

TALK ABOUT SEX: A REVIEW OF *SEX CRIMES: PATTERNS AND BEHAVIOR**

By

Scott R. Senjo, JD, PhD
Weber State University

Book: *Sex Crimes: Patterns and Behaviors* (2nd edition)
Authors: Stephen T. Holmes and Ronald M. Holmes
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It is hard to imagine (and this book necessarily conjures the imagination) a more savage vignette to the start of a book: while raping his victim, necrosadist Ted Bundy achieves a “powerful orgasm” upon slicing his victim’s throat (2). This is just the beginning. On the same page, during a prison interview, an offender explains how he kidnapped a young girl . . . and brutally ravished her for 18 hours . . . inserting rocks into her body Not yet fully recovered from that opening, an explication of homosexuality follows, including a study, which shows that 37% of all males in American society have had a homosexual experience (7), and a “Roman Shower” is defined (vomiting on a partner as a form of sex play) (11). “Sensational” would be a good word to describe Chapter One. “Unnecessary” would be a good word to describe how these identical stories are repeated in subsequent chapters. Fortunately, a more sober discussion takes place throughout the rest of the book because when it comes to sex crimes, Ted Bundy and Roman Showers are not representative of what needs to be the focus of this discussion.

What does need to be the focus? A person does not have to read this book to sense the peculiar condition of sexual expression in American society but doing so could very well confirm it. Eight million couples partaking in triolism annually (sharing a sexual partner with another person so the triolist can watch) (64), 264 magazines devoted to children having sex (118), and 1 million women affected by rape annually (172) are empirical facts that offer a glint of the situation because these are only the things we know about and do not include deviant acts which remain a secret. How does it happen?

A useful starting point to the query is to recognize the widespread social acceptance of deleterious sexual practices rampant in our culture. In seemingly every direction, the subtleties inherent in human sexual expression are blasted apart. Messages fill the subconscious that tell us sex is not for spiritual connection with one’s partner, but for something else. Sex is for beer commercials on T.V. Sex is for controlling and hurting loved ones. Sex is for political power in prison (and elsewhere) or for manipulating the approval of others. Sex is for sale when you get tired of working for a living. Above all, sex is not to be talked about, but rather a human energy force to be kept shamefully hidden away in the recesses of our minds where it festers problematically for a release, sometimes a criminal one. In the aggregate, Ted Bundy, triolists, and beer commercials create a sense that something is not quite right and hence make *Sex Crimes* a significant contribution to the field of Sociology/Criminology and Criminal Justice. Written by Stephen T. Holmes and Ronald M. Holmes, the second edition of *Sex Crimes* opens the door to

shed light on a dark, pandemic situation of sexual aberration and violence that is in need of this kind of sober discussion.

How have we come to manage our sexuality in such a manner? Parents and teachers say don't do it but popular culture says you can never get enough and to do it every chance you get. Where social messages are schizophrenic, political messages are rigid and hypocritical. Like Charles Keating (described in Chapter Eight), those with the shrillest voice decrying sex are often those who have the most to hide. Is it any wonder that we produce sex offenders in such volume? And if we create the conditions for sexual deviance, be it promiscuity, transvestitism, date rape or formicophilia (sex play with insects), it is even more curious that we hate sex offenders so much. "Although [sex] crimes may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, the feelings of animosity toward these offenders do not" (223). Sex offenders remain the most hated of all deviants.

Could the contempt for sex offenders be inward societal shame that is projected outward? Could it be that we hate in others that which we do not like about ourselves? Megan's Law, Zachary's Law (Chapter Six) and other quick-fix approaches do not appear to be rational policies carefully designed to address a serious social problem, and maybe aren't even necessary. "In 1998, arrests for rape and other sex offenses constituted 1% of all arrests for that year" (223). Megan's Law, Zachary's Law, and their inevitable counterparts seek to placate hysterical citizens and seem like symptoms of a sexually neurotic culture. Truly, *Sex Crimes* throughout does not fail to demonstrate the curious nature of sexuality in American society.

Perfectly suited for an upper or lower division college course in Criminology or Victimology, Holmes and Holmes maintain remarkable composure explaining practices such as agonophilia (sexual excitation from a pretension that one's partner is involved in a struggle to be free) (164) or zooerasty (sexual gratification achieved with animals by stroking, petting, or kissing them) (248). The authors also keep a steady hand relating their interviews with sadistic killers on death row or traumatized victims who wonder how the state can provide for felony offenders while being comparatively oblivious to the plight of victims.

While maintaining excellent social science objectivity, an occasional dash of unintended humor punctuates the harsh reality of the topic: While describing bestiality, the authors note that a Los Angeles man, who, after fights with his girlfriend, sought revenge by raping her pet chicken. After the second incident, the chicken died (77). The only major slip concerns the book's one photograph of a black male on page 209. While the criminal justice system has experienced remarkable success in portraying black Americans as the crime problem, the research does not make such a connection. The cover of the book does better but only slightly as it shows a 40-year-old white male, lurking and leering menacingly in the shadowy distance. It likely would have been too much reality to place a college dean, Catholic priest, or Bill Clinton on the cover, however accurate that portrayal of a sexual deviant may be.

While the book gets high marks for organization, structure, and analysis, and exceptionally high marks for the inclusion and synthesis of empirical research on sex offenses and offenders, it receives a low mark for causation. We are treated to outstanding descriptive analysis, including historical and theoretical applications, all firmly rooted by methodologically sound social research, but in a sense, that is all we get. The reader may have difficulty reading

about practices such as klismaphilia (sexual arousal linked with being given an enema) (75) and not wonder what leads someone to express their sexuality in such a manner. A highly appropriate Chapter Two, *Theories of Sexual Deviance: Understanding the Causal Nexus* is most helpful, especially for undergraduate students, but runs into trouble trying to apply conventional criminological theory to sex offenders. Was Bandura really thinking about eproctophilia (arousal from flatulence) when he developed social learning theory?

The first edition was of high quality and this latest edition has built upon the first, including computer-related sex crimes among other recent developments. It comes as no surprise that in both editions the authors make a diligent effort to establish empirical causal connections to explain sexually deviant behaviors, especially since they teach a university course on sex offenses. But the effort, while noble, comes up short in certain parts of the book. In fact, with each new chapter comes another attempt to explain sexual deviance either empirically or medically, but also another failure. On one page after another: “there is no clear understanding of the etiology of the voyeur” (61); “the exact etiology [of transvestitism] is unknown” (69); “the basic etiology of pedophilia is unknown” (95); “no one knows the precise etiology of necrophilia” (149); “the issue of etiology [for lust offenders] is not fully addressed” (168); “there is no simple explanation for the etiology of a rapist” (184).

These futile attempts to identify root causes highlight the enormity of the task because as experienced criminologists and outstanding researchers, if anyone could offer a better explanation, it seems like these authors probably could. However, the most we seem to get in terms of underlying causes is that many sex offenders come from broken homes and suffer from low self-esteem. That just about includes everyone.

What is interestingly absent from the book (or totally silent about) is that which other cultures such as the Chinese or Arabic cultures have known for centuries – that sex is part of spirit, and that sexual dysfunction in large measure is caused from a spiritual breakdown. The authors correctly identify in Chapter Three, *Sex and History*, certain historical foundations that can be traced to current sexual practices. However, the discussion is limited, covering only dominant family paradigms. It may be that the undue loyalty to the dominant Western model for sexual expression is what contributed to this predicament in the first place.

The authors are likely well aware of the non-dominant philosophies concerning human sexuality, such as those in India which link sex with spirit but may have considered them beyond the scope of the book. Nevertheless, the ancient wisdom of other cultures (non-Western) may have something to offer, especially for undergraduate students. It appears that universally, sex therapists who treat obsessive-compulsive disorders require their sex offender patients of all stripes to understand the connection between sex and spirit. Doing so is thought to address a maligned spirit and provide a necessary supplement to the other treatment modalities such as the behavioral, cognitive, and medical ones noted on pages 236-237.

The authors note, “we can probably safely assume that sex offenders, as a population, will never be accepted into mainstream society” (239). Yet, they also state that “the more we learn about sex offenders, the more we come to accept that there is something distinctly different about them” (239). More and more people are seeking to admit to the problem, seek help, and

accept their unique illness even though mainstream society will not. And these sexual deviants, the ones who should be banished and never be accepted into mainstream society, they must be disgusting outcasts, right?

The reality is that sex offenders are found in every segment of society. College deans and lawyers can be necrophiliacs (sex with a corpse) (148), rapists can be attractive men of above-average intelligence, married with children (185), charming and charismatic men who are fully employed and have socially adequate skills can derive sexual satisfaction from the sadistic torture, killing, and mutilation of their victim (166), and pedophiles can be church leaders (100).

Despite the reality that some sex offenders may look like the neighbor next door, so do many burglars, arsonists, or car thieves and we do not want to diminish the approbation for them or any other felony offender. The authors do not favor any semblance of leniency for sex offenders. Doing so is not only politically impossible, but may jeopardize public safety. As the book carefully implies or expresses, a subpopulation of sex offenders may be the most sinister in the entire criminal population. However, the majority of the problem of sexual aberration noted throughout the book is a little too widespread to ignore and far too complicated to leave to the media and government to interpret. The problem is not beyond a greater treatment effort. Perhaps the first step toward a better understanding of the problem and subsequent treatment effort is to engage in a constructive discussion, the kind made possible by the second edition of *Sex Crimes*.

* Direct correspondence to Dr. Scott R. Senjo, Associate Professor, Weber State University, Department of Criminal Justice, 1206 University Circle, Ogden, UT 84408-1206 (E-mail: ssenjo@weber.edu).