picture of sexual murderers.

Finally there are two chapters that focus on what are said to be practical features. I must say I was surprised to learn that work over the past few years on profiling has revealed utility to this approach. However, the authors are careful to point out that too many practitioners overemphasize the 'art' or 'semi-mystical' aspect of applied profiling. Apparently, adhering carefully to the empirically established rules of profiling can result in very valuable information that can assist investigators. The last chapter treads where few authors have gone before to suggest ways to therapeutically intervene with sexual murderers. While there are good suggestions made for treatment, these need to be subjected to empirical analysis, although one problem that besets such endeavours is the fact that few sexual murderers get released from prison and those that do are quite old at the time of release. Since we now know that age at release markedly alters the likelihood of reoffending among sexual offenders, this latter feature will always remain a confounder in examining the effects of treatment on sexual murderers.

I found this book to be very valuable and I congratulate the authors on their top-class work. The topic of sexual murderers has been of considerable interest to me in my work over the past 38 years of treating sexual offenders. At last I feel I have some empirical guides to help me in my work with these men.

William L. Marshall, OC, PhD, FRSC

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INTRODUCTION

SEXUAL MURDERERS: MYTH AND REALITY

Maurice Cusson

Why is it that sexual murder elicits such a striking mixture of revulsion and fascination from us? Perhaps it is because the sexual murderer, although a figure of evil, bridges the gap between the two antithetical realities of unbridled violence and sexual pleasure. Krafft-Ebing believed that this association can be traced back to the Marquis de Sade, that regular guest of French asylums and prisons from 1763 until his death in 1814. Sadism – for that is the name we know it by today – appeared to Kraft-Ebing to be the key, the direct link between violence and sexual pleasure.

Since then, the shadow of de Sade has hovered in the background of every study of sexual murder. Sexual murder is the culmination of an attack prepared with the express purpose of seeking pleasure, even orgasm, in the subjugation, rape and suffering of a carefully selected woman. Indeed, it is precisely because they obtain pleasure in the suffering and humiliation of women that sexual murderers torture and kill their victims. Most authors believe that this aberrant motivation originates in long-nurtured fantasies in which cruelty and sexual pleasure are intermingled. Once a sadist has experienced the pleasure of sexual murder, he develops an obsession for it and sets out on murderous hunts over and over again. Hardly surprising, therefore, that of all sexual murderers, it is the serial killer who predominates in literature – both professional and fictional. It goes without saying