

THE DISTURBED MIND

Compliant victims of the sexual sadist

■ This is a descriptive summary of the experiences of a sample of women who have been consensually involved with criminal sexual sadists. The paper details the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse to which the women were subject as well as the process by which they were transformed from independent, competent women to the compliant appendages of their criminally active partners. Similarities in the sexual sadist's criminal and consensual sexual activities as they reflect a specific paraphilic preference are discussed.

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Studies of prisoners of war,¹ battered women,^{2,12} and abused children¹³⁻¹⁵ have all shown that systematic manipulation of rewards and punishments in the context of social isolation can alter self concept, expectations, and behaviours among at least some victims. The most puzzling aspect of the behaviour of victims of prolonged abuse is the means by which the abusers gain compliance from their victims to the extent that the victim seems to the casual observer to be voluntarily undergoing abuse despite opportunities to escape.

In situations of domestic abuse, however, the 'captor' not only seeks compliance, but also seeks opportunities for continuing abuse of the victim. Every spouse-abuse worker has seen women go home from work night after night to abusive men whom they decline to prosecute even after life-threatening injuries. Every child protection worker has seen children lie to protect abusive parents. How do some captors gain such extraordinary compliance from the victims?

To answer this question, the authors examined the relationship that certain sexually sadistic offenders had with their wives or girlfriends. This inquiry grew from a study of sexually sadistic offenders and their offences^{16,17}. The 30 men in the original study executed criminal acts in which they were sexually aroused by the intentional torture of victims. Their crimes were also characterised by careful planning, selection of strangers as victims, recording of the offences by various means, keeping personal items taken from their victims, restraints of the victim, and a pattern of holding the victims

captive for periods ranging from 24 hours to 7 years before killing or releasing them. While the offenders were sometimes forthcoming about their criminal acts, few were forthcoming about the pattern of sexual arousal that motivated or accompanied their crimes.

To examine the intimate behaviours and sexual arousal of the sexual sadist, and to assess whether similar behaviours occur in both criminal and consenting contexts, seven women who had been the wives or girlfriends of sexually sadistic offenders were interviewed. As these lengthy interviews unfolded, it became apparent that the women described not only the same types of extreme emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, but also a common process of transformation through which each became the compliant appendage of her sexually sadistic partner.

The women

Seven women have been interviewed thus far by one of the authors, a special agent with the Behavioral Sciences Unit of the FBI. The women came to the awareness of the authors primarily through the FBI's involvement in the investigation or prosecution of their partners' crimes. The sample is obviously not random but represents an exploratory inquiry into the interpersonal exploitation that characterises the intimate relationships of certain identified sexual sadists.

Three of the women were married to sexual sadists and their marriages ranged in length from 2 to 13 years. The remaining four women dated sadists exclusively for periods ranging from 3 months to

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18 months. All were sadistically victimised by the men they were involved with. An eighth woman who also dated a sadist when they were both teenagers was interviewed; although they engaged in intercourse, she reported no sexual, physical or psychological abuse. This man was responsible for the deaths of more than 20 women within 11 years of their relationship.

As children, four had been sexually abused, two physically abused, and six psychologically abused. One reported that she had been sexually abused by two older sisters and an older brother.

All but one of the women were sexually naive at the time of meeting the sadists, even though five had previously been married. None of the women reported prior knowledge of sadomasochism before meeting the sadists.

All the women had low self-esteem and readily admitted that they lacked confidence in themselves. One woman, who was quite attractive, advised that one of the reasons she succumbed to the seduction of the sadist was that she could not believe that he found her physically attractive.

In every instance, the women came from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds, and none thought they had been economically deprived as a child. With no exceptions, the women were non aggressive, remorseful, and guilt-ridden. They berated themselves for 'being so stupid' and could not accept the fact that they had been manipulated to such a degree by the men.

With one exception, the women were professionally successful at the time they became involved with the men. Table 1 contrasts the occupational status of the women and the sadists with whom they were involved.

The abuse

Physical abuse

All the women suffered physical abuse during their relationship with the sadists. They reported being frequently beaten

with fists and other blunt objects. One woman reported that her husband called his arms 'guns' and would periodically give her 'body shots' or blows to the chest and stomach. Another woman advised that her boyfriend kept her in captivity for 3 days during which he bound her from head to feet in adhesive tape. Hourly, he would stand her upright and strike her viciously in the body, knocking her over. Four of the women suffered broken bones at the hands of their 'loved ones'.

Five of the women were whipped with leather whips, ropes or belts. One respondent reported that her abuser carefully weaved a leather whip and used it on her until it became so badly frayed that he resorted to a belt for her beatings. Both the condition of the whip and photographic evidence of her trauma validated her assertion. Another woman was suspended by the wrists and whipped with a belt periodically over a number of years.

Four of the women were burned with matches, cigarettes, or lighters. In each instance, the injuries were located in areas normally covered by clothing, so as to preclude inquiries from associates of the women. Biting, as a means of physical abuse, was reported by all of the women. Painful clamping devices were used on the nipples and labia of five of the respondents. One woman advised that her boyfriend wanted to place an earring through her labia but he could not find "one he liked".

Six of the women reported that they were strangled manually or by ligature during sexual activities. Most reported either losing consciousness or being on the verge of doing so. Painful bondage was used on all of the women. The bindings would be applied so as to cause maximal discomfort (for example, tightly binding the breasts) or to force the women to assume uncomfortable positions for extended periods.

While all the women advised that some of their injuries were visible to others, only one sought medical assistance. This woman's husband broke her arm while forcing her to engage in anal sex. She left him after that incident. She reported being too embarrassed or fearful to seek assistance until she decided to leave her partner.

Sexual abuse

All the women were sexually abused by the men. Three victims were forcibly penetrated by large foreign objects. One subject used a 12 cell flashlight and also a long cylindrical piece of wood. Almost invariably these items were inserted anally, so as to cause maximal suffering.

Six of the women reported anal intercourse to be their sadistic partner's preferred mode of sexual release. Forced fellatio was also reported by all seven women, and these same women reported that the sadists enjoyed ejaculating on their bodies, primarily their face or mouth.

Two of the seven women advised that they had been urinated on, and one reported being required to administer enemas to herself. Three of the women were forced to have sex with others; two were raped by friends of the sadists, and one was forced to engage in sexual acts with another woman who had been kidnapped by her husband.

All seven of the respondents agreed that the men were sexually insatiable. The constant demand for sexual activities took precedence over all other activities.

When asked to describe the worst sexual abuse suffered, one woman told being hung by her wrists and whipped to the point of unconsciousness, explaining that this degree of suffering and humiliation enabled her partner to become sexually aroused for vaginal intercourse. During the whippings, she was not allowed to cry, scream, or plead.

TABLE 1
Contrasts of occupational status of women and the sadists

Woman	Sadist
Bank employee	Ex-convict, mechanic
Free system engineer	Music sound mixer
Teenager	Metal worker
Business owner	Ex-convict, card dealer
Insurance broker	Business owner
Student nurse	Unemployed
Retail clerk	Unemployed

Psychological abuse

All of the women suffered emotional abuse at the hands of their sexually sadistic husbands or boyfriends. Three of them were kept in physical captivity for a period of 24 hours or longer and three were forced to write and sign documents of slavery or servitude. Six of the seven victims were 'scripted' by the men. Such scripting included being required to repeat words or phrases given them by the men, being forced to verbally describe the sexual acts taking place, pleading for sexual or physical abuse, using derogatory terms for themselves or parts of their bodies, or developing obscene fantasy scenarios for the men.

Four of the seven women reported that their partners recorded the sexual and sadistic activities. Such recordings were made in a variety of ways. One woman was photographed while being hung by her wrists. Another advised that her boyfriend took photographs, made drawings, audiotaped and wrote about her

sexual and physical abuse. The other two women were photographed during sexual acts, and the photographs were used to blackmail them into continued compliance.

In every situation, the women were verbally abused by the sexually sadistic men. They agreed that the constant verbal degradation not only lowered their self-esteem, but also kept them in a constant state of fear and depression.

The transformation process

Intrinsic to the stories told by the seven women was a process of transformation wherein they went from relatively normal patterns of living and relating to bizarre, destructive, and dangerous forms of exploitation and perversion. The process by which this transformation took place for them was surprisingly similar.

Selection of a vulnerable woman

Extrapolating from the behaviour described by the women, it appears that the sexual sadists had developed an ability to identify a naive, passive, and vulnerable woman. All the women reported feeling badly about themselves when they were initially approached by the sadist, either due to situational factors such as the breakup of a relationship or as a result of more chronic problems with self-esteem. The sexual sadists seemed able to assess this vulnerability and exploit it to manipulate these women toward interpersonal scenarios that would meet their need for dominance, control, and sadistic sexual behaviours. It seems likely that these men have attempted such activities with other women and failed.

The behaviour of the sadists reflected a degraded view of women in which they are all ultimately 'bitches' and 'whores'. They tended to choose 'nice' middle class

women who had never previously been exposed to perverse sexual practices. The transformation of these 'nice' women into humiliated and demeaned victims was the sadist's mission. This process not only insured them access to a compliant sexual partner, but also highlighted the control and mastery he could exert over another.

Selection of the targeted woman

The women reported that their partners were initially charming, considerate, daring, unselfish, and attentive. They gave the women gifts unexpectedly and were constantly attentive to their desires. As one woman said: "He couldn't do enough for me." Another woman, who was experiencing marital problems, advised that the man she became involved with was available to her day or night for advice or "just to listen". The women all 'fell' for the men relatively quickly, even though they recognised a sinister side to them. In all of the cases, the men related to the women in a romantic, seductive manner that was the antithesis of their eventual degradation and abuse. Like the paedophile, the sadist continued this phase until he was confident in his ability to manipulate and use the woman in ways that were sexually gratifying to him. He cultivated the woman's genuine affection for him before initiating the next steps.

Shaping sexual behaviour

The time devoted to the shaping of the woman's sexual behaviour depended on the vulnerability and susceptibility of the woman. Typically, the sexual sadist persuaded the woman to engage in a sexual activity that was beyond her normal sexual repertoire. These activities included fellatio (n=7), bondage (n=7), the use of foreign objects (n=6), anal intercourse (n=7), sexual photography (n=4), or a combination of these. Once she had participated in such an act, the sadist then

used 'positive reinforcement' (for example, gratitude, compliments, or attention) or 'negative reinforcement' techniques (for example, pouting, ignoring, or rejection) to obtain her compliance for progressively deviant activities. Over time, what began as atypical sexual behaviour became routine in their relationship.

In our earlier research on the criminal activities of the sexual sadist we found that anal sex was the preferred act involving penetration, followed by fellatio, vaginal intercourse, and foreign object penetration¹⁶. The interviews of these women confirm this rank-ordering of sexual preferences. The partners of these women eventually relied on threats and violence to maintain the compliance of the women in such activities. In a number of instances, the women reported that once anal intercourse became a regular part of their sexual repertoire, vaginal intercourse ceased to interest their partners.

Social isolation

Having shaped the woman's sexual behaviour, the sadist moved into the fourth phase, 'social isolation'. The men gradually became overly possessive and jealous of any activity that did not centre on them, and they alienated any acquaintances who were not their own friends.

Restrictive measures were used so that the world of these women became increasingly circumscribed and their circle of confidants eventually dissipated.

Punishment

The fifth and final step in the transformation involves physical and psychological punishment. Having met, seduced, and transformed a 'nice' woman into a sexually compliant and totally dependent individual, the sadist has validated his theory of women. The woman is now a subservient, inferior being who has 'allowed' herself to be re-created sexually and has participated in sexual acts that no 'decent' woman would engage in, thereby

confirming that she is a 'bitch' and deserving of punishment. In fact, three of the men referred to the women, and demanded that the women refer to themselves as 'evil'.

This punishment takes many forms. The types of punishment experienced by these seven women included painful sexual bondage (n=7), whipping (n=5), beating (n=7), captivity (n=3), signing a contract of servitude (n=3), enemas (n=1), being urinated on (n=2), burning (n=4), biting (n=7), forced sex with others (n=3), hanging (n=4), strangulation (n=6), and forced participation in criminal activities (n=4).

Discussion

The degradation and suffering experienced by these women illustrates the exploitative and inhumane behaviour that one person can intentionally inflict on another. Perhaps unsettling is that the women were compliant for so long with the men who degraded, exploited and abused them. The finding that as children, 25 per cent of the women had been physically abused, 50 per cent had been sexually abused, and 75 per cent had been psychologically abused and that in adulthood 50 per cent had previously been involved in abusive relationships, suggests some process of re-enactment in which early relational matrices are replicated in later life. This finding is similar to observations made by Walker¹⁷. While asserting that there was no 'victim-prone' personality among battered women, she nonetheless noted that their backgrounds were characterised by sexual abuse and 'uncontrollable events' that might lead to depression.

Still, not all of the women had been previously abused and even those who had been were functioning competently when they met the sadists. In the majority of cases, the sadist took a competent woman of higher status and transformed

her into a sexually and psychologically compliant slave. This process seems to require a subtle means of selection when the sadist recognises or tests women to their potential susceptibility and vulnerability. While it is not clear exactly what they look for, it appears that vulnerability in the women's sense of self—who and what she is—makes her prime target for molding by her eventual captor.

Many of the dynamics used in other kinds of 'brainwashing' or 'mind control' seem to be used in this context. Not only does the sadist isolate the women from other intimate relationships, but he also physically abuses her, deprives her of sleep, repeatedly degrades and humiliates her, and gradually introduces new behaviours into her repertoire accompanied by both positive reinforcement for compliant behaviours and negative reinforcements for non-compliant behaviour. The use of drugs also occasionally accompanies the process.

As highlighted by the authors in an earlier paper¹⁶ the issues of control seem central both to the sadist's behaviour and his pattern of sexual arousal. One sexual sadist defined sadism in the following way:

Sadism: The wish to inflict pain on others is not the essence of sadism. One essential impulse: to have complete mastery over another person, to make him/her a helpless object of our will, to become her God, to do with her as one pleases. To humiliate her, to enslave her are means to this end, and the most important radical aid is to make her suffer since there is no greater power over another person than that of inflicting pain on her to force her to undergo suffering without her being able to defend herself. The pleasure in the complete domination over another person is the very essence of the sadistic drive.

The current study suggests that this state of 'complete domination over an-

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other person' is a goal to which the sexual sadist strives not only in his sexual behaviour but also throughout all aspects of his intimate relationships. According to the women who were involved with these men, every aspect of their lives gradually came under the control of their partners. Perhaps the most extreme case was a woman who voluntarily returned to abysmal conditions of captivity despite frequent opportunities to escape. The psychological control of the sadist was graphically expressed as a physical reality.

Of particular interest in understanding the sexual sadist is the finding that many of the behaviours that characterise the sexual sadist's criminal behaviour also characterise his consenting sexual relationships. As described by the former wives and girlfriends, their relations with the sexual sadists were characterised by beatings, captivity, being bound, anal rape, forced fellatio, foreign object penetration, scripting, intentional torture, and the recording of sexual acts. These behaviours which mirror those found in the sadist's criminal behaviour support the view that certain behaviours constitute arousing components of the sadist's sexual response pattern regardless of situation. Interestingly, the availability of consenting partners with whom they can legally enact these sexual scenarios raises the question as to why the sadists simultaneously choose to commit crimes against additional victims, despite the risk of apprehension. Perhaps this motivation is best described by one sexual sadist, who, after his first murder, observed: "I never thought it would be so easy to kill a person, or that I would enjoy it. But it was easy and I was enjoying the feeling of supremacy. A supremacy like I have never known before."

This intermeshing of attachment of perversion raises interesting questions concerning criminal responsibility. As indicated, several of the women eventually became co-conspirators with the sadists

in serious criminal activities. The past decade has seen the 'battered woman syndrome' being recognised as evidence supporting a claim of self-defense when the abused woman kills her abuser. From a somewhat different perspective, Patty Hearst argued that she had been brainwashed by her captors and was thus not fully responsible for her behaviour in support of their crimes. While the former addresses the question of guilt or innocence and the latter the issue of diminished capacity, neither suggests that the impairment the abused or 'brainwashed' woman experiences in her reality testing is significant enough to warrant a finding of legal insanity under either the McNauten or Model Penal Code Standard. AUTHOR: A SHORT EXPLANATION MAY HELP FOREIGN READERS. COPY EDITOR. In the current sample, the wife of a sexual sadist who became involved in the kidnapping and murder of victims acquired for her husband was convicted on a guilty plea and is now serving a substantial prison sentence. Although her criminal behaviour began and was perpetrated exclusively within the context of her relationship with her husband, she entered a guilty plea in exchange for a shorter sentence than she might otherwise have incurred.

Finally, the results reported here suggest that domestic abuse complaints can be a source of investigative leads for unsolved sexually sadistic crimes. In particular, men who have persuaded, manipulated, or forced their wives or girlfriends to sign slave contracts, or to engage in a variety of deviant sexual or sexually sadistic acts should be recognised as men who are at risk of committing similar acts with strangers.

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