Sexual Sadism: A Portrait of Evil

Michael H. Stone, M.D.

Sexual sadism has been defined ambiguously in the DSM to include both preoccupation with sadistic sexual fantasies and the acting out of such fantasies (with resultant harm or death to the victims). Ideally, the term should be used only for persons in whom such fantasies are acted out in actual behavior. Almost all such persons will be men. There is an overlap between the psychiatric diagnosis of sexual sadism (as behavior) and the concept of evil as the word is used in everyday parlance. The word evil is evoked generally when one comes to learn of (or witness) violent actions of such a nature as to horrify, shock, and disgust us. Evil corresponds, that is, to an emotional reaction when confronted with acts of a particularly horrific and repugnant type. Violent sexual crimes involving torture of the victim are particularly likely to elicit this response. A common exemplar of sexual sadism is the serial killer who experiences orgasm when murdering his victim. Sadistic sexual fantasies are noted in certain adolescents. In some of these the fantasies serves rehearsal for future sadistic sexual acts, especially in adolescents with callous-unemotional personality (who often emerge in adult life as psychopaths). Whereas therapy would usually fail even if such adolescents were brought to treatment early, there are others who experience sadistic sexual fantasies, but for whom these fantasies are ego-alien and disturbing. Patients of the latter type may be amenable to dynamic psychotherapy.

A Matter of Definition

From a historical perspective, the term sadism makes its first appearance in Boiste's 1835 Dictionnaire Universel (Coward, 1992, p. xxi), but did not become part of everyday parlance until the publication of Krafft-Ebing's famous monograph of 1886 (Krafft-Ebing 1886/1965).

As outlined by Hucker (1997), Krafft-Ebing cited eight varieties of sexual sadism; namely, lust-murder, mutilation of a corpse, injury to a woman via stabbing, flagellation, or comparable means, defilement of a woman, symbolic sadism (where one might cut a woman's hair rather than her skin), ideational sadism (restricted to thoughts only), sadism via use of an object such as a whip, and sadistic acts with animals. All these counted as instances of sexual sadism insofar as they led to sexual arousal. Contemporary usage would argue against mutilation of a corpse, because—despite leading to sexual arousal in certain men—no suffering is inflicted upon the victim (unless of course there were antemortem pain-inducing acts; Hazelwood & Michaud, 2001, p. 93).

The inspiration for research in this area came, as is well known, from the writings and actions of the 18th century French aristocrat, Donatien Alphonse François Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). There are interesting correspondences between de Sade's adolescent years and the sexual perversions he later practiced. His father had sent him to live with a clergyman-uncle who happened to honor his Catholicism in the breach, initiating his nephew into a most active and varied sexual life, with on-the-premises orgies, and the like. When de Sade's father got wind of this, he sent his son to boarding school run by the Jesuits. Far from being a corrective measure, the new Catholicism in the breach, initiating his nephew into a most active and varied sexual life, with on-the-premises orgies, and the like. When de Sade's father got wind of this, he sent his son to boarding school run by the Jesuits. Far from being a corrective measure, the new

Contemporary Definition

The term "sexual sadism" has been defined in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; 1994) of the American Psychiatric Association—in a manner that is at once over-inclusive and ambiguous. The manual speaks of “…recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving acts (real, not simulated) in which the psychological or physical suffering (including humiliation) of the victim is sexually exciting to the person” (p. 530). To this is added a second criterion: “The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (p. 530).
The main problem with the first criterion lies in the word “or.” By virtue of the or-word, a person can be diagnosed with sexual sadism either if he has fantasies alone, or if he exhibits the pain-inducing behaviors. But such a definition (akin to Krafft-Ebing’s “ideational sadism”) allows persons who never indulge in any pain-inducing behaviors to be stigmatized with the diagnosis of sexual sadism. This flies in the face of the common-sense meaning of sadism as it has evolved over the years; namely, that it implies pathological behaviors. One would never call anyone a “sadist” who never does anything mean, hurtful, humiliating, or otherwise obnoxious or destructive to other persons. In the same spirit, it does not make sense to call someone a “sexual sadist” who has never inflicted pain that involves sex. The DSM description is thus in need of disambiguation. This can be achieved by insisting on certain behaviors as the crucial and defining feature. Otherwise the definition is at once ambiguous and overinclusive (the latter, because those who have morbid sexual fantasies which are never acted out, would be placed under the same heading, with all its pejorative connotations).

Before we discuss these issues further, let it be said that sexual sadism, in my narrower concept of sexual excitation induced by the actual inflicting of suffering on others, is almost exclusively a male phenomenon. The number of women who would be included under this definition is quite small. Later I will describe briefly the two instances known to me. Apart from those rarities, the pronoun he will suffice in our references to sexual sadists.

There is also a problem in the second criterion of the DSM-IV, where mention is made that the sexual urges or behaviors cause significant distress or impairment. Again, the or-word is the problem. There are indeed persons who experience sexual excitation at their pain-inflicting sexual fantasies, but who have developed a guilt-guided (that is, internalized) moral structure sufficiently strong to restrain them from any acting out of such fantasies. Men of this sort are often troubled enough to seek psychiatric help. In contrast, the sexual sadists one reads about in the forensic literature or in newspapers and journals are cut from a different cloth. With few exceptions, these men are strangers to the very concept of guilt and go about their destructive and to others pathologically destructive activities with glee.

Overlap with the Concept of Evil

In our psychiatric training we are taught not to make judgments about our patients. This injunction is underlined even more strongly in the psychoanalytic training. Because psychoanalysis as a therapy has its best results with inhibited personality types, persons who are uncommonly cruel, let alone who experience sexual excitement by torturing or killing others, do not present themselves for treatment and do not make it to the analytic couch. I should say almost never, since there have been a few isolated examples of sexually sadistic men who have come to analysis as a sort of refuge, where they have feigned innocence and pretended to seek help as a way of hoodwinking the authorities (and the analyst).

Because of the prohibition in psychiatry against making judgments, the term evil inhabits a domain that appears to lie well outside, nor even contiguous with, the domain of psychiatry. This is because to call an act, let alone a person, as evil is indeed to make a judgment—one that many feel is not appropriate for ordinary people at all, but legitimate only in the opinion of God or perhaps of His earthly representatives among the clergy. The situation in everyday life, as it turns out, is quite different. We use the word evil all the time. And as I have argued recently (Stone, 2009), there is wide agreement in the public concerning the circumstances that evoke this word. When people in ordinary life, and this includes judges and prosecuting attorneys as well as journalists and others in the media, speak of an act (or of a person who repeatedly commits such acts) as evil, the acts in question are those we characterize as horrifying, shockingly depraved, heinous, atrocious, breathtakingly awful, nauseating, etc. The “etc.” here is meant to embrace all other descriptors from the menu of adjectives we reserve for evil acts. The chief ingredient of such acts is a repugnance that we experience as sickening, violating to the maximum the rules and qualities that we regard as human. Torture comes at the head of any catalog of evil acts, since by torture we mean the intentional and methodical infliction of great suffering upon another person or group of persons, especially when the victims are living in peace and have been completely innocent of any wrongdoing. The acts need not be of a sexual nature, though they may be inspired by sexual rejection, as when a man tosses acid in the face of a woman who has just broken up with him. The acts may be of a sexual nature, yet without the added element of engendering sexual excitement in the perpetrator. Cutting a woman’s breast, in the absence of tumescence or orgasm on the part of the perpetrator, would be an example. This is still a step short of sexual sadism, where sexual excitement is a necessary accompaniment. Erection or orgasm at the moment of a violent or murderous act, especially one involving rape, does count as sexual sadism. The public will typically describe such an occurrence as evil; the tabloid press will often run a headline caption to the effect of “The Face of Evil” (showing a picture of the perpetrator) or some similar phrase. Examples will involve a sexual crime with a sexual motif which is diagnostically ambiguous with regard to sexual sadism for want of confirming data. There had been a case in Texas in 1993, for example, in which 19-year-old Jason Massey (Cox, 1996) killed a boy and a girl, both 13. He decapitated the girl and cut off her hands and feet. The body was discovered only after considerable decomposition had taken place; it could not be determined whether he had also raped the girl. After his arrest, his dairy was discovered, in which he detailed his ambitions to be the most prolific serial killer ever, killing, dismembering, and cannibalizing as many beautiful girls as possible. He had
already killed dozens of cats and dogs, and described his “adrenaline rush” at each act of animal-killing and murder. Massey denied having sex with the female victim, and it is not clear whether he experienced sexual arousal as well as the “rush” at the time of the murder. His crimes seem compatible with the description of sexual sadism (as opposed to sadism without sexual arousal), but we cannot be certain. His

**WARNING:** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

---

...crimes were called “evil” by the prosecutor—“of a sort you’ve never seen before and will hopefully never see again” (Cox, p. 19).

Because of the aura of privacy and intimacy surrounding our ideas about sex, along with the preciousness with which we regard the sexual aspects of our anatomy, we react to violent and torturous acts to a victim's sexual parts as representing the violation of the sacred: the worst thing that can happen to a human being. What makes us experience sexual crimes (especially by a man against a woman) as a violation of the something sacrosanct is, I believe, the fact they could lead to a pregnancy and an unwanted child, sired by a man the victim would never choose as the father of her children. Thus rape is considered a more heinous crime than robbery. Sexual sadism goes a step further: the acts involved may, depending on their particularities, scar the woman so as to make her undesirable, subsequently, to other men, or may even amount to castration—such that she could not become pregnant in the future by a man she would want as the father of her children. Unlike a mugging or a robbery, where there may be nonlethal physical injury or the loss of money or valuables, sexual crimes may have consequences that last many years beyond the offense, and may lead to “genetic death” (by eliminating the possibility of reproduction) even in a surviving victim.

**A Spectrum of Sexual Sadism**

If we adhere to a strict definition of sexual sadism as a paraphilia involving sexual excitation as a prelude or accompaniment to a pain-inducing (or even death-inducing) sexual act—one that is often ritualistic and may include prolonged torture—then the various examples of this perversion will be seen along a spectrum. Sexual sadism can also be distinguished from typical cases of rape. The latter are often carried out by men with sadistic personality traits (as outlined in the appendix of DSM-III-R, 1987), but who quickly overpower their victims (women, usually, but homosexual rapists who victimize men also exist), and do not indulge in torture or complex ritualistic behaviors.

Among sexual sadists ritualistic behaviors are one of the defining features. Not all the men violate the letter of the law, however much they may violate the spirit of the law. Some seek, and manage to achieve, attachment to willing partners. Janet Warren and Roy Hazelwood (2002), for example, interviewed female partners of sexual sadists. Seven of the 20 sexual sadists with whom these women had affiliated had also murdered some of their victims—but the other 13 had not. The relationships with these women were consensual, at least in the early phases; most of the women had histories of having endured physical abuse

**WARNING:** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

---

from a parent, or (in 9 of the 20 cases) incest (by father, brother, or even a female relative). The early experience of these women had, in effect, primed them, via a psychical incorporation of their abnormal caretakers, to expect, tolerate, and in some instances, even desire sadistic treatment at the hands of their sexual partners. The sexual sadists themselves initiated their partners into sadistic practices through a series of stages. In the “candy and flowers” stage, the man would ply a woman with gifts, behave with uncommon gentlemanners and tenderness toward her, but then progress to a stage in which he expanded her sexual repertoire well beyond, and alien to, her prior experience. This might take such forms as forced anal sex, bondage, urinating on the woman, measured choking with release before unconsciousness occurred, etc. The man's quest for domination and total control might proceed to cutting the woman off from relatives and friends, such that she was now his sexual slave. If she were lucky, the pattern would progress no further. But in some cases, the drama would end in her death. Those sexual sadists who maintained ongoing relationships with a wife or girlfriend might lead a kind of double life, in which they exacted pain and suffering of a controlled sort with their partners, but also had a secret life in which they trolled for other women whom they tortured and murdered. In a number of examples, the female partners were forced into becoming the inadvertent accomplices of sexually sadistic torture-murder of other women. Some of these women, having been compliant in the beginning, desperately wanted “out” of the relationship toward the end—but they were routinely threatened with torture and death themselves if they dared to exercise that option. In any event, as Warren and Hazelwood underline, the double lives of the sexual sadists does not consist of polar opposite situations where they were consistently gentle with their wives or girlfriends, but merciless in their behavior toward their victims. Instead, they were at least somewhat sadistic even with their favored partners—whom they made endure varying degrees of bondage, whipping, sex through undesired orifices, sex half a dozen times a day, and such like.

An example is that of Karen Homolka, who married the Toronto serial killer, Paul Bernardo (Burnside & Cairns, 1995). Karen came from a “dysfunctional” Canadian family. Not much is known about her early life apart from her father being alcoholic. In adolescence she was given to episodic depressions and wrist-cutting. She visited a boyfriend in Kansas with whom she had sex for the first time. She used cocaine while with him and allowed him to practice bondage on her. He also humiliated her, subjecting her to “S&M” (sadomasochistic) practices and calling her “ugly.” Later, she married Paul Bernardo, who quickly passed from the candy-and-flowers stage to the total subjugation and humiliation of her. Karen worked as an anesthetist for a veterinarian. In 1990 Paul was able to persuade her to subdue her younger sister with halothane and triazolam (Halcion®—so that Paul could rape the girl while she was unconscious. (On coming to, Tammy aspirated her vomitus and died, which was written off as an “accident.”) Paul then got Karen to assist him in the rape and murder of two teenage girls.
But first, he took pictures of Karen having “lesbian” sex with the victims, to use as blackmail, in the event Karen threatened to go to the authorities. Eventually, Karen did go to the police—after Paul had disfigured her with black eyes and beatings around the face. Willing accomplice of a serial killer, Karen was sentenced to 12 years in prison (Paul received a life sentence), and was released in 2007. Amoral and sociopathic in her own right, with her penchant for affiliating with sadistic and violent men, she planned to marry a murderer whom she had met while both were in prison.

We may understand the Bernardo-Homolka marriage as occupying an intermediate position within the spectrum of sexual sadism. Experiencing excitation by inflicting suffering had progressed to the point, toward the end of their time together, of beating his wife and humiliating her in particularly degrading ways. When Paul had his hand bitten after putting his hand into the cage of Karen's pet iguana, for example, he decapitated it and made her skin and cook it—the remains of which he then ate. Paul's preference for anal sex is in line with the observations of Hazelwood and Michaud (2001), who noted that nearly three quarters (73% in their series) of sexual sadists preferred anal sex (p. 102; cf. also Hazelwood, Dietz, & Warren, 1992, p. 6). The authors speculated that, in some of the men, this predilection reflected not so much a connection to underlying homosexual interests as a means of exacting pain and degradation upon the woman (whether girlfriend, wife, or stranger-victim). In a subgroup of the men, this preference was allied with exclusively homosexual erotic interest as well, as was the case with the sadistic serial killers: Dean Corll (Olsen, 1974), Wesley Dodd (King, 1993), and William Bonin (Gribben, 2001). Co-occurring paraphilias are common in sexual sadists in general, including bondage (77%) and transvestism (20%). In still others, the men identified themselves as heterosexual but were bisexual in their erotic interests: John Gacy (Cahill, 1986), Albert Fish (Schechter, 1990), and Arthur Shawcross (Olsen, 1993). As for men committing serial sexual homicide, the majority of whom also meet criteria for sexual sadism, those who identify as homosexuals constitute, in my study of 150 serial killers, 13.3% of the entire group—perhaps twice as many as would be expected from figures for the general population.

At the milder end of the spectrum, we encounter sexual sadists who have some capacity for enduring attachment to their partners, upon whom they inflict—in order to achieve sexual excitation—actions that cause comparatively mild discomfort and no more than minor degrees of humiliation and domination. Such a man might need to call his partner a whore or a slut or a cunt, while pinching or smacking her lightly in a quasi-playful sort of S&M game, as a prelude to sex. There would be no progression to highly painful or dangerous behaviors, and the relationship might survive for many years. One of the marriages among the women studied by Warren and Hazelwood lasted 26 years. Moving further toward the middle of the spectrum, another case involved a man who at first introduced his wife to anal sex, then abused her physically and verbally, and ended up having her assist him in the murder of other women.

Ironically, the Marquis de Sade himself, belongs to the middle portion of the spectrum, if we judge him (as I think is appropriate) by his actions. He did inflict a moderate degree of pain and humiliation on his female victims. But he never indulged in the more extreme types of torture, let alone sexual homicide. In contrast, the acts committed by many of the serial killers of our era exceed in depravity not only the actions of the marquis, but even of his fantasies. It is to the sexually sadistic crimes of some of the modern serial killers, representing the extreme of the spectrum, that we now turn our attention.

**Sexual Sadism in the Domain of Serial Sexual Homicide**

Sexual sadism, in the strict sense of experiencing arousal (and usually, orgasm) at the time of inflicting physical suffering on a victim is encountered frequently within the ranks of men committing serial sexual homicide. If the paraphilia of sexual sadism is dependent also on the death of the victim, the paraphilia is sometimes known as lust murder or erotophonophilia (Money, 1990). Men exhibiting sexual sadism often show the characteristics of sadistic personality disorder (SPD) as it had been defined in the DSM-III-R (1987), though the two diagnostic categories are not always conflated (Bernet, Berger, & Hill, 2003): sexual sadists are more likely to meet criteria for SPD, for example, than are men with SPD to act in addition as sexual sadists. If one focuses on men who have committed at least one sexual homicide, sexual sadism was noted in about a third of the men (36.7%) in a study based on 166 offenders (Hill, Haberman, Bernet, & Briken, 2006). The sexual sadists in their study were more than three times as likely to have killed more than one victim, as compared with the men who did not show sexual sadism (39% as compared with 11%), but it was not mentioned how many men had killed three or more victims—the minimum criteria used by the FBI in defining serial sexual homicide.

My own study focused more narrowly on serial killers (i.e., with three or more victims), rather than on men who had committed at least one sexual homicide. The latter umbrella group contains, besides men convicted of one sexual murder, all serial killers, as well as any serial killer marqué—a man who has all the characteristics of a serial killer, but who (a) was caught after the first or second murder, or (b) was suspected of having killed three or more persons but convincing forensic evidence could be gathered only for one or two such crimes.

Currently my data are based primarily on 150 full-length biographies of serial killers, though I have additional material on serial killers I have interviewed in various prisons and forensic hospitals, and on still others known from articles in magazines, journals, and Internet sites. In an earlier paper I discussed background factors of relevance to serial killers, at a time when the biographies numbered 90 men (Stone, 2001).

The proportion of serial killers manifesting the characteristics of sexual sadism is quite high: 47.3% (71 of 150 men), as would be expected in a group of men committing multiple as opposed to solitary sexual murders. The proportion may well be higher still, considering that not all the biographies provided explicit information as to whether the killer experienced some form of sexual arousal

---

**WARNING!** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

during or immediately after the murder.

A distinction needs to be made concerning rapists: sexual sadism is a common feature of men committing rape, since sexual arousal at the anticipation of overpowering a victim for the purpose of sexually assaulting the victim—is the defining feature of rape. But rape is usually carried out either by masked men who do not intend to kill their victims, unless the mask is torn off in the struggle, or—more often—by unmasked men who feel confident enough that the victim will not go to the authorities. The typical rapist, that is, has sexual gratification and the assertion of power through violence as his main motives; he resorts to murder only out of fear of detection, arrest, and imprisonment. The serial killer has murder on his mind to begin with: it is an integral part of his inner script, along with the craving for sexual gratification. Serial killers, at all events, constitute a small but highly important subset of the much larger set of rapists. Their importance stems from the disproportionately large number of murder victims for which they are responsible, as compared with the murder victims of rapists in general.

**WARNING:** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

When there is a history of paraphilia, within the ranks of serial killers, *multiple* paraphilias are the rule. Nine out of ten serial killers who were also sexual sadists had one or more additional paraphilias, such as bondage, exhibitionism, and even cannibalism (the latter was a factor in one of ten of the sexually sadistic serial killers).

Sexual sadism, in contrast to most of the other paraphilias, often emerges as a prelude to serial sexual homicide. The term “rehearsal” is sometimes used, as when an adolescent begins to elaborate sexually sadistic fantasies, which he will (in some cases) begin to act on in his 20s or 30s (the average age for “lust murder” is 26.5). Examples of this progression can be found in the literature about serial killers. There are several biographies of adolescents with marked sadistic fantasies who went on to become serial killers. These include books by Cox (1996), Davidson (2006), Gibney (1984), Glatt (2002), Henderson (2004), King (1992), Petit (1990), Phelps (2008), Schechter (2000), and Schwartz (1992).

The section that follows consists of several vignettes illustrating some of the varieties of sexual sadism in serial killers.

**Examples of Sexual Sadism in Serial Killers**

*Leonard Lake.* Lake was born in 1945, raised largely by his grandparents—after his father abandoned the family. His mother then took the two younger children with her, leaving Leonard with his parents. In his adolescence he had fantasies of enslaving and torturing women, in what may have been retaliatory measures prompted by his mother's abandonment. He joined the Marines, and then became a survivalist, preoccupied with making photos of nude women—which progressed to the notion of creating “snuff films” of dying women whom he had just strangled. In the early 1980s he teamed up with a younger man, Charles Chitat Ng, a native of Hong Kong, who sneaked into the U.S. illegally, joined the Marines, but who became a fugitive from justice for having stolen weapons which he then tried to sell. Lake and Ng set up a bunker in a remote part of California, to which they added a crematorium. They then waylaid and kidnapped a number of women, or couples (some with children), imprisoning them in the bunker—there to be subjected to prolonged torture, humiliation, and death, the deaths recorded on videotape as “snuff films.” Lake made meticulous recordings and notes of conversations with his victims. Here is a passage from one such recording (Lasseter, 2000). Lake and Ng had just captured a young mother, Brenda O'Connor. Unbeknownst to her, they had already killed her baby. Bound to a chair in their torture room, she begs for her baby. **Lake** tells her: "Brenda, you have a choice. We'll give it to you right now.” **Brenda:** “What?” **Lake:** “You can cooperate with us … that means you will stay here as our prisoner. You will work for us. You will wash for us. You will fuck for us. Or—you can say 'No, I don't want to do that’ in which case we’ll tie you to the bed, we'll rape you, and then we’ll take you outside and shoot you. Your choice!”

*David Parker Ray.* Born in 1939 in a small town in New Mexico, Ray was raised from age ten by his paternal grandparents. This followed the abandonment of the family by his violent and alcoholic father. The grandparents were fundamentalist Christians and superstrict disciplinarians. Already at 13, Ray developed a fascination with bondage and torture of women. He tied one to a tree shortly thereafter, and she may have died as a result. He could achieve orgasm when masturbating—only by fantasizing murdering a woman. Ray led a double life, marrying several times and working as a park ranger, but maintaining a secret life in which he tortured and killed women, aided by a female accomplice (his daughter for a time; later, a fiancée Cindy Hendy). Gifted both as a mechanic and as a draftsman/artist, Ray converted a mobile home into a torture chamber which, in his morbid humor, he called his **Toy Box.** Ray's torture chamber was affixed to his home in the small town of Truth-or-Consequences (formerly Hot Springs), New Mexico. Using his female accomplices to lure women in bars back to Ray's home, he would then imprison them in the Toy Box, hoisting them on pulleys above a gynecological table. The room was outfitted with oversized dildoes in which nails were embedded, stretching devices for spreading apart the women's breasts and legs, and other such diabolical machinery. Ray made detailed and artistically fashioned sketches of various women being subjected to torture. He also recorded a lengthy monologue that dealt with the varieties of the tortures and sexual invasions to which the women were about to undergo, to which they were forced to listen before the torture commenced. The torture could last anywhere from days to months, and ended presumably with their death and burial in the sands of the New Mexico desert. Some may have been dumped in the nearby Elephant Butte lake. Accomplice Hendy, whom I interviewed in 2007 in the Grant, New Mexico women's prison estimates that Ray may have killed about 40 women. But no bodies have ever been recovered despite extensive searches by the FBI. Ray died in prison in 1991 at age 62, but not before having made a number of snuff films, as Leonard Lake had done. It is difficult to give an accurate picture of sexual sadism at its extremity, as conceived and put into practice by Ray, without descending into the pornographic and the obscene.

**WARNING:** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

When there is a history of paraphilia, within the ranks of serial killers, *multiple* paraphilias are the rule. Nine out of ten serial killers who were also sexual sadists had one or more additional paraphilias, such as bondage, exhibitionism, and even cannibalism (the latter was a factor in one of ten of the sexually sadistic serial killers).

Sexual sadism, in contrast to most of the other paraphilias, often emerges as a prelude to serial sexual homicide. The term “rehearsal” is sometimes used, as when an adolescent begins to elaborate sexually sadistic fantasies, which he will (in some cases) begin to act on in his 20s or 30s (the average age for “lust murder” is 26.5). Examples of this progression can be found in the literature about serial killers. There are several biographies of adolescents with marked sadistic fantasies who went on to become serial killers. These include books by Cox (1996), Davidson (2006), Gibney (1984), Glatt (2002), Henderson (2004), King (1992), Petit (1990), Phelps (2008), Schechter (2000), and Schwartz (1992).

The section that follows consists of several vignettes illustrating some of the varieties of sexual sadism in serial killers.

**Examples of Sexual Sadism in Serial Killers**

*Leonard Lake.* Lake was born in 1945, raised largely by his grandparents—after his father abandoned the family. His mother then took the two younger children with her, leaving Leonard with his parents. In his adolescence he had fantasies of enslaving and torturing women, in what may have been retaliatory measures prompted by his mother's abandonment. He joined the Marines, and then became a survivalist, preoccupied with making photos of nude women—which progressed to the notion of creating “snuff films” of dying women whom he had just strangled. In the early 1980s he teamed up with a younger man, Charles Chitat Ng, a native of Hong Kong, who sneaked into the U.S. illegally, joined the Marines, but who became a fugitive from justice for having stolen weapons which he then tried to sell. Lake and Ng set up a bunker in a remote part of California, to which they added a crematorium. They then waylaid and kidnapped a number of women, or couples (some with children), imprisoning them in the bunker—there to be subjected to prolonged torture, humiliation, and death, the deaths recorded on videotape as “snuff films.” Lake made meticulous recordings and notes of conversations with his victims. Here is a passage from one such recording (Lasseter, 2000). Lake and Ng had just captured a young mother, Brenda O'Connor. Unbeknownst to her, they had already killed her baby. Bound to a chair in their torture room, she begs for her baby. **Lake** tells her: "Brenda, you have a choice. We'll give it to you right now.” **Brenda:** “What?” **Lake:** “You can cooperate with us … that means you will stay here as our prisoner. You will work for us. You will wash for us. You will fuck for us. Or—you can say 'No, I don't want to do that’ in which case we’ll tie you to the bed, we'll rape you, and then we’ll take you outside and shoot you. Your choice!”

*David Parker Ray.* Born in 1939 in a small town in New Mexico, Ray was raised from age ten by his paternal grandparents. This followed the abandonment of the family by his violent and alcoholic father. The grandparents were fundamentalist Christians and superstrict disciplinarians. Already at 13, Ray developed a fascination with bondage and torture of women. He tied one to a tree shortly thereafter, and she may have died as a result. He could achieve orgasm when masturbating—only by fantasizing murdering a woman. Ray led a double life, marrying several times and working as a park ranger, but maintaining a secret life in which he tortured and killed women, aided by a female accomplice (his daughter for a time; later, a fiancée Cindy Hendy). Gifted both as a mechanic and as a draftsman/artist, Ray converted a mobile home into a torture chamber which, in his morbid humor, he called his **Toy Box.** Ray's torture chamber was affixed to his home in the small town of Truth-or-Consequences (formerly Hot Springs), New Mexico. Using his female accomplices to lure women in bars back to Ray's home, he would then imprison them in the Toy Box, hoisting them on pulleys above a gynecological table. The room was outfitted with oversized dildoes in which nails were embedded, stretching devices for spreading apart the women's breasts and legs, and other such diabolical machinery. Ray made detailed and artistically fashioned sketches of various women being subjected to torture. He also recorded a lengthy monologue that dealt with the varieties of the tortures and sexual invasions to which the women were about to undergo, to which they were forced to listen before the torture commenced. The torture could last anywhere from days to months, and ended presumably with their death and burial in the sands of the New Mexico desert. Some may have been dumped in the nearby Elephant Butte lake. Accomplice Hendy, whom I interviewed in 2007 in the Grant, New Mexico women's prison estimates that Ray may have killed about 40 women. But no bodies have ever been recovered despite extensive searches by the FBI. Ray died in prison in 1991 at age 62, but not before having made a number of snuff films, as Leonard Lake had done. It is difficult to give an accurate picture of sexual sadism at its extremity, as conceived and put into practice by Ray, without descending into the pornographic and the obscene.

**WARNING:** This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.
Here are a few paragraphs from the 16 pages of monologue, taken from the police records made at trial (New Mexico State Police, 1999). The reader may skip them if he wishes. Bear in mind that the victims had no such choice, and they then had to undergo the tortures:

Now as I said, you're going to be kept like an animal. I've been raping bitches ever since I was old enough to jerk off, and tie little girl's hands behind their back. As far as I'm concerned, you're a pretty piece of meat, to be used and exploited. I don't give a flyin' fuck about your mind or how you feel about this situation.... I make it a point never to like a slave and I fuckin' sure don't have any respect for you. Here, your status is no more than that of one of the dogs.... Your only value to us is the fact that you have an attractive useable body.... You're gonna be kept chained in a variety of different positions, usually with your legs or knees forced wide apart. Your pussy and asshole is gonna get a real workout, because I'm into animal sex. And both of these holes are going to be subjected to a lotta use with some rather large dildoes ... On numerous occasions, you're gonna be forced to suck cock and eat pussy until your jaws ache and your tongue is sore. You may not like it, but you're fuckin' sure gonna do it.

What gives Lake and Ray their special place in the annals of crime, and specifically of sexual sadism, is that both men recorded their sadistic plans in obsessive and unblushing detail, while the vast majority of other sexually sadistic serial killers—some of whom were equally depraved and who subjected their victims to tortures of no less a heinous variety—kept their activities secret. A number of them, like England's Ian Brady, recorded the screams of their victims, but not the detailed plans of how they went about their tortures. And only Ray made artistic blueprints of the varied torture devices and positions within his large menu of acted-out sadistic fantasies.

David Paul Brown. Brown was born in Massachusetts in 1957, the youngest of four. Already by age six he drew attention at school for having tried to choke a classmate. By 15 he was cutting out words from magazines to compose notes by which he hoped to entice boys to meet him for sexual purposes at a cemetery. At 18 he dressed up as a police officer and lured and assaulted a young boy on his way to school. Brown was merely given probation for that crime. Brown had not been abused or neglected during his childhood or teen years, though he did endure a measure of mockery at school because of his morbid obesity and homosexuality. Two years later, at all events, again impersonating a police officer, he lured two boys emerging from a theater, persuaded them to get into his car, where he handcuffed them. Once ensconced in a wooded area, he forced them to undress and proceeded to strangle them. One boy managed to escape and summon the police. Brown was arrested and sentenced to a series of institutions, the last being Bridgewater for sexually dangerous offenders. While there he revealed his interest in torture, body dissection, and cannibalism—which had become his sources of sexual stimulation, always directed along homosexual lines. Though sentenced to an indefinite term at Bridgewater, his mother was able to secure the services of two outside psychiatrists, who declared that Brown was safe to be released. This, despite his never having gone to group therapy and despite his refusal to participate in treatment of whatever kind. While there he changed his name to Nathaniel Bar Jonah, adopting a Jewish name, ostensibly so he "could feel persecution." Although the Bridgewater staff vehemently opposed the idea of his release, because of his continued dangerousness, the presiding judge let him go in February of 1991 three days short of his 34th birthday. Less than a month later, Brown/Bar Jonah was about to be arrested again—this time for sitting on a boy in a parked car by a mall where his mother was shopping. This was no small offense, for Brown weighed nearly 400 pounds. His mother, again to the rescue, pleaded with the mother not to press charges, with the understanding that her son would move to Montana and never return to Massachusetts.

Two years later, in Great Falls, Montana, Brown/Bar Jonah was arrested on suspicion for having lured, sodomized, killed, and cannibalized a 10-year-old boy, who he lured in his usual fashion: donning police uniform and fake-badge, though this time he was armed with a stun-gun. The victim, Zack Ramsay, disappeared, never to be found. Brown was noted at that time to have fed his unwitting neighbors “deer meat,” which he pretended to have obtained through hunting (though he had never owned a hunting rifle nor had he hunted, nor had he even shopped for meat the month after Zack's disappearance). The police discovered in his apartment thousands of pictures of boys in various states of dress and undress, along with written-out recipes of a ghoulish nature, to which he had affixed contemptuous, though to his mind, “cute,” labels such as Little Boy Stew, or Some Young Kid. Brown was sentenced to 130 years in prison for kidnap. Underneath Brown's apartment bones were found—but these belonged to a different boy, whose identity could never be established. Brown denied to the end having killed, let alone eaten, any young boy; he continued—in the face of staggering evidence of his guilt—to declare his innocence when I interviewed him in 2006. He died in 2008 of the complications of diabetes-II, brought about by his morbid obesity. In all likelihood Brown was a sexually sadistic serial killer of the homosexual-pedophile type, responsible for the deaths of two boys (Ramsay and the unidentified boy whose bones were found) and perhaps others. We cannot say that he meets FBI criteria (three or more victims), but is at least a serial killer manqué—one who had characteristics of a serial lust murderer in personality and behavior, whose victim-count will remain forever unknown.

Jeffrey Dahmer: The elder of two brothers, Dahmer was born in Milwaukee in 1960. His mother had a history of mental illness and hospitalization. His parents argued constantly, finally divorcing when he was 18. From early childhood he developed a fascination with dead animals. He would decapitate rodents, bleach chicken bones with acid, and mount the carcasses of dogs and cats on sticks or trees in the backyard. He would dissect “road-kill” and other dead animals so as to glimpse their insides. Dahmer was unable to make friendships and felt particularly lonely after his parents' divorce. Though neglected, he did not suffer parental abuse. There was one report of sexual molestation by a neighbor boy when he was 8. He committed his first of 17 murders when he was 18. The victim was a hitchhiker whom Dahmer had invited home for some drinks. When the young man tried to leave, Dahmer crushed his skull with a barbell, strangled him, dismembered the corpse, and scattered the bones over a wide area. The murder went undetected until Dahmer confessed many years later.
Thereafter he joined the Army, but was discharged after two years because of his drinking. He remained severely alcoholic until his eventual capture. Dahmer frequented gay bars and took to luring adolescent boys back to his flat, where he would anesthetize them with a mixture of vodka and Halcion (which he would slip into their drinks). When his victims were comatose, Dahmer would attempt to convert them into sexual slaves—"zombies"—by drilling a hole into the skull, in the hope of lobotomizing the victim by pouring in hydrochloric acid. These crude neurosurgical procedures invariably failing, Dahmer would then strangle the victim, engage for as long as possible in necrophilic sex, then dismembering the body, and retaining various parts—particularly the skulls, which he would then paint and keep as trophies. The story of his narrow escapes from justice, brief incarcerations for public lewdness, and final capture in 1991 are recounted in a biography by Anne Schwartz (1992).

Dahmer's highly ritualized crime shows how sexual sadism and serial killing, though often merged (as in the cases of Lake and Ray), can sometimes be separable phenomena. The sexual sadism in Dahmer consisted in his being aroused by the murder of his victims. But he did not appear to relish the suffering of his victims, whom he did not strain until he had tricked them into losing consciousness via the Halcion-laced cocktails. The murders (by strangulation) commenced only after his victims were comatose. A number of psychiatric diagnoses were suggested by the forensic specialists who examined him before trial: homosexual hebephilia (predilection, that is, for adolescents, as opposed to prepubescent boys) mixed personality disorder with antisocial, obsessive-compulsive, sadistic, fetishistic, and borderline features. All his examiners understood Dahmer was not psychotic. A major diagnosis that was not recorded at the time was Asperger's syndrome—which would capture his monomanic preoccupation with dead animals, inability to make eye-contact, etc.

Sexual Sadism in Females

As mentioned earlier, sexual sadism is essentially a male phenomenon. Very few women experience sexual arousal or orgasm at the suffering (or death) of a victim. A few women, out of motives of revenge (usually for incest) have enjoyed killing men whom they regarded as the symbolic equivalents of their former abusers. This seems to have been the case with Aileen Wuornos (Russell, 2002). She had been sexually molested by relatives into whose care she was entrusted by her mother; later she embarked on a career of killing male truck drivers in Florida from whom she would hitch rides. There is no evidence, however, that she felt sexually aroused at the time she shot the men to death.

Erzsébet Bathory. One of the two instances of female sexual sadism noted in the literature concerns the Hungarian countess, Erzsébet Bathory (1560-1614; Penrose, 1996). Erzsébet was the niece of King Stefan Báthory of Poland and lived in a castle in Hungary. There were many eccentric, if not outright mentally ill, persons among her close relatives. Preoccupied with preserving her beauty as she rounded the turn of 40, the countess conceived the notion that bathing in the blood of virgins might confer the sought-for perpetuation of her good looks. To that end, she had her servants lure young girls walking along the roads near the castle. Once within its walls, the girls would be suspended on hooks from the ceiling, thence to have their bellies cut, the blood being then collected in a tub for the countess. During the act of cutting, the countess was said to have pressed her body against that of the young girls—experiencing orgasm at that moment. While the exact number of victims will never be known, Erzsébet was believed to have killed more than 600 in this fashion. By virtue of her being an aristocrat, she could not be executed, once she was finally caught and arrested. The laws of the time permitted only that she be immured in her own castle, to be fed through a hole created for that purpose in the wall behind which she was imprisoned.

Jane Toppan. Somewhat better documented is the next example: that of nurse Jane Toppan in Boston, whose years were 1854-1938 (Schechter, 2003). Born to a violent, alcoholic father who later died insane, and a mother who died of tuberculosis when her daughter was still young, Jane originally bore the name Honora Kelly. After the death of her mother, she was given to the well-to-do Toppan family as an indentured servant. Though never formally adopted, she took the Toppan name and changed her first name to Jane. An accomplished liar and imposter, Toppan would meet full criteria for psychopathy. She hated her foster family, though she stayed on with them for 10 years after release at age 18 from indentured status. She went to nursing school, where she rapidly earned the reputation of a malicious gossip and thief. Never having completed her training, she nevertheless worked afterwards as a private nurse. Experimenting with morphine and atropine, she began to poison hospital patients, then expanding her circle of operation to include her hated foster-sister, her landlord, and at times entire families of the people who had hired her. In her 40s she set fires to some of the homes where she was employed. Finally caught and arrested at 44, she was found to have experienced orgasm when her patients were dying from her poisons. Found "not guilty by reason of insanity," she was remanded to an asylum in Taunton, Massachusetts, where she died many years later. Ironically, she did not appear (by contemporary standards) mentally ill when sentenced, but as the years wore on, she became paranoid, imagining that her food was being poisoned. Toward the end, she tried cajoling one of the nurses with the comment: "Get the morphine, dearie; and we'll go out into the ward, you and I, and will have a lot of fun seeing them die."

Given that women are much less apt to be sadistic than men, there are a few in the forensic literature whose sadism stands out, albeit they did not meet the extra criterion of deriving sexual gratification from torturing their victims. Cindy Hendy, the willing accomplice of David Parker Ray, for example, acknowledged having whipped the women who were strapped to the chains and pulleys of the Toy Box. She had great contempt for the victims (referring to them as "packages" to be tossed away after use), and did her whipping with gusto. But in my interview with her in 2007, I did not get the impression that she was aroused sexually by the torture. The same can be said for the other women who proved merciless in torturing their victims. Jessica
Sexual Sadism in Statu Nascendi

Therapists will occasionally encounter adolescents and young adult men whose mental life is dominated by sexually sadistic fantasies and whose clinical picture suggests that their sadistic impulses are at great risk of bursting forth in the near future. Some appear to be troubled by these fantasies (in keeping with the DSM definition) while others are not (and to that extent appear more dangerous).

A man in his late 20s, for example, harbored fantasies of sodomizing, killing, and dismembering young boys. While in treatment for his supposed borderline personality disorder, he mentioned to his therapist a particular boy he was seriously considering as a potential victim—but he refused to share with his therapist the name of the intended victim. He also spoke of having downloaded pornographic images of naked boys ranging in age from adolescence to 3 or 4. He seemed blithely unaware of the degree to which he was becoming a danger both to others and to himself (if caught with “kiddie-porn” in his computer, he could be arrested and faced with a lengthy imprisonment). This man also refused to take a libido-lowering medication that would have reduced the risk of his engaging in these destructive behaviors. Cases of this sort raise problematic ethical issues. If, for example, the man in therapy had identified by name his intended victim, therapists in most (though not all) states would be obliged, or at least entitled, to warn the potential victim, via the Tarasoff rule that arose out of the famous case of Prosenjit Poddar (who killed Tatiana Tarasoff, whom he imagined was his fiancé); Blum, 1986). If a patient refused to identify the intended victim, but if the threat seemed vehement and pressing, a therapist might feel it prudent to warn the local authorities about an anticipated act of violence. Guidelines regarding the latter situation are less well spelled out, and a therapist might want to consult local authorities to ascertain what was considered the appropriate intervention (if any).

The triad of enuresis, fire-setting, and cruelty to animals has been considered, when noted in children, predictive of future criminal behavior, including violence and sexual offenses (Hellman & Blackman, 1966). Not all investigators have accepted the validity of this postulate, although the triad has indeed been observed in a significant percentage of men committing serial sexual homicide. The triad has also been noted as well in men predisposed to sadistic offenses of a non-sexual nature. Examples among serial killers include Gary Ridgeway (the “Green River Killer”), Ken Bianchi (one of the two “Hillside Stranglers,” along with his cousin, Angelo Buono), Arthur Shawcross, and Richard Chace (the “Vampire Killer” in California). Recently the mother of a 12-year-old boy contacted me with concerns about her son. At the time she called me both the biological father and his father were serving life sentences for murder. The boy was still enuretic at 12, and set fires numerous times in the home. He had tortured and killed cats and dogs, and had tried to strangle his half-sister. At school he was a bully and also stole from both his parents and classmates. He was raised from the age of 2 by his mother and stepfather in a home free of abuse or neglect. There were no birth complications and the mother did not abuse drugs during her pregnancy. It is likely that risk genes for psychopathy (Johnson, Smailes, Cohen, Kasen, & Brook, 2004) were the predominant factor in this callous-unemotional boy. The association between callous-unemotional traits in preteen boys and both bullying and later antisocial, including violent, behaviors has been underlined by several recent authors (Frick & White, 2008; Viding, Simmons, Petrides, & Frederickson, 2009). When such traits are coupled with the triad, the risk is also heightened for violent, including sadistic and sexually violent, offenses as the child passes into adult life. Adolescents and young adult men with Asperger’s syndrome or with schizoid personality are also at greater risk for entertaining sadistic fantasies and, in certain cases, for later acting them out—because of their reduced capacity for empathy or compassion and their inability to form lasting and gratifying friendships. The serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, as mentioned earlier, exemplifies these characteristics.

Discussion

We have concentrated thus far on the most malignant forms of sexual sadism, contrasting it with sadism in which the sexual element is lacking. The behavior of sexual sadists as a group extends over a wide spectrum. Some men confine their activities to within the bounds of the law, engaging in sadomasochistic acts with a consenting partner (“S&M”). The fantasy life of persons involved in sexual sadism center on domination, pain, injury, humiliation—in various combinations. Satisfaction is derived from the suffering of the other person: mild suffering, in the case of a willing partner; extreme suffering, in criminally relevant cases (Hazelwood, Dietz, & Warren, 1992). In the extreme cases, the sadistic acts often seem so removed from ordinary experience as to raise the question of psychosis, in clinicians less familiar with this area of psychopathology. As an example, a man who had castrated an adolescent while alive, cannibalized the young

Schwarz (who tortured and later killed her stepson) or Teresa Knorr (who tortured and murdered two of her own daughters Stone, 2009). Schwarz, who behaved appropriately with her biological offspring, was inhumanly cruel toward her 10 year old stepson. She forced him, for example, to wear a T-shirt on which she had written “I’m a piece of shit, Don’t talk to me.” He was too afraid to remove the shirt when a baby-sitter put a rubber band over his head and beat him more than usual. The baby-sitter put a sweater over the T-shirt until Jessica returned. If he failed to scrub the kitchen floor to Jessica’s satisfaction, she made him swallow a roach. Knorr grew morbidly jealous of her three adolescent daughters. She killed one by taking her to a remote spot in the California countryside, where she forced her son to act as an accomplice—pouring accelerant over the girl and then burning her alive. A second daughter was chained to a pipe in the closet and left there till she starved to death. These were the lethal acts that followed years of less than lethal tortures of various kinds.

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.
man's testicles, and then killed him—was adjudged schizophrenic by the psychiatrists who first evaluated him, even though the man was not psychotic, simply a sexual sadist (Davidson, 2006). The truth, when revealed, often invokes disbelief, as emphasized by Dietz, Hazelwood, and Warren (1990). The more common “comorbid” diagnoses will be narcissistic personality disorder or psychopathy.

Hazelwood and Michaud have outlined the typical components relevant to acts of sexual sadism (2001, p. 43). The relational component focuses on the fantasies concerning what the desired relationship should be between the sadist and his victim. Some try to actualize a “hunter-prey” fantasy. Others prefer to act as Master over the Slave-victim. This was the case with the man, cited above, who castrated the adolescent: he demanded that the young man acknowledge that he too was “gay” like his persecutor, even though he was not. The victim was bound and eventually gagged—as further signs of total submission to the older man.

Many sexual sadists exhibit other paraphilias as well, such as bondage, pedophilia, zoophilia, and a near exclusive preoccupation with and preference for anal sex, irrespective of their predominant sexual orientation. Some of the rarer paraphilias may be noted, whether in the non-criminal or in the criminally violent men, such as autoerotic asphyxiaphilia, in which brief strangulation is indulged in by way of enhancing the intensity of orgasm via masturbation. Dennis Rader, the “BTK Strangler,” was an example (Beattie, 2005).

The situational component refers to the preferred place where the sexual sadistic practices are to be carried out. Men such as Leonard Lake

WARNING: This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

and David Parker Ray created torture chambers of their own fashioning. John Ray Weber took his victims to a remote spot in the woods. Robert Berdella (Jackman & Cole, 1992) preferred to carry out his torture in his own home.

Another component relates to the preferred type of victim. Leonard Lake, for example, preferred petite, slender blonde women between the ages of 18 and 20. Some of the homosexual sadists prefer adolescents (as in the case if Dahmer's hebeophilia) or older men of a certain build and age (Randy Kraft preferred young athletically built men, such as the Marines he tortured and killed in the San Diego area before his capture; McDougal, 1991).

How the sexual sadist perceives himself constitutes still another component. A typical self-perception is that of being God and Master, with omnipotent control over his victims—as in the case of DeBardeleben, Lake, and Bernardo. A few fancy themselves with the notion that the victims enjoy what is happening to them—which, in the case of a sadist teaming up with a sexual masochist, may not be too far off the mark.

Sexual sadists committing violent offenses are often of the “organized” type. Their offenses are planned well in advance, and may involve the adoption of ruses like wearing fake policeman's uniforms to lure potential victims. This was the case with David Brown (“Bar Jonah”), who chose child victims, and with the serial killer, Gerald Schaefer, who preyed on adult women (London, 1997). Other practices include the use of binding and blindfolding, penetration with foreign objects, degradation and humiliation of the victim, and (in the case of sexual homicide) careful concealment of the corpse (Dietz, Hazelwood, & Warren, 1990). While some sexual sadists are impulsive and not motivated by a specific fantasy and victim-type, others are ritualistic. The latter manifest a carefully thought out and often quite elaborate pattern of sadistic behaviors (Hazelwood & Warren, 2000). Sexual sadists of the latter type have their own inner “script”: a well-constructed plan of what they would like to do to their victims, how they would go about capturing and immobilizing the victims, what the victim should look like, etc. Here, the sadistic act represents the dramatization of this script, and as is so often the case with re-enactments of this sort, they fall short of the “ideal” script in the mind of the sadist. From a psychodynamic standpoint, the script answers to very specific sexual fantasies elaborated within the first five or ten years of life: once formed and solidified by the time of puberty, they generally remain fixed throughout life. These fixed qualities form the basis for the often ritualistic or “signature” aspects of the sadistic acts peculiar to each sexual sadist (Douglas & Munn, 1990). Jeffrey Dahmer, for example, developed a fascination with dissecting the insides of animals by the time he was 5 or 6. This

WARNING: This text is printed for personal use of BGSP. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

pattern, once evolved, remained unchanged all his life, and became his “signature” during his career as a serial killer. He killed and dismembered his victims, focusing on their abdominal organs—the variegated colors of which fascinated him just as they had years earlier, when he dissected domestic animals and “road-kill” (Dahmer, 1994).

Because sexual sadism is closely associated with the torture of victims, the crimes committed by sexual sadists easily rise to the level that triggers the reaction of evil in the minds of the public. I use the phrase “reaction of evil” to register my belief that the most useful way of conceptualizing evil is to view the word as corresponding to an emotion. When we hear about a crime to which we react with repugnance and horror, and that makes us wince as we are told about the details, evil is the word that comes to our mind, and is the word we most often utter in response. It is not surprising that the reaction of prosecutors and judges parallels the reaction of the public: in the ranks of men who have been executed for their crimes, there is a substantial overrepresentation of sexual sadists among them. This is particularly true of the men who, in addition to meeting the criterion of sexual arousal while carrying out a murder, have also subjected their victims to prolonged torture.

The topic of this article may seem far afield, perhaps exotic, to psychiatrists and psychoanalysts with more conventional practices. For many the encounter with dangerous persons, let alone sexual sadists, may evoke only rare memories of one's days working in the emergency rooms during one's training. Yet it is not so rare to encounter even in private practice—adolescent and adult patients (they will almost always be male) who report sadistic fantasies, including those involving sadistic rape. In some instances these fantasies will be ego-alien and uncomfortable; in other case, not. But it will be helpful for the therapist to be familiar with fantasies of this sort, and to be able to work with the underlying dynamics—and to do so without countertransference feelings of shock or repugnance so great as to foreclose the possibility of effective treatment.
References


