



### I33 Sexual Sadism: A Coping Strategy Model

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a broader and deeper understanding of the vast range of sexually sadistic behaviors, their prevalence, and their manifestations in popular culture and in the sexual behaviors of normal people and criminal offenders.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining the significance of evidence often found in home searches and in the scenes of sexual homicides.

The spectrum of sexually sadistic behaviors extends from secret fantasies, erotic tickling, and "love bites" to horrific instances of torture, mayhem, and serial murder. For over 100 years, clinicians and researchers have sought greater understanding of these behaviors without achieving much more than competing schemes of classification.<sup>1-3</sup>

One of the most important observations of many early authors is that there are sexual sadists who confine themselves to imaginings, viewing natural occurrences of suffering, or writing or sketching their interests. These have been described as "ideal sadists," "symbolic sadists," or "mental sadists," and those professionals who only see sexual sadists who are seeking treatment after being found out by their wives or the police or who have committed crimes may never encounter a case and may thus conclude falsely that all sadists are criminal or dangerous.

More recent research suggests that the number of men aroused by sexually sadistic imagery who do not act criminally vastly outnumber those who do commit crimes. This is the obvious but oft missed implication of studies showing that 10% of a sample of 1,016 males had definite and/or frequent erotic response to sadomasochistic stories, that sadomasochistic themes appeared on the covers of 12% of 5,132 pornographic items for sale in a random sample of 13 "adult bookstores" in four cities, and that 9.4% of male college students had experienced whipping or beating their sexual partners, degrading their sexual partners, and torturing their sexual partners.<sup>4-7</sup>

Research on those participating in the Bondage/Domination/Slave/Master (BDSM) subculture have shown a similar range of sexual activities in the subcultures in West Germany, the U.S., Finland, and Canada, with no indications whatsoever of comorbid nonsexual psychopathology, and several studies suggest higher educational and occupational achievement among BDSM participants than among the general population.<sup>8</sup>

Studies of sexually sadistic offenders, including serial rapists and serial killers, demonstrate that these men, like other violent offenders, have psychopathology, primarily personality disorders, in addition to sexual sadism, and that many retain collections of memorabilia of their crimes.<sup>9-11</sup>

Based on these and other sources, this study's thesis is that sexually sadistic fantasies and behaviors are far more common than encountered in clinical or forensic samples, and that the ways sexually sadistic individuals cope with their offbeat sexual desires are primarily a reflection of their character and values rather than a necessary outcome of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) diagnosis of sexual sadism disorder. The primary coping strategies used by those who find themselves aroused by sexually sadistic imagery and activities are:

- Suppression of the thoughts and urges
- Confining the thoughts to fantasy during masturbation or sexual activity with a partner
- Use of sexually sadistic pornography for arousal during masturbation or in association with sex with a partner
- Enacting mild, symbolic, and socially acceptable sadistic activities with a consenting partner, who may or may not enjoy some or all of the activities
- Role-playing by phone or internet communication, for a fee or with an unpaid partner
- Participation in the BDSM subculture, abiding by its rules under penalty of ostracism and expulsion
- Paying a "submissive" or prostitute to submit to pre-determined sadistic acts at commercial B&D parlors, strip clubs, or brothels, which may or may not include touching or overt sexual activity
- Pressuring a sexual partner into submitting to sadistic abuse, under threat of abandonment, rejection, or replacement
- Unduly influencing a sexual partner into submitting to sadistic abuse through social isolation;



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psychological, physical, and sexual abuse that crushes the partner's self-esteem and sense of autonomy; and ensuring the partner remains dependent on him in as many ways as possible

- Exploiting vulnerable people (poor, young, intoxicated, addicted, developmentally disabled, emotionally unstable, or otherwise impaired) with sadistic abuse
- Committing sexually sadistic assaults through force or threat of force
- Kidnapping a victim to hold captive and abuse- and kill-at-will

It remains to be seen how often such men progress along this spectrum of coping strategies, and the extent to which life stressors or intoxication account for such progression.

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### Sexual Sadism, Torture, Serial Killer