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## Sexual Aberrance in Male Adolescents Manifesting a Behavioral Triad Considered Predictive of Extreme Violence: Some Clinical Observations

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He who lights a fire during the day will wet his bed  
that night. (German and Mexican-Spanish proverb)

The wisdom of the proverb makers continues to pique our interest as the subtle inter-relationship among the triad of enuresis, fire-setting, and animal cruelty is observed. Elsewhere the authors have reviewed the literature on these behaviors and new clinical evidence concerning the validity and meaning of this predictor is offered [1]. The present paper is limited to a discussion of sexually aberrant behavior, particularly from a developmental point of view, in six male adolescents who manifest the triad.

Considering the biophysiological needs of the human organism, clinical observers (particularly following the discoveries of Sigmund Freud) have commonly described human behavior in terms of a set of interlocking need systems [2]. Currently the essential needs are thought to include: (1) nutrient intake, (2) oxygen intake, (3) water intake, (4) waste elimination, (5) temperature regulation, and (6) periods of sleep. Simply put, failure of regulation or delivery in any one of these need systems results in disease and eventual death. The human infant, considered to be most vulnerable during the first few months and possibly years of life, is incapable of meeting his own needs. Hence, he must depend upon others for survival. In our western culture this dependent condition seems to continue through late adolescence and, in many instances, into early adulthood.

Returning to the interlocking system of vital needs, we may note in early infancy that a gradient of tension, with its low point describing moderate discomfort and its high point describing imminent collapse of the organism, can be projected to describe the relationship between need gratification, tension discharge, and biological survival. As a need remains unmet, tension in the form of physical discomfort increases. Associated with this gradient are the numerous "feeling states" or emotions in their rawest forms. Biology and psychology are thus inextricably intertwined and the discharge of tension (that is, the experience of need fulfillment) is a powerful influence upon behavior. Whether we can

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safely argue that all behavior is determined by this system is difficult to say. The homeostatic and pleasure principles familiar to students of psychoanalytic thought are briefly described herein.

Our point is not to raise a psychoanalytic debate, but rather to offer foundation to the notion that man's sexuality is evident in a variety of forms. This fact may be all too evident to judges and lawyers familiar with cases involving sexual perversion. The essential model for sexual discharge is a state of arousal, followed by a heightening of tension and then by a release from that tension to a more quiescent state. This is the model for the discharge of tensions in other areas as well, as noted above. In the infant, for the most part, typical genital sexual expression does not predominate, although male infants do achieve erections either spontaneously or from penile contact with objects, and infant females do explore the outer labia and sometimes, spontaneously, the vagina as well. Infantile sexuality is viewed as assuming a number of forms (that is, polymorphous), and relates to a variety of cutaneous experiences, particularly around the various orifices of the body.

This view of polymorphous infantile sexuality becomes quite important when clinical examples of sexual perversion and related aberrant sexual behavior are discussed. As noted, the variety of experiences sought in the expression of perverse sexual activities varies greatly in number and type [3]. However, the aim (that is, reduction of the tension associated with sexual excitement) remains a constant in such activities.

In reviewing our data, we noted that each of the six subjects in the study demonstrated marked sexual deviation as well as the atypical development in this area. At the time this discovery appeared to be serendipitous, but we have presently come to accept this as another graphic element of disturbance in the personality formations of these young men.

### **Methodology**

The six cases described in this study were observed by the authors in their service as clinical consultants to the California Youth Authority. Although such referrals are pre-selected to a significant degree (that is, declared delinquent under the California Welfare and Institutions Code, §602; demonstrated significant psychological symptoms so as to merit a psychiatric evaluation), there was no further active selection of cases for this study by the authors. A total of 46 cases was referred to the authors and seen during a six-month period of time. Of these, six adolescents demonstrated the triad of enuresis, fire-setting, and excessive cruelty to animals. Four additional cases were considered to exhibit the triad but complete documentation of one or more of the components was not possible; therefore, these cases were not included in this study. Although the authors believed that many youth authority subjects possessed the triad under consideration, denial of one or more of the symptoms by the subject was considered sufficient for exclusion. Each subject was seen individually in psychiatric evaluation and subsequent referral for psychological testing. The following case vignettes are developed from the psychiatric evaluation, psychological testing, and review of all available supporting materials.

Each case is not presented in its entirety. Rather, there is a brief sketch of the essential developmental and judicial data, followed by a discussion of the aberrant sexual material.

### **Case Presentations**

#### *Case 1*

Ted M., a 17-year-old of Mexican-American Indian background has documented police involvement from the ninth year. Complaints have included petty theft, incorrigi-

bility, multiple runaway episodes, grand theft (auto), and burglary. Serious assaultive behavior was first documented in his early teens, and when Ted was 14 one of his victims was hospitalized for several weeks. Assaultive aggressiveness has continued and has become more severe despite treatment efforts. The product of a chaotic and disorganized family with an alcoholic father and an infrequently present mother, Ted is fourth in a sibship of five, each of whom has been involved in a serious asocial act ranging from murder to assault with a deadly weapon. Ted's disorganized behavior has resulted in a state hospitalization, during which he was diagnosed as experiencing a schizophrenic reaction of the chronic undifferentiated type.

His atypical sexual behavior has primarily involved exhibitionism. He has appeared before the authorities several times following episodes of indecent exposure. He is unable to describe or to discuss the circumstances leading to the expression of such impulsive behavior. In addition to these episodes, he has been involved in some rather provocative sadistic activity including attempts to brand the letters "MF" on a younger lad's chest. When recounting this incident, however, Ted reported having experienced sensations of excitement and then release. Notably, the psychologist remarks that Ted's performance on projective tests indicates marked confusion in the area of sexual identification.

#### *Case 2*

Harry H. is a 13-year-old caucasian with a history of violent, dangerous acts causing referrals to police authorities in his ninth year and commitment at the age of 13. This boy has attempted to murder, on separate occasions, a foster father and a natural brother, the former with a gun and the latter by stabbing with a knife. Numerous observers have described Harry as having experienced severe deprivation and overt rejection in the early years of life. Though he has been diagnosed as experiencing an adjustment reaction of early adolescence, his extreme unsocialized aggressive behavior, considered with his developmental history, would suggest the presence of more malignant psychopathology. Notably, Harry was the passive victim of numerous overt sexual assaults in childhood. Thus, it is not surprising that the boy's aggression very much pervades his attempts at sexual expression. Natural and foster parents describe him as engaging in "unusual sexual practices" otherwise unspecified. While a ward of the youth authority, Harry has been reported to be the frequent active participant in group sexual activities, including performing fellatio on his peers.

#### *Case 3*

Phillip D., a 20-year-old caucasian, was first detained by authorities as a runaway in his 12th year. He was a known petty thief during his early teens. By mid-adolescence he was judged guilty of two separate charges of forcible rape, and in the later teens answered to two separate charges of arson as well as a charge of property destruction. In his 20th year he was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and discharging a pistol near a residence. A summary of psychological and psychiatric evaluations describes Phillip as having a personality disorder of the schizoid type. He is currently viewed as a decompensating borderline psychotic who, under stress, will fulminate in overt psychosis.

Phillip's history reveals tenuous control of impulses, particularly those of a sexual nature, throughout development. In the early teens he was reported to have left obscene notes for females of his acquaintance. Some five years following the episodes of attempted rape for which he was charged, this young man was involved in the sexual molestation of small neighborhood girls. At that time his interest appeared to be in coercing the youngsters into exhibiting their genitalia to him. During the current psychiatric evaluation

Phillip reports that, although married, he has avoided intercourse with his young wife. His reasons for genital sexual abstinence were unclear at the time of the study.

#### *Case 4*

Charles L., a 16-year-old caucasian, was referred for assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to commit murder (two counts). Little historic material is available on his family or his development, and he reports moderate to heavy use of dangerous drugs, including barbiturates, amphetamines, and alcohol. Psychiatric and psychological examiners have diagnosed Charles as psychotic, most likely of the paranoid schizophrenic type. Within the ideation distinguishing him as paranoid are numerous fantasies of attack and assault on his person by others, as well as an associated blurring and confusion of his masculine sexual identification.

#### *Case 5*

Richard R., an 18½-year-old Mexican-American, was first detained by the police in his 14th year for burglary. At age 17, he was committed to the youth authority for exhibiting a firearm in a threatening manner. A parole violation involved possession of a loaded shotgun and resulted in his return to an institution. He has a history of drug involvement with associated violent, antisocial behavior dating back to his 14th year. Development marked by severe physical and emotional deprivation has resulted in psychotic vulnerability. At present the psychiatric diagnosis involves personality disorder, asocial type, with borderline (paranoid) features. Richard's highly conflicted personality formation involves features of masculine protest, as evidenced by a compulsive fascination with firearms, weapons, and other such symbolic materials. Psychological and psychiatric examiners have found evidence of specific difficulties in the area of sexual identification and homosexual (latent) concerns.

#### *Case 6*

Vern L., a 13-year old caucasian with a documented history of violent acts dating back to the eighth year, was most recently referred for battery (one count). The product of a chaotic household, this boy has responded to his mother's asocial and sadistic tendencies by performing similar acts. Himself the witness and possible participant in his mother's perverse sexual escapades, Vern now performs sadistically with other youngsters, particularly younger boys. His most recent offense was burning a seven-year-old child (male) with lighted cigarettes. Vern's performance on psychological tests indicates that he pictures himself as "an invulnerable seductive but punitive tormentor of females." On occasion he overtly described himself as being similar to his mother in sexual terms, that is, in terms of interest and activity. On one occasion, he was alleged to have set fire to a hut in which he and his mother were locked, and in another instance he attempted to set fire to a man whom he did not like.

### **Discussion**

What continues to appear to be most striking in the case material is the degree to which sexual impulse expression is plastic and therefore may mold to a variety of forms. Granted that each of our subjects is deeply disturbed and all are products of chaotic households and victims of irregular child-rearing approaches; considered together, these cases illustrate the very essence of sexual aberrance. Hence, we would prefer to focus our discussion on the various modes of deviation illustrated by these cases, rather than to discuss each case in terms of the forms of psychopathology which it demonstrates.

*Fusion of Sexual and Aggressive Impulse*

All of the cases which we have presented illustrate a degree of fusion of sexual and aggressive material. Essentially, aggressive, assaultive, abusive activity and some form of sexual expression become inseparable for such individuals. Current psychological theory concerning the differentiation and regulation of impulses and drives acknowledges that in infancy and early childhood the urgency of the basic vital needs predominates, and only after the human organism develops ways of securing these needs do the more distinct sexual and aggressive areas emerge independently. They are at first seen as commingled, however, and it is not unusual to observe in late infancy or early childhood the expression of affection mixed with some obvious piece of aggression such as biting, hitting, pushing, or even rather violent hugging. In many of our subjects this fusion has continued into adolescence or even early adulthood. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this occurs in the material presented by the forcible rapist. Phillip clearly demonstrates this fusion, both in his avowed sexual abstinence toward his wife and his numerous attempts at forcible rape. It would appear that the tender, nonaggressive aspects of sexual expression are unavailable to him. In some sense his partner must be his victim or he is unable to participate with her. Sexuality and violent aggression must be present in the sense that he must act upon both impulses in order to receive gratification.

*Turning of the Passive Experience into an Active One*

A number of our subjects had been brutalized or assaulted sexually in childhood. Harry and Vern, in particular, had been the passive participants in sexual attacks by others. One might assume that Ted may also have experienced similar attacks. These young men were active participants in sadistic attacks upon younger and presumably weaker individuals. Noted in their materials are at least two instances of attempts to burn or to brand others by means of lighted cigarettes. In addition to the delight taken in inflicting pain and injury upon others, each seemed to be turning what was at one time passively experienced (that is, being burned) into activity (that is, inflicting burns upon someone else). The psychological mechanism involved in such a reversal of roles is usually termed "identification with the aggressor." In such a role reversal the individual finds a means of mastering feelings of incompetence, anger, and frustration by becoming very much like the obvious object of the original discomfort.

*Problems in Sexual Identification*

Each of our subjects demonstrates, to some extent, instability in this sense of adequacy as a male. Psychological test reports on many of our subjects repeatedly emphasize a blurring or a confusion of the subject's identity in this area. Essentially this means that the process by which one learns to express sexuality in terms of behavior socioculturally appropriate to one's biological gender has not occurred. We are quite familiar with the biochemical basis for the human organism's bisexuality or, more correctly, polysexuality. Studies in the area of embryology, endocrinology, and even recent advances in the study of human sexual response and development underscore this fact. Hence, much of what is accepted as masculine or feminine (that is, gender specific) is socioculturally determined and therefore is influenced as much by social learning as by chemistry. Failure in this learning process occurs for a variety of reasons, including poor "teachers," "teachers" or role models who are indeed *too* adroit, hormone imbalance, failure in emotional development, or neurotic conflicts regarding aspects of identification and consequent sexual expression. Without in-depth study of the individual, determination of the precise cause

of difficulties in the area of gender identification is quite difficult. We do know, however, that the more severely disturbed or psychotic the patient, the more infantile and therefore polymorphous the sexual expression will be. Similarly, the greater the deviation from the nuclear family environment, the higher the vulnerability to deviation from the norm of acceptable gender-associated behavior. We believe it is clear that our subjects demonstrated blurring and confusion in this area for a variety of reasons, and in at least two instances aggressive assaultive behavior and preoccupation with armaments and weaponry are determined by the individual's need to assert what he believes to be active, aggressive masculinity.

#### *Polymorphous Perverse Behavior*

We have already made much of the point that (infantile) sexuality is polymorphous. Sexual perversion is defined psychologically according to developmental criteria. Typically many forms of sexual activities are commonly observed and considered to be age-appropriate in infancy and early childhood. However, when these activities are carried on from an earlier stage into the later stages of development, and are maintained as the individual's principal mode of sexual activity and source of release, the very same behaviors are considered perverse. Several examples of perversion occur in our case materials. The exhibitionistic and voyeuristic activities of Ted and Phillip clearly demonstrate this developmental trend. Consistent with his severe psychotic disturbance, Ted derives much pleasure from exhibiting himself and thus being seen by others. This pleasure is thought to be akin to the elation which is observed in small children or infants when they are observed, particularly by the parents and principally by the mother. We are all too familiar with the devastating results on successful personality formation when the child has not thought himself to be highly regarded by the parents. Ted's "showing off" seems to be directly related to this line of development. Phillip, on the other hand, shows a higher level of concern or curiosity, manifested in his compulsion to observe the genitalia of little girls. Since his difficulties illustrate the broadest range of aberrant behavior in our sample, we cannot at this time be sure whether his curiosity relates to the usual concerns which young boys have about the failure of girls to be equipped genitally in the same way as they are, or whether he has less fear of retaliation for his sexual and aggressive wishes at the hands of young children in contrast to peers or adults. Phillip also appears to be driven to confront others with obscene language. This behavior is termed *coprolalia* and may become an extreme compulsion for some individuals. Again this behavior is not uncommon but rather to be anticipated in young children who begin to discover "dirty language." In some children, the demonstration of this repertoire becomes very important, much to the annoyance of those who must listen.

#### **Conclusion**

We believe that the German and Mexican-Spanish proverb carries an additional connotation. We have in the past understood this to suggest a consistently observed relationship between fire-setting and enuresis. However, in the light of this discussion it may have a more universal application concerning elements of excitement and subsequent regressive loss of control. We have attempted to illustrate the developmentally regressive aspects of sexual aberrance principally by examination of such material observed in six cases of violently aggressively adolescent and young adult males. In the discussion, we have illustrated both the range and scope of human sexuality and its expression, particularly in those areas considered by society to be deviant. The implications of this psychologic-

psychiatric point of view for legal-judicial action and penal correctional treatment of such offenders is clearly a topic for future presentations and discussion. We hope that this article may provide a beginning stimulus for such further consideration.

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