

THE POWER SERIAL RAPIST

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THE POWER SERIAL RAPIST

A Criminology-Victimology Typology of Female Victim Selection

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Charles C Thomas

P U B L I S H E R • L T D.

SPRINGFIELD • ILLINOIS • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

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© 2002 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 0-398-07249-3 (cloth)
ISBN 0-398-07250-7 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2001044298

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*Printed in the United States of America
RR-R-3*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Graney, Dawn J.

The power serial rapist: a criminology-victimology typology of
female victim selection/by Dawn J. Graney and Bruce A. Arrigo.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-398-07249-3 (cloth) – ISBN 0-398-07250-7 (pbk.)

1. Rapists—Psychology. 2. Rape. 3. Rape victims. 4. Escobedo,
Gilbert Hernandez. 5. Rapists—Texas—Dallas—Biography. I. Arrigo,
Bruce A. II. Title.

HV6558.G73 2002
362.883—dc21

2001044298

PREFACE

The Power Serial Rapist provides an in-depth, comprehensive, and integrated approach to understanding this sexual offender's victim selection process. Consolidating the criminological research on rape and the victimological literature on victims, this book deepens our knowledge about the offender, his victim, and the sexual crimes this rapist commits. *The Power Serial Rapist* systematically explores past victimization theories and models, mindful of their relative strengths and limits. Moreover, by selecting out the most salient and useful features of past victim selection typologies, this book develops a detailed assessment of what sort of individuals are likely victims and why.

Going well beyond the presentation of theory, *The Power Serial Rapist* examines the explanatory and predictive capability of the victim selection typology it proposes. To this end, the case of Gilbert Escobedo, the Ski Mask rapist, is thoroughly explored. After important background material on this sexual offender, past victimization models and theories are applied to the case for purposes of interpreting and explaining Escobedo's method of selecting victims. Moreover, the victim selection typology developed by the authors is also applied to the Escobedo case. The authors demonstrate where and how their own typology significantly advances our assessment of female victim selection for sexual offenders like the Ski Mask Rapist. The text concludes by reviewing the implications of the authors' model for purposes of future clinical treatment, criminal justice administration and policy, and ongoing research.

D.J.G.
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THE POWER SERIAL RAPIST

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THE SUBJECT OF INQUIRY

This book investigates power serial rapists and female victim selection with the intent of developing a conceptual typological model. Rape can be differentially defined, depending on the source of the explanation (e.g., a legal versus a psychological context). In general, however, the term rape refers to sexual penetration and/or a sex act (i.e., vaginal, oral, anal sex, as well as object penetration) performed forcibly and without an individual's consent (Holmes & Holmes, 1996; Holmes, 1991). According to U.S. Department of Justice statistics, based on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), there were 98,000 rapes and an additional 99,000 attempts in 1996. We note, however, that the information obtained by the NCVS comes directly from crime victims and is not validated by, or representative of, crimes accounted for by the police. Therefore, these numbers represent both reported and unreported rapes.

Many researchers believe that less than 10% of all rapes are reported to law enforcement officials (e.g., Holmes, 1991). This underreporting logically means that only a small percentage of rapists are ever apprehended for their crime. However, statistics from the Rape Relief Center in Louisville, Kentucky, suggest that each time a rapist is caught the person has typically offended approximately fourteen previous times (Holmes, 1991). Given these statistics, it is reasonable to argue that, in essence, most rapists commit serial sex crimes. This position notwithstanding, a clear and unambiguous definition of a serial rapist is difficult to identify in the literature.

For purposes of our research, the term “serial rapist” refers to an individual who has raped on two or more separate occasions and has had at least two different victims. We note that this definition distinguishes itself from rapists who commit a single offense with more than one victim or those who repeatedly victimize the same individual. The phrase “separate occasions” draws attention to individual acts of rape that, when assessed in total, represent a series of crimes committed by the same offender. Thus, the phrase “separate occasions” is not predicated on a specific span of time (e.g., isolated rapes that occurred over *X* number of hours, days, etc., by the same individual). Rather, our definition recognizes an offense as a separate occurrence in a series if two unrelated victims are raped either in separate structures (e.g., physical dwelling, public building) or within different time frames. In this context, then, the amount of time that transpires between the assaults is not a pivotal issue for conceptual or empirical inquiry.

Throughout this book the terms “power rape,” “serial rapist,” and “power serial rapist” are used considerably. To avoid any confusion, a brief discussion of these terms is warranted. Rape can be divided into several subcategories, according to common elements and/or characteristics of the rapist and the sexual assault. For example, these elements may focus on the manner in which the rapist approaches the victim, the level of violence the offender uses, or whether or not the individual uses a weapon during the assault. These subcategories also denote personal aspects of the rapist (e.g., motivation, sense of self-worth, feelings of adequacy). Consequently, the term “power rape” (or power rapist) refers only to one particular sexual offender or rapist subtype.

The various rape categories are described in detail in subsequent sections of this chapter and elsewhere throughout this study. However, as previously noted, the purpose of the categorizations is to provide a quick and easy reference regarding personal and assault characteristics of a particular rapist type. When the term power rape (or rapist) is used in this book, our intent is to refer only to those elements that are distinctive to that particular sexual offense or rapist type. Thus, although the term power rape does imply serial offending, its fundamental function is to provide readers with a simple term by which to describe a particular type of rapist and the person’s sexual assault.

As we previously explained, the term serial rape refers to a number of sexual assaults committed by the same offender. The phrase serial rape does not, on its own, specify a rapist subtype. Rather, it serves only to describe the repetitive nature of the sexual offense. Although this project focuses specifically on the power serial rapist, we anticipate that our inquiry will yield additional and fruitful information on the crime of serial rape in general. Therefore, throughout this book, the term serial rape is relevant to and resonates for all types of serial sexual offenders and not just the power serial rapist. We note that the subsequent chapter (and section) on rape incorporates a great deal of research on the serial rapist in general; however, it is not applicable to the power serial rapist in particular. As we explain in Chapter 2, the research findings discussed are not germane to a rapist subtype. Finally, the term power serial rapist (or power serial rape) refers to those instances in which the offender repeatedly commits rape assaults.

WHY INVESTIGATE POWER SERIAL RAPISTS?

This study was principally conceived from and is based on the first author's presuppositions regarding serial rape and victim selection. These assumptions emerged several years ago during an undergraduate lecture in a criminology course. The instructor spoke about a serial rape case in a large metropolitan area in which each victim had been approached by the offender in a particular local park. An undercover female officer was then assigned to patrol the area. However, during the time the female officer was in the park (several days for a number of hours each day), the police officer was never approached by the assailant. Eventually, the rapist was caught, and the female officer did question him about why he never approached her in the park on the days she was there. The apprehended felon responded that he did in fact see her in the park each day; however, he could tell by the way she carried herself that she was not a victim.

This very provocative story led to a series of (research) questions for the first author, especially regarding the concept of victim selection and what offenders look for in potential victims. In addition, both researchers have always been fascinated by the crime of rape, given the frequency with which it occurs and/or is attempted and the very

physical and emotional invasion it represents for the victim (e.g., Arrigo, 1993). Thus, learning something more about the offender's motivations and thought processes regarding this sexual offense—curiosities harbored by many social science investigators, forensic mental health practitioners, criminal justice professionals and the lay public—would arguably go a long way in satisfying our intellectual and practical interests. Accordingly, our decision to focus on the serial rapist stems from very personal feelings about this atrocity and a genuine desire to learn more about this crime. We believe that both explanations inform the implications of this study, explored at the end of the book.

We have offered some observations on why serial rapists are the focus of our inquiry. We have not, however, explained why we specifically examine the power serial rapist subtype. In general, the justification is methodological. Several comments along these lines are discussed in this chapter.

Before initiating this study, we assumed the following: (1) many serial rapists do make use of victim selection techniques; (2) because of the nature of their crime, power rapists rely on victim selection techniques to an equal or greater extent than other rapist subtypes (e.g., anger and sadistic types); (3) power serial rapists rely on both personal and situational (i.e., micro and macro) criteria in the selection of their victims; (4) power serial rapists are not always cognitively aware of factors that affect their selection processes (e.g., neighborhood structure, surveillability); and (5) because of the significant overlap between micro and macro-level factors, it is difficult to determine the extent to which particular factors contribute to the victim selection techniques.

According to Clinnard and Quinney (as cited by Knight, Rosenberg, & Schneider, 1985), typologies are “classifications which . . . attempt to specify the ways in which attributes or variables are empirically connected” (p. 33). The creation of our typological model on the victim selection process for power serial rapists stems from its potential to contribute meaningfully to both the study of victimology and the phenomena of serial rape. Victimology is the study of crime victims, their characteristics and behavior, and their relationships and interactions with offenders (Fattah, 1995). Victimology was first recognized as a branch of criminology in the 1940's when works such as Von Hentig's *The Criminal and His Victim* (1948) began to focus primarily on victims in the study of crime. Although victimology is increasingly recognized

as a viable domain of inquiry in the criminological field, research on criminal victimization is evolving somewhat independently of its predecessor, given the seemingly difficult task of connecting victimization theories with current crime theories. The proof of this assertion is found among the scholarly periodicals principally anchored in the victimological (rather than criminological) frame of reference (e.g., *Violence and Victims*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Victimology: An International Journal*).

Fattah (1991), a pioneer in victimology, argued that although criminology has traditionally ignored the role of the victim, victimology cannot make the same mistake by ignoring the role of the offender. His suggestion has been to study victim selection processes as one method for developing interactionist models of crime, focusing equally on the victim and the offender. Indeed, Fattah's doctoral dissertation investigated victim selection in cases of murder for robbery, exploring several notable aspects of the offended party and the assailant.

After Fattah's (1991) observations, we maintain that the development of our typological model will serve to further integrate victimological and criminological explanations of serial rape. Moreover, we contend that our conceptual typological exploration will help foster a synthesis of these intellectual perspectives for other crimes as well. We believe that efforts at integration in criminology and victimology will further legitimize the latter as a bona fide domain of scholarly inquiry and increase awareness regarding the significant contributions the discipline offers the field of criminology.

The premise of victim selection can be linked to the rational choice perspective, which is a recognized theoretical orientation in criminology (e.g., Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Clarke & Felson, 1993). Many researchers have discouraged the creation of any formal definition for the construct of rationality in this theory, given the debatable quality of such a definition (Newman, Clarke, & Shoham, 1997). For example, Opp (1997) stated that defining rationality is not as important as identifying the kind of reason and judgment that appropriately and accurately explains a particular crime. However, others have argued that this approach suggests that some criminals process and evaluate information in a strategic manner in order to make decisions concerning the commission of their crimes (e.g., Stevens, 1994). This criticism draws attention to the contentiousness inherent in defining rationality