



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2016

I18 A Scientist-Practitioner Model for the Identification and Interpretation of Sadistic Offenders

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the distinctions between pseudo-sadism/BDSM, sadism, and other paraphilic interests and the implications for investigation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by assisting practitioners in the discernment of pseudo-sadism/BDSM from both sadism and necrophilia. Furthermore, attendees will have the opportunity, in session and beyond, for questioning and understanding the psychological and investigative implications of elucidating these distinctions.

A multi-factor, practitioner-oriented, working model of sadistic offenders is presented which has been developed from forensic clinical casework and the extant research literature. The model articulates the means of identifying the etiology of individual offender's sadism both in idiographic and nomothetic terms. It is argued that the identification of these aspects of sadistic offenders' personalities and their individual personality development histories are prerequisite factors to understanding the offenders and, accordingly, effective case management and the accurate risk assessment of recidivism.

Additionally, the model identifies the different forms of sadism — especially in distinguishing sexually sadistic from non-sexually sadistic offenders — articulating their significance for case management and risk assessment. The importance and means of distinguishing ego-syntonic sadistic offenders from those who are ego-dystonic are also featured in the model with comparable implications articulated. A further aspect which is addressed in this multi-factor practitioner model is the etiological link between sadism and necrophilia. In this regard, the forensic potential for understanding the possible overlap and the nature of distinct differences between those two psychological conditions is highlighted.

The model, rooted in clinical experience and case histories, also articulates the distinction between sadism cases and those that are rooted in pseudo-sadism/BDSM. It is argued that distinguishing between these two very different case backgrounds is critical for psychological understanding and case management, court assessment of mens rea, and risk assessment. BDSM-active couples, it is argued, are congruent in joint sexual/seemingly non-sexual enterprise and thus both parties have their mutual needs met. Other than “play acting,” they are parties who are mutual in their activities.

In contrast, sadistic offenders are, ipso facto, authentic in their motivational orientation of their excitement through the expression of genuine fear in their victims. It is argued that this contrast is neither merely academic nor a nicety in regard to the forensic process; instead it is fundamental to establishing whether the alleged “victim” is the focus of a sadistic offender or whether he/she is complicit in the relationship with malicious intent.

Recommendations for forensic-related interagency cooperation and continued inter-communication in cases of sadistic offenders are discussed.

Sadism, BDSM, Investigation