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What Propels Sexual Murderers: A Proposed Integrated Theory of Social Learning and Routine Activities Theories

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Abstract

Despite the great interest in the study of sexual homicide, little is known about the processes involved in an individual's becoming motivated to sexually kill, deciding to sexually kill, and acting on that desire, intention, and opportunity. To date, no comprehensive model of sexual murdering from the offending perspective has been proposed in the criminological literature. This article incorporates the works of Akers and Cohen and Felson regarding their social learning theory and routine activities theory, respectively, to construct an integrated conceptual offending framework in sexual homicide. This integrated model produces a stronger and more comprehensive explanation of sexual murder than any single theory currently available.

Keywords

Sexual homicide, sexual murderer, social learning theory, routine activities theory, criminological theory, victimology

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Introduction

Douglas, & McCormack, 1986, p. 252). Although sexual homicide has generated tremendous media attention over the years, the occurrence of this crime is rare (Heide, Beauregard, & Myers, 2009). Sexual homicide constitutes between 1% and 4% of the overall homicide rate in the United States, Canada, and Britain (Chan & Heide, 2008). These percentages have remained fairly stable over the years (Chan & Heide, 2009).

Research on sexual homicide is in its early stage. As of July 2008, there were less than 40 empirically published studies on sexual homicide (Chan & Heide, 2009). Moreover, a large majority of these published studies were exploratory and descriptive. The present study proposes a theoretical explanation of sexual homicide by combining two well-known criminological theories: social learning theory and routine activities theory. The ability of social learning theory to explain the sexual homicide offending process is strengthened by adding the situational component of routine activities theory to it.

Several definitions of sexual homicide have been proposed by scholars and practitioners during the past two decades and are reviewed elsewhere (see Chan & Heide, 2009). This theoretical discussion incorporates the FBI's definition of sexual murder, which is currently among the most widely used by sexual homicide researchers. For a murder to be considered sexual in nature, the homicide has to include at least one of the following: (a) victim's attire or lack of attire; (b) exposure of the sexual parts of the victim's body; (c) sexual positioning of the victim's body; (d) insertion of foreign objects into the victim's body cavities; (e) evidence of sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal, and/or anal); and (f) evidence of substitute sexual activity, interest, or sadistic fantasy, such as mutilation of the genitals (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

The FBI's definition has several strengths. First, it is readily operationalized. Second, it is broader than some definitions that suggest that sexual murderers are exclusively motivated by sadism or lust. Although some sexual murderers are indeed motivated by sexual sadism, others may kill during a sexual act for other reasons (e.g., accidentally, during the struggle, or to avoid witnesses). Several studies comparing sexual murderers to nonhomicidal sex offenders found that these two groups share more similarities than differences (see, e.g., Proulx, Beauregard, Cusson, & Nicole, 2007). Third, the FBI's definition does not assume that sexual homicides are premeditated acts from the outset. Rather, it allows for the situation to affect the offender's behavior and to influence the outcome. Mieczkowski and Beauregard (2009) found that a sexual assault was more likely to end as a homicide when the crime was committed on an older victim by a stranger who acted with a weapon and was under the influence of drugs.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory was initially proposed by Burgess and Akers (1966) and integrates Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association (DAT; Akers & Sellers, 2008). It focuses on violations of social and legal norms with new principles of modern learning theory, with emphasis on the behavioral specification of the learning process (Akers, 1985). Because Akers's social learning theory was not originally developed to explain sexual aggression, most of the discussion below is derived from Bandura's work on aggression (Bandura, 1973, 1977, 1978).

Akers's social learning theory, as it is currently conceptualized, is organized around four principal themes: (a) differential association, (b) differential reinforcement or punishment, (c) definitions, and (d) imitation. The concept of differential association refers to the direct or indirect interaction and exposure to different attitudes and behaviors in different social contexts. Primary groups such as family and peers tend to be the most important social groups in which differential associations have strong influence on the individual's behavioral learning process. The impact of such exposure, however, varies greatly according to the frequency, duration, intensity, and priority of different associations (Akers, 1998). Although the primary social groups have tremendous influence on the behavioral learning process, secondary and reference groups (e.g., school system, colleagues and work groups, mass media, Internet, computer games) can be equally important to the normative definitions in the learning process (Akers, 1997; Hwang & Akers, 2003; Warr, 2002).

Definitions refer to attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms about certain behavior learned directly or indirectly from specific social groups, usually within intimate primary groups (Akers, 1997; Akers & Jensen, 2006; Batton & Ogle, 2003; Bellair, Roscigno, & Velez, 2003; Sellers, Cochran, & Branch, 2005). The third theme of social learning theory, differential reinforcement or punishment, simply refers to the net balance of expected social and/or nonsocial rewards and costs associated with different behaviors (Akers, 1997; Krohn, Skinner, Massey, & Akers, 1985; Sellers et al., 2005). Social reinforcement involves "not just the direct reactions of others present while an act is performed, but also the whole range of tangible and intangible rewards valued in society and its subgroups" (Akers, 1977, p. 55), such as financial rewards, positive facial expression, and verbal approval from significant others. In contrast, nonsocial reinforcements are "unconditioned positive and negative effects of physiological and psychological stimuli" (Akers, 1998, p. 71), such as the psychophysiological effects of a stimulant.

The fourth theme, imitation, refers to the emulation of certain behavior through the observation of role models (Akers, 1997; Bandura, 1977; Donnerstein & Linz, 1995; Krohn et al., 1985; Sellers et al., 2005). Important sources of imitation are normally from primary social groups, such as family and peers, whom the individuals admire and with whom they have personal relationships (Donnerstein & Linz, 1995; Sellers et al., 2005). Sources may also come from other resources like the mass media (Akers, 1997), which may shape either prosocial or deviant behavior.

Social Learning Theory of Sexual Violence and Sex-Related Offenses

Social learning theorists widely believe that deviant behavior has its roots in the family of origin through parent–child interaction (Fagan & Wexler, 1987; McCord, 1991a, 1991b; Patterson, 1975). Besides observations of parental aggressive attitudes and behavior, personal experience with family violence (i.e., physical abuse and sexual abuse) may increase one's tolerance for violence and the likelihood to use violence as a coping mechanism (Burgess, Hartman, & McCormack, 1987; Flowers, 2006; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Straus, 1990).

Sexual violence, in particular, is perceived as a learned behavior associated with interpersonal aggression and sexuality as an outcome of social and cultural traditions (Bandura, 1978; Ellis, 1989). Ellis (1989) maintained that sexual attitudes, sex role scripts, and other sexually deviant thought processes that connect with physical aggression and sexuality are often mediated by cultural and experiential factors. Social learning theorists maintain that sexual aggression is typically learned through differential associations with significant others such as family and close peers. These individuals are prone to a behavioral model that supports sexual hostility such that sexually aggressive behavior is considered appropriate and is differentially reinforced over other nonsexually aggressive behavior (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991; Ellis, 1989; Flowers, 2006).

For decades, rape has been studied by social learning theorists (Wilson & Nakajo, 1965). It is widely suggested that sexual deviance is learned through the conditioning effects of differential reinforcement for sexual responses to any stimulus that promotes positive feelings (Ellis, 1989; Wilson & Nakajo, 1965). This conditioning process has been referred to as the "psychologic factors in sexual response" (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). The social learning model of sexual aggression and rape was supported by Boeringer and colleagues (1991) in their study on dating and acquaintance relationships among college male students.

In addition to the differential association and reinforcement of sexually violent behavior by individual's primary groups, reference social groups such as the mass media have been widely blamed as an influential imitation medium of sexual violence. Findings support that long-term exposure to sexually explicit materials or pornography with violent content may increase aggressive behavior (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987; Dworkin, 1979; Gray, 1982). These studies demonstrated that combining erotic material with violence desensitized individuals' reactions to violence (Bandura, 1978) and might promote tendencies to rape through imitation (Ellis, 1989; Flowers, 2006). Violent pornographic materials tend to sexually objectify women, foster male dominance in society, and provide behavioral and ideational support for actual sexual violence (Bandura, 1978; Baron & Straus, 1989; MacKinnon, 1984). As a result of technological advancement, pornographic materials can now be easily obtained by anyone with Internet access.

Although limited, opposite findings regarding the effects of pornography also have been reported. The report from the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970) concluded that the viewing of pornographic materials does not produce any measureable negative effects on sexual behavior and does not lead to the

development of sexually deviant behavior. McCormack (1978) found similar results. He noted, however, that viewing violent hardcore pornographic depictions does promote aggressive behavior against another individual when anger or hostility against this particular target is already felt prior to the violent pornography consumption.

Ellis (1989) emphasized the importance of cognitions in influencing behavior. He offered four hypotheses of rape through the lens of social learning theory. He believed that rapists would hold more favorable attitudes toward rape and violence in general relative to other men. In addition, rapists would exhibit more sexual arousal to depictions of rape and violence, particularly toward women, than the general population of men. Exposure to violent pornographic materials would increase male tendencies to commit rape and to be violent in general toward women. Lastly, Ellis hypothesized that exposure to pornography that degrades women would increase men's attitudes that are conducive to the commission of rape.

Routine Activities Theory

Routine activities theory was first proposed by Cohen and Felson in their 1979 publication on social change and crime rate trends. They argued that the possibility of crime occurring on collectivities was influenced by the convergence in space and time of three main elements in the daily routines of individuals: (a) a motivated and potential offender, (b) an attractive and suitable target, and (c) an ineffective or absent capable guardian protecting against a violation. The lack of any one of these elements reduces the likelihood of a potential crime (Felson & Cohen, 1980).

This theoretical framework addresses the differential risks for victimization among individuals based on their daily lifestyles. Two central assumptions have emerged from the routine activities approach to criminal violations: (a) A criminal-opportunity structure is created from patterns of routine activities and lifestyles through the contact between a potential offender and target, and (b) the selection of a particular crime victim is determined by the offender's subjective value of the target and its level of guardianship (Wittebrood & Nieuwbeerta, 2000). Indeed, crime is not a random occurrence in the society (Lunde, 1976).

The victim selection process involves a rational decision (Hough, 1987). Offenders generally select victims who meet a set of criteria that hold special significance for them (Boudreaux, Lord, & Jarvis, 2001; Canter, 1989) and who lack guardianship at that given moment (Hough, 1987). The vulnerability of becoming a victim is greatly associated with the individual's specific daily activities, lifestyles, and statuses (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2001). Behavior is assumed to be both repetitive and predictable (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Kennedy & Forde, 1990).

Guardianship is simply defined as a formal or informal social control mechanism that restricts the availability and accessibility of an attractive target (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen, Kluegel, & Land, 1981). The presence of another

individual as a willing and capable protector may help to prevent the occurrence of the criminal event.

Routine Activities Theory and Sex-Related Offenses

Variables relevant to the routine activities approach have been heavily tested on various types of violent and property crimes. Sexual offenses have received particular attention, especially within the last decade (Belknap, 1987; Cass, 2007; De Coster, Estes, & Mueller, 1999; Fox & Sobol, 2000; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995; Sherley, 2005; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2001; Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2008). Target suitability or victimization risk is the most tested tenet in studies of sex-related offenses, especially among college populations. Annual victimization studies indicate that 1 in every 20 college students reports at least one incident of forced sexual touching, and 1 in every 25 college students reports at least one incident of forced sexual intercourse (Presley, 1997). Those on campus suffer higher risk of victimization through frequent and close proximity to potential offenders and the absence of effective guardianships (Cass, 2007; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990).

Studies examined under the routine activities approach have indicated that one's suitability as a target is likely to increase through regular public alcohol consumption and drug use as part of the college "culture of alcohol" (Felson, 1997; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995; Sherley, 2005; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2001). Accordingly, college students who are using alcohol and/or drugs are perceived by potential offenders as vulnerable targets less capable of resistance because of a lower state of awareness. Moreover, the number of students enrolled on campus is positively correlated with the rate of sexual assault on campus (Fernandez & Lizotte, 1995).

Single Theory Explanations of Sexual Homicide

The tenets of both social learning theory and routine activities theories can be applied to some extent to explain the occurrence of sexual homicide. Below, both are reviewed as single theory explanations. Following the individual reviews, the limitations of the two theories as sole explanations are highlighted. Thereafter, the strengths of combining the two theories are discussed and illustrated with a case study.

Social Learning Theory and Sexual Homicide

Consistent with findings of the sexual offenders' behavioral learning process, studies of sexual murderers consistently have revealed that a large majority of these sexual homicidal offenders grew up in abusive domestic environments. They typically were the victims of physical and/or sexual abuses by their parents and/or primary

caregivers or witnesses of such events (Beauregard, Stone, Proulx, & Michaud, 2008; Burgess et al., 1986; Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995; Dent & Jowitt, 2003; Heide et al., 2009; Hickey, 2002; Langevin, Ben-Aron, Wright, Marchese, & Handy, 1988; Lussier, Beauregard, Proulx, & Nicole, 2005; Meloy, 2000; Myers, 2004; Myers, Burgess, & Nelson, 1998; Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman, & D'Agostino, 1986; Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, Douglas, & McCormack, 1986; Ressler et al., 1988; Stone, 2001).

Parents of violent offenders who engage in deviant sexual and homicidal acts often had histories of violent behavior, alcohol and substance abuse, and psychiatric and sexual problems (Burgess et al., 1986; Dent & Jowitt, 2003; Ressler et al., 1988; Stone, 2001), which contributed to insecure parent-child attachment (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995; Hickey, 2002). Studies of stalkers—which is a common behavior related to sexual homicide—also discovered that early childhood disturbance related to attachment, parental rejection, and violence is commonly seen among those who stalk their victims (Bartholomew, 1990; Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O'Regan, & Meloy, 1997; Main, 1996; Meloy, 1996, 1997; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003).

Inappropriate sexual behavior of parents or other caretakers has also been associated with aggressive acts of abused and psychologically unhealthy children who experienced or witnessed violence at home (Burgess et al., 1986). In their study on sexual murderers, Burgess and colleagues (1986) confirmed that most of the deviant sexual definitions or attitudes of their sample of sexual murderers were initially introduced by their parents or caregivers during childhood. Research has indicated that the percentages of sexual murderers who experienced physical and/or sexual abuse and other types of family violence were very high, ranging from 86% to 94% (Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, et al., 1986; Myers, 2004; Myers et al., 1998).

The experience of physical and/or sexual victimization at home is strongly associated with the development of sexual deviations or traits of psychosexual disorders (Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, et al., 1986), which include both deviant and sadistic fantasy (Dietz, Hazelwood, & Warren, 1990; Eth & Pynoos, 1985; Jackson, Lee, Pattison, & Ward, 2002) and paraphilic behavior (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Hickey, 2002; Stone, 2001). Most of the sexual killings that are premeditated from the outset represent the acting out of sexual murderers' deviant fantasies. In most cases, sexual murderers' primary motives for acting out include attaining sadistic psychological gratification or sexual euphoria through the expression of power or anger, or a combination of both, as a need to dominate, punish, control, humiliate, degrade, and torture their victims (Cook & Hinman, 1999; Hazelwood & Warren, 2000; Hickey, 2002; Langevin et al., 1988; McNamara & Morton, 2004; Meloy, 2000; Myers, Eggleston, & Smoak, 2003; Myers, Husted, Safarik, & O'Toole, 2006; Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, et al., 1986; Salfati, James, & Ferguson, 2008). An operant conditioning process with the emphasis on positive reinforcement is then created as a consequence of the acting out of deviant sexual fantasies that culminates in orgasm. This conditioning process is likely to increase behavioral habituation and escalation, which, in turn, lead to the repetitive behavior of sex killing.

Moreover, the experience of abuse and the development of deviant sexual fantasies are congruent with the attachment model of the development of sexual deviance (Marshall, 1993; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995). In this model, attachment reflects the bond between the child and parent that provides the necessary security and confidence for the child to explore his world (Marshall, 1993). The presence of negative childhood experiences—such as different types of abuse—may prevent the development of a secure attachment (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995; Heide & Solomon, 2006, 2009). The failure to develop a secure attachment can lead to psychosocial deficits such as low self-esteem and lack of skills necessary to establish an adequate relationship with peers (Marshall, Hudson, & Hodgkinson, 1993).

The difficulty relating to peers can lead to seeking alternative ways to fulfill emotional and sexual needs in ways that do not challenge these deficits. Sexual assault may be found appealing because it makes no demands on self-confidence and social skills that are lacking and may be interpreted as a means that can provide the illusion of intimacy without fear of being rejected (Marshall & Eccles, 1993). This behavior can be “learned” through a social learning process by being exposed to, or being a victim of, sexual abuse (Laws & Marshall, 1990). Furthermore, these script types of action may be used during masturbatory activities, thus pairing deviant sexual fantasies with orgasm and creating a conditioning process (Abel & Blanchard, 1974; McGuire, Carlisle, & Young, 1965).

Studies have also demonstrated that alcohol is a disinhibiting factor in sexual assault (Barbaree, Marshall, Yates, & Lightfoot, 1983; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). These studies have found a positive relationship between the use of alcohol and the level of force used by the offender, as well as the level of injury inflicted on the victim (Beauregard, Lussier, & Proulx, 2005; Ouimet, Guay, & Proulx, 2000). These findings are consistent with the “state-disinhibition model” as defined by Barbaree and Marshall (1991). This model suggests that situational and contextual factors (i.e., consumption of alcohol, viewing of pornography) may increase sexual aggressors’ rape arousal, thus facilitating sexual assault. These circumstantial variables may influence the occurrence of a sexual assault through the disruption of stimulus inhibition. In other words, situational variables can temporarily disrupt one’s level of self-control over sexual and aggressive tendencies and accentuate the risk of a sexual assault.

Sexually aggressive parents or primary caregivers are the principal role models for their children in shaping their sexually deviant attitudes and behavioral patterns into sex killings in the future. In addition, sadistic pornographic materials have also been widely believed to have a strong impact on those who sexually assault and kill, regardless of whether the killing was intentional. Findings showed a high percentage of sexual murderers ranging from 39% to 81%, both sadistic and nonsadistic, collected and consumed violent pornographic materials (Brittain, 1970; Grubin, 1994; Langevin, 2003; Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, et al., 1986). These percentages reveal the devastating impact of imitating the sadistic acts depicted in violent pornography by sexual murderers.

The developmental risk factors discussed here are not limited to sexual homicide offenders. Family dysfunction and parental pathology are often found among violent offenders and nonsexual murderers (Heide, 1992, 1999, 2003). Even more importantly, sexual murderers and nonhomicidal sex offenders share many characteristics, particularly with respect to poor parenting. In a sample of 101 sexual aggressors and 40 sexual murderers, Canadian researchers found no significant differences between the two groups in the exposure of deviant and antisocial models of attitudes and behaviors. More than half of the offenders in each group had been exposed to psychological violence and abusive alcohol consumption prior to age 18. About half of the men in both groups had been exposed to physical violence as juveniles (Proulx et al., 2007).

Although sexual murderers and nonhomicidal sexual offenders do not present diametrically opposed developmental trajectories, it seems that they can be distinguished from one another on the basis of the seriousness of their developmental disturbance (Nicole & Proulx, 2007). Why did some of the men in the Canadian study kill, whereas others did not? Social learning theory seems to offer a part of the answer. Does routine activities theory have something that could elucidate the differences between lethal and nonlethal outcomes?

Routine Activities Theory and Sexual Homicide

Almost all of the routine activities theoretical studies on sex-related offenses have focused on the risks of victimization. No study has tested the offending process from the routine activities framework. Routine activities theory has traditionally been viewed as a "victimization" theory. However, this theory is versatile and can be used to explain offending behavior as well as victimization. It can be used to explain both why certain victims are selected and also why certain offenders will select certain victims at specific places and time (Graney & Arrigo, 2002). Simply put, routine activities theory may serve both the offender and victim perspectives.

The routine activities framework assumes a motivated offender without further explanation provided on how one learns to become a motivated offender. Researchers have studied the sexual fantasy of sexual murderers and believe that sexual fantasy plays an important role in the motivation to kill in many sexual homicides. It is important to note, however, that the routine activities perspective does not discuss the development of sexual fantasy because it is beyond the scope of this theory.

Sexual fantasies of sexual murderers have typically involved repetitive acts of sexual violence (Burgess et al., 1986; Warren, Hazelwood, & Dietz, 1996), which serve to fulfill or alleviate sexual frustration (Langevin, Lang, & Curnoe, 1998). Sexual fantasy is one of a few limited resources for sexual arousal among sexual killers. Scholars have found that one of the primary motives for many sexual murderers to sexually assault and kill is to fulfill their sexual fantasies through highly planned sexual killings (Burgess et al., 1986; Langevin, 2003; Warren et al., 1996) once their inhibitions against acting out their fantasies no longer exist (Prentky et al., 1989).

When deviant fantasies are losing their "arousing" value (i.e., habituation effect), offenders are increasingly motivated to perform their "trial runs" in a more violent fashion (Hill, Habermann, Berner, & Briken, 2007; MacCulloch, Snowden, Wood, & Mills, 1983; Prentky et al., 1989). Studies have suggested that the acting out of deviant fantasies is likely due to the finding of an outlet for unexpressed emotional states, such as humiliation, rage, and suffering (Myers et al., 2006; Proulx, McKibben, & Lusignan, 1996). Acting out is likely to occur after an extended period of emotional retreat into a fantasy world that results in social isolation and emotional loneliness because of the lack of healthy intimate heterosexual relationships (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Grubin, 1994; Marshall, 1989; Ressler et al., 1988).

According to the second theme of the routine activities framework, a crime will not occur if there is no suitable target for the motivated offender. Sexually motivated offenders often begin their "hunt" for suitable targets (Amir, 1971), who satisfy the "goodness of fit" with their deviant fantasies in order to match their sexuoerotic template (Meloy, 2000). In most situations, motivated offenders create "mental maps" of neighborhoods when they spot potentially suitable targets (Rossmo, 1999). Engaging in stalking behavior and/or voyeuristic behavior on the lookout for suitable targets is an important element in mental mapping among sexual murderers.

In terms of the third theme of the routine activities model, sexual murderers are continually assessing their potentially suitable targets' vulnerability and accessibility in the course of their daily routines (Boudreaux et al., 2001) during their stalking process for an attack opportunity in the absence of detection or deterrence. Among the four types of victims (children, adolescents, adults, and elderly victims), children and elderly victims appear to be the most vulnerable targets because of their less advantaged body build-up and physical strength against their perpetrator (Chan & Heide, 2008). Elderly female victims, as a consequence of widowhood, are more likely to live alone and away from any capable guardian, which lead to their increased vulnerability to becoming suitable targets (Safarik, Jarvis, & Nussbaum, 2002). Sexual murderers of children are likely to prey on their victims in places where potential targets gather (e.g., playgrounds, schools, convenience stores, and shopping centers). These offenders wait for an opportunity for abduction when the targets' guardianship is weak or reduced (i.e., parents or school teachers walk away and leave the children alone for a short period of time; Beauregard et al., 2008; Beauregard, Proulx, & St-Yves, 2007).

However, both elderly and child victims may also be seen as the least vulnerable targets according to the routine activities theory. Because of the nature of these victims' ages and lifestyle, elderly individuals and children are less likely than adults to be exposed to potential perpetrators during night time because they are less likely to leave their homes. Rather, adolescent and adult men and women who routinely go out at night and those who frequent bars would appear to be at greater risk than child and elderly victims.

Limitations of Using a Single Theory to Explain Sexual Homicide

Routine activities theory is able to capture the dynamics of the offending process in the study of sexual homicide. The routine activities perspective focuses on the environmental opportunity generated from the structural relationships of different social groups via the economic, social, and political systems. This model places primary emphasis on the environmental opportunity for a motivated offender to come into contact with a suitable target in the absence of an effective guardian or guardianship.

This theoretical model, however, is not able to address the issues surrounding the study of sexual homicide from an individual basis (micro level). No explanation or proposition is provided in this model to explain how a person becomes motivated to commit a sex crime and to kill. The applicability of the routine activities framework in explaining sexual homicides is strengthened by combining it with a more micro theory that accounts for the missing piece of the puzzle: Social learning theory has a great deal to offer in explaining the core element in routine activities theory of the "motivated offender." This theoretical model is able to predict the type of behavioral learning environment that is conducive to crime commission. It is also ideally suited to explain how one individual might become more likely than another to commit a sexual homicide in the presence of certain conditions, specifically a vulnerable target in an unprotected environment.

Social learning theory by itself, however, is unable to predict under what circumstances these sexually deviant offenders will or will not commit a sexual homicide. The routine activities framework overcomes this limitation by explaining the environmental opportunity piece of the puzzle. In essence, the routine activities perspective is helpful in elucidating the likelihood that a sexual homicide will be committed by a motivated offender. A motivated offender is going to weigh opportunities to offend in terms of rewards and costs. Opportunities to commit a crime by a motivated offender in the presence of an attractive target, coupled with the absence of a capable guardian, are likely to yield higher rewards than costs. In contrast, in the absence of a suitable target or in the presence of an effective guardian, commission of a crime by a motivated offender is likely to result in higher costs than rewards.

Toward an Integrated Theory of Sexual Homicide

A psychologically damaging childhood and adolescent development seems to be a major factor in the road to murder. A high majority of sexual murderers grew up in a dysfunctional home environment. Experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse or witnessing violence at home is common within this predatory population. These children have developed a strong deviant behavioral learning process since childhood through direct and indirect associations with individuals with whom they shared close and intimate relationships. During an extended period of time through frequent and intense exposure to various aggressive and deviant attitudes, values

and attitudes have been implanted into the minds of these children and became part of their own belief system.

Sexual murderers learn attitudes and behaviors conducive to sexual offending in two primary ways: through the interaction with primary groups and through emulation of primary role models' behavior. Parents and primary caregivers are the important sources of role modeling for these children. Findings revealed that most of the parents of sexual murderers have criminal backgrounds or past experiences in sexual violence.

Aside from the direct emulation from those in the primary social groups of these children, reference groups such as the media also have tremendous impact in becoming role models for the offenders. Consumption of violent pornographic materials is an important factor in the study of sexual murderers. A large number of sexual murderers admitted to great interest in violent pornography as a means to compensate for their social isolation and emotional loneliness that originated from their domestically abusive environment. As these children were suffering from violence at home, they indulged in a deviant fantasy world that served as their gateway to control and euphoria. Their deviant fantasies functioned as positive reinforcers for these children, encouraging them to return to their fantasy world for pleasure in the future.

The Road to Sexual Murder

Once the mere indulgence in deviant fantasies is insufficient to produce anticipated sexual euphoria, these individuals begin to seek alternatives. The acting out of their deviant fantasies is one of the best methods for these offenders to achieve expected outcomes to satisfy their psychological gratification. To successfully capture their victims, these offenders develop a set of criteria in their search for suitable targets through engaging in stalking and voyeuristic behavior. Mental mapping is used during their search for suitable and attractive targets to maximize the chances of capturing and abducting targets without failure. These offenders are waiting for the golden opportunity to attack their targets when the immediate surrounding guardian-ship is weak or absent.

The mental mapping related to the search for suitable victims is usually carried out through the routine activities of the offender. The offender is on the lookout for potential victims as he goes to and from work and as he engages in leisure activities. The likelihood of a victim being targeted and eventually selected increases when the routine activities of the offender intersect with those of potential victims. For example, an individual drinks to quell social anxiety that he feels because of negative childhood experiences. Drinking helps him to feel more powerful, to interact more easily with women, and to feel more sexual. If this individual regularly frequents bars because he is a regular drinker, he is more likely to select a victim at a bar. Many scenarios are possible. Perhaps, the encounter starts off as flirting and the woman eventually leaves the bar with the offender to go to a quieter, more secluded area "to talk." The man wants sex; the woman does not. The man becomes aggressive in his

pursuit of sex. The violence escalates. Whether intended from the onset of the exchange or not, the man kills the woman.

Once their targets are captured, if the offenders are so motivated, various paraphilic behaviors may be performed on their victims before and/or after the killing in order to achieve sexual gratification. Most of these paraphilic behaviors, in conjunction with their deviant fantasies, are repetitive behaviors that encourage reoffending unless these offenders are stopped by legal authorities (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Holmes & Holmes, 2001).

Case Illustration of a Sexual Homicide Offender

The contribution of the social learning theory and routine activities theory to the understanding of sexual homicide can be further emphasized by the illustration of a case study. Jeffrey Dahmer, arrested on July 2, 1991, in Milwaukee and subsequently convicted of 15 sexual murders involving male victims (Hickey, 2002), is a good selection because this case is widely known to readers. Dahmer's problematic behaviors can be traced back to his early childhood. Early in his childhood, Dahmer was fascinated by dead insects and animals, as well as their deteriorating remains. He would collect the entrails of the animals and keep them in a shed behind the family home (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006). As a result of his parents' neglect, their troubled marriage, the mental health problems of his mother, and his sexual abuse, Dahmer started to show impulsive and aggressive behavior (Martens & Palermo, 2005). He started to isolate himself and developed deviant sexual fantasies to gain control over his life by controlling others (Hickey, 2002). Dahmer's absorption into violent fantasies was accompanied by compulsive masturbation. Interestingly, Dahmer's father admitted having had violent fantasies too during his childhood until his early 20s (Giannangelo, 1996).

At adolescence, Dahmer was regarded as a social outcast by neighbors and teachers. He would prefer the comfort of fantasies over the disappointment of reality (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006). Nonetheless, despite his marked tendency to social isolation, Dahmer got involved in school-related activities (e.g., school band, tennis, school newspaper). However, it was common for him to attend class under the influence of alcohol or illicit substances (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006).

Dahmer seemed indifferent to having relationships with women. He was shy toward girls but aggressive toward authority figures (Martens & Palermo, 2005). Having difficulties dealing with his homosexuality, Dahmer developed increasingly violent fantasies. For instance, at age 15 he stole a manikin on display at a local store that he took back to his home and rested with it in his bed. It is at that point that he developed necrophilic fantasies, including the domination of others (Palermo, 2004). A common theme to his fantasies was to kill, dismember, and disembowel his lover (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006).

With the increasing turmoil at home and the difficulty to deal with his homosexuality, Dahmer's problem with alcohol became even more serious. His heavy drinking problem led to his dropping out of college as well as to his discharge from

the military. He displayed violent tendencies while under the influence of alcohol (Silva, Ferrari, & Leong, 2002).

Dahmer's early criminal history was also marked by sexual crimes. In 1982, he was arrested for indecently exposing himself and, in 1986, for masturbating in front of two 12-year-old boys (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006). In 1989, he was found guilty of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old boy, whose brother would become 2 years later a victim of Dahmer's sexual homicide series.

Dahmer's drinking problem, as well as his homosexuality, led him to spend a lot of time cruising in gay bars and bathhouses for the purpose of interpersonal sex (Giannangelo, 1996). However, with the increasing deviant sexual fantasies coupled with the disinhibitory effect of alcohol, Dahmer started using gay bars and bathhouses as hunting fields to find suitable victims. Victims were homosexual males selected for their attractiveness. Dahmer took these individuals to his place for sex and would use alcohol spiked with drugs (i.e., benzodiazepine or menzodiazepine) in order to have sex with the victims, kill them, dismember them, and on occasion, to have sex with some body parts (Giannangelo, 1996). He would lure victims by offering them money to pose in the nude (Hickey, 2002). In the months prior to his arrest, Dahmer was killing at a rate of one victim per month and his deviant activities began to interfere seriously with his daily functioning (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006).

Conclusions

This article relied heavily on the initial work of Akers (1977) and Cohen and Felson (1979) regarding their social learning and routine activities theories, respectively, to construct an integrated conceptual offending framework in sexual homicide. This integrated model is important in the context of demonstrating how and where both social learning theory and routine activities theory can be combined to produce a stronger and more comprehensive theory. In addition, it offers a well-explained offending model in sexual homicide through multilevel (individual and environmental levels) conceptual analysis.

This integration of social learning and routine activities into a theoretical model aims to explain the offending process by focusing on both the offender's characteristics and the environmental components in sexual homicide. Potential sexual homicide offenders who possess sexually deviant behavior and attitudes learn to become motivated to offend sexually against their suitable targets from three main venues. Regular and long period of exposure to sexually violent and other criminal attitudes and behavior since early childhood, especially from their parents or primary caregiver(s), is one primary way to develop such negative behavioral pattern. Differentially associating with friends or other influential individuals who are sexually violent is another means that can shape the attitudes of these potential sexual murderers. Behavioral emulation of sexually deviant behavior of individuals with whom these potential sexual homicide offenders differentially associate may lead them to become motivated to act out deviantly. Direct behavioral imitation of

characters in the sadistic pornographic materials, a third venue, is not uncommon among potential sexual homicide offenders. Importantly, as long as the consequences of such sexually deviant acts are reinforcing, these potential sexual murderers may continue to seize the opportunity to attack.

According to this model, sexual homicide is most likely to occur when a motivated potential sexual murderer perceives a suitable or attractive target in the absence of a capable guardian or an effective guardianship in the immediate surroundings. Suitable targets are those who possess particular personality or outlook characteristics that mean something to the potential sexual murderer. Capable guardians or effective guardianships are individuals or physical structures that exist in the immediate surroundings of the suitable targets during the hunting process that discourage the potential sexual murderer from acting out.

Future Research and Implications

This proposed model is preliminary. Although largely speculative, this integrated theoretical framework is based on published empirical studies in sexual homicide. Future studies are needed to assess and analyze the usefulness of this proposed theoretical framework. This integrated theory can be tested by focusing on two separate levels: individual and situational. Although these are both “after-the-fact” phenomena, understanding the dynamics involved in sexual murder may indeed suggest ways to reduce the occurrence of this crime.

The offender’s characteristics are the main focus of analysis in terms of the individual level of the integrated theoretical model of sexual homicide offending. In-depth semi-structured interviews with the sexual homicide offenders and, when possible, with those close to them are the primary sources of information. At this level, the social learning process is the main focus of investigation on how the offender becomes motivated to commit sexually deviant acts. Accordingly, the social backgrounds of those influential individuals who share close relationships and who have associated with the sexual homicide offender such as parents, primary caregiver(s), intimate partners, and friends are needed to examine the behavioral and attitudinal learning processes of the offender. The attachment history, fantasy life, use of pornographic materials, criminal background, psychiatric history, and history of drug and/or alcohol abuse of the sexual homicide offender and of his close associates are among the variables that warrant investigation at this level.

The offending process in sexual homicide falls into the situational level of analysis. The situational structures of the crime scene surroundings can be examined to address two of the three components of routine activity theory: the target suitability and the presence or absence of capable guardians and/or effective guardianships. Criminal hotspots with low surveillance and visibility, leisure and recreational activities establishments such as bars and nightclubs, and existence of formal (police department and fire station) and informal (neighborhood watch group) social control mechanisms in the immediate surroundings are examples of possible variables of analysis for the two situational-level constructs of the integrated model.

Do sexual murderers frequent criminal hotspots or hunting fields (Beauregard, Rossmo, & Proulx, 2007) with low surveillance and gravitate toward areas with both weak formal and informal controls? These variables are likely to be found in police and court reports, tract and census data, and other official documentations.

This proposed integrated theoretical model on sexual homicide offending has often been the approach used in good forensic examinations because it has the potential to explain the sexual murdering process. The case study of Jeffrey Dahmer highlighted the usefulness of the integrated theory. A more in-depth case study of Dahmer exploring in greater detail the components of these two theories using available primary sources by experts who evaluated him (see Palermo, 2004) would be valuable. In addition, the use of other clinical cases, including those involving children, such as the Polly Klass and Samantha Runnion cases, wherein the victims are complete strangers and audiences are present, would be of interest in further evaluating this proposed integrated model.

The authors want to emphasize that in analyzing the dynamics involved in sexual homicides, the victim is not to blame for his or her victimization. The innocence of the victims is most apparent in cases of sexual homicides involving children (Heide et al., 2009). It is important to note, however, that the meeting of the offender and the victim in time and space creates interactions. Accordingly, we are suggesting is that it is possible that certain actions (or reactions) of the victim may lead the offender to pose certain actions. Knowledge of these dynamics is useful in preventing sexual homicides.

The proposed model clearly suggests ways that these crimes may be prevented. At the individual level, healthy parent–child relationships and secure attachment from birth are critical in shaping positive behavioral and attitude patterns toward sex and the avoidance of violence (Heide & Solomon, 2006). Programs designed to help individuals become good parents, such as parenting classes, child development and parenting courses in high schools, and support groups for parents, are needed (Heide, 1999). With healthy behavioral and attitude patterns ingrained from early childhood, the chances of adopting negative attitudes and learning deviant behavior from other individuals such as friends and intimate partners later in life would likely be greatly reduced.

Efforts must go beyond the individual level to reduce the incidence of sexual murder. In terms of the situational level, surveillance and visibility can be enhanced through increasing formal and informal social control mechanisms at potential hunting fields (Smallbone, Marshall, & Wortley, 2008). These environmental supports may discourage the potential sexual murderer to offend in those immediate surroundings. In the 21st century, efforts to curtail sexual murder need to transcend physical space into cyberspace. Although the data are anecdotal, cases of sexual murderers targeting male and female victims online have been reported (see, e.g., Ford, Pearson, & Kennedy, 2009; “Missing Persons—Jason Rodney Galehouse,” n.d.). In addition to educating Internet users, online guardians in the form of law

enforcement, site personnel, and consumers are needed to reduce the likelihood that a motivated offender will troll cyberspace looking for his next prey.

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