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# “Mental Pictures And Emotional Intimacy: A Theoretical Explanation for the Sexual Sadistic Serial Murderer’s Heterosexual Lifestyle”

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## ABSTRACT

This paper develops a theoretical explanation for the sexual sadistic serial murderer’s heterosexual lifestyle. The theoretical formulation developed draws upon Glasser’s (1984) control theory and Marshal’s (1989) general theory of sexual offending. It synthesizes Glasser’s propositions around *idealized life style* and *mental pictures* and Marshal’s propositions on *intimacy*. The theoretical formulation developed focuses on the mental and behavioral contradictions implicit in the life of this type of offender. The paper concludes by comparing these lifestyles to those of homosexuals in similar heterosexual lifestyles.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretical explanation for the contradiction implicit in the acts committed by sexual sadistic serial murderers who live heterosexual lifestyles. The contradiction these men pose is that they live a “normal” heterosexual life with one woman, while *simultaneously* engaging in the sadistic sexual assault and/or killing of other women. Serial killers of the power/control-oriented type derive immense satisfaction from having complete control over their victims. And the brutality that frequently

accompanies this type of murder enhances and reinforces their perverted images of power and control. The source of pleasure for this type of serial killer is not sexual. Rather, it is the ultimate power (i.e., life or death) he has over his victim. Control is central and the sexual aspects of the act are secondary (Homes and De Burger 1988:59). Men of this type have generally been perceived by the female significant-others in their lives (e.g., wives and/or common law spouses), as having led "normal" heterosexual married lives with them. The essence of the problem to be explored in this paper centers upon explaining why these men, after apprehension, are consistently reported as suffering from a severe antisocial personality disorder and/or exhibiting sadistic sexual personality traits that have not been exhibited toward, and/or have gone undetected by, the heterosexual partner prior to the male's apprehension.

Because most of these sexual sadistic serial murderers become celebrated cases, it can reasonably be assumed that if these men had also been severely psychologically mistreating or physically battering their heterosexual partners, these unreported criminal acts would subsequently be uncovered after their apprehension. However, just the opposite seems to be the case. Their female partners tend to report them as men who have been kind, loving, thoughtful, etc. Illustrative of this type of person are the accounts provided by others of Kenneth Bianchi, "The Hillside Strangler," and Ted Bundy (Schwarz 1981; Michaud and Aynesworth 1983). The statement, "That's not the man I know," sums up these undetected Jekylls and Hydes with whom these women have been living.

## **Theoretical Formulation**

The theoretical formulation developed here to explain how serial killers can be simultaneously living a normal relationship with one woman while murdering and raping other women draws upon propositions contained in Glasser's (1984) control theory and Marshal's (1989) general theory of sexual offending. According to Glasser's control theory, early in life people develop a whole album of mental pictures of how they see each of their basic needs being satisfied. These mental pictures depict specific distinctive styles for meeting these needs (Glasser 1984: 20-86). For example, the pictures of the type of marriage stored within the individual may be autocratic or democratic and/or patriarchal or matriarchal.

Glasser further suggests that these pictures generally only present difficulties of the problems-in-living type (e.g., unhappy careers, unhappy marriages, etc.). Although unsatisfied pictures may result in marriage counseling, divorce, career change, or unemployment, most people are usually able to

cope with them in a non-violent manner and to modify either their mental pictures of the ideal or replace the persons or things in their lives that do not fit with their pictures with persons or things that do. Glasser uses the example of the battered female spouse to illustrate the extreme permanent nature of some of these pictures. He contends, for example, that battered females stay with their battering partners because it's the only picture of a loving person they have (Glasser 1984:20-86).

In terms of changing pictures that satisfy sexual needs, Glasser (1984) proposes that it is almost literally impossible to do so. His ideal lifestyle pictures suggest that these murderers have developed perverted sadistic mental pictures regarding how their sexual needs are to be fulfilled. Along these same lines, Sandy Lane suggests that. "Nonsexualized control-seeking fantasies tend to be elaborations of previous power-based behaviors but often involve more expression of power, with themes of domination, retaliation, humiliation, and aggression." Also, similar to Glasser's pictures, she proposes that fantasies are an integral part of our lives, but that sexual abuse fantasies serve a compensatory purpose and involve the misuse of power (Lane 1997:102). However, this alone does not provide an explanation for why the significant females in these men's lives are not also among their victims, and/or why their sadistic traits are not identified by these women.

According to Marshal, all of us have a need for varying degrees of emotional intimacy, which includes nurturing lovers as well as casual friends. Marshal describes intimacy as a continuum involving partner closeness, affection, and mutual self-disclosure. He suggests that there are six features to adulthood emotional intimacy centering around: (1) security and emotional comfort; (2) companionship; (3) nurturance; (4) reassurance of self-worth; (5) confronting adversity; and (6) relationship assurances (Marshal 1989: 491-503).

The need for emotional intimacy, similar to Glasser's pictures, lies within the individual and is dispositional in nature. In other words, some pursue emotional intimacy very tenaciously, while others pursue it much more passively. Marshal (1989) conceives of emotional intimacy as a continuum with deep emotional intimacy at one end and emotional alienation at the other. As with Glasser's (1984) pictures, Marshal suggests that the capacity for adult emotional intimacy evolves relatively early in life out of adolescent experiences. Adolescents who are unable to achieve emotional intimacy in relations with adults develop emotional loneliness and carry this into their adulthood. Marshal further contends that emotional loneliness (i.e., failure to achieve intimacy in relations with adults), in turn, results in aggressive dispositions and tendencies towards pursuing intimacy through sexuality with diverse and

non-threatening partners (Marshal 1989:491-503). Thus, the first proposition in this paper is that *sexual sadistic murderers have perverted mental pictures of emotional intimacy of a pseudo-sadistic sexual nature and can only satisfy their intimacy and sexual needs if acted upon.*

According to Marshal, emotional loneliness is significantly different from social loneliness. Social loneliness is experienced when the person has few social contacts. Social loneliness is not as predictive of emotional or behavioral aggression in its many forms, as is emotional loneliness (Marshal 1989:491-503). Thus, the second proposition offered here is that *social loneliness is not a significant causal factor in rape-murderers of this type.* Thus, they may be either socially fulfilled or socially lonely.

According to Marshal (1989:491-503), there are four categories of individuals who have failed to achieve intimacy: (1) those who are capable of achieving intimacy, but have not done so by choice; (2) those who are withdrawn and isolated; (3) pseudo-intimates; and (4) stereotyped intimates. The latter two types of relationships are non-intimate ones because they involve very little personal disclosure or closeness in the relationships. Based on Marshal's categories, the third proposition offered in this paper is that *rapists are either pseudo-intimates or stereotyped intimates.* It is further hypothesized (corollary one to proposition three) that *the pseudo-intimate or stereotyped intimate relationships that rapists are engaged in with their female significant-others are totally social in nature.* The rapist's role in these relationships can best be described as "cynical performances" (Goffman 1959) or what Enck and Preston (1988:371-376) refer to as "counterfeit intimacy." The specific goal of the rapist in these types of relationships is assumed to be social status and not emotional intimacy.

In essence, although the sexual sadistic murderer's attachment to female significant-others provides the opportunity to develop intimacy, the fact is that these men simply lack the ability to do so. Thus, the fourth proposition offered here is that *the root cause of this type of serial murder's behavior is the joining of the permanency of their perverted pseudo-sadistic sexual mental pictures and their total lack of ability to develop emotional intimacy.* The fifth and final proposition offered is that *only in the commission of the sadistic sexual rape act do rapists of this type have their emotional intimacy needs satisfied.*

**FIGURE 1:**  
**A MENTAL PICTURE AND INTIMACY THEORY FOR CONTRADICTIONS  
 INHERENT IN SEXUAL SADISTIC SERIAL MURDERERS**

Proposition 1	Sexual sadistic serial murderers have perverted mental pictures of emotional intimacy of a pseudo-sadistic sexual nature that can only satisfy their intimacy and sexual need if acted upon
Proposition 2.	Social loneliness is not a significant causal factor in serial murderers of this type
Proposition 3	Sexual sadistic serial murderers are either pseudo-intimates or stereotyped intimates
Corollary 1.	The pseudo-intimate or stereotyped intimate relationships that murderers are engaged in with their female significant-others are totally social in nature
Proposition 4.	The root cause of this type of murderer's behavior is the joining of the permanency of their perverted pseudo-sadistic sexual mental pictures and their total lack of ability to develop emotional intimacy
Proposition 5.	Only in the commission of the sadistic sexual murder act do rapists of this type have their emotional intimacy need satisfied.

## **Juxtaposition with Homosexual Lifestyle**

Male homosexuals in heterosexual marriages would seem to be a group of men in a somewhat similar situation to that of the sexual sadistic murderers that have been hypothesized above. Many of the same sexual conflicts and/or lack of sexual gratification seem to exist for both groups. In fact, H. Laurence Ross (1971:386) writes, "If marriage and homosexuality do not represent a logical contradiction, the combination is very likely a strainful one." Various coping mechanisms are employed by homosexuals and their heterosexual mates (Latham and White 1978:198-212). Some modes of adjustment in homosexual/heterosexual marriages include turning the marriage into: a platonic marriage; a double-standard marriage, or an innovative marriage (Ross 1971:385-393).

These modes of adjustments on the part of homosexuals seem to parallel those of pseudo-intimate or stereotyped intimate proposed here for sexual sadistic serial murderers. However there is a big difference between how the hypothesized sexual sadistic serial murderer, in the preceding section, satisfies his sexual needs, and how the homosexual satisfies his. The evidence provided by the significant others of sexually sadistic murderers suggest that they, like some heterosexual women married to homosexual males, had no major complaints and/or were satisfied with the sexual relationships they had with their husbands (for heterosexual satisfaction concerning women married to homosexuals, see Latham and White 1978:1201).

## Summary

The propositions formulated in this paper provide a theoretical explanation, at least in part, for the contradiction implicit in the acts committed by these serial murderers relative to their heterosexual lifestyles. Their perverted sadistic sexual needs pictures, coupled with their inability to develop emotional intimacy, allow them to be socially involved in heterosexual relationships while, at the same time, do not allow their significant others to fulfill their sexual and intimacy needs.

This theoretical formulation also allows for a continuum of sadistic sexual offenses and offenders based on the nature of the sexual needs contained in the pictures and the level of emotional intimacy attained. This continuum ranges from exhibitionists to sexual sadistic serial murderers.

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