Chapter 13

Sexual (Lust) Homicide

Definitional Constructs, Dynamics, and Investigative Considerations

Janet McClellan

Abstract

This chapter discusses the historical definitional origins of sexual homicide (lust murder), the dynamics of sexual homicide injury, offense definition constructs and their limitations, and key presumptions of injuries associated with sexual homicide offense models. The chapter concludes by arguing for the clarification of concepts, characterizations, linkages, and research into the offense dynamics and offender motivations of sexual (lust) homicides.

INTRODUCTION

Violent interactions in which people are engaged are based on experiences and expectations of reality. For that reason, an understanding of violence and its extremes must consider the offender’s construct of reality. As Skrapec noted, “behavior is the product of one’s own sense of reality regardless of the degree

1 The author acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of Ms. Victoria Esposito-Shea, J.D. for her proof reading and copyediting of this manuscript.

From: Serial Murder and the Psychology of Violent Crimes
Edited by: R. N. Kocsis © Humana Press, Totowa, NJ

229
to which that reality matches the objective facts of that person’s life” (1, p. 51–52). The mental representations of an offender’s realities are acted upon and acted out, and they may be presumed to be detectable and specifiable in the processes of crime scene analysis.

The noted anthropologist James (2) stated that the rationale behind scientific inquiries is that there is an attempt to understand the causes and outcomes of human actions in order to determine or formulate sets of “relatively simple explanatory principles laying beneath immediate appearances, and behind what people say [or do]...[in defining] the reasons for their actions” (2, p. 18). Because humans engage in a constant state of “building and sustaining mental models of reality...[those realities perform as the]...regulator and arbitrator” of those behaviors. Therefore, violent offenders normalize their psychologically constructed violent propensities, realities, and motivations so as to normalize for themselves and within their life the violence they commit against others (3, p. 75–76). Those regulators and arbitrators of behavior for sexualized homicides are presented through the preparation, targeting, and violent assault processes toward the acquired victim(s). The current trend in the characterization and classification of sexual/lust homicides attempts to use and evaluate the violent character of those homicides to determine the psychological predispositions of the offender by analyzing the patterns, controls, wounding techniques, wounding focus, and injuries suffered by the victim(s).

Some critics find objectionable the interest in sexual homicide and discount as frivolous the examination of sexual homicide, as it is believed that such events account for less than 5% of serial homicides and single-event homicides annually in the United States. However, the official data are misleading, as flaws and inaccuracies in the identification and collection of homicide data are masked in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) because “sexual homicide is generally indexed under Unknown Motive...[because]...law enforcement agents are largely unaware of the underlying sexual dynamics of criminal conduct” (4, p. 6). Regardless of the reporting inaccuracies, sexual homicide researchers believe that sexual (lust) murder is a researchable and important category of homicide (5–8) and as valid a research focus as any other motivationally construed murder (e.g., infanticide, patricide, matricide). Therefore, whether ascribed to a single incident or a series, the contemporary research distinguishes offenders various modus operandi, signature, and wounding as based on the totality of violence committed against the victim, victim targeting, and the offender’s psychosexual predisposition(s).

It should be noted that much of the literature regarding sexual homicide does not employ the term “lust.” Rather, it alludes to it in instances where the violence is presumed to be the result of the offender’s motivations (9–16) being