



I20 The Vicarious and Literal Consumption of Identity: Interpreting Psychological Cannibalism

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand psychological cannibalism and its putative etiology. Attendees will have also been advised on the ramifications for forensic intervention and law enforcement's effective case management stratagem.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by: (1) enhancing competence in identifying signs of psychological cannibalism, particularly in the context of stalking and threat cases; and (2) increasing the understanding and consideration of appropriately tailored assessment tools for utilization in investigative domains and in the context of therapeutic (forensic mental health) and correctional settings.

This presentation articulates the nature of a little-understood and previously unidentified form of cannibalism that is principally psychosexual in nature. This presentation states how psychological cannibalism represents an extreme form of stalking that could result in a heightened risk of reputational, familial, or physical harm.

Moving away from the physical act of cannibalism, it is argued that a certain psychological disposition can result in the quest for the identity of another, that is, someone for whom the perpetrator wishes to become. The underlying etiology of this psychological and corresponding behavioral presentation will be discussed in its various forms and include illustrations of cases. These briefly include some of the legion impersonators of the late celebrity Elvis Presley, the murderer of the Beatle John Lennon, and other non-celebrity examples.

The psychological challenges occur, it is argued, during the process and realization of the perceived transition from the rejection of "own self," followed by the search, identification, and fixation processes in the acquisition/development of the "new self." Cases have incorporated a focus on achieving a pseudo-celebrity, pseudo-intellect, and/or pseudo gender and sexual identity change. It will be argued that this can be an extremely tortuous and dangerous condition from a victim/investigative/treatment perspective. The pattern is not uncommonly that of adulation of an obsessional nature, which in time subsumes the victim's identity, lifestyle, and personal life. The consequences of this insidious process are not only painful for the primary victim, but also for their loved ones.

The cases range from the seemingly benign Elvis Presley pretenders to the lethal consummation of another's identity by causing their death. It will be discussed, physically consuming victims by psychological cannibalists is not a necessity, though they may wish to retain their body as reifying, comforting evidence of their having taken over the victim's identity. However, it is a possibility that when the fixated cannibal wants complete consumption/annihilation of another's fixated identity, only physical consumption would serve as being sufficient. This will be discussed in the context of a typology of cannibalistic need to set the scene for broader considerations of the challenges in risk and the prediction of future harm. Ultimately, the difficulties facing practitioners in understanding the presentation of psychological cannibalism are varied in regard to the complexities of harm.

Cannibalism, Extreme, Stalking