

Just Crossover Offending

Introduction [00:00:05] Now, this is recording, RTI International Center for Forensic Science presents Just Science.

Voiceover [00:00:19] Welcome to Just Science, a podcast for justice professionals and anyone interested in learning more about forensic science, innovative technology, current research, and actionable strategies to improve the criminal justice system. In episode ten of our Research and Considerations for Sexual Assault Cases season, Just Science sat down with Dr. Rachel Lovell, researcher and professor at Cleveland State University, and Mary Weston, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and director of the Cold Case Unit at the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, to discuss the complexities surrounding crossover offending in sexual assault cases. Do serial rapists have a consistent modus operandi? According to Dr. Lovell's research and Mary Weston's experience as a prosecutor, serial offenders rarely stick to a script, making it harder to bring them to justice. Listen along as our guests use their research and experience in the courtroom to demystify crossover offending and provide strategies to better investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases involving serial offenders in this episode of Just Science. This season is funded by the National Institute of Justice's Forensic Technology Center of Excellence. Some content in this podcast may be considered sensitive and may evoke emotional responses or may not be appropriate for younger audiences. Here's your host, Tyler Raible.

Tyler Raible [00:01:34] Hello and welcome to Just Science. I'm your host, Tyler Raible with the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence, a program of the National Institute of Justice. Our topic today is crossover offending associated with sexual assault cases. To lead us in this conversation, I'm joined by our guests, Dr. Rachel Lovell and Mary Weston. Rachel, Mary, welcome back. It's great to see you again.

Rachel Lovell [00:01:53] Thanks for having us.

Mary Weston [00:01:54] It's good to talk to you, Tyler.

Tyler Raible [00:01:56] So I'm really excited to have you both back on the podcast. And last time you were here, we discussed an article highlighting some of the benefits of a test-all, investigate-all approach to sexual assault kits. And admittedly, today's topic is a little different in the vein of crossover offending as it relates to sexual assault. So can you tell us a little bit about how this topic came about or maybe how you two started working together on it?

Rachel Lovell [00:02:18] Myself and my team started working on coming to task force meetings, which was about a year and a half into the formation of the task force to investigate and prosecute the cases associated with the kits that were being tested. And one of the very first things that struck me about attending the meeting, so they would have these big meetings of everyone coming together every week, and I would sit in as a research partner so that I could understand the cases and how they're talking. And it was such a complicated process that I just needed to be there to hear it and see it and observe - true research format. And so, one of the first things that struck me from sitting in those meetings was, a) the number of serial offenders that they were identifying as part of the testing, which the testing wasn't even complete at that point. And two was, in these task force meetings, they would present cases that were coming up for trial and prosecutors would present the facts of the case and talk about the different rapes and talk about how they were connected, through DNA most of them. And it really struck me because they're

talking about the MOs and the facts of the case in each of these about how very different these offenders were in their offending pattern. So, you know, they were sexually assaulting what we call crossover or sort of varying their patterns across the different victims. And so just by listening and observing what they were doing in their regular day-to-day activities was something that really struck me. And at that time, the county prosecutor funded a pilot project - which was before SAKI was around - we did work around this through the pilot project funded from the prosecutor's office. And one of the first things they wanted was to sort of how to help identify or sort of find consistent patterns and MOs so that rapes could be put together in an easier format, not just through DNA, through basically a ViCAP sort of process. And much of what we found was that these offenses wouldn't have been tied together. The offending patterns were so different that ViCAP wouldn't have picked up - now, ViCAP kept still has great use - in many of these cases, ViCAP wouldn't have been useful or wouldn't have connected them without the use of DNA because the rapes were so different.

Tyler Raible [00:04:35] Excellent. Thank you. So, Rachel, I know you've published research associated with crossover offending. As a starting point for our audience and just for our conversation in general, can we get just a definition of crossover offending? What is crossover offending from an economic standpoint?

Rachel Lovell [00:04:49] There's many different terms for crossover offending or the idea of it - sometimes it's called sexual polymorphism, which doesn't roll off the tongue in the same sort of way. But it's basically the idea that any offending pattern that the suspect would vary the characteristics of the victim. So primarily we mean varying race, age, gender, types of sexual assault - sexually assaulting people that the suspect has a different relationship with. So it's crossing over between different types of groups. And so that's basically what crossover is, although again, it can be called sexual polymorphism, meaning you have many different types or more than one type of victim.

Tyler Raible [00:05:31] Excellent. I do want to clarify a little bit for our audience in particular, especially those who might not have listened to previous episodes, but I know that Cuyahoga County went through the process of testing a bunch of untested kits, and that's kind of how these patterns started to come about. So can you and Mary talk a little bit about the process of going through the kits - just a brief recap so that our audience has a good starting point and then how these patterns really started to surface?

Rachel Lovell [00:05:56] In 2013, the task force was formed to follow up on the testing that had already begun of - at the time it was five thousand, it now is over seven thousand - kits that needed additional testing or had never been tested. So in 2013, the task force formed because the kits were being tested and they were having forensic hits coming back from the testing, but they didn't have a mechanism in Cuyahoga County to really make a concerted effort to investigate and prosecute these cases. First, it was just given to the Cleveland Police Department to follow up, but they didn't have the resources - they were already swamped as it was, so they decided in the county that they really needed a dedicated task force that was multidisciplinary to investigate and prosecute those. And so, at that time, the county prosecutor was the one who formed and led this task force in Cuyahoga County. Now that the rape kits were- had been inventoried and they were in the process of being tested, there were all these cases that needed to be followed up on. And that's the task force that Mary has been leading.

Mary Weston [00:07:03] Early on in our project here in the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, we were testing thousands of kits kind of all at once and started getting results

really quickly, right. Like every day we were getting lab reports back. We were getting CODIS hit letters and we were getting CODIS match letters. And as we were taking deeper dives into those cases, first thing you notice is similarities, right. And it's very tempting to note similarities and think that it's really important. So I remember a day I was reviewing some cases maybe like five, six years ago. On the same day I looked at two cases that appeared similar. They were six days apart. They were one block away. They were home invasions. Both women described a man that was wearing jogging pants and a mask and gloves. And both women describe that the man said he had a weapon. One woman described the guy made her touch his stomach. One girl said he made her touch his chest. They both described that the man threatened to harm their families and said things that made both women think that he knew things about them. And so I remember thinking, OK, this got to be the same guy. And so that's not the only case like that so that's not in a vacuum. As a task force, you're looking at all these cases and you see kind of these similarities, and that was really helpful. I mean, it is really helpful. For instance, I still think the same guy committed both those crimes. But it's also really tempting to think that if somebody is going to offend multiple times, that they are going to always offend in the same way. And so I think that my beliefs and understanding of these cases has changed over time. Working with Rachel and learning, you know, people do not offend the same way every time and that people are more opportunistic than they are selective. And I think Rachel will talk a little more about how she came to learn that.

Tyler Raible [00:08:58] Perfect. Thank you both for the background. And now that we've nailed down our definition and kind of the environment within which you're operating, I've heard recently - and Mary, you just kind of reiterated this - that those who commit these sexual assaults often choose random, unknown individuals as well as known victims. So you said they're a little more opportunistic. So can you two elaborate a little bit on what this means?

Rachel Lovell [00:09:19] Yeah, I think it has something to do with sort of a crime scene investigations effect or sort of the proliferation of TV versions and/or just general knowledge of sex offenders that suggest- that still ties much of any offending, but in particular of sexual offending, to the victim's characteristics. Because I think of the type, the sexual attraction, that there's this idea that sexual offenders are really methodical and well planned out and they sexually assault strangers and they come very organized and structured - sort of that typical one that you would see on TV of like home invasions where they have duct tape with them, and they thought through this, and they cut through electricity wires and phone and so forth. And while those certainly do exist, that's certainly the exception rather than the rule. Because of that, I think there's a tendency to want to look, as Mary mentioned, to find similarities. That's a natural inclination to be like what makes this series, what makes more than one? Let's look for the consistencies across them. And the reason we did that was because of the information that we had at hand. Primarily what we know about sexual offenders, in particular serial sex offenders, is based upon a conviction. And we know that convictions are the exception rather than the rule. So conviction research suggests that three to five out of every one hundred rapists will end up serving a day in jail. So there's a very small percent that actually get convicted. And the only way we knew about them was those that went to prison, and then they came back out and then they committed again. So to be connected to more than one, most of the time, you had to be convicted of a sexual offense, get out of prison, observe for a long period of time, and then get convicted again for another offense. Then you have your series, right - you have more than one that they're connected to. The data from the untested rape kits, I think, are really transforming the way we think about serial sex offending, both in its prevalence and its nature. Because what we have are several things. One, we have rape

kits that were collected from victims at the time of reporting, not at conviction. So if you're thinking of the criminal justice system as a process, the reporting is the very early stages. It's certainly not all rapes. Most rapes aren't reported, but of those that are and victims get a sexual assault kit collected, it's collected at the time the victim reports. Then you go down the criminal justice process and you get to conviction, which again, is rare. So what you're getting at is information collected, evidence collected from a victim at the time of reporting. So you have a more representative sample - not completely representative, but more representative. And two, you have DNA that linked rape kits together that would have never been linked together before because the rapes are so different from each other. So sexually assaulting strangers and your foster children - had it not been for DNA, you wouldn't have put those together because the offending patterns are so different. Now, what has traditionally been used to link offenses that didn't have DNA together was the FBI's ViCAP, which stands for Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, which takes inventory and a series of questions about the offense itself and the offending pattern and the facts of the case, and then tries to link those offenses based on the offending pattern across different jurisdictions because it's the FBI so you have nationwide. And while that's very useful, because in many cases, if there's something particularly unique about a case, you would be able to potentially link those together across different jurisdictions. But what we were seeing a lot in the untested rape kits where the MO wasn't particularly unique, so there was nothing that sort of stood out as being able to connect it. And quite honestly, many of the cases wouldn't be eligible for ViCAP entry because they were connected to non-stranger rapes, and those don't go into ViCAP by and large. So what we're really seeing with these data are being able to link sexual assaults through DNA that wouldn't have been linked together and rapes that were- the evidence was collected at the time of reporting. So, for example, I was sitting in those meetings and there was one guy they called the bicycle rapist, and they were calling him that because he approached victims on a bicycle. And so prosecutors were talking about the case and they were like, oh, well, you know, he's the bicycle rapist. In these two cases, he approached the victims with a bicycle. And then there was this other one. And there was always this conversation of like but this other one. While similarities are interesting, as a researcher, I was always like, well, you have two that are similar - what's the other one that's not similar? I can't remember exactly with the bicycle rapist - I think it was a non-stranger case. And then there was one that was like a preacher, and he was abusing his position of authority and sexually assaulting, and he had a couple that were linked to that. And then it was like and then he has these others. And you're like, well, what's the others? Like how are they so different? And why are we- why is our conception of serial rapists based on those that are linked together that are similar, but not all of them together? And I think that that's where testing these rape kits is really transforming what we thought about those cases. That even those that are somewhat similar, that the offender is not married or tied so much to the offending pattern, but more of the opportunity and exploiting a victim's vulnerabilities to exploit. So it's more that they have the option to sexually offend and they have less of a preference for who the victim is and what that victim looks like or what the age range is or even how they're connected to them. As a couple examples that we write about in our publication, I think some of the most shocking ones are ones that cross over by gender. So we see one that where a male in his 20s was sexually assaulted by a perpetrator, and the man who was sexually assaulted was an adult male but lived in a group home. So the vulnerability there was he lived in a group home. This offender also sexually assaulted two strangers who were women. And so had it not been for DNA, police wouldn't have naturally been looking for the guy who would have sexually assaulted two adult stranger women and someone he had access to through his employment in the group home. Those wouldn't have been connected because they were so different. And we also, not just crossover by victim preference, but we also see crossover by level of violence. So in some of the offenses,

even though they may be all strangers, some of the victims, they abuse them physically much more beyond just the sexual assault, so very gratuitous violence where they severely injure the victims, and then others where they don't injure them at all. They don't even bring a weapon, or they constantly apologize in the act of the rape of like, I'm sorry, I'm hurting you. I'm sorry I'm hurting you. And then this other one where they severely injure the victim. So even in those cases, we could see vast differences in the level of violence, of always bringing a weapon, taking clothes. Those sorts of things were varying quite a bit across the different sexual assaults.

Tyler Raible [00:16:32] So, Rachel, I feel like you touched on a lot of myths that I kind of want to unpack a little bit. The first one that we kind of hinted at, as you mentioned, was the CSI effect of this almost a Hollywood-ization of sexual assault and how it's methodical. And then the other one that I'm interested in knowing a little more about is that offenders have a type. You know either they stick to strangers or known victims, or they have their own specific MO. So it's my understanding that your research indicates that in many situations that's not the case - these offenders don't have a type. Can you discuss a little bit about what kind of data did you actually find?

Rachel Lovell [00:17:07] We don't have data from the offenders themselves. I think that that's an interesting avenue to explore and something I'm definitely interested in exploring. But just from the information we have from their offenses that they've been connected to, and the research would suggest that sexual offenders might have a victim preference if they had their choice, but their choice may not have a temporary vulnerability that they can exploit in that situation. So it's much more about completing the sexual assault than it is finding someone who exactly fits perhaps who their sexual preference would be in terms of who they would consensually have sex with, and really trying to disentangle the idea of sexual preference for consensual sex and victim preference for sexually assaulting. I don't think - those might be somewhat related, but I think they're very different because those have different access. So even though someone might have a victim preference, they may not be able to complete a sexual assault at that moment. And we even see offenders, and Mary can speak a little bit more because she helped prosecute one of the offenders, but he was in the restroom of a public building waiting for the next victim to come in. And that's the victim that he sexually assaulted. In that instance, I think a really good example of a lack of victim preference because he didn't even know who was going to walk into the bathroom next - he was hiding in the bathroom, waiting for somebody to sexually assault and didn't even see the victim prior to sexually assaulting her.

Tyler Raible [00:18:42] Correct me if I'm wrong, but it really sounds like a) the big part of it is power dynamic, and b) it sounds like a lot of the preference is based on whether or not the offender thinks that they can get away with it - is that fair to say?

Rachel Lovell [00:18:54] Yes, I think that that is the case, that it has a lot to do with being able to complete the sexual assault. And really our other research on their criminal histories would suggest that the common theme is violence and power dynamics and a lack of respect for women and in many cases, other individuals. So it has more to do with that offender than it does necessarily - they're just sort of violent offenders. And as the prosecutor used to say in those meetings, if you're going to sexually assault the person you're supposed to love, who wouldn't you sexually assault? So to think that you would disconnect intimate partner sexual assaults from stranger sexual assaults, we think that those aren't together, that someone who would sexually assault an intimate partner, that's more about the dating relationship than it is about the rape. But we have data on a fairly large number of intimate partner sexual assaults through untested rape kits. And we've

published a paper on looking specifically at those. And in those, 40 percent of them are serial sexual offenders. And a good portion of those are those that have sexually assaulted intimate partners and strangers. It's more about the act. And that even has implications, I think, for registration, as well as looking for those that would sexually assault children and adults. We have traditionally thought of those as separate types of offenders, and our research, as well as others, suggests that there is a lot of crossover offending between sexually assaulting adults and sexually assaulting children, which calls into question, I think, some of how we think about risk. And they have a preference for kids, well they'll be fine around adult women, or they won't sexually assault adult women, and I don't think that that's the case.

Tyler Raible [00:20:33] I mean, it definitely seems the main factor here is vulnerability. So how do you see this research impacting a criminal justice professional's approach to sexual assault cases? Do they need to keep more of an open mind about patterns or what does this change in that arena?

Rachel Lovell [00:20:51] I think researchers have known about crossover offending for quite some time, although didn't have enough data to really understand it, because, again, it's mostly tied through conviction. But I think that it's still very new for many individuals within the criminal justice system. So I know Mary, as a prosecutor has spent quite a deal of time helping educate jurors, judges, defense attorneys, other prosecutors to sort of say, like, don't hang your hat on a consistent MO or sort of saying these are tied together, if you don't have DNA, for example, by just saying, oh, well, look, they must be similar. And let me show you how similar because what if there's the other one that isn't similar or isn't similar enough in a juror's mind that they are going to not be willing to accept that someone can vary across different offenses. So I think there's a lot of information that still needs to be pushed out to law enforcement and to the public and jurors as well for them to have a better understanding of offending patterns. And, Mary, I know you could probably speak better to, I know there was one big case that that happened with.

Mary Weston [00:22:00] Right. So you're talking about Nathan Ford case. I sort of mentioned this one before, where early on in the project I had seen these two crimes that seemed to me to be probably perpetrated on by the same person, and based on my read on that, I had additional testing done in those cases with a direct comparison done to an offender we already knew about who had had sort of that MO, right. And we got his DNA in both of those cases, and so I thought, OK, my hunch was right, this is the same guy. And we went to trial and both those women testified and the jury found him guilty of one, but not guilty of the other one. When we talked to the jury afterwards, they pointed out like these very specific differences in the cases. So they said, well, he made the first victim, like put a towel down and he raped her on a towel and then took that towel with him. He didn't make the second victim lay down on a towel. And, you know, he made the first victim shower after the rape and he didn't make the second victim shower after the rape. And he demanded and took things in the first case. But he didn't demand and take things in the second case. And so the jury thought that was significant enough that they didn't think it was - and here's the thing, we had less DNA in the second case. So I was making quite the argument that these circumstances were important because my DNA where there was just a little bit of his DNA in that second case - which, by the way, like most people would say, if you have any of his DNA, that's pretty- it's pretty important, right? But the jury said, well, we have these differences, and they were really caught up on those differences, despite the fact that it was the same block of the same street within six days, wearing the same clothing, doing these weird same things like touch my stomach and these specific threats. And there were so many similarities. My point is that it would be helpful to teach

juries that similarities are not everything, right. These offenders cannot be tied to one specific way of doing things. They're not always going to do things that way, because, as Rachel said, it's more important to complete the act, and like you said, Tyler, get away with it. What we're learning from looking at all these cases and from really finding out more about the research that Rachel has conducted is that it's not about the victim so much as it is about the offenders and what's in their mind. Well, they're looking for perhaps a vulnerability in a victim that would help them get away with it, right. So number one, offenders want to get away with their crimes. So that might account for some differences within the crimes. Maybe they don't have time to do everything that they would do in their perfect crime fantasy, but it doesn't mean they're not the same people. And this research that Rachel is conducting would be really helpful, I think, for, you know, in the court of public opinion so that juries don't come into court with these ideas that everyone's like what we read about years ago with Ted Bundy, remember? I mean, I remember as a kid my mom telling me, well, you got better be careful because you look just like Ted Bundy's victims. You have this long, glossy hair and everyone kind of thought, I remember, you know, people just kind of thinking Ted Bundy had a type - you know, we just talked to Rachel about whether offenders have types. And I remember thinking, well, you know, if Ted Bundy had convinced some girl to buy his ruse of having his broken leg or whatever it is that he was known to do and she was about to get into his van, but she had red hair. I don't see him saying I'll just wait for the next sorority girl to come along. So it makes sense when you think about what Rachel was saying about her research, which is that offenders are opportunistic and they want to get away with their crime. That's their- that's their number one goal is to complete that act of rape and to get away with it.

Tyler Raible [00:25:41] So there's something that both of you have touched on that I'm really interested in kind of running down a little bit. And it sounds like there are a lot of heuristic cues in place, right? There are these mental shortcuts that are being made either on the side of the jury, on the side of the investigator, especially when you have similarities between cases. So, Mary, you talked about the Nathan Ford case where the jury convicted on one and not the other because of these slight differences. And Rachel, you mentioned the bicycle rapist, where there were two cases, and then there's also this other one. So we have these situations where you might have people with similar MOs or even like a copycat offender type of situation. So, Mary, I guess my question really is, what advice do you have for other prosecutors when it comes to trying these kind of cases where you know that there are slight differences and you need to kind of overcome these mental shortcuts that are being made?

Mary Weston [00:26:31] I think it's important for a lot, and not just other prosecutors, right, like judges, juries, but, yes, other prosecutors too, even defense attorneys, to understand that it's tempting to think that offenders are going to act a certain way based on their prior history, right - that their prior history is going to predict their future behavior, but it's not that simple. I know I keep using Nathan Ford as an example, but Nathan Ford offended against women as young as 13 and as old as 55. There was- his victims were all races. His victims were from all different neighborhoods, opposite sides of Cleveland. There were different locations. Sometimes he was on foot. Sometimes he was breaking into a house. Sometimes he wore a mask. Sometimes he didn't wear a mask. So, you know, you don't want to think that somebody is always going to act in a certain way, especially if one of your focuses is keeping your community safe, right, as a prosecutor is supposed to be doing. You want to understand that offenders are not going to follow some specific or predictable pattern. They may offend in ways that you didn't expect them to offend. This also comes into play with me when I, you know, we have times where defense attorneys will come up to us and say, well, I don't think that you've got the right guy. You know what -

my guy, this isn't "what he does," right. And I'm putting "what he does" in quotes, in air quotes. But that's where the education of folks that are involved in the criminal justice system becomes so important. Right now, it is tough, though, like one of the challenges as a prosecutor is how do I get that kind of information into the hands of juries, judges? It's not easy to get that sort of expert information into their hands. So, I mean, really, it's the court of public opinion that you have to disseminate it in. So talking about it in forums like this is important and getting that information into the hands of other prosecutors, partners in the criminal justice system, and the public, because they are the arbiters in jury trials of the final verdicts.

Tyler Raible [00:28:32] I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about the research itself. So, Rachel, what are some of the key features of this crossover offending research that you'd like to highlight for our audience?

Rachel Lovell [00:28:43] I think one of the things I'd like to highlight is the importance of testing all kits. Traditionally, as you know, the kits were only tested in most jurisdictions when the suspect was a stranger, and the victim was interested in prosecuting - those two conditions. Then, once DNA became available, that's when those kits were tested because they thought, why test if the victim a) is not going to want to prosecute, and two, why test the non-strangers? Only the strangers, because that's how we need to identify somebody. That's the critical part of the testing. And while that makes sense in a vacuum, I think they, the individuals, couldn't have foreseen the extent to which the kits would hit to each other. So in Cuyahoga County, out of a fourth of the rape kits are hitting to each other - the hit to each other means you had to have sufficient DNA in both kits to be able to have it linked to each other. And still, a fourth of their kits are hitting to each other, and even as low as sexual conviction rates are, also, a fourth of the defendants are known serial sexual offenders. We now know two things. If you test all kits, you're likely going to then be picking up the stranger and the non-stranger sexual assaults, and they're going to likely then link to each other. The probative value of that kit has now gone exponentially more because as a prosecutor can tell you, one rape is difficult enough to prosecute. But if you have two or more, there's exponentially more power in being able to prosecute as well as getting in prior bad acts. So having more than one really helps the case and helps with the prosecution. By testing them all, you're getting a more complete picture, but also in those stranger ones, if the DNA came back, but it didn't hit to somebody in the federal DNA database because that person isn't in there, you didn't need them to be because they're linked. Here's the DNA. Well, this person may not be in CODIS, but they're linked to one where there is a name there, and you're like, oh, well, that's a John Smith or John Smith is the one who now is connected to that. It really helps solve future crimes and the value in testing all of them says that we get a more complete picture as well as strong probative leads in cases because of this crossover between stranger and non-stranger.

Tyler Raible [00:31:08] I guess my follow up is how do you envision this research really impacting the field of sexual assault response? I know you mentioned that it's going to impact the investigation of future crimes, but I mean, big picture, is this going to have a large impact?

Rachel Lovell [00:31:23] I hope so. And we've been working with, through SAKI and BJA and the FBI, to really try to get this information out there, and the data, sadly, because there were so many kits in Cuyahoga County, means that there's lots and lots of examples. And because we've been doing this for a while, we have some really great data on these serial offenders and we can answer any number of questions, I think, from that. And so we get this information out to, for example, the National Academy. So police

coming through training, for profilers to help them understand and have a better understanding of offending patterns, as well as publishing and presenting this externally. So I hope that it's starting to make this. But I think opportunities to speak to a different audience and not just other academics, like through this podcast, I think is a really great way. And we are very pleased to be able to ask to present on this, because I think it's a really important topic that everyone needs to know about.

Tyler Raible [00:32:20] Excellent. Thank you so much. And we are unfortunately nearing the end of our time together today. So I do want to ask, first and foremost, what's next for each of you? Is there anything coming up you're excited about?

Mary Weston [00:32:31] Right. So we're just excited to continue to do this kind of work. It's not done. There's more to learn from it. And we're learning about it by doing the hard work, which is just reviewing the cases, getting down to what the actual evidence in the case is. Is there physical evidence still available? Can we find additional items to test that haven't been tested before? Can we determine if the testing that was already done was done in an older technology? So we're just taking really close looks at these cases in Cuyahoga County. We've completed testing the kits from 1993 through 2011. The things that we've learned from those cases can- we've determined can be applied to even newer old cases, right. I say newer old cases because now we're looking at cases 2012 forward, and so we're taking a look at those cases from Cleveland police.

Rachel Lovell [00:33:26] I would say for me, I'm really excited. I'm co-editing a book on sexual assault kit initiative, primarily with researchers, but not all of the contributors are researchers. So the purpose of the book is really to help curate all the information that we're learning from forensic testing to victim advocacy to a bunch of different topics. So we've gotten a lot of the chapters in from that and we're editing them. But one of the chapters I am co-authoring with someone from the FBI and someone from BJA, Mary, and a profiler from the FBI, as well as a researcher from the FBI to curate and kind of say, like, what are we learning now about sexual offenders based upon SAKI, not just from Cuyahoga County, but from many of the different sites? What are some of those big takeaways for law enforcement? And so it's an expanded version of an earlier paper that we wrote for Law Enforcement Bulletin, which is the FBI's journal. So we're expanding on that and really kind of moving more into the forensic world as well as the profiling world to kind of help distill that information. And we're excited to kind of see that book come together.

Tyler Raible [00:34:39] Yeah, I'm looking forward to reading it. And Mary, I really loved the sound bite of you saying the work is never done, which really kind of leads us into our last little point. Are there any final thoughts that you two would like to share with our listeners before we wrap up today?

Mary Weston [00:34:53] The conversations and the work that Rachel and I do together, it's rewarding. I mean, if anyone out there is thinking, it's daunting to think about looking at a big giant room full of sexual assault kits, and how do you even get started? All those things have been done by certain jurisdictions. There's ways to learn how different people handle those and tackle those kinds of things. But it's definitely worth it to go into something like this and take a look at what you have and what can be done in these kinds of cases. You will learn so much. You will, as we've talked about in the last few podcasts, you will save your community money. I think Rachel has said if you're not willing to do it, even if you're not interested in doing it for the right reasons, do it for the wrong reasons. You know, you could save money for your community, but there's right reasons to do it,

too. You're going to keep your community safer. You're going to learn more about offending patterns. You're going to learn more about what offenders are doing out there. They're out there under the radar right now. What are they doing? What kind of different crimes are they committing and how are they committing them? So there's a lot to be learned and a lot of good work that can be done to make communities safer by putting your heart into a project like this.

Rachel Lovell [00:36:00] I would say that one of the things that I'm very thankful for is the collaboration with the prosecutor's office, as well as others from the task force, from police and victim advocacy, from the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. I feel very privileged to be invited to their table. And it really was an invite to sort of be at the table, as well as the sharing of the data. And I think we've had a successful partnership. We've had to navigate many aspects of a successful partnership, but not just for a plug for research, but here's all this great stuff, but a prosecutor's job isn't to sort of highlight and glean key points and lessons from this, right? Their job is to prosecute cases and it's really at the individual. You need some individuals, like researchers or crime analysts can help as well, being able to distill some of these key pieces and parts to be able to link things together and glean the larger key lessons from this. Because of the partnership, I think that these are the things that we're able to learn about and to share with law enforcement and to your listening audience about the key lessons that we've learned from this. So I feel very lucky to be included in this and be able to get to do this work.

Tyler Raible [00:37:17] Excellent way to wrap up today. So I'd like to thank Rachel and Mary for sitting down with Just Science to discuss their research associated with sexual assault crossover offending, and just to reiterate how inspiring it is. I'm sure that I'm not alone when I say that the work you two are doing is incredible and you know, you're helping people and you're preventing future crime. It's across the board remarkable. So thank you both for all of your hard work and dedication and for sitting down with us today.

Rachel Lovell [00:37:44] Thank you. Thanks for having us.

Mary Weston [00:37:46] Thank you so much, Tyler. It's always great to talk to you.

Tyler Raible [00:37:49] Same to you. For those of you listening at home, on your drive, or wherever you listen to your favorite podcast, if you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Just Science on your platform of choice. For more information on today's topic and resources in the forensic field, visit ForensicCOE.org. I'm Tyler Raible, and this has been another episode of Just Science.

Voiceover [00:38:09] Next week, Just Science will be sitting down with a panel of guests from Connecticut to discuss the standardization of sexual assault kits in their state. Opinions or points of views expressed in this podcast represent a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of its funding.