



## Behavioural Patterns in Rape as a Sexual Assault

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to understand rape as a complex criminal behaviour with multiple patterns and varying motivations by taking a classification-based approach. This moves beyond the stereotypical image that reduces rape to merely a sexual crime.

It presents the Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC: R3) classification of rapists, which categorises them into types such as opportunistic, anger-retaliatory, sexually sadistic, non-sadistic and vindictive. Additionally, it discusses a range of explanatory variables related to understanding and analysing rape behaviour, including aggression, impulsivity, social competence, sexual fantasies, sadism, beliefs and naïve perceptions.

This article aids the analysis of individual differences among rapists and contributes to preventive, therapeutic and security approaches within social and cultural contexts and specificities.

**Keywords:** Sexual assault, rape, classification patterns.

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### Introduction

Rape is considered a sexual crime involving physical violence and profound psychological violation that goes beyond mere sexual acts. Rape is committed by a diverse group of criminals, leading to a range of psychological and social characteristics and motivations. Consequently, a classification approach has emerged as one of the most effective means of understanding the behavioural patterns that govern this type of sexual assault. This article aims to contribute to the scientific understanding of rape behaviour as a form of sexual assault.

#### Sexual assault as criminal behaviour:

Sexual assault crimes are a significant concern in all societies due to the increasing number of victims of sexual abuse, a reality faced by many individuals.

Sexual assault is a deviant sexual behaviour in criminology, where a relationship is established between partners through violence, threats or surprise. This results in pleasure for the perpetrator and destruction for the victim, who experiences humiliation and physical and psychological annihilation. This indicates profound disturbances in communication, relational, and belief systems that shape human connections.

Firstly, it is important to note that the term 'sexual assault' encompasses a wide range of sexual crimes, including rape, violent indecent acts, indecent acts against minors and sexual deviance. These crimes are outlined in the amended Algerian Penal Code under Articles 334, 335 and 336 respectively.

For a long time, sexual assault has been defined as behaviour resulting from a deviant psychological state, which has led to societal rejection and severe punishment in different cultures, religions, and legal systems. Contemporary interpretations of this phenomenon have sought to understand sexual assault through various approaches, providing explanations and predictions. This has led to therapeutic attempts to treat sexual assault as a pathological phenomenon, as discussed in a book by J. Aubut et al.

Research by Terrie Moffitt indicates that delinquency and crime can be understood by viewing them as developing along at least two pathways. One pathway involves children developing a trajectory of delinquency and crime from an early age, potentially from around three years old. Moffitt states: Throughout

life, these children exhibit marked changes in antisocial behaviour: biting and hitting at four years old, stealing and truancy at ten, drug dealing, theft and sexual assault at twenty-two, and child abuse, fraud and murder by thirty (Moffitt, 1993, p. 679).

### **Key approaches to understanding sexual assault:**

#### **Bio-social approach:**

This approach emerged from advances in medical and neurological sciences, as well as investigative methods aimed at identifying organic injuries resulting from sexual assault and rape. It is based on the premise that children are born with a range of sexual constructs, as well as neurobiological and temperamental predispositions, which play a significant role in the development of antisocial behaviour and violent conduct. This falls under what is known as bio-social studies. This field of study has been divided into three phases:

The 1960s: Focusing on identifying aggression-related chromosomes.

The 1970s: Characterised by research into hormones.

The 1980s: Linked to neurological sciences and establishing three explanatory aspects of the phenomenon.

In this context, Steinberg developed a theoretical model providing a neurological explanation based on empirical neuroscience and developmental psychology studies. The hypothesis is that the pursuit of reward and impulsivity develop at different times, influenced by various neurological and hormonal factors during adolescence and young adulthood. These differences in timeline help to explain the high levels of risk-taking behaviour observed during adolescence. Steinberg adds that adolescent behaviour is characterised by impulsivity and sensitivity.

Impulsivity and rapid mood changes are common traits among many deviants and criminals, and are likely linked to self-regulation mechanisms that take time to develop. On the other hand, sensitivity is associated with seeking out high-stimulation narratives and experiences, as well as a willingness to take risks to achieve them (Steinberg et al., 2008, p. 1765).

Steinberg's dual-system model provides a remarkable framework for understanding adolescent offenders, focusing on self-regulation as a key skill in preventing antisocial behaviour and sexual assault. Self-regulation is defined as the ability to control and modify one's behaviour and emotions, including the capacity to shift focus. Therefore, it is a vital skill for maintaining socially acceptable behaviour and avoiding aggression, sexual assault, and drug use. Self-regulation requires a neuro-hormonal mechanism and a supportive psychosocial environment.

#### **Psychoanalytic approach:**

The psychoanalytic approach is widely regarded as one of the most powerful frameworks for understanding deviant sexual behaviour. While it is well established that sexual assault reflects a profound psychological disturbance, global classifications of mental disorders (e.g. DSM-V, ICD-10) do not include it among their classifications of sexual disorders, even in its more violent, sadistic forms.

The psychoanalytic approach has attempted to provide detailed theoretical explanations for aggression and sexual violence. S. Freud introduced the concepts of fusion and differentiation relating to the life and death instincts concerning the duality of sex and aggression. He posited that the destructive instinct prevails and that aggressive behaviour arises from differentiation and separation (Postel, 2005, p. 112).

Freud also introduced the concept of sadism within the death instinct, whereby this instinct serves the sexual drive. The aggressive instinct manifests as an expression of the death instinct directed outward, which Freud termed 'acting out', a form of resistance that is legitimately and analytically connected to criminal behaviour. This concept was further clarified by Sandler (1975, pp. 123–124).

The concept currently encompasses a range of explosive, antisocial and dangerous behaviours. In his essay on fetishism, Freud argues that those who engage in such behaviours possess primitive defence mechanisms, such as denial. Consequently, sexual deviations and rape evoke intense emotional responses.

C. Balier is considered to be the first person to analyse the personalities of sexual offenders in his 1996 work, *Psychanalyse des comportements sexuels violents*, in which he distinguishes between sexual deviance (perversion), which involves acting out unconscious psychological scenarios linked to deviant scripts, and sexual perversion (perversité), which refers to acting without hidden motivations, with the sole dynamic being that of destruction, power and sexual assault.

According to Balier, sexual assault is a defensive attempt to protect the ego from depression or breakdown. The sexual offender experiences fragility reflecting a narcissistic disorder, which leads them to choose an external object (Balier, 2000, p. 2008).

### **Classificatory approach: MTC Classification Model**

Today, numerous models are used to classify sexual offenders and establish preventive and therapeutic strategies. One of the most prominent is the Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC) classification of rapists. This empirical model, based on observation, is useful for classifying the behavioural patterns of rapists and includes the emergence of sexual aggression in sexual assaults. It also provides an excellent framework for describing the psychological characteristics of individuals who commit rape crimes in general.

MTC researchers believe that rape is a multifaceted behaviour that can be explained by models incorporating various dimensions. This empirical classification considers all possible categories of individuals who commit rape.

Originally, the model identified four categories of rapist based on the offender's primary motivation:

- opportunistic rapist
- Anger Rapist
- Sexual Rapist
- Vindictive Rapist

Additionally, nine subtypes of rape were distinguished, each playing an important role in behavioural and emotional patterns. These are associated with six variables:

- Aggression
- Impulsivity
- Social competence
- Sexual fantasies

Sadism

- Naïve perception or beliefs

### **Explanatory variables of the rapist's personality:**

Each variable should be described to gain a deeper understanding of the sub-patterns of classification.

Aggression is behaviour characterised by the intention to cause harm or damage to others, whether physical, psychological or verbal. Aggression can be divided into two types:

The first type is called 'instrumental or strategic aggression'.

The second type is known as 'expressive or non-strategic aggression'.

The first type is used by rapists to achieve compliance from the victim and typically involves no anger. In contrast, expressive aggression is used by rapists to hurt, humiliate and insult.

Prentky and Knight (1991, p. 647) indicated that these rapists intend only to enforce compliance from their victims and that they are likely to differ significantly in the level of overt aggression present in their crimes.

- Impulsivity: This behaviour is characterised by hasty actions without consideration of the consequences; an individual acts suddenly under the influence of strong emotions or desires, without logical evaluation or self-control. Numerous studies suggest that impulsivity is a significant factor in many sexual assaults and criminal behaviour in general.

As a lifestyle pattern, impulsivity is a strong indicator of recidivism, especially among rapists. It is also a focal point for many therapeutic programmes aimed at changing the antisocial behaviours of sexual offenders. Due to the inability to exercise self-control, impulsivity plays a critical role in relapse.

### **Social competence:**

Social competence is a psychosocial concept referring to an individual's ability to interact positively and effectively with others, understand social norms, build successful relationships and adapt to various social situations. Sexual offenders are often described as lacking social and personal skills, particularly when

interacting with the opposite sex. This characteristic is especially evident in the behavioural patterns of child molesters.

Social competence encompasses a wide range of abilities and skills, including communication, problem solving, social comfort and cunning. It is a complex skill developed within a variety of contexts.

In a study on antisocial personalities, Reid notes that sexual offenders and rapists misinterpret friendliness and natural interaction as sexual behaviour. They also misunderstand social and emotional cues due to a deficiency in social competence (Reid, 2024, p. 158).

### **Sexual fantasies:**

Sexual fantasies are thoughts or mental images of a sexual nature, which people use to achieve arousal or pleasure. They can occur during wakefulness or in dreams, and are a natural and common phenomenon regardless of gender.

S. Freud viewed sexual fantasies as a means of releasing repressed sexuality, considering them to be unconscious content reflecting repressed desires from childhood. In contrast, Alfred Kinsey, who conducted extensive field studies on sexual behaviour and fantasies among men and women, found that they are widespread and vary according to gender, age and social background.

Sexual fantasy is considered a necessary preliminary step for individuals with deviant sexual behaviour. Leitenberg and Henning (1995, p. 487) state that there is little doubt that many men who commit sexual offences are aroused by fantasies about these acts and regularly masturbate to them, certainly more than non-offenders. They add that those men with high narcissism are more likely to act on their sexual fantasies.

### **Sadism:**

In the psychoanalytic approach, sadism is viewed as a sexual deviation reflecting the interplay of the life instinct ("Eros") and the death instinct ("Thanatos") within the human psyche. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argues that sadism represents a regression to a primitive stage of instinctual gratification where sexual pleasure and a tendency towards destruction are intertwined.

Rather than seeking mere sexual gratification, a sadistic individual derives pleasure from inflicting pain, harm and humiliation upon others. Sadism is characterised by extreme violence in sexual crimes, involving brutal acts and repeated abuse of victims (Freud, 1949, pp. 44–45).

Some sadistic sexual offenders interpret certain characteristics of the victim as sexual invitations or implicit consent, which is a dangerous cognitive distortion that can justify violent behaviour.

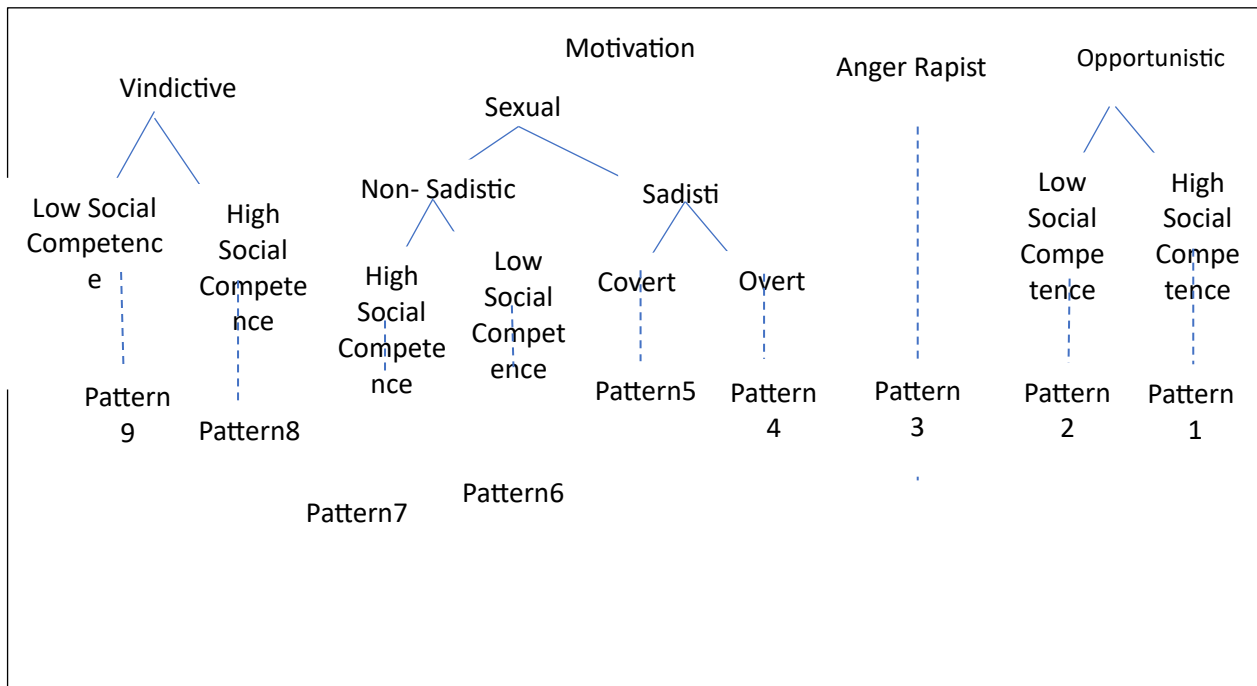
### **Naïve beliefs or perceptions:**

Proper sexual socialisation and rational social learning play a critical role in the healthy development of the individual. Distorted social perceptions and naïve beliefs are among the psychosocial factors that can lead individuals to commit sexual assault due to erroneous cultural notions that justify violent sexual behaviour, minimise its severity or shift blame onto the victim.

According to social perception theory, individuals often make judgements based on incomplete or biased information. This was noted by Martha R. Burt in her study of misconceptions about rape. Koss and Dimero's (1988, p. 144) study found that men with sexual hostility display significant aggression, watch violent pornography and are part of peer groups that strongly reinforce dominant sexual viewpoints. These men are more likely to believe that force and coercion are legitimate means of gaining compliance in sexual relationships. This represents an evolutionary process of sexual aggression, in which early experiences and psychological traits play a crucial role in setting the stage for sexual violence.

### **Classification of the Four Patterns of Rapists According to the MTC**

R3: The Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC) classifies rapists into four primary patterns, which branch into nine sub-patterns. The following figure illustrates this classification:



Source: Knight, R.A., Warren, J.I., Reboassin, R. & Soley, B.J. (1998). Reprinted with permission from Sage on behalf of the International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychologists.

### 1. Opportunistic Rapist (Types I and II):

The opportunistic rapist engages in sexual assault and rape when the opportunity arises. They are driven by antisocial behaviour. These offenders are characterised by impulsivity, a lack of self-control and emotional immaturity, resulting in reckless and irresponsible behaviour. This behaviour tends to be disruptive throughout their lives and shows a lack of concern; they are also inclined towards instrumental aggression and excessive force.

MTC researchers further categorise opportunistic rapists as follows:

- High-Impulsivity Opportunistic Rapist with High Social Competence. Impulsivity is evident during adolescence.
- Low-Social-Competence Opportunistic Rapist: Impulsivity manifests during childhood.

### 2. Anger Rapist (Type III):

This psychological behavioural pattern is characterised by intense impulsivity and aggression that exceeds mere sexual gratification. It manifests as a concentrated release of anger, contempt and hatred towards the victim, particularly women. Their violent acts reflect random impulses and target anyone who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Their violent and aggressive behaviour indicates a lack of sexual arousal.

Offenders of this type exhibit a high degree of non-sexual aggression, expressing it through verbal and physical assault (expressive aggression). They typically carry out unplanned and unintentional attacks.

### 3. Sexually driven rapist (type IV and V): sadistic.

The sexually driven rapist is a well-known behavioural pattern among sexual assault offenders. This type is divided into sadistic and non-sadistic categories. Sadistic sexual offenders can be either overt (Type IV) or covert (Type V). The motivation of the 'covert' offender lies in the victim's fear or certain fantasies that aid their sexual arousal. In contrast, the overt sadistic rapist employs both sexual and aggressive elements in their assault to inflict actual pain on the victim and torment them.

This type believes that their victims enjoy being abused and raped through force, control and domination. Sadistic tendencies are more consistently expressed in this type than in other types of rapist.

Durand and Barlow (2022, pp. 410–420) indicate that the term ‘sadism’ encompasses a range of sexual disorders and deviations. Sexual pleasure occurs exclusively in the context of subjects or individuals characterised by repeated practices and fantasies for intense sexual arousal, behaviours involving non-human subjects and the suffering and humiliation of a partner for at least six months.

An overt sadistic rapist is an assailant who exhibits a level of aggression or violence that exceeds what is necessary to enforce the victim’s compliance, with clear evidence that the aggression is pleasurable and sexually arousing. This can be demonstrated through harmful acts towards the victim or their sexually significant body parts.

Conversely, a covert sadistic rapist is an instrumental offender with sufficient power to ensure the victim’s compliance, who exhibits evidence of sexual fantasies involving violence through tests or the victim’s fear.

### **Sexually Driven and Non-Sadistic Rapists (Types VI and VII):**

The non-sadistic rapist engages in sexual assault due to intense sexual arousal. Although rape is clearly defined as an act accompanied by violence, aggression is not a significant feature of the sexual assault perpetrated by the non-sadistic, sexually driven rapist. Instead, a desire to demonstrate sexual prowess and competence to the victim is a key motivator.

This type is known as the ‘power reassessment rapist’ and is one of the most common patterns (Holmes & Holmes, 2009, pp. 60–62). They exhibit clear personality disorders, including a lack of impulse control and cognitive distortions, as well as deficiencies in social skills. Rape is often accompanied by emotional delusions and the perpetrator does not seek to dominate or humiliate the victim. Assaults often occur at night, with intervals ranging from seven to 15 days between them.

This category is characterised by verbalisation aimed at self-reassertion, with an interest in the victim’s comfort and enjoyment of the sexual experience — albeit distorted.

### **Vindictive rapist (types VIII and IX):**

The vindictive rapist commits rape out of hatred, with the intention of harming and humiliating women rather than for sexual reasons. This pattern often stems from past experiences and results in feelings of hostility and anger towards women. The assault is intended as revenge, with the aim of destroying the victim both psychologically and physically, accompanied by verbal insults and clear sadistic behaviours such as biting and tearing parts of the body. The victim may possess characteristics that attract the offender’s attention, and resistance can provoke further violence.

A rapist is considered vindictive if their verbal and non-verbal behaviours involve contempt, humiliation and devaluation of the victim, affecting every part of their body. The general approach to classifying rape is a serious, systematic, and empirical effort to understand the behavioural and psychological patterns of rapists by categorising them into groups based on psychological motives and the social contexts surrounding the criminal act.

### **Conclusion:**

The Massachusetts Treatment Center for Rapists’ approach to classification has highlighted the behavioural patterns of sexual offenders and their variations, aiding in the deconstruction of the underlying structure and motivations behind the criminal act of rape. It reveals dimensions and indicators that extend beyond fulfilling pathological inclinations, expressing anger, and the need for control in a sexual context.

Understanding these patterns is essential for conducting more in-depth clinical studies and sociological research that consider cultural contexts.

Research in criminal psychology, particularly with regard to sexual assault, can contribute to the development of more effective criminal and preventive policies, as well as strategies for providing psychological support and facilitating social reintegration.

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