Examining Sociobiological Fitness Traits in Conjunction with the General Strain Theory in Convicted Rapists

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Examining sociobiological fitness traits in conjunction with the General Strain Theory in convicted rapists

By

Lyndi Hetterle

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Masters of Criminology

REGIS UNIVERSITY

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EXAMINING SOCI BIOLOGICAL FITNESS TRAITS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE GENERAL STRAIN THEORY IN CONVICTED RAPISTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine if sociobiological theories are useful in studying deviant behavior. Due to sociobiology being a field that has only recently been developed, there is little research regarding the overlap between criminology and sociobiology. Using forcible rape as the conduit of research, this study examined if and how sociobiology stressors contributed to the General Strain Theory. Specifically, this research answered the question, “Were sociobiological fitness stressors present in convicted rapists prior to the offense(s)?”

Using secondary source data, a content analysis was performed on five separate case studies to qualitatively assess what, if any, sociobiological fitness stressors were present in convicted rapists. Results show that four of the five case studies do in fact have sociobiological stressors lending strength to the General Strain Theory in first time convicted rapists.

*Keywords:* sociobiology, general strain theory, forcible rape, criminology
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Introduction

Sexual behavior is exhibited by most living organisms. While the primary purpose of sexual behavior is reproduction, humans also engage in sexual activities for various other reasons. Sociobiology has emerged as a field of study determining how genetics and evolutionary psychology influence behavior, including sex. Though criminologists typically do not study sex alone, one form of sexual activity pertinent to the criminological field is rape. In its broadest sense, rape is any type of unwanted and forced sexual activity.

Criminologists have acknowledged many motivating factors for rape: aggression, jealousy, power, anger, revenge, psychological impairments, learned behavior, misogynistic tendencies, as well as other factors. In fact, rapists have been subcategorized according to their motivating factors. Vindictive and pervasively angry rapists are primarily known for their anger motivation. Opportunistic offenders, sadists, and non-sadists are all sexually motivated. Regardless of the classification, no one likes to attribute rape to a genetic anomaly due to the implication that it is an incurable tendency or a rehabilitative impossibility. This thought acknowledges and labels an individual as a permanent criminal. Rather rape is preferably thought of as learned behavior.

Opposite of learned behavior is innate behavior, genetically programmed actions. There are some sociobiologists who claim rape has evolved due to the need to procreate. This idea stems from the fact that before modern technology and medicine, the most assured way to survive was through one’s children. Therefore, to ensure one’s survival, one needed to have a multitude of offspring. Those who possessed desirable traits were said to have sociobiological fitness traits. These were the individuals most successful in procreation, and their traits or genes have been passed down through the generations. If one lacked desirable fitness traits, they
experienced sociobiological stressors, or stress associated with being unable to survive or reproduce. With the various forms of birth control, modern culture suggests reproduction is no longer the only motivating factor for sex. However, some sociobiologists suggest rape is an innate desire not necessarily to procreate, but rather the sexual act itself is the act of survival.

**Statement of the problem**

Traumatic events can have long-term repercussions, and each type of victim suffers in his own way. "It is clear that for a sizable number of rape survivors, the trauma of rape has a lasting effect on their lives and functioning in numerous ways" (Neville & Heppner, 1999, p. 42).

Additionally, rape carries a social stigma and therefore victims may feel even more uncomfortable reporting it (Altindag, 2012) which has led to the slow progression of accurate rape studies.

To date, there are still many theories surrounding rapist behavior. Because rape is often thought of as a distasteful topic, many do not wish to delve into the minds of these offenders. However, sociobiology and criminology are two fields of research not afraid to tread this path. Yet even these two fields have neglected to collaborate information. Looking at all the current theories on rape, there is an evolving picture of sex, anger, and power.

For a long time, rapists were misunderstood. "Historically, Western culture has viewed rape as the act of overly libidinous, sexually frustrated, and more often pathologically deranged males" (Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 121-122). However, the act of rape is not just about sex. From the evolutionary psychologist perspective, rape was about survival. Through the years, rape has become a symbol of power and revenge. Shields and Shields (1983) stated there are "internal contributors" such as anger, violence, and hostility that motivate rapists behavior.
Without understanding the underlying factors, it is impossible to fix any problem. A unified effort is needed to explore ideas and motivations for rape. “Although rape is universally considered a heinous and punishable crime, it remains a serious and growing problem in many modern cultures” (Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 115). By collaborating with other researchers, criminologists can better understand rape motivations. Criminological efforts can be focused on implementing prevention methods and recognizing deviant tendencies before individuals become criminals.

**Overview of the problem**

Sociobiology studies human behavior and interaction from the evolutionary psychologist viewpoint. With the changing of gender roles in modern western society, it is important to understand what effects these changes may have had on rapists’ behavior and how criminologists can confront these changes. Attitudes towards submission and dominance begin to tell us about these motivating factors.

The gender roles of western society have evolved and even been reversed in some situations. The unknown responsibilities create difficulties in knowing one’s position in western society. Kenrick (2011) referenced a study conducted in 1987 with two other researchers determining the attractiveness of dominance. Their study consisted of a sample group of college students brought into a lab and shown videos of the opposite sex. Some of the videos displayed individuals exerting dominance while others exerted submissive attitudes. The participants were informed they were to judge the person in the video based on the little information shown, especially pertaining to dominant versus submissive and femininity versus masculinity. What these researchers were actually studying was the attractiveness of those in the videos. Results showed that females judged dominant males as more attractive. Males on the other hand did not
rate dominance or submission as more attractive. It actually had very little effect on his judgment of her.

It is important to take gender role reversal into consideration due to the fact that these men are now sociobiologically strained in lack of power. If sociobiological stress does in fact lead towards criminal behavior, these men would be at higher risk for criminal activity. With more men assuming the “house-husband” role and generally taking over the female position, it follows that women would find these men less attractive as he no longer portrays the traditional dominant role. Eldredge (2004) found that anything diminishing a man’s power disrupts sex which results in further power loss. This decline can lead to frustration and anger. Men who are not content in the house-husband role are exposed to stresses that can lead to hostility and anger, issues which are discussed in later sections.

Furthermore, while females have multiple options regarding pregnancy, men are rather limited. The male is no longer necessary, and by obliterating him he is downgraded further in the submissive line. Single women who wish to procreate have the option of in-vitro fertilization whereas single men have no option except to adopt. Additionally, women have the convenience of medicinal intervention to prevent pregnancy. These options give power to women allowing them to assume the role of both dominant male and female, or provider and nurturer. This versatility lends aid to those women who wish to obtain a family and cannot find a suitable partner. However, the male has no such option. For the frustrated man who cannot have children by traditional standards, his options are limited and he becomes more submissive, catering to women’s desires. While the changing of traditional gender roles benefits women by allowing them to play both roles, it lends frustration for the men who are limited to the male role.
The responsibility that comes with being a provider often requires higher education in order to obtain financial independence and support. Women, who are already more discriminant in mate selection, have further reason to be choosy. If they cannot find a partner who will be a strong financial provider, they simply take on the role themselves. With these changes, men need not only compete against other males, but now also must compete against females. Eldredge (2004) stated, "...psychological dangers of having so much of one’s feelings of success, well-being, and power wrapped up in sex is that there is an awful lot that can (and routinely does) happen in life that upsets the applecart” (p. 157). Thus, perhaps rape has emerged as a maladaptive strategy in social relations due to the gender role confusion. Though not all rapists do or will have the same motivations, it is possible that the gender role reversal noticed in modern society contributes to a motivating factor for rape.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is validity in using sociobiological perspectives to help criminologists explain human deviant behavior. Using forcible rape as the conduit of research, this study examined the prevalence of sociobiological fitness traits as well as other stressors in convicted rapists prior to criminal behavior. If sociobiological fit stressors exist in known deviant criminal behavior, these two fields can potentially assist each other to redirect anti-social behavior before it becomes criminal. Criminological efforts can be focused on prevention strategies.

Criminology advocates collaborative efforts through community policing, multi-agency cooperation, and utilizing other resources. Criminologists work with psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, health professionals, and a multitude of other experts. However, because sociobiology is a relatively new field of study, criminologists have yet to work with
sociobiologists. It is worth exploring to determine if experts in sociobiology can be utilized in criminological work.

Research questions

This study will explore one basic question: Were sociobiological fitness stressors present in convicted rapists prior to the offense(s)?

Definitions

In order to avoid confusion or ambiguity, the following definitions will be used throughout this study:

- It is important to note that there are many different forms of sexual assault. For the purpose of this paper, forcible rape will be used for analysis. This refers to the “carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will” (Crime in the United States, 2010).

- Because sociobiology was first introduced in 1975, very few people know much about the field. Sociobiology was first introduced by E. O. Wilson in his book Sociobiology: The new synthesis. Though this field is still developing, the basis of sociobiology is using genetics and evolutionary psychology to explain social behavior (Wilson, 2000).

- Natural Selection is the process of survival proposed by sociobiologists. Wright (1995) described it in the following way:

  If within a species there is variation among individuals in their hereditary traits, and some traits are more conducive to survival and reproduction than others, then those traits will (obviously) become more widespread within the population. (p. 23)
• General Strain Theory was first introduced in Merton's Anomie/Strain Theory as it pertained to monetary goals (Baron, 2006). Robert Agnew expanded this theory in 1992 to be more encompassing. The General Strain Theory states there are many events and situations disliked by an individual which cause strain and potentially lead to deviant behavior (Sigfusdottir, Kristjansson, & Agnew, 2012).

Limitations/Delimitations

A limitation to this research is that the subtypes of rapists were not considered. Sexually motivated offenders were not considered different from non-sexually motivated offenders due to convicts not being classified as one type or if they were, the information is unavailable.

Additionally, this research only considers five case studies from Australia. Though the Australian culture differs slightly from American culture, similarities are significant enough that the deviant behavior cannot be contributed to cultural factors.

Delimitations are considered to be factors controlled by the researcher (Mauche & Park, 2003). This research only considers forcible rape. All other sex crimes such as child molestation, female sexual offenders, gang rapes, date rapes or any other types were excluded from the study.
Violence and crime

There is evidence for both low self-esteem and high self-esteem driving individuals to commit crimes. “Overall, then, different theories have connected violence to either low or high self-esteem, and neither view has received unequivocal empirical support” (Ostrowsky, 2010, p. 71). Specifically, rape could be thought of in both ways as well. Rapists with low self-esteem commit rape acts because they feel they cannot have sexual intercourse by other means. Oppositely, rapists with high self-esteem commit rape acts because it is a method for exerting one’s power over another. Ostrowsky (2010) studied the correlation between violence and self-esteem.

Individuals with high self-esteem, especially narcissism, show high levels of aggression. Ostrowsky (2010) noted this aspect in instances of child bullying, direct aggression towards the actual threat, and when there is a combination of narcissism and insult. Thomas, Bushman, Stegge, and Olthof (2008) as well as Bushman, Baumeister, Thomaes, Ryu, Beeger, and West (2009) also found extremely high levels of aggression in individuals with narcissism and high self-esteem. Ostrowsky (2010) concluded, “In short, recent theorizing suggests that narcissism, which is generally associated with high rather than low self-esteem, contributes to aggression” (p. 70).

Conversely, low self-esteem has also been noted to be associated with violence. Ostrowsky (2010) stated, “Likewise, individuals with low self-esteem may resort to violence to provide themselves with an increased sense of power and independence” (p. 70). With power being a strong factor in rape cases, it is easy to note how low self-esteem and rape are interrelated. Walker and Bright (2009) concluded that the majority of previous studies
evidencing low self-esteem was more often associated with violence rather than high self-esteem. Because violence is associated with both high self-esteem and low self-esteem there must be more to rapists other than extremely high or low self-confidence.

**Education and crime**

Research has found that a high number of criminals "...tend to be less educated and from poorer and more disadvantaged background than non-criminals" (Buonanno & Leonida, 2009, p. 11). Unemployment is also a significant factor of early crime determinants. In the adolescent period, schooling provides a substitute for criminal activity. Buonanno and Leonida (2009) as well as Lochner and Moretti (2004) found that "...the effect of high school graduation is larger than the effect of an additional year of school" (p. 14). Two significant findings were associated with education and crime: civic responsibility and future earning potentials. "Education conveys a civic externality, a benefit to society over and above the benefit to the student in enhancing his future earning power" (Buonanno & Leonida, 2009, p. 12). Not only does the student feel like a societal contribution and worthiness in that role, but "...higher levels of schooling are associated with higher wages, increasing the opportunity cost of criminal behavior" (Buonanno & Leonida, 2009, p. 11).

As education leads to employment, it is important to note that "individuals with potentially better current and future opportunities in the legal labor market are less likely to commit crime" (Altindag, 2012). Similarly, it is not just the unemployment factor, but rather the combination of unemployment and lower education that contribute even more to social deviance. "...unemployment of individuals with low education is a significant determinant of the impact of the unemployment rate on crime" (Altindag, 2012, p. 154). It is obvious that crime rates are affected by education and unemployment. However, these studies indicate that the financial
success is the driving force for the uneducated and unemployed. Rarely, if ever, is rape committed for monetary gain. Though there is evidence for crime and financial success, there is no obvious correlation between rape and financial success. Therefore, the correlation between education level and employment in rapists must be derived from something other than finances.

**Criminology - General Strain Theory**

Robert Agnew enhanced the General Strain Theory (GST) derived from Merton’s Anomie/Strain Theory which states individuals endure many events and conditions that are disliked (Sigfusdottir, Kristjansson, & Agnew, 2012). Without proper coping mechanisms to deal with all of the strains, an individual may resort to criminal behavior. This theory has been useful in explaining many aspects of crime from victimization (Hay & Evans, 2006) to drug use (Slocum, 2008) and community violence (Warner & Fowler, 2003). While this theory has been examined regarding one’s struggle with obtaining jobs and resources, it has not been examined in combination with rape due to the fear of labeling women as a “resource.”

To label women as a “resource” is controversial. However, females are necessary for reproduction and thus can be considered as such. The same can be said for males. They provide an essential function in reproduction as well. For the purpose of this study females, while still maintaining a human aspect, will also be considered a resource. With this perspective, we can examine the relationship between rape and strain.

Froggio and Agnew (2007) stated there are two types of strains: objective and subjective. Objective strains are those events that are disliked by a group, whereas subjective strains are more individualistic. Either of these strains can lead towards deviance, but when an individual experiences both, the perceived stress an individual feels is doubled.
It is likely that both subjective and objective strains influence the actions of rapists. The sexual desire is more pronounced in rapists than in non-rapists (Wolf, 1988; Ryan, 2004). They “spend more time thinking about sex. Moreover, their sexual preoccupation and arousal may fuel the desire to engage in intercourse and may lead them to use sexual coercion” (Ryan, 2004, p. 584). If they do not have sexual access, whether it be from his own undesirable looks or character traits or lack of money or any other factor, these men experience subjective strain. Ryan (2004) claimed rapists “also appear to enjoy sex less than other men. Thus, their sexual preoccupation may lead to chronic sexual frustration” (p. 586). With rapists, their continual sexual frustration is a constant subjective strain.

In certain societies and cultures, an additional factor men face is the strain to successfully obtain and maintain a family. This objective strain is compiled with their already subjective strain leading towards more frustration. Shields and Shields (1983) stated:

...hostility is a major motivating drive that predisposes men to rape. In short, ultimately men may rape because it increases their biological fitness and thus rape may serve, at least in some part, a reproductive function, but in an immediate proximate sense it is as likely that they rape because they are angry or hostile... (p. 122)

This anger or hostility can be mitigated from their own thoughts and feelings in their male role position which has evolved through time.

Men were historically seen as the provider. They were to be protectors of the family and to provide food and shelter for one’s wife and offspring. Through time, male and female roles have changed even to the point of women taking over the traditional male role. Though gender equality is something that has been fought for, it has also taken its toll on societal functioning. “When men rape, they are fulfilling the macho role, while failing at conventional masculinity”
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(Ryan, 2004, p. 596). Their ability to fulfill the masculine role is either unclear or unattainable. Therefore, men may rape because they need to fulfill their male dominance role or are angry at the females taking over their male responsibilities. “Some rapists are enacting a rape script, that is, they want to dominate, humiliate, and/or punish their partner, and so they choose to rape” (Ryan, 2004, 589). When any individual experiences enough strain, criminal actions are the result according to the General Strain Theory. With men experiencing both subjective and objective sexual strains, as well as normal every day stresses, it is easy to see how the General Strain Theory explains rapists’ actions.

**Sociobiology - Natural Selection Theory**

The term “sociobiology” was first coined by Edward O. Wilson in 1975. This field includes genetics and evolutionary psychology to explain human behavior (Wilson, 2000). It stems from the belief that all human actions, traits, and characteristics have evolved due to the need to survive. The Natural Selection Theory (NST) is at the core of sociobiological understanding. It posits that the traits we see prevalent today are those that have foraged through generations and have aided in the reproduction and survival process.

Edward Wilson and Charles Darwin were both key researchers in developing sociobiology. They shared similar perspectives in the fact that they believed only the fittest species survive. Therefore, characteristics prevalent today are those that have allowed certain men the reproductive advantage. “Males not hereditarily equipped for combat with other males have been excluded from sex” (Wright, 1995, p. 34). With the gender role reversal, men not only have to compete with each other, but now they must also compete with women. Eldredge (2004) claims that, “Rape, as well as other non-reproductive sex acts, are just spin-offs of side
effects of the urge to make babies” (p. 130). An important aspect is that rape is a “spin-off” of the baby-making drive; children are not the actual intent.

The deeper issue of sex is that is “has a lot to do with one’s self-esteem…it has come to symbolize personal worth and personal power” (Eldredge, 2004, p. 154, 156). Men are judged by the number of sexual partners they obtain and their sexual performance. Commonly heard in society and discussed by Eldredge (2004), power is “what person you are with, what car you drive, how long your penis is” (p. 156). It is clear that sex is about more than gratification and reproduction. To answer what sex is actually about, Eldredge (2004) stated:

So, if by their very actions rapists don’t seem to be out to make babies, what are they after? The short answer is that rape is an act of violence, but one of manifestly sexual violence. It is not just some guy beating up a woman; it is a guy sexually violating a woman - no less violent for all that - but the violence is overtly sexual. What does that mean? Only one thing: men have feelings of power so tightly wrapped up in their sexuality that rape is an expression, in some deep sense, about power - sexual power...

As psychologists and social workers have known for years, rape is basically an expression of rage - rage ostensibly against women (victims are usually anonymous), but rage born of a deep sense of powerlessness. (p. 176)

This is where sociobiology and criminology combine. Both fields recognize deeper meaning in rape; it is not just the un-reigned libido, but sub-conscious urges that drive individuals to commit such unacceptable acts.

**Rape - nature versus nurture**

The role of nature and nurture in the act of rape is a subject of debate. While some evolutionary psychologists are under the belief rape is a nature effect, others researchers believe
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it is a nurture effect. There is, however, evidence that supports both views which leads one to believe that perhaps rape is a combination of learned behavior and genetics.

Ryan (2004) stated that “rape is a learned behavior” (p. 598). This statement alone implies that rape is a result of direct observation or experience with previous rape behavior. Indeed, there are many cases of rapists being a rape or sexual molestation victim himself. But this is not true of all rapists.

Sociobiology proposes that it is indeed a cultural aspect, learned from others. Yet it also suggests that there are innate learned behaviors. “…if they [men] can’t find willing partners, it is now ensconced in their genes to get the job done by force” (Eldredge, 2004, p. 174). In other words, it has been observed as a successful survival skill and thus passed down from one generation to another. “We suspect that during human evolutionary history, males that possessed a mating strategy that included rape as a facultative response were favored by natural selection over those that did not” (Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 123). Rape is a learned behavior in that it has proven to be successful through evolutionary development, yet it is innate in that it is a survival skill.

This is not to say rape is the only mechanism for successful survival. In fact, a nuclear family has been noted most stable with the presence of accessible resources and legitimate mating strategies. However, many factors contribute to a stable nuclear family such as finding a mate in the same social hierarchy, ensuring a spouse’s faithfulness, continuing access to resources both sexual and financial, fertility, and other psychological and social factors. Shields and Shields (1983) stated, “With respect solely to benefits, if there is any probability of success for each tactic, then males that court honestly, seduce, and rape in the appropriate circumstances would appear to possess both optimal and evolutionary stable strategies” (p. 119). It is noted that
“appropriate circumstances” does not indicate that rape is ever an acceptable action, but rather it is viewed as a necessary albeit immoral means for genetic success. It is seen as necessary because these individuals, rapists, are unable to successfully compete with other males for female access.

“Human rape can be considered as an evolved facultative behavior that is condition dependent in that it is employed by men who are unable to compete for resources and status necessary to attract and reproduce successfully with desirable mates” (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983, p. 137-138). Thornhill and Thornhill (1983) proposed that “...it is those males who have the greatest difficulty in climbing the social ladder who are most likely to rape” (p. 141). Thus we see evidence of both nature and nurture effects resulting in rapist behavior. The evolutionary psychologist views rape as a behavior sometimes necessary for survival through reproduction whereas the criminologist sees rape as a result of learned behavior. By understanding both views, a new image emerges.

**Rape - female’s role**

This study does not promote the idea that females are responsible for their victimization. Neither does this study serve to rationalize rapist behavior. Rather, it is to compare the interactions of society, specifically those between males and females to help understand what has led to such behavior. With that in mind, it is important to study women’s roles in society and in the mating selection process.

The power struggle that comes with choosing who to have sex with is a key aspect to understanding rape. Females have generally been viewed as the more finicky gender when it comes to sexual intercourse. However, it is understandable when considering the differences
between male and female sex cells, or gametes. Females not only have a limited number of eggs, but only a few can actually be fertilized. Conversely, males can and do continually produce sperm and have the potential to fertilize any accepting egg. Wilson (2000) compared the differences in the following way:

The most important immediate result is that the female places a greater investment in each of her sex cells... The costs of bringing an infant to term and caring for it afterward are relatively enormous.... Once he [the male] has achieved fertilization his purely physical commitment has ended. His genes will benefit equally with those of the female, but his investment will be far less than hers unless she can induce him to contribute to the care of the offspring. (p. 124)

The amount of energy and time invested is what has driven females to be more preferential with whom they engage in sexual intercourse. Wilson (2000) further stated, “It pays males to be aggressive, hasty, fickle, and undiscriminating. In theory it is more profitable for females to be coy, to hold back until they can identify males with the best genes” (p. 125).

Females are genetically equipped to deserve the right to be choosy not only in mate selection but also in sexual partner selection. This selectivity, however, is why some men resort to rape. “...males may circumvent female choice by forcefully inseminating an unwilling female - that is, rape” (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983, p. 140). Women are required to invest more time and energy, whereas males have a relatively quick and cheap investment. “Based on these models, females are expected to prefer mates with the most to offer in the way of resources that are important or necessary for success in progeny production” (Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 117). If males cannot provide the means and fitness traits of a successful family, he is at great risk of being rejected.
The power struggle for sexual partner selection has always been present. With the observed changing gender roles, women have come to hold more power in the male/female interaction. Not only do they possess the genetic investment allowing for discriminant selection, but now they may not even need a partner at all. Men can be completely obliterated from the entire mating ritual. Women have adapted in ways that allow them to control when to be and not to be pregnant. Women can have babies when they want, providing no genetic interference is present, and provide for the family in top executive positions. Has this gender role reversal created a society in which men feel demasculinized thus resulting in rape? Does lack of sociobiological fitness traits provide enough stress to lead to deviant behavior? Do sociobiological fitness stressors accumulate with every-day stresses resulting in the heinous criminal act of rape?

Literature shows there is already evidence supporting the GST in explaining rape. There are also several sociobiological factors exhibited that may influence rapists' behavior. Additionally, it is has been established that a history of violence predisposes an individual to more violence. However, as noted earlier, financial gain is rarely, if ever, the driving force behind rape. Therefore, this study uses education and financial stability in the context of NST to determine if and how NST supports rapist behavior. By studying the rapists' background, this study will also determine if rape is in fact a nature or nurture effect or a combination brought about by the transformation of gender roles in western society.
Methods

This research is an exploratory, qualitative study which will examine the interrelationship between criminology and sociobiology which has not been studied previously. With this research, the question “Were sociobiological stressors present in convicted rapists prior to the offense(s)?” will be answered. This research will provide a glimpse as to whether or not sociobiological theory should be considered when studying human deviant behavior.

Research design

Case studies of convicted rapists previously conducted will be analyzed regarding stress factors present during the time of criminal activity and prior to conviction. A content analysis will be performed regarding the lifestyle and various forms of known stress experienced by the offender. A case study is the best method for analyzing this data due to the information that can be obtained. Mauch and Park (2003) described a case study in the following way: “The background, development, current conditions, and environmental interactions of one or more individuals, groups, communities, businesses, or institutions are observed, recorded, and analyzed for stages or patterns in relation to internal and external influences” (p. 127). In order to examine factors regarding an offender’s lifestyle, this type of research method allows for such information to be uncovered while at the same time allowing for a manageable amount of data.

Sample size

The study will utilize second-source data in five case studies of convicted rapists. All five cases are derived from the same source due to the amount of background information collected on each offender from the previous researcher. These five offenders were chosen due to their similarities: each offender was charged with sexually aggravated assault, though all fit
the forcible rape category needed for this study; all five offenders are first time rapists; and each rapist had between one and four victims.

**Measurement**

A content analysis will be performed on each case study to determine if sociobiological fitness stressors were present prior and leading up to the offense(s). Due to the fact that forcible rape qualifies men as the offender and each offender in this study is indeed male, all cases will be analyzed for the historically accepted male role as defined by sociobiological success. Sociobiological fitness traits to be considered are head of household, ability to act as financial provider, and ease of sexual access. Other stressors noted will be attributed to general strain.
Results

Each case study is derived from a previous researcher, Mark Crake, and assessed in four different areas. Relevant factors are categorized into offender information, offense information, criminological stressors, and sociobiological stressors. The offender information listed includes personal background, intelligence, family history, and known struggles. The offense information describes the situation pertaining to the rape(s). Criminological stressors asses the risk factors known by criminologists to lead to deviant behavior. Finally, sociobiological fitness stressors examine three areas of the traditional male role: head of household, financial provider, and ease of sexual access.

Case study 1

Offender information. Offender 1 is a 29 year old Melanesian male with two children from a common law marriage of five years. He’s described as having normal intelligence and being articulate, but suspicious and controlling. He comes from a violent family and has a history himself of adolescent gang violence participation. His criminal record shows property offenses as well as breaking and entering.

Offense information. Offender 1 was charged with sexual assault of his estranged partner. Crake (1993) described the offense details in the following way:

Mr. A and his wife had separated because of his domestic violence. They had had several separations in the past for similar reasons but had always reconciled. One the night of the offence he had gone out with her and friends and he was hoping to effect a reconciliation. Alcohol was consumed during the evening. His wife rejected his attempts to reconcile whereupon an argument ensued. He violently physically assaulted her and raped her. (p. 280)
Criminological stressors. In the situation described above, there are many predisposing criminological stressors that put Offender 1 at risk of criminal activity. His originating from a violent family is a strong indicator as well as his own history of gang violence participation. He clearly is used to a violent atmosphere. Additionally, he continued his criminal history into adulthood with minor offenses such as breaking and entering as well as property offenses. Finally, his lack of self-control and power were elevated by alcohol consumption. All of these have been shown to be criminal risk factors.

Sociobiological fitness stressors. From the situation described, there is no evidence indicating Offender 1 is not the head of household. He has assumed the traditional male role and was allowed to take over as family leader. Similarly, there is no indication he was unable to financially provide for his family. However, there is evidence for lack of sexual access. With two children already, he clearly had access at some point but it had since been revoked due his domestic violence history.

Case study 2

Offender information. Offender 2 is described as a 33 year old caucasian male originating from a stable, intact, and nurturing family with traditional gender roles. Though his development through adolescence was normal, he was a poor student and dropped out of high school at the age of 15. He experienced many deaths during his developmental years, but was not allowed to grieve the loss which led to problems in his future relationship. In his twenties, he became involved with a female for the duration of twelve years. However, this relationship was strained due to tension over closeness and individuation. There was low relationship commitment, poor conflict resolution, and little communication leading to a series of separations and reconciliations over the twelve year period.
Offense information. A week before he was arrested for sexual assault, Offender 2 found his partner in bed with another man. Though the couple had been separated at the time, he wished to pursue reconciliation once again and went home in hopes of making up. However, after walking in on the affair, he physically assaulted the man until his victim was able to escape. Then, without speaking to his partner, he left the house.

Offender 2 consumed great amounts of alcohol that whole week due to hurt, resentment, and revenge. Though he still wished to get back together with his partner, he was too proud to go back. At the end of the week, he escalated in the following way:

While drunk at a sporting club function he followed a woman into the female toilets in the club house, loitered in a cubicle, attacked her when the opportunity presented itself, dragged her into adjoining rooms and proceeded to sexually assault her. She called for help when a friend came looking for her and she broke free. He was caught immediately and summarily punished by her friends. (Crake, 1993, p. 281)

Criminological stressors. In the situation above, Offender 2 has very few criminological risk factors. The only known predisposing factor is the lack of education. His family history, personal history, and lack of violence show a relatively normal functioning adult. Once again, however, we see alcohol consumption as a propagator to criminal behavior which for the purpose of this study is being classified as a general strain.

Sociobiological fitness stressors. Of what is known, Offender 2 appeared to be a sociobiologically fit individual, though clearly in need of psychological assistance in dealing with emotions and communication. Though he lacked education, he was a skilled laborer
indicating he was able to provide financially. There is no indication as to whether or not he was able to act as head of household. However, Offender 2’s breaking point was walking in on an affair. Due to the couple’s history of separations and reconciliations, compiled with the discovery of his partner’s infidelity, there is evidence that the lack of ease of sexual access was his strongest stressor.

**Case study 3**

**Offender information.** Offender 3 is described as a 22 year old caucasian male. His personality is typically placid, good-natured, hard worker, and popular. As the youngest and only male of four siblings, he was deemed “the baby” of the family. His childhood was described as nurturing and stable with an intact family. However, his parents were disengaged from each other which led to his mother forming a close bond with him. During adolescence, Offender 3 tried to individuate himself and became involved in a few dating relationships in the process. However, his family never approved of any of these females and he was always forced to end each relationship. At the age of 18, he became a father with yet another girl of whom the family disapproved. It was reported that Offender 3 had a difficult time choosing between his family’s approval and the responsibility he felt towards his girlfriend and soon-to-be mother of his child. He ended up marrying the girl, but he remained living in his parent’s home and she in hers through pregnancy and even after the birth of their child. Later psychological assessments concluded Offender 3 did not appear to have the mechanisms for coping with every day stresses. He also was anxious and immature with a poor self-concept.

**Offense information.** Offender 3 has two known assaults. The first assault had a sexual component and occurred after he left from visiting his fiancee and child. A 16 year old female was walking through a darkened park when Offender 3 attacked her. He demanded money,
restrained her, dragged her further into the park, and then raped her. At the time, he was wearing dark clothing and a mask, though he disposed of all this immediately after. Offender 3 also claims to have had a knife at the time. After his assault, he got in his car, drove up alongside the girl, and offered his assistance noting her distress. Though unclear whether or not the girl recognized her offender, she ran off.

The second assault happened again after visiting his child and fiancee. Once again, he saw a lone woman walking across a darkened park. And once again, he was wearing dark clothing and a mask. This assault was a simple attack and did not have the sexual component, instead only robbery. Crake (1993) stated:

At the time of the assaults his child was four months of age and he was very worried about providing financially for his fiancee. Psychological assessments described an immature and anxious individual with a poor self-concept. He also seemed to have limited psychological resources to handle everyday stress and was inclined to give way to his emotions. (p. 282)

**Criminological stressors.** There is no evidence Offender 3 had any prominent criminological stressors, though he did have his own set of issues with which to struggle. From the text, we see he did not have the coping mechanisms to deal with normal stresses. He also had low self-esteem which has been noted in some criminals. Though there is no explicit information regarding an unhealthy mother-son attachment, there is indication that one might have existed. Any other stresses appeared to be normal everyday stresses no greater than typically experienced.

**Sociobiological fitness stressors.** Offender 3 was unable to demonstrate sociobiological fitness in dealing with two stressors in this situation. The first is clearly stated in the text in that
Offender 3 was experiencing stress over being able to financially provide for his family. Second, he was unable to act as head of his household. The fact that he could not individuate from the family thus allowing him to become husband and father shows sociobiological stressors.

**Case study 4**

**Offender information.** Offender 4 is a 32 year old caucasian male. His childhood was described as normal and stable with an intact family; the only noted problem was the inability to confide in his parents. Offender 4’s parents reported he was caught cross-dressing during early adolescence, though Offender 4 states he has no recollection of this and states he had no sexual interest during this time. However, at the age of 15, Offender 4 was caught breaking into a neighbor’s house and soliciting sex. He was sent to Children’s Court and put on probation. Shortly after, at the age of 17, he and a friend were regularly peeping in on a certain woman. They decided to quit before being caught, but took some of her underwear off her clothesline as a memento. Ironically, this is where law enforcement caught them. Offender 4 continued his breaking and entering pattern, but only for money for several years. Later, his modus operandi changed.

**Offense information.** Offender 4 was charged with four counts of aggravated sexual assault. He escalated from breaking and entering for money to breaking and entering then attacking, restraining, and raping his four victims. His final act before leaving was to vandalize each house. All of these women had similar characteristics and were similar in age showing a specific victimology. However, Offender 4 denied any premeditation, fantasy, or victim preference. Crake (1993) stated of the offender’s perception of the crimes:

He describes the rapes as break and enters gone wrong despite his apparent careful
selection of victim type. He denies any fantasies or urges to commit rape despite a pattern close in time and the absence of any precipitating life crisis that may have overwhelmed his psychological coping mechanisms. He claims not to know why he stayed in the houses once he became aware of someone else's presence. He denies any premeditation in the assaults. He claims to be wanting treatment services but does not like to think of himself as a rapist. (p. 283)

Criminological stressors. From the information provided, it appears Offender 4 should have been a relatively normal functioning individual. The only noted criminological risk factor is his adolescent arrest for breaking and entering at age 15. Since his criminal activity continued into adulthood, it is apparent that his punishment and/or rehabilitation from his earlier offense was ineffective thus leading towards continuation and escalation.

Sociobiological stressors. Due to Offender 4 not having a family of his own, and without any information regarding his normal life routines, it is unknown if this offender had any sociobiological stressors. From the information provided, he appears to be able to play the role of traditional male. However, his offenses clearly show there is more going on than what can be derived from the supplied information.

Case study 5

Offender information. Offender 5 is a non-white male in his late twenties. Though he had an intact family, supportive parents, and normal childhood, he often had to deal with racism. In his early teens, Offender 5 became involved with a white female. Due to race, her family strongly and openly disapproved of the developing relationship. Fighting the resistance, the couple remained together and lived at his parents house. They married in their early twenties, but lived with extended family for financial reasons.
His wife gave birth to their child shortly thereafter, but sadly the child was born with a degenerative disease. The baby was hospitalized from the day it was born until the day it died a few weeks later. The death was precipitated by Offender 5 being forced to withdraw life support from his child. Though his wife did not blame him, their relationship became strained. Her family laid guilt on Offender 5, and they were full of grief over the loss.

Offender 5 attended his wife’s family gathering at which one family member pointedly told him he and his family were rejected because of their race. He went to a hotel where he consumed large amounts of alcohol, but was followed by one of his wife’s female family members. The female confronted him at the hotel and told him his baby’s illness and death was his fault. Though this incident lacked physical violence and she left unharmed, Offender 5 continued to drink through his vengeful thoughts and feelings.

**Offense information.** Offender 5 broke into the house of the female family member who confronted him earlier. Reportedly, he intended to humiliate and degrade his victim through rape. Offender 5 has been convicted of sexual assault and is participating in a rehabilitation program. Crake (1993) reports Offender 5 is ashamed and remorseful.

**Criminological stressors.** No doubt Offender 5 had great stressors in his life. The results of racism and death of his child were only exacerbated by alcohol. However, with respect to criminological tendencies, Offender 5 showed no outstanding risk factors.

**Sociobiological fitness stressors.** Offender 5’s inability to financially provide for his family was a clear stressor. This downfall caused him to live with other family members which in turn created stress as it relates to the inability to act as head of the household. When he was
forced to make those types of choices, as in removing life support, he was blamed and faulted for the whole debacle.

Table 1 below summarizes each case study and the different stressors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Criminological Stressors (GST)</th>
<th>Sociobiological Stressors (NST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CS 1</td>
<td>Family violence, gang participation, criminal history, alcohol</td>
<td>Lack of sexual access due to marital separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS 2</td>
<td>Low education, alcohol</td>
<td>Lack of sexual access due to partner having an affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS 3</td>
<td>None noted</td>
<td>Lack of financial success, inability to act as head of household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS 4</td>
<td>Minor single adolescent offense</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS 5</td>
<td>Subject of racism, alcohol</td>
<td>Lack of financial success, inability to act as head of household</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Noted criminological stressors and noted sociobiological stressors
Discussion and Conclusions

This research sought to answer the question, "Were sociobiological stressors present in convicted rapists prior to the offense(s)?". This study shows that in these five first-time rape offenders, four of these individuals experienced extreme sociobiological stressors. These strains were either sufficient enough to produce criminal activity, as in case studies two and three, or they compounded with general strains leading towards rape, as in case studies one and five.

Four out of the five case studies exemplify how sociobiological stress factors enhance the General Strain Theory in explaining rape. Case study four does not signify a relationship between sociobiology and criminology, nor does it fit either the Natural Selection Theory or General Strain Theory from the information provided. This research was limited to the information gathered by the previous researcher. Therefore, it is possible that both criminological stressors and sociobiological stressors could have been present or perhaps neither were a factor. It is undeterminable at this point. However, with the majority of case studies in support of this correlation, there is clear evidence that sociobiological fitness traits do, in fact, add strain to individuals and can lead towards criminal action.

Lower education levels have been found as risk factors for criminal behavior, but it has been unclear how financial gain pertains to rape. This study provides evidence that lack of education is relevant to rape not for the monetary purpose, but rather the sociobiologically fit purpose. He who cannot meet financial goals for himself or as dictated by society is sociobiologically unfit and thus may resort to rape as an exhibition of self worth and power as was the scenario in case study five.

In this research, the extent to which the sociobiological strain led the individual towards deviant behavior is unknown. However, there is evidence from case study three that
sociobiological stressors can be sufficient enough to produce anti-social behavior. Furthermore, only three aspects of sociobiological strain were taken into consideration. Other sociobiological fitness factors could have also been missing, and further study should be conducted to explore what other fitness traits provide strain.

The bigger question of this project is, “What can criminologists do with this information?” It has already been shown that higher education is a crime deterrent, but females surpassing the males in educational achievement is a sociobiological strain. It is implausible and a-beneficial to limit women in their educational achievements, so the sociobiological strain felt by the men cannot be removed. This leaves the only option of having to confront sociobiological strains. Men who have no prior violent tendencies suddenly find themselves committing criminal acts as was the case for Offender 5. It is this author’s opinion that individuals who have resorted to criminal activity due to multiple stresses in life have a greater chance to be rehabilitated. This does not imply that there are some individuals incapable of rehabilitation, but rather there is a stronger chance for a successful outcome if the General Strain Theory can be applied to the offender’s actions. Just like sexual behavior is exhibited in every organism, so is stress. The mechanism for dealing with these life stresses is the difference between criminal behavior and healthy coping.

This research shows that sociobiology factors can and should be considered in explaining rape motivation. Further research should be conducted to determine if sociobiology also can be useful in explaining other types of rapes such as gang rape, date rape, and male rape. Other crimes, such as violent crimes, property crimes, and white collar crimes are all areas to explore if sociobiology could provide insight as well.
References


