

Chapter 3

Profiling Sexual Fantasy Fantasy in Sexual Offending and the Implications for Criminal Profiling

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Summary

Criminal profiling attempts to understand the behavioral and personality characteristics of an offender and has gained increasing recognition as a valuable investigative procedure. This chapter investigates sexual fantasy within the context of sexual crimes. It opens by providing an account of sexual fantasy, its nexus with sexually aberrant behavior, and how it has been utilized within the domain of criminal profiling. Research that applied grounded theory to develop a tripartite model of sexual fantasy within the context of sexual offending is presented, as well as the implications of the model to the process of criminal profiling. In closing, we argue that sexual fantasy plays an integral role in the development and maintenance of sexually aberrant behavior and can provide important insights into the internal world of the offender.

INTRODUCTION

Criminal profiling has gained increasing recognition as a valuable investigative procedure despite the controversy that surrounds it (1,2). At its core, criminal profiling attempts to understand the behavioral and personality characteristics of an offender through the analysis of aberrant behavior they commit. It is argued that understanding fantasy is an integral part of that process although research investigating this phenomenon within the context of offending generally, and criminal profiling more specifically, is limited. Much of the work to date appears restricted to single-case studies, to acts of sadistic

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homicide, and/or theoretical inquiry. As such, the applicability and utility of the phenomena of sexual fantasy to criminal profiling remains opaque.

SEXUAL FANTASY AND DEVIANT SEXUAL FANTASY

Leitenberg and Henning (3) have asserted that sexual fantasies can include almost any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual and which the individual deliberately controls. A more elaborate conceptualization depicts sexual fantasy as an imaginative process accompanied by a withdrawal from the immediate demands of the external world and a narrowing in focus of an individual's internal world. Such processes allow an individual to create an elaborate, emotionally anchored, mental picture that has its origins in daydreaming and involves erotica that creates or intensifies sexual arousal (4,5). Researchers have suggested that individuals have core sexual fantasies whose material is organized around a small number of basic themes that are laid down early in life and which closely relate to the sexual experiences of childhood and adolescence (6,7). Accepting that childhood sexual fantasies might evolve from serendipitous activity resulting in sexual arousal or through non-coercive sex play with another child (8), it is also recognized that such fantasies may develop in response to traumatic sexual experiences or from exposure to sexualized environments alongside heightened levels of emotional tension (9,10). Sexual fantasies are noted to become more common and explicit in adolescence (3), wherein an adolescent's experiences and exploration of the range and uses of sexual fantasy is believed to be important in their sexual development (11,12).

Through repetition, often within the context of masturbation and/or other sexually arousing activities that lead to orgasm, an individual's previously incongruous sexual imagery becomes condensed into a coherent sexual fantasy script. This script is a set of rules for predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling a set of interpersonal scenes that are meaningful to an individual (13). Hazelwood and Warren (6) posited that such scripts comprise a number of key facets that include a behavioral component (i.e., the sexual behavior that occurs within the fantasy), a situational component (i.e., the context in which the fantasized activity is occurring), a relational component (i.e., how the various participants are related within the fantasy), a demographic component (i.e., the characteristics of the fantasized others), and a perceptual component (i.e., how the individual perceives themselves within the fantasy).

One of the more contentious constructs within the sexual fantasy literature is that of deviant sexual fantasy [see Leitenberg and Henning (3) for a review]. Unlike general sexual fantasy, deviant sexual fantasies contain themes involving

the intentional infliction of harm in a sadistic/sexually aggressive way (14) or themes depicting illegal (e.g., rape and child sexual offenses) and/or socially marginal behaviors. An example includes sadism, which refers to repeated behaviors and fantasy characterized by a wish to control another person by domination, denigration, or inflicting pain for the purposes of producing mental pleasure and/or sexual arousal (15).

An abundance of research has indicated that many individuals who never commit sexual offenses have fantasies that contain deviant sexual imagery (16–19) although the acknowledgment of deviant sexual fantasy within community samples varies widely (17,20). Research has also demonstrated that both male and female non-offenders have fantasies of being forced into sexual encounters (21) or of forcing sex onto another person (18,19,20,22). If, as this research suggests, deviant sexual imagery is within the realm of “normal” human experience to what extent can such fantasy themes be considered deviant or perverse? Leitenberg and Henning (3) have argued that because the majority of individuals who entertain perverse sexual fantasies have little, if any, desire to put them into practice, the notion of deviant sexual fantasy is somewhat of a misnomer. For this reason, researchers have often reserved the use of this term to those situations that involve sexual fantasies that are “statistically” more unusual and sexual fantasies that are associated with socially unacceptable behavior.

In an attempt to overcome the problems associated with the term “deviant” fantasy, the term “offense-focused fantasy” has been used more recently to distinguish offense-based sexual fantasies evident within the sexual offender population from sexual fantasies in non-offending populations (23). At times, the term deviant fantasy continues to be used in this chapter, however, in keeping with the literature.

THE FORMATION OF OFFENSE-FOCUSED SEXUAL FANTASY

Researchers have contended that specific early-life experiences may lead to an inner world of violent thoughts, which in turn may manifest in a desire to act on such thoughts. Anderson (24) postulated that the abuse suffered by some children might lend strength to their fantasies, making them more aggressive and instilling a dominant and controlling focus. During such instances, a child may also use fantasy to escape the harshness of reality by entering a world where they have more control over their fears and can act out their abuse against others rather than being the victim (25,26). In the case of repetitive sexual crimes, the content of sexual fantasy often reportedly derives from explicit, protracted, sexually deviant experiences first sustained in early childhood (27). The age of onset, duration, and degree of violence associated with such abuse

may also be functionally related to the likelihood that sexually deviant material is incorporated into fantasy (10).

The empirical bases for the above assumptions are found in the body of literature that suggests many individuals who act out in a sexually aberrant manner engage in deviant sexual fantasy and have themselves been subjected to abuse during childhood (28,29). It is important to add, however, that not all individuals who entertain deviant sexual fantasies have been subjected to abusive childhood experiences. Deviant sexual fantasy can be generated from either internal sources (where the fantasy stems purely from imaginary process) or any of at least five external sources (i.e., an individual's own childhood abuse, pornography, previous sexual experiences, modeled experience, and/or the media) (30).

Ward and Hudson (13) posited that the development of deviant sexual fantasy, coupled with the resultant mental picture, constituted the formation of an offense script. Through the processes of mental simulation, cognitive rehearsal, and covert modeling, additional material can be re-worked into the deviant sexual fantasy. By utilizing these psychological processes, an individual can modify those aspects of a fantasy that become boring or unstimulating while savoring the most pleasurable parts of the mental representation, in turn providing a more powerful imagery that can be used as sexual stimuli. Moreover, as the rehearsal of deviant sexual fantasy often accompanies masturbation, sexual arousal may become conditioned to the deviant sexual fantasies (31), which in turn can produce deviant sexual arousal patterns. These "preparatory" sexual fantasies may move an individual closer to the point where they attempt to translate fantasized scenarios into behavior (7,32).

THE NEXUS BETWEEN SEXUAL FANTASY AND SEXUAL OFFENDING

The hypothesis that fantasy facilitates action has led many researchers to express concern over the role that sexual fantasy, and in particular deviant sexual fantasy, may play in sexually aberrant behavior. Despite this oft-argued theoretical nexus, empirical research has yet to identify the potential link between (deviant) sexual fantasy and sexual offending. Most contemporary investigation into sexual fantasy within the context of criminal profiling has been restricted to the classification of offenders according to the specific motives found in their fantasies or has attempted to tease out the potential role(s) fantasy may play in sexual offending. Although the bulk of this work has focused on more excessive and repetitive aberrant acts (e.g., homicide, sadism, and abduction rape), there appears to be a consensus among researchers that supports the presumptive role of fantasy as a causal mechanism in sexually aberrant behavior.

Researchers have contended that sexual fantasy serves numerous integral functions. To quote Meloy (33), sexual fantasy provides a number of positive reinforcers before, during, and after the offense(s): “(a) it sustains pleasure (through memory or imagination) when coupled with masturbation; (b) it reduces behavioral inhibition while physiologically releasing orgasmic tension; (c) it stimulates grandiosity, since all fantasies are perfect, and thus compensating for any felt sexual or relational inadequacies; (d) it stimulates omnipotence, since the fantasy of omnipotent control of the victim is likely imagined; and (e) it allows the perpetrator to practice his paraphilia prior to, or between, behavioral ‘try-outs’ and the eventual consummation, or repletion of the sexual homicide” (p. 9). Similarly, it has been posited that fantasy can provide the sexual offender with a sense of control, a means for dissociation, a way of inducing or enhancing arousal, and the potential to regulate affect [see Gee et al. (34) for a review].

Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most contentious role of sexual fantasy in sexually aberrant behavior, is the degree to which such fantasies facilitate the *enactment* of fantasized behavior. Recently, Ward and Hudson (13) suggested that offense scripts, together with mental simulations of offense behavior, might provide offenders with an automatic, goal-dependent action plan, which partially facilitates subsequent sexually aberrant activity. Researchers generally agree that when deviant sexual fantasy becomes part of the offense chain, an individual moves closer to the point where acting on aberrant sexual fantasies becomes a reality. Although deviant sexual interest may be maintained by masturbation to aberrant themes, the intensity of the resultant sexual arousal is seen to decrease as a function of the frequency with which sexual fantasy is used to enhance such arousal (35). Therefore, as the intensity decreases, the “response tendency” (i.e., the motivation to act on the environment) increases (33). At the point where sexual fantasy escalates to a degree whereby the incorporation of further fantasy material fails to produce the desired changes in attention, arousal, or the environment, individuals may attempt to transform their fantasy into behavior. This may be accomplished through gradual and partial enactment in an attempt to stage the fantasy as it was imagined (15).

In those situations where the offender uses deviant sexual fantasy (either implicitly or explicitly) to re-live past experiences, the themes that emerge are reinforced by repetitive activation and rehearsal. As the fantasy scenarios are repeated, each offense, victim experience, and/or sexual behavior become part of the offender’s collective fantasy (6,13,36). This collective fantasy is then rehearsed before, during, and after a sexual encounter in order to mentally and sexually re-experience the “high” that was associated with the actual sexual

offense. It has also been contended that re-enactment provides an offender with an opportunity to deliberately plan and simulate escalatory behavior (36). Through mental simulation, an offender can preview anticipated experience and prepare themselves for plausible alternatives. That is, by replaying a scene several times, an offender can develop ways to minimize difficulties and/or problems that may be encountered and desensitize themselves to potential feelings of guilt, fear, awkwardness, and/or embarrassment.

Despite the contemporary advancements in the understanding of sexual fantasy within the context of sexual offending, much of the aforementioned research has been hindered by the complex relationships between deviant sexual fantasy and sexual aggression, as well as the inherent difficulties of investigating these, often internal, constructs within sexual offender populations. Thus, much of the work published to date remains at a more theoretical level of inquiry. Despite these obstacles, there is a continued need for a more comprehensive understanding of the role of deviant/offense-focused sexual fantasy in sexual crimes, which might help to inform the criminal profiling process.

SEXUAL FANTASY AS AN ADDICTION

During the past decade, numerous researchers have conceptualized deviant sexual fantasy as a “process addiction” that drives repetitive sexually violent behavior, wherein individuals become addicted to a certain “peak experience”, the achievement of which may become a goal in itself (37–40). Burgess and colleagues (41) have hypothesized that the sadistic serial killer is not only pushed to kill by their thought patterns, but they are incited to murder by an intrusive fantasy life. That is, it is the internal processing and cognitive operations of the repeat sexual murderer that sustain and perpetuate fantasies of sexually violent actions, which in turn lead to continued behavioral enactments and subsequent offending. Fantasy, then, has a complex organizing function and provides the sexual killer with a pervasive sense of control (6).

Anderson (24) also contended that fantasy plays a significant role in the life and motivation of the sadistic serial killer. His thesis posited that offenders were addicted to the use of fantasy and that the strength of this compulsion is what engendered the individual to kill in an effort to preserve the addiction. Arguing his point, Anderson concluded that sadistic serial murder is not an isolated event but rather a logical outgrowth or extension of the serial killer’s fantasy life. Therefore, following the initial offense, which can often be accompanied by pleasure resulting from the exertion of power, control, and/or sexual activity with a victim, the offense behavior gives rise to more elaborate thoughts, which are in turn incorporated into, and solidify, the deviant sexual fantasy.

As the offender continues their aberrant acts, they often attempt to make reality match their “idealized” fantasy (14). However, the match can never be perfect, as reality is usually never as satisfying as the “high” experienced within the individual’s fantasy (36). Thus, each new offense results in the refinement of the fantasy, a process that, for some offenders, builds to a point where it becomes equivalent to, or as viable as, the external world. Indeed, some researchers have suggested that the sadistic serial killer’s fantasy world is so real that they believe they can move between fantasy and reality without needing to distinguish between the two (26).

We suggest that those theories incorporating the “process addiction” hypothesis to account for sexually aberrant behavior lack explanatory breadth. Although many of these theories posit that sexual fantasy has the same inherent properties as other addictive processes (namely, salience, conflict, tolerance, withdrawal, relief, and relapse/re-instatement), the extent to which these characteristics are evident across the population of individuals who engage in deviant sexual fantasy would appear limited. Thus, unlike the theoretical work on sadistic serial murderers, it could be argued that the level of sexual violence present in the majority of deviant sexual fantasies is not as extreme as those seen in sadistic serial murderers. This, in part, may account for the discrepancy between those models of offending that highlight the addictive properties of fantasy and the large proportion of individuals who entertain deviant sexual fantasy content but do not display an “addiction” to fantasy. Moreover, it is also plausible that once the “process addiction” hypothesis has been empirically investigated, the notion will need broadening to encapsulate all sexual fantasy themes and behaviors entertained by sexual offenders.

A TRIPARTITE MODEL OF SEXUAL FANTASY IN SEXUAL OFFENDING

Recent research (23,30,34) utilized a data-driven, micro-level analysis referred to as grounded theory to investigate the phenomena of sexual fantasy in adult male sexual offenders. The goal of the research was to construct a descriptive, empirically grounded model to explicate the psychological and physiological processes of sexual fantasy for sexual offenders, as they progress through the various phases of the offense chain. The resultant tripartite model of sexual fantasy in sexual offending (SFSO) elucidates the function, content, and structural properties of sexual fantasy across the process of sexual offending. The model also acknowledges that for a small number of individuals, sexual fantasy played little or no part in their aberrant sexual behavior; however, this

was usually the case for those few individuals who indicated that sexual fantasy was also absent from their everyday experiences.

THE FUNCTION OF SEXUAL FANTASY

At its most abstract, this aspect of the SFSO model highlights four primary functions, together with their nine second-order processes. The primary functions of sexual fantasy in the context of sexual offending are regulating affect, regulating sexual arousal, coping, and modeling (34).

One of the more fundamental functions of sexual fantasy appears to be its ability to regulate an offender's mood/affective state. Unlike previous research that suggests fantasy is primarily used to regulate dysphoric mood, the SFSO model suggests that fantasy can serve a more general function in the regulation of mood/affect and does so in one of three ways. Although some offenders use fantasy to regulate dysphoric mood, sexual fantasy also serves a sensation-seeking function, in that it can be used to elevate an ambivalent mood state and/or to enhance a pre-existing positive mood state.

The SFSO model distinguishes between the two specific ways that offenders use fantasy to regulate sexual arousal. The first acts to induce a state of sexual arousal, a process primarily used as a precursor to masturbation, consensual sexual activity, and/or offending. This provides offenders with a means to shift from an otherwise unaroused state into one that physiologically prepares them for sexual activity. Secondly, sexual fantasy can serve as an adjunct to masturbation or other consensual sexual activity, thereby providing a means of enhancing a pre-existing state of sexual arousal. This type of fantasy behavior is primarily used to shift an offender closer to orgasm and/or intensifying the potency of a particular sexual experience. A particularly noteworthy feature is the degree to which offenders build up a "tolerance" to their sexual imagery. That is, when offenders use specific fantasy themes to induce or enhance sexual arousal over a period of time, the ability of the fantasy to produce the desired state of arousal decreases. This resulted in either an active escalation of the explicitness of their fantasy or a move away from more general sexual imagery toward offense-specific themes.

The ability of sexual fantasy to provide a coping function was achieved in one of two ways, either by allowing for an escape from the realization of a situation or by exerting control over an actual or perceived internal/external threat. The first of these avenues, escape, extends the original construct of dissociation (36) beyond the need to merely avoid detection. Within an offending context, fantasy also permits a perpetrator to mentally detach from a particular situation by escaping into their "fantasy world," allowing them to dissociate

during a specific sexual encounter and suppress the realization of their behavior following an offense. The second way fantasy serves a coping function is to provide an offender with a sense of control through the psychological processes of distortion and manipulation. Similar to the role of cognitive distortions, fantasy can be used to legitimize both the content of sexual imagery and the metamorphosis of such fantasies into reality. This process appears to provide some offenders with a means of overcoming their internal inhibitors to offending, by allowing them to maintain close links between fantasized behavior and actual experience. Fantasy can also be used to actively manipulate the characteristics of perceived reality, a process that often occurs through idealization and/or the substitution of fantasy content. The SFSO model unpacks this process by highlighting three ways in which offenders use fantasy to manipulate perceived reality. First, offenders can replace the content of reality (in both offending and non-offending contexts) with idealized images gleaned from other sources (e.g., the media, pornography, and past experiences). Second, fantasy can help restrict the focus of reality, acting to filter out those aspects of reality that are “illegal,” “wrong,” or no longer arousing. Third, offenders can manipulate reality within fantasy through active substitution. Here, offenders begin with fantasy content that reflects their objective reality (such as a sexual fantasy involving a partner) then actively manipulate one or more characteristics present within the five subcategories of fantasy content, often resulting in an offense-specific fantasy (23).

Perhaps, the most salient function of sexual fantasy within an offending context is its ability to provide a means of modeling experience. The majority of offenders use fantasy as a “mental sketchpad” to re-live experiences (rehearsal) and/or to create new experiences (simulation). In this context, rehearsal connotes the active and/or passive recall and re-enactment of past sexually aberrant experiences, together with a re-experiencing of the emotional and physiological sensations associated with those experiences. Although this rehearsal often occurs within the context of masturbation, it can also occur during consensual sexual activity. Within the self-regulation framework (42), those offenders who explicitly or implicitly engage in fantasy for the purpose of rehearsal appear to fall within the inhibitory (avoidance) offense pathways, at least until the fantasies became more preparatory in nature.

The process of “simulation” provides offenders with a safe means to plan and/or escalate their fantasies. For some offenders, it appears that simulation is meant to provide a purely substitutive process (i.e., there is no desire to act out the escalated fantasies); however, this generally leads to an implicit mode of escalation. That is, although some offenders do not appear to have a conscious desire to escalate their offense behavior, through the inappropriate regulation

of behavior via fantasy, they often fail to inhibit such escalatory processes. For other offenders, sexual fantasy is used in a preparatory manner, providing them with a means to explicitly plan escalatory behaviors for the purposes of re-offending. This process can be construed as acquisitional (approach) behavior within the context of a self-regulation model of relapse (42). That is, the use of offense-focused fantasies leads to the creation of offense scripts that, when activated by internal or external cues, result in sexual offending.

THE CONTENT OF SEXUAL FANTASY

The content arm of the tripartite model delineates two types of fantasy theme: general sexual fantasy and offense-focused fantasy (both non-specific offense fantasy and offense specific fantasy) (23). General sexual fantasy refers to fantasy themes that, while sexual in nature, are unrelated to sexual offending behavior *per se*. Like non-offending populations, the majority of sexual offenders also entertained general sexual fantasies. Offense-focused fantasy describes those fantasies containing sexually deviant material that, if acted out, would constitute a sexual offense. Unpacking this concept further, non-specific offense fantasies are those fantasies where, although the theme of the fantasy would constitute an offense if acted out, the content of the fantasy relates more to general aberrant activities than to a specific offense. Offense-specific fantasies on the contrary delineate specific offense characteristics. That is, they involve particular victim characteristics and/or the acting out of particular offense behaviors with a past, present, or identified future victim.

It may be argued that the use of non-specific offense fantasy appears to provide an important steppingstone to subsequent offending. That is, similar to the disinhibiting effects of pornography (43), the recurrent use of non-specific offense fantasy may allow offenders to desensitize themselves to the offense themes present within their fantasies. These same fantasies may then be used to normalize and/or entrench those offense-specific fantasy themes, thus increasing the potential for the acting out of a particular fantasy.

As the SFSO model moves from an abstract to a more fine-grained analysis of sexual imagery, it distinguishes five subcategories of sexual fantasy content for each general theme—that is, demographic, behavioral, relational, situational, and self-perceptual characteristics. Accepting that each subcategory might be conceptualized independently, it is their combination that often determines the overall theme of a sexual fantasy. Moreover, through the organization/re-organization of the five components, sexual offenders can create/manipulate specific imagery into any of the three sexual fantasy categories. For example, by changing the demographic characteristics of the

fantasized “other,” an otherwise consensual sexual fantasy theme can be altered into one containing pedophilic content. Similarly, by altering the behavioral and relational characteristics present within a sexual fantasy, an otherwise mundane script can be re-worked into one containing sadistic imagery.

A particularly salient feature of sexual fantasy content is the existence of three distinct interpersonal foci within the relational subcategory. Here, fantasies vary according to how the individual engaging the fantasy perceives the interplay between the various parties within the fantasy. Some fantasies appear to have a mutual focus, where the individual engaging the fantasy gives consideration (albeit often distorted) to the perspectives of all parties in the fantasy. This means that in some instances, all of the parties within the fantasy were perceived as actively participating in and enjoying (or not, as the case may be with sadistic fantasy content) the experience. During other instances, fantasies are more narrowly focused, with the perpetrator concentrating purely on themselves and on meeting their needs. In these situations, the other parties present within the fantasy are generally construed as objects to be used by the offender. In yet other fantasies, the focus is purely on the other parties, who are perceived as either enjoying the contact or, as is the case with more violent/retaliatory themes, ensuring that the other party is suffering in some way. The presence of these foci appear to provide offenders with a way to justify and rationalize their behavior across the offense process and, at the very least, affords them a means to overcome potential internal inhibitors to offending.

THE STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES OF SEXUAL FANTASY

The final arm of the SFSO model identifies eight structural characteristics of sexual fantasy that are evident across the process of sexual offending. At their most abstract, these properties are origin, context, trigger, perceptual modality, clarity, intensity, emotion, and action (34). A salient feature of this arm of the model is the three ways in which an offender attempts to manage the intensity of their fantasies across the offense process. That is, offenders can actively and/or passively escalate, inhibit, or maintain the frequency and extent of their sexual fantasies, thereby exerting considerable control and/or influence over their fantasy behavior.

The model also provides insight into the origin of an offender’s sexual fantasies and how previous experiences are incorporated into an individual’s sexual fantasy repertoire. The SFSO model distinguishes between two types of sexual fantasy origin: those generated internally from an offender’s imaginary thought processes and those that evolve from one of five external sources of sexual imagery (i.e., an offender’s own childhood abuse, pornography,

past sexual experiences, modeled experience, and/or the media). As noted in previous research, exposure to these types of sexual imagery early in life appears to have considerable influence over the development of sexual scripts that arguably guide future sexual behavior. It appears that for a large proportion of offenders, there is a core set of especially arousing fantasy themes that developed from experiences earlier in life that they return to. A particularly salient feature with respect to the source of sexual fantasy examines how offenders integrated, or failed to incorporate, previous experiences of childhood sexual abuse into fantasy. The SFSO model suggests that whether such material is actively incorporated into fantasy is highly dependent on the offenders' current appraisal of the childhood abuse. Those individuals who report that their early abusive experiences were positive (regardless of how they were perceived during the actual offense) are more likely to incorporate imagery relating to those experiences into their offense-focused fantasies. If an offender currently holds a negative appraisal of their childhood abuse, this does not necessarily exclude the incorporation of that material into fantasy; however, it does appear to influence the emotional experiences that accompany such fantasies. That is, unlike the positive emotions that were attached to the fantasies in the former scenario, the latter fantasies were generally brief, negatively toned flashbacks, which were often triggered during a sexual offense or while an offender was actively attempting to inhibit thoughts of their sexual offending.

A further noteworthy finding borne out in the SFSO model was what an offender did when access to external sources of offense-focused sexual imagery was blocked or absent. In these situations, many offenders appeared to actively manipulate non-sexual themes and/or general sexual imagery into offense-focused fantasies. We argue that this has important implications within the context of sexual offending, both in terms of what constitutes pornography for sexual offenders and in terms of how such material is restricted/regulated.

THE TEMPORAL PROFILE OF SEXUAL FANTASY IN OFFENDING

An important advancement in the understanding of sexual fantasy, and a particular strength of the SFSO model, is the development of a temporal dimension to sexual fantasy across the process of sexual offending. Unlike contemporary theorizing, which suggests that sexual fantasy is specific to pre-offense stages of the offense chain and related to the alleviation of negative affect, the current model explicates changes to the various functions, content, and structural properties of sexual fantasy across the offense process. Moreover, the SFSO model suggests that such variations are not only dependent on which

stage of the offense chain an offender is in but also on whether the individual is within the initial offense chain (first offense) or a relapse process.

A particularly salient aspect of the temporal dimension is the way that the content of sexual fantasy, together with its five second-order components, varies across the different stages of the offense process. Although most offenders do not entertain offense-focused fantasies during the historical phase (e.g., childhood recollections and first sexual fantasies), a small proportion of individuals do report entertaining such themes from an early age. Interestingly, these individuals generally appear to be those whose offenses are more predatory and/or sadistic in nature. As an offender moves through the initial offense chain, general sexual fantasy themes are seen to decline, whereas offense-focused themes increase. The initial offense brings about the cessation of general sexual fantasy and non-specific offense fantasy themes, as well as a narrowing in focus of offense-specific fantasy to the behavioral component. Similarly, during the initial post-offense period, while sexual fantasy themes appear restricted to offense specific content, they often contain all of the second-order components. Although general sexual fantasy themes re-emerge in later phases of the offense cycle, non-specific offense fantasy themes appear restricted to the early phases of the initial offense cycle.

The beginning of a relapse cycle generally coincides with a qualitative escalation in all five second-order components of offense-specific fantasy, with a shift in the behavioral content toward more hands-on behaviors and/or the incorporation of more bizarre and/or forceful experiences into fantasy. Although the actual relapse offense(s) again brings about a narrowing in the focus to offense-specific themes, those fantasies that are present often contain all of the second-order components. Thus, it would appear that during the build-up and relapse phases of the offense chain, sexual fantasies gain both detail and intensity, as well as broaden in scope. Similar to the initial post-offense period, the post-relapse phase of the relapse cycle was generally devoid of most sexual fantasy content.

The post-offending phase brings about the cessation of offending behavior, either because the behavior is detected or the offender makes a conscious decision to abstain from further offending. Despite this cessation, both general sexual fantasy themes and offense-specific fantasy themes re-emerge for the majority of offenders. As would be expected, this generally coincides with a constriction of an offender's potential sexual outlets, either because of incarceration or through relationship difficulties that stem from the offending behavior. Interestingly, many offenders actively attempt to inhibit offense-specific fantasy themes at this time, either because such fantasies are appraised as causal in offending and therefore need to be avoided or because they remind the offender

of the negative consequences (for themselves, the victim(s), and/or both) that resulted from their behavior.

Acknowledging the interconnectedness of the various functions of sexual fantasy, offenders do not consistently appear to use fantasy for any one specific reason over the course of the offense chain. Instead, sexual fantasy functions more dynamically across the offending/relapse process. Fantasy's ability to regulate sexual arousal generally appears restricted to situations where offenders are preparing for, or engaged in, sexual activity. Thus, this function appears less tied to the offense chain than it is to the underlying sexual script(s) that guides sexual interactions. It is through the indirect influence of the sexual script that the role of fantasy in sexual arousal appears to become conditioned to multiple sexual scenarios, the offense process being just one. In light of this variation, one of the more stable functions of sexual fantasy appears to be that of emotional regulation.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SFSO MODEL FOR CRIMINAL PROFILING

Criminal profiling evolved as an analytic process grounded in physical evidence that provided investigators with a tool to aid in the solving of previously unsolved crime and the linking of previously unlinked cases, a process that was believed to be most productive in situations where an unknown perpetrator has demonstrated some form of psychopathology in the commission of their crime (44). The recent proliferation of conceptual frameworks and investigative techniques/procedures within the profiling community makes a universally accepted definition of criminal profiling somewhat difficult to advance. However, within the present context, criminal profiling has been defined as the application of psychological theory and behavioral evidence analysis to the investigation and reconstruction of physical evidence that relates to a particular offender's crime scene characteristics, victimology, motivation, and behavior patterns. This process is underpinned by several core assumptions: including (i) no two cases are completely alike; (ii) no offender acts without motivation (regardless of whether this is within or outside consciousness); (iii) an offender may have multiple motives within a single offense and/or across multiple offenses; (iv) different offenders can exhibit the same or similar behaviors for completely different reasons; and (v) offense behavior progresses over time in ways that are unique to the individual (45).

A key aspect of the criminal profiling process is attempting to understand sexual fantasy within sex crimes; however, the ways in which such phenomena are to be investigated remain unclear, with the process made all the more challenging by the inherently subjective and oftentimes intangible nature of

these experiences. This has led to a haphazard, and perhaps under-utilization of, fantasy in criminal profiling despite its central role in understanding the process of sexual offending. By mapping the SFSO model onto the criminal profiling process, a conceptual framework is provided by which to approach the analysis of fantasy and illuminate its role in the etiology and maintenance of sex crimes. Using the SFSO model, fantasy can be explored with respect to the salient features of criminal profiling, thus systematizing the process and helping gain insight into the mind of the perpetrator. It does this by elucidating the function, content, and structural properties of sexual fantasy within the process of sexual offending and by examining the interconnection of these facets, their respective characteristics, and their temporal features. This represents a significant development in our understanding of sexually aberrant behavior and provides a unique vantage point from which to investigate, conceptualize, and treat the offender.

Modus Operandi

Modus operandi (MO) refers to those behaviors committed during an offense that serve to ensure its completion while also protecting the perpetrator's identity and facilitating escape following the offense (6). In effect, MO accounts for *how* an offender commits their crime (45). MO is believed to be dynamic in nature, wherein learned behaviors develop and evolve as a perpetrator gains expertise in their offending career. As highlighted by Geberth (46), an offender's MO may also devolve, with a perpetrator becoming less competent and/or skillful over time. Such decompensation often coincides with a deteriorating mental state, increased use of drugs/alcohol, or an offender's growing confidence in their ability to avoid apprehension. Moreover, the influence of extraneous variables (e.g., victim resistance and witnesses) means that criminal activity does not always go to plan, resulting in the need for improvisation or offender retreat. In effect, this culminates in an interrupted or incomplete offense, whereby the perpetrator may have been unable to carry the crime through to completion.

Sexual fantasy plays an important role in the development and maintenance of MO behavior, as it provides a stage on which the perpetrator can rehearse and plan anticipated offenses. That is, sexual fantasy may be conceptualized as a mental "sketchpad" on which an offender can simulate multiple offense scenarios, or aspects of their MO, "testing" which are most likely to ensure successful completion of the crime. Following the commission of a crime, sexual fantasy provides a means by which to re-enact specific aspects of an offense, with a view to "correcting" any perceived flaws, thereby refining the offense script. In this way, sexual fantasy is integral to the evolution of

an offender's MO, as well as the development of criminal "expertise." The SFSO model provides insights into how and why the temporal profile of sexual fantasy moves from general sexual fantasy through non-specific offense fantasies to offense-specific fantasies. The progression from general to specific sexual fantasizing illustrates, in broad terms, the evolutionary nature of sexual fantasy and its progression into offense behavior.

The SFSO model suggests that sexual fantasy can also contribute to the understanding of a devolving MO. To illustrate, as an offender's sexual fantasy gains in complexity (i.e., as additional subcategories of content are incorporated into the fantasy script and/or pre-existing subcategories become more intricate), the successful completion of an offense becomes increasingly difficult. In other words, as the underlying sexual fantasy script becomes more complex, the potential for behavioral "slippage" increases, a process that should be differentiated from overconfidence, for example. Such devolution can also occur when an offender over-utilizes sexual fantasy in the development of their MO, believing that the way an offense plays out in fantasy will mirror "real life" and in so doing fails to account for extraneous variables (e.g., witnesses).

Analyzing the key facets of the SFSO model can provide other important insights into an offender's MO. To illustrate, an offender may attempt to re-enact the source or origin of their sexual fantasy during an offense. For example, they may have incorporated aspects of the abuse they endured as a child when planning their MO or incorporate images from pornography and/or other forms of media. Irrespective of its origin, the core sexual fantasy shapes various aspects of an offender's MO including the context of the offense (e.g., outdoors in a park), victim selection (e.g., male child), method of approach (e.g., blitz attack), grooming processes/control (e.g., affective manipulation, disinhibition to sexually explicit material, and threats/violence), and organizing the type of resources needed to complete the offense (e.g., rape kit, sweets, vehicle, and precautionary acts). The origin of the fantasy is essentially static (although it may have dynamic aspects), representing, as it does, the core fantasy images to which the individual's sexual responses have become conditioned. As such, the context of the offenses would be unlikely to change fundamentally although they may develop in complexity (or devolve as the case may be). Hence, a serial offender is more likely to deploy similar strategies and resources across offenses, in keeping with the origin of their core fantasy structure.

OFFENDER SIGNATURE

Offender signature is conceptualized as those aspects of the offense that go beyond what is required to accomplish a particular crime and which are related to an offender's personality (47,48). Specifically, crime scene signature

is a pattern of distinctive behaviors that are characteristic of, and satisfy the, emotional and psychological needs of an offender (45). Thus, signature behavior captures the distinctiveness of a particular offender's needs and can therefore best be conceptualized as a reflection of the underlying personality, lifestyle, and developmental experiences of an offender (45). In essence, signature aspects have to do with *why* an offender committed a particular crime and is thus an integral component to all crime scenes (although its presence may not always be easily discernible).

The etiology of an offender's signature has been conceived as those fantasies that are progressive in nature and contribute to thoughts of committing violent or predatory behavior (48). Traditionally, an offender's signature was believed to be an inherent and static feature of their offense behavior (49). However, more contemporary theorizing accepts that, like an offender's MO, the signature aspect of an offense can evolve, devolve, or remain static across multiple crimes (37,46). Signature behavior may include the taking of "mementos," having a victim say or do pre-scripted actions, the sequencing of offense behaviors, or seeking out/altering a crime scene prior to an offense to ensure that it conforms to an offender's "idealized" image of the environment in which the offense will occur.

Signature behaviors essentially mirror a perpetrator's core fantasies; therefore, by attempting to understand the offender's sexual fantasies, the investigator may develop better insight into the specific psychological makeup of the offender (e.g., personality and prevailing cognitive schemas) and subsequently their criminal behavior(s). One of the more salient strengths of the SFSO model is its potential applicability to this nebulous task. By analyzing the discrete facets of the SFSO model, insights into the psychological forces driving the individual's behavior may be more cogently operationalized. In particular, the properties and dimensions of the core category referred to as Content are considered especially revealing.

Content demonstrates that perpetrators of sexual crimes fantasize both about general sexual and about offense-focused themes. Moreover, instances of offense-focused fantasy are not always related to offense-specific fantasies although it is plausible that they are intimately connected. That is, a linear progression from non-specific offense (and perhaps even General sexual) fantasies to Offense-specific fantasies is suggested by the SFSO model, thereby demonstrating the evolving complexity of fantasy structure. A closer inspection of signature aspects of a crime scene may provide direct clues into this process. For instance, victim profile (e.g., age, hair color, and weight) is a dimension reflected by the property Demographic, which is a component of both General sexual and Offense-focused fantasies. One can safely speculate that similarities

across these categories will exist not only in the Demographic features of sexual fantasy but also in the other properties they share.

To illustrate further, the property Relational pertains to the perpetrator's fantasies of the relationships between the players in it. Whether the perpetrator is Self-focused, Mutual-focused, or Other-focused is likely to remain consistent across General through to Offense-specific fantasy content, in keeping with the individual's core psychological drives (e.g., power/control, inadequacies, sensation seeking/experimentation, and revenge); however, it is likely that these dimensions become elaborated in the progression to Offense-specific fantasies, which may lead to criminal behavior. The same trajectory may be conceptualized for the other properties of the core category Content, all of which are shared by both General-focused and Offense-focused fantasy, including Behavioral (e.g., the types of injuries inflicted on the victim and the order or types of sexual activities engaged in), Situational (e.g., choice of location and time of day/night), and Self-perceptual (e.g., perpetrator as dominant and perpetrator as righteous victim).

Understanding the interplay between Content and the various Functions of sexual fantasy may also elucidate why changes to an offender's signature occur across time. Through the organizing function of Modeling, the various content categories of an offender's sexual fantasy are reworked into an offense script that better serves the offender's needs. Thus, if specific fantasy content more successfully fulfills one of the underlying functions of fantasy (i.e., Affect Regulation, Sexual Arousal, Coping), then such content is likely to enter the fantasy script. Importantly, this process may result from purposeful attempts to increase the potency of a fantasy experience, through trial and error or simply by accidental association. Regardless of its route, such processes lead to the refining, habituation, and ultimately an acting out of the particular fantasized behavior, which then translates into the evolution of signature behavior across crime scenes.

Accepting that offense scripts are rehearsed many times before they are enacted, the foregoing process says little about the underpinnings of a devolving signature. However, similar to MO behavior, the devolution in offense signature might signify deterioration in mental state, increased use of drugs/alcohol, or an offender's growing confidence in their ability to avoid apprehension. A devolving signature may also represent the interplay between personality, psychopathology, and sexual fantasy (e.g., as is the case for the sadistic psychopath). That is, an offender's use of fantasy may become confused and/or chaotic, possibly as a result of either over-refinement or over-reliance on this process as a means of escaping reality. Alternatively, attempts might be made to incorporate bizarre or sensationalistic aspects into fantasy that become

impossible to replicate in reality. As an offender becomes habituated to the peak fantasy experience and attempts to translate such themes into behavior, the offense script would have no parallels in reality. It is at this point that the offense requires a degree of improvisation and, as a result, is reflected in a crime scene through a change/devolution in an offender's signature.

In sum, by examining signature behaviors, the profiler may develop insight into the fantasy life of a perpetrator and make predictions about the progression of individual cases based on analyses of crime scenes. That is, it may help to understand which aspects of signature are likely to satisfy underlying psychological drives and thus remain constant while speculating how certain features may evolve/devolve as the perpetrator becomes satiated to their baseline fantasy and seeks to heighten their arousal or where the impact of mental disorder is discerned.

INFERRING MOTIVE

Distinguishing signature behaviors from MO can be a subtle task as the two often overlap. It is widely acknowledged, for instance, that separate offenders may utilize the same or similar MO, yet the psychological motivation for committing a sexual offense may be completely different. At the same time, the offender's signature may be so intricately linked to their MO that they cannot be readily disentangled. Attributing psychological motives to crime scene behavior is complicated by the fact that, unlike aspects of personality, mental state is not static across time. Therefore, in some situations (e.g., brief psychotic episode, drug-induced psychosis, and automatism), signature behavior would be more a reflection of an offender's psychological/mental state at the time of the offense rather than of an underlying personality structure or of enduring psychopathology.

Making distinctions between the "why" and "how" of a particular crime can be further complicated by the presence of "staging" within a crime scene. This is the deliberate effort by an offender (or another person) to alter the crime scene prior to the arrival of the police in an attempt to thwart the investigation and/or to move the focus away from the most logical suspect (49). At times, staging may also incorporate posing—that is, utilizing the victim/crime scene as a "prop" to communicate a symbolic message. Staging, therefore, signifies criminal or precautionary intent and should not be confused with alterations of the crime scene by the victim's loved ones in an effort to preserve the victim's dignity and/or that of their family (46).

Function, a core category of the SFSO model, is central to exploring and inferring potential motives of sex crimes. Affect Regulation, for instance,

connotes an offender's use of sexual fantasy as a means of regulating (i.e., Alleviating, Elevating, and Enhancing) their mood over the course of the offense process. As is often the case with child sexual abusers who offend along an avoidant offense pathway, forming sexual "relationships" with children can help stave off feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. It might also reflect attempts by the predatory rapist to regain a sense of control over their inability to engage in intimate sexual relationships, providing them with a means to humiliate, inflict pain, or seek revenge. Alternatively, through fantasy, a perpetrator can envisage how each facet of their offense will transpire, giving them a means to enhance sexual arousal and affect while simultaneously attempting to avoid detection and/or staging a crime scene for another purpose.

The manipulation of a crime scene post-offense (e.g., murder, disfigurement, and body disposal) may also provide insights into the fantasy motives underpinning those aspects of the crime scene that an offender feels most sensitive about. Although such activity may signify attempts to avoid detection or communicate a symbolic message, they may also represent a broader coping function. That is, as an outgrowth from fantasy, it can help the offender escape that realization of their behavior following the offense and avoid the consequent negative affect (e.g., denial, shame, and guilt) in the immediate post-offense period. Such scripted attempts at "undoing" a crime can also help elucidate certain aspects of staging, posing, or signature behavior. That is, it could help explain why a rapist might ask their victim for a date, why some perpetrators force a victim to wash following sexual experimentation with urine or faeces, or why a corpse is dressed following a sexual assault.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapter opened with a presentation of the theoretical developments in our understanding of sexual fantasy and, more particularly, current conceptualizations of sexual fantasy and its relationship with sexually aberrant behavior. Recent research employing the grounded theory method explicated a tripartite model of sexual fantasy (SFSO model) and its crucial role in understanding the offense process. Each of the three key facets of the SFSO model—namely, Function, Content, and Structural properties (along with their various categories, properties, and dimensions), was described, and their potential utility in criminal profiling was hypothesized. The general implications of the SFSO model to criminal profiling were elucidated followed by an exploration of its application to more specific aspects of criminal profiling including MO, offender signature, and inferring motive.

Sexual fantasy plays a fundamental role in the commission of sex offenses. Indeed, if we think of sexual fantasy as a “mirror” into the psychological drives, motives, and forces within the offender, then a crime scene acts as a reflection of this internal world. Thus, by attempting to understand the intrapsychic dynamics within sexual offenders, criminal profilers may begin to make inferences about certain sexual crime scenes, by mapping their analyses onto what is understood about sexual fantasy within the context of sexual offending.

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