

Suspect Typology; Profiling the Sex Offender

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- **“Sexual Assault Investigations: A Telecourse Reference Guide.”** Produced by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training. Copyright 1995.

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Suspect Typology

In 1979, Dr. Nicholas Groth and H. Jean Birnbaum developed a profile of several types of assault, drawn from their work with people who had been arrested, convicted and incarcerated for crimes of sexual violence.¹ The following section is an adaptation of this work to assist law enforcement officers in developing appropriate investigative questions and to determine patterns of offenders in a given community.

It is important to recognize the limitations of the following typology as it is based on research with incarcerated sex offenders; moreover it is usually applied when investigating an unknown rapist. In addition, investigators must recognize that a sex offender may not fit neatly into one typology, but instead may exhibit characteristics from multiple typologies or none at all.

Investigators should review all available information to assess an offender's typology, including: victim/witness statements, any suspect statements made to the responding officer, evidence, modus operandi, reports of previous offenses, and the suspect's criminal history. This assessment will help you organize your investigation, prioritize your leads, support a search warrant and determine how best to investigate a particular offender. However, experienced investigators know that a suspect should never be eliminated solely because he doesn't fit a typology.

Power Rapist

There are two types of Power Rapists, the *Power Reassurance Rapist* and the *Power Assertive Rapist*. These men are convinced of their sexual prowess. Power rapists show less aggression in both sexual and non-sexual situations than other kinds of rapists. They do not use unnecessary force beyond what is necessary to achieve the rape. They exhibit anger only in response to victim resistance, but will use any amount of force necessary to accomplish their goal. This may include verbal intimidation, use of a weapon, or actual physical force. However, they will sometimes run away if the victim screams or fights back. They do not want to harm the victim physically, but rather to own her sexually and achieve sexual submission. In cases where such power rapists know their victims, they use the relationship to satisfy their immediate needs, without caring how this will affect the victim.

Opportunistic Rapists often fall under this category of Power Rapist. (e.g. Burglars who sexually assault a victim during a robbery. This rapist usually does not intend to physically harm the victim.)

¹ Groth, Nicholas A. *Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender*. Plenum Press: New York.

Additional characteristics of the two types of power rapists may include the following:

Power Reassurance Rapist (Gentleman Rapist)

Style of Attack

- The assault is premeditated and preceded by persistent rape fantasies. His fantasy is that the victim wants him and he may instruct her to tell him this during the assault. These suspects often give the victim information about them such as a pager or phone number to contact them to arrange for another “consensual” sexual encounter.
- The offender’s language is instructional and inquisitive: giving orders, asking personal questions, and inquiring as to the victim’s response.
- The offender uses limited force/threats necessary to gain control and overcome resistance of the victim. The victims may be unharmed and any bodily injury would most likely be inadvertent rather than intentional.
- He will rely on the threat of a weapon but often times will not have one. Weapons frequently employed and brought to the scene are for the purpose of threat or intimidation more than injury. If the offender uses a weapon, it is often unintentional.
- He will sometimes advise the victim he has an accomplice.
- This type of offender is referred to as a “gentleman” rapist. He generally spends a short time with his victims since he does not have the confidence or social skills to interact with a woman for any length of time. However, if the victim is “compliant,” he may spend a considerable amount of time during which he might act out his fantasies by attempting to engage the victim in “pillow talk” after the assault. Possibly he will tell her his life story or to caution her about locking her doors to prevent anyone from harming her after he leaves.

Investigating officers need to be sensitive when interviewing victims of a suspect with this profile. Victims may feel guilty about not “fighting” their “gentleman” attacker. Investigators should use techniques to validate what a victim did to resist such as saying, “You survived the incident. You did the best you could do considering the circumstances.”

- He will be complimentary to the victim and attempt to sexually satisfy her.
- He will normally commit his crimes in close proximity to where he lives or works. This is the area where he is most comfortable.

- The offender's victim selection will be made in advance of the attack, normally through surveillance or peeping. Victim selection is determined by vulnerability. He will target persons of the same age or younger.
- He will likely select many targets and if one is unsuccessful, he will move on to the next one on the list. This explains why you might have an attempted rape, followed by another attack in the same neighborhood. The victim will usually be alone or in the company of small children.
- The offender will usually have the victim undress herself and may have the victim undress him. To do so fuels his fantasy of a consensual relationship.
- His mood is one of anxiety. An insufficient erection and premature ejaculation are signs of performance anxiety.
- The offender may take a souvenir from the victim or scene to use at a later time to relive his fantasy.
- He may keep records in the form of a diary, charts, or computer records.
- The offender may reconnect with his victim to relive the fantasy. For example he may attempt to contact the victim to apologize, or to attempt a second assault.
- These offenses are repetitive and may show an increase in aggression over time.
- The offender's prior criminal record may include crimes of exploitation such as theft, breaking and entering, robbery and/or prior sex offenses.

Profile

- This offender has low self-esteem that permeates his life. He is probably seen as an underachiever.
- Employed in menial work.
- Described by those who know him as gentle, quiet, and passive.
- Non-athletic.
- This offender is considered a loner. His solitary pastimes include, reading, watching television, and surfing the Internet. He may be a member of several online chat rooms.

- He has little or no social contact.
- He is nocturnal and is more comfortable in hours of darkness.
- This offender is usually single. If he is dating, he is usually involved with significantly younger girls. He lives alone or with a parent.
- He takes little pride in his personal appearance.
- Prior arrests may include nuisance sexual offenses, such as indecent exposure, or peeping.

Power Rapist (Power Assertive)

Style of Attack

- This category of Power Rapist focuses his anger to prove his virility and his power over women. He sees himself as a macho man.
- The assault is more impulsive, spontaneous and unplanned. He often meets his victim on the same evening as the assault at bars, clubs, and parties, etc. Many offenders of acquaintance rape fall under this category.
- His language is abusive. He uses a lot of obscenities.
- Level of force is moderate. The offender feels no need to harm his victims but he will use enough force to get what he wants.
- He relies on his fist for a weapon. Because there is no pre-planning he will not have a weapon unless he usually carries one.
- The assault is of relatively short duration.
- The offender will attack away from his work and residence since he has the confidence to leave his immediate area.
- The victim tends to be of the same age or older than the offender.
- The offender may commit multiple assaults during the same evening to prove his masculinity.

- The offender's mood is one of anger and depression. The most often experienced sexual dysfunction is retarded ejaculation due to hostility and anger.
- The offenses are episodic.
- The offender's prior criminal record may include crimes of aggression such as reckless driving, assault and battery, and breach of peace.

Profile

- This offender has a macho image and the most important thing to him is to have others see him as a "man."
- He is very self-centered and does not like to be under the control of others, even in the workplace.
- He dresses according to his macho image, drives a macho car and has a macho job (e.g. heavy equipment operator, police officer, or construction worker).
- He drinks a masculine drink, no fruit drinks or umbrellas, and he hangs out at clubs, bars, and locations where he finds his victim.
- This offender is athletic with an athletic build (body builder). He exercises regularly and takes pride in his appearance.
- He may have been married more than once. It is very difficult for a woman to stay with him but his ego dictates that he remarries.
- There is a history of conflict with women because of his selfish behavior.

Anger Rapist

Anger rapists focus their anger exclusively at women or can be aggressive with men as well. This type of rapist is unpredictable: the rage displayed in these assaults range from verbal abuse to murder. Although relative to other types of assault these attacks tend to be brief, the amount of force and violence used by anger rapists is excessive in cases where the victim does not resist. Should the victim resist, this will probably further intensify the level of aggression. Anger rapists often cause significant physical injury in addition to the rape itself.

Anger rapists want to humiliate and degrade the women they assault, and insults and abusive, derogatory language will usually accompany the attack. The anger rapist

typically thinks that women are dirty and cannot be trusted. There is no evidence with this type of rapist that their aggression is erotized or that they are preoccupied with sadistic fantasies.

In many cases, this type of rapist is displaying misplaced anger at a randomly chosen woman because another woman has, in his mind, wronged him. Often the rapist has had a fight with his girlfriend or wife not long before, and this triggers the assault.

Style of Attack

- The attack is unplanned and there is no set timing. The attack is precipitated by events in the offender's life. He attacks spontaneously and out of anger.
- His language is abusive. He uses a lot of obscenities.
- The force used by this offender is excessive and will exceed that necessary to control the victim. The victim will be battered.
- Since the attack is spontaneous, the use of a weapon will depend on the offender's access and opportunity. If a weapon is employed, it is used to hurt and not to threaten the victim.
- The offender spends a short period of time with the victim.
- His sexual behavior is selfish since his purpose is to punish.
- His approach is a "blitz" attack. This offender attacks anytime, day or night.
- The victims chosen are often symbolic of an individual with whom the offender wants to get even.
- Victims tend to be in the same age range or older (not elderly) as the offender.
- The victim's clothing may be torn.
- The offender's mood is one of anger. The most common experienced sexual dysfunction is retarded ejaculation due to anger.
- These offenses are episodic.
- The offender often drinks alcohol to release his inhibitions.

- The offender's prior criminal record may include crimes of aggression such as reckless driving, assault and battery, and breach of peace.

Profile

- His personality is explosive. This may have resulted in prior arrests for assault.
- He acts impulsively.
- This offender has an action-oriented job allowing him to work off some of his aggression.
- Personal acquaintances often report a "dark side" to the offender's personality or lifestyle.
- The offender may be a high school drop out.
- Capable of socializing but prefers to be alone and is considered a lone wolf.
- Does not use pornography (no fantasy).
- His relationships are often superficial, and he may abuse alcohol.
- May have been married more than once. There is a history of physical conflicts with his wife, possibly including emergency calls to the police reporting domestic violence.

Sadistic Rapist/Ritualistic Rape

Sadistic rapists, an extreme and rare category, display sexual aggression fueled by erotic, destructive fantasies. For them, sexuality and aggression are totally merged. Aggression itself becomes eroticized. Their motive is to achieve sexual gratification through causing mental and physical pain and suffering. They increase the violence to achieve further arousal. Sexual areas of the victim's body become a specific focus of injury and abuse. Object rape and anal rape are common with sadistic rapists, as are bizarre acts (e.g., giving victims an enema). Dismemberment, postmortem coitus, and other such acts occur in extreme cases.²

Sadistic rapists are opportunistic, attacking suddenly and often kidnapping their victims. This group shows low social competence. Other sadistic rapists act out their fantasies

² A. Nicholas Groth & William F. Hobson, *The Dynamics of Sexual Assault*, in *Sexual Dynamics of Anti-Social Behavior* 161 at 14 (Louis B. Schlesinger & Eugene Revitch, eds. 1963)

symbolically (bondage, shaving) or having sadistic fantasies that they do not act out. This group has a high social competence.

All sadistic rapists inadequately distinguish between sexual and aggressive urges. Additional characteristics of the sadistic rapist may include the following.

Style of Attack

- The assault is calculated and preplanned. This is the most premeditated sexual crime, practiced over and over in his mind before it is attempted. The approach to the attack is confident. His voice is non-emotional and practiced. The victim suffers physical trauma to sexual areas of her body. In extreme cases she is murdered and mutilated.
- His language is commanding and degrading, alternately reassuring and threatening.
- Physical force and aggression are eroticized. The favorite weapon is a knife.
- Weapons are generally employed to capture the victim. In addition, instruments for restraint and/or torture may be used.
- The assault may be for an extended duration in which the victim is abducted, held hostage, assaulted and disposed of.
- The offender's sexual behavior is selfish. He is fixated on anal sex because it is seen as degrading.
- Victim selection is determined by specific characteristics or symbolic representation; and are usually complete strangers. The age of the victim does not matter.
- The victim's clothing may be torn or cut off.
- The offender's mood is one of intense excitement. Retarded ejaculation is a common result of his heightened anxiety.
- The offense is ritualistic, typically involving bondage, torture or bizarre acts and is interspersed with other, non-sadistic acts.
- There is no pattern to the attacks. He attacks when he wants to.
- There is usually no prior criminal record, but if he has a criminal record it may include bizarre ritualistic or violent offenses.

- Dynamics: Symbolic destruction and elimination

Profile

- He is usually a white male, outgoing, and well liked.
- Above average IQ, at least some college education.
- White-collar job
- No history of mental health care.
- Compulsive.
- The offender may subscribe to bondage pornography, *Soldier of Fortune* or various detective publications.
- He is an outdoorsman, a survivalist and would do well in the military.
- This offender does not abuse drugs. He might use some drugs in moderation, but losing control is avoided.
- He is often happily married. His wife will be firmly under his control and is often a victim herself.
- If the offender has a girlfriend she will not be under his total control and he will not act out against her.
- May own a family type vehicle (e.g. a Volvo or station wagon.)

Conclusion

Recent efforts to elaborate on these profiles has resulted in the development of additional behavioral measures to apply to rapists. Raymond Knight and Robert Prentky, from Brandeis University and the Massachusetts Treatment Center offer the following criteria to use when developing an offender profile:

- Degree of aggression used to force compliance
- Was the attack sexually or opportunistically motivated?
- Pervasiveness of other antisocial behaviors³

³ Knight and Prentky (1990)

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As research in this area continues, a clearer profile of offenders may emerge to aid police professionals in responding to crimes of sexual assault.

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