

# Relating Rape and Murder

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# Relating Rape and Murder

## Narratives of Sex, Death and Gender

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of Camilla Petersen*

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# Contents

<i>Foreword by Professor Keith Soothill</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
1 Relating Rape and Murder	1
2 Biological/Historical Sexual Violence Discourse	17
3 Feminism and Sexual Violence Discourse	39
4 Jack the Ripper Narrative	55
5 Violence Against Women in News Report Narratives	82
6 Police Narratives	115
7 Rape and Murder Related	151
<i>Appendix</i>	174
<i>References</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	188

# Foreword

I have known the author for some time. Our paths have crossed at criminology conferences which she first attended as a mature student. She showed the familiar diffidence and lack of confidence of someone who had come later to higher education. But there was also perhaps an underlying recognition – which had to be carefully moulded and encouraged – that her past working experience could produce something special in the criminological arena. This book is an important outcome in that process and will, hopefully, be the first of a series where Jane continues to produce refreshing insights on familiar issues and problems.

Academic books that have a *prima facie* interest for a reader will, after being read, produce the reaction that either it is just ‘more of the same’ or, more unusually, be identified as doing something more. For me, this book does something more than expected. I have written on homicide (Soothill *et al.*, 1999) and on rape (Soothill, 1991) but also with a particular focus on media representations of sex crime (Soothill and Walby, 1991) and homicide (Peelo *et al.*, 2004; Peelo and Soothill, in press). In the present volume Jane Monckton-Smith has powerfully demonstrated how the analytically distinct crimes of homicide and rape are dangerously linked. In short, she argues that ‘there is a relationship constructed in sexual murder discourse between the offences of rape and murder which allows them to share meaning’ (p. 000). The implications of sexualizing violent acts in the way that are discussed in this text are enormous. It has implications for the way that human fears are constructed but also, at a more practical level, of how police investigations are conducted.

It is not my task to rehearse all the arguments but I do want to emphasize the importance of the project. First, however, the modesty of the author precludes her stressing the scale of the work undertaken. The evidence is drawn from narratives produced in police investigations, press reporting and entertainment media. Each type of source could have produced a volume of its own. The topics are similarly rich and diverse. A chapter on the ‘Jack the Ripper Narrative’ is matched by ‘Police Narratives’ on very contemporary crimes. In fact, there are a series of chapters which, as the author notes, can be read separately – they have their own integrity. Readers are likely to return to the book

and read again a chapter for a particular task in hand. However, in the first instance, readers would be wise to accept the challenge of reading the text in its entirety, for it is the impact of the cumulative evidence that makes the message so convincing.

I think most readers will eventually identify with at least one of two versions of the message. Certainly, after reading the book it would seem unlikely that the message will fail to convince at some level. The strong version is that the routine linking of homicide and rape has become so insidious and pervasive – with the police and the media colluding in the misrepresentations – that the dangers are already manifest and that change will be impossible to achieve. However, a blander interpretation is that the inappropriate linking of homicide and rape is simply a tendency that may on occasion happen. With this interpretation the dangers of the tendency are not fully recognized and the difficulties of challenging such misrepresentations would not be thought to be great.

My own position moves towards the strong version but with some modifications. I think current police practice and contemporary media frenzies about crime have, indeed, both fed into the development of the linking of homicide and rape exactly in the ways that the present author describes. Sadly, however, the dangers of this routine conflation have not yet been fully understood and articulated although this book begins to do so. Indeed, the main merit of this book is that it identifies the potential importance of the message. The question of whether much can be done about it reminds – at a time when the UN's climate summit in Copenhagen is of topical interest – that there are some issues which have to be confronted. In fact, this book lays down the gauntlet in stressing that some of the ways we talk about homicide and rape, in effect, make matters worse. This is the important challenge which needs to be confronted.

*Keith Soothill*  
*Emeritus Professor of Social Research*

# Acknowledgements

This book is passionate and leans towards the polemic but it would be difficult to write about such emotionally charged issues without partiality. My passion has sometimes consumed my energies and it would be true to say that I have had to prioritise and compromise, and not always to the benefit of my family; that is my husband Keith, and my three children Rhiannon, Ffion and Kieran. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank them for their unquestioning support; it is a treasured gift that I hope to always reciprocate. Keith, I owe you special thanks, both for your willingness to endlessly engage with my reflections, and your extraordinary ability to critically consider thorny gender issues with aplomb.

Special thanks to my mother Maeve for the long, long chats on tricky subjects which were always an oasis of wisdom and fun; also my father David who shared experience, knowledge and crime scene equipment! Not always the typical conversations for family gatherings but all the more memorable and cherished for that.

Dr Paul Mason, I thank for his excellent guidance and support over many years, and especially his collaboration in Chapter 5. Professor Keith Soothill, who is the most generous of academics, has played a bigger role in my journey into the academy than he realises and is someone to whom I am truly grateful. Dr Carol Davis is another who is probably unaware that her patient listening and advice had a profound impact on my own confidence. To all these people I give heartfelt thanks.

Acknowledgement too is given to certain police officers from the Serious Crime Team who generously gave of their time; especially one officer who coordinated my access. It became clear whilst speaking with them that they are deeply affected by the job they do. They were all passionate and caring and consummately professional. It is easy to confuse critical analysis with simple criticism and the police services suffer much of both. I would therefore like to make it clear that it was abundantly evident to me that all these officers were clearly dedicated to achieving justice, appreciably compassionate and greatly skilled. Many, many thanks for your time and insights.

Finally, thanks to *The Times*, the *Sun*, the *Guardian* and the *BBC* for such uncomplicated permissions.

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