

Hybristophilia White Paper

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Abstract

Hybristophilia, as defined by sexologist Dr. John Money (1986), was initially used to explain the paraphilia where an individual is “sexuoerotically turned on only by a partner who has a predatory history of outrages perpetrated on others” (p. 56). Since this definition, which is found throughout the literature preceding it, there have been other interpretations that have created a large variance within the topic, although the primary commonality has been in the preponderance of this phenomenon amongst females in comparison to males. The differences in the existing definitions and the associated research, or anecdotal discussion, can suggest some uncertainty within the literature as to the definition, diagnostic criteria, circumstantial detail, or underlying motivation or drive for an individual either diagnosed with hybristophilia or associated with potential markers; this includes females who become involved in romantic relationships with incarcerated violent offenders and sexual partners involved in violent offenses as a couple.

Keywords: hybristophilia, female sexual offenses, paraphilia, paraphilias

Introduction

Hybristophilia, deriving from the Greek *hybridizein*, meaning to perpetuate an outrage against another, has been defined as the phenomenon of an individual being sexually aroused by a criminal offender. It is here, even in the definition of the term, that there is some discussion as to the vacillation within definitions. Money (1986) defined hybristophilia as occurring when “an individual is sexueroerotically turned on only by a partner who has a predatory history of outrages perpetrated on others” (p. 56). Money’s (1986) discussion of hybristophilia occurs underneath the umbrella of marauding and predatory paraphilias, occurring when sexual pleasure occurs through tragedy or sinful lust as a primary component. Corsini (2002) and Takas (2004) both defined hybristophilia as a sexual attraction to a criminal, with Takas (2004) stating that an individual with hybristophilia “are sexually aroused by a predatory partner” (p. 41). Griffiths (2014) defines hybristophilia as the sexual arousal and pleasure obtained by an individual who has a partner “known to have committed an outrage or crime, such as rape, murder, or armed robbery.” Parker (2014) provides the longest definition of the diagnosis, initially suggested by Vitello (2006) appearing to include certain aspects of the other primary definitions within the literature:

Hybristophilia is technically described as a paraphilia of the predatory type in which a person can be sexually aroused, or even achieve orgasm in response to, or contingent upon, being with a partner who is known to have committed an outrage, like cheating or lying, or known infidelities of crime, such as rape, murder or armed robbery (p. 13).

There are multiple mentions within both the literature and the social zeitgeist that refer to this phenomenon. The literature refers to the paraphilia diagnosis and also focuses upon the relationship development and maintenance amongst the population. Within the social zeitgeist, the conversation seems to center on anecdotal or true crime stories focusing on hybristophilia as occurring within “serial killer groupies,” as Parker (2014) defines them, or women who pursue relationships and marriages with convicted and incarcerated offenders.

Background & Literature Review

The topic of sexuality is one that has been significantly defined and redefined within the literature of multiple different fields, from the biological sciences to the social sciences, and there are few topics that are

more socially charged. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the topic of sexuality has been well explored for certain populations within the social sciences. Money (1986) states that:

In the confusion of so much complexity, it is not surprising that today's scientific knowledge of how the sexual brain develops and maintains its governance of sexuality and eroticism is still very preliminary, and subject to continual revision (p. 13).

Feminist theorists, such as MacKinnon (1989) comment that female sexuality has often been relegated solely as the focus of the objectification of the female as a sex object for the male, and Little (1991) remarks upon the overwhelming concentration within the sphere of female sexuality centralized on sexual violence perpetrated against women. Discussions of concupiscence seem to exist within a male framework, and discussions of victimization in a female one. Federoff, Fishell, and Federoff (1999) expand upon the comments within the study of female sexuality in relation to sexual paraphilias, stating that "when women are discussed, it is mainly in terms of their involvement in paraphilic activities at the behest of men with paraphilic disorders" (p. 127). This belief is echoed within the literature as well (Hazelwood, Warren, & Dietz, 1993; Gaudenti, 2006; Warnes, 1986).

It is not just feminist researchers that have acknowledged the dearth of female-centric research within sexual constructs; this recognition also correlates with the acknowledgement of the paucity of research of female-centric topics within criminology (Chesney-Lind, 1998; Mann, 1996; Shipley & Arrigo, 2004). Scott (2005) argued that "women were either not the subjects of these studies, or their actions and participations in crime were dismissed" (p. 163). Gurian (2013) contends that criminological theories focus upon male behavior and male perspective, which may be one reason for the seeming imbalance of criminological theory, research, and literature on certain topics, and van San (2011) notes that "it is also often assumed that women, if at all, only turn to crime under the influence of the men in their lives" (p. 282).

One of these categories relates to female deviant sexual behavior, including female paraphilias or female sex offenses. This is not a new issue; Gaudenti (2006) expresses that "throughout history, the connection between women and any form of sexuality has been a sensitive subject, particularly the idea of women sexually offending against others" (p. 362). This includes the ignorance, or outright denial of, female

sexuality and female aggression. Gavin (2014) comments that female criminals, especially females involved in sex-related criminal behavior, are often viewed as doubly deviant because of their behavior and the fact their behavior places them so far outside the norm of socially constructed female roles. Miller (2007) is one of many researchers who discuss the importance of or need for many of these socially acceptable roles within certain populations, and the prevalence of these roles may still explain the overrepresentation of males in “high risk, underpaid, altruistic, romantically attractive professions such as the police, fire, and military services, whereas women remain overrepresented in low risk, underpaid, altruistic, romantically attractive professions such as nursing and school teaching” (p. 102).

Hybristophilia, within the working definition, does not necessarily meet a standard to be considered criminal behavior on the part of the individual experiencing the paraphilia, but by its very nature, it does require criminal behavior on the part of the attractive individual to the individual experiencing hybristophilia. In all of the definitions of this diagnosis, there is no specific gender criteria, but no known research or literature was found that involved the diagnosis of hybristophilia for a male subject or even any discussion of male populations as experiencing a sexual attraction to criminal behavior.

Analysis

The exploration into the sexual attraction of an individual toward someone who has committed criminal behaviors typically concentrates upon offenders who commit violent criminal behavior. Interestingly, Aggrawal’s (2009) definition of hybristophilia only states that the individual experiencing it is attracted to an individual known to have committed a violent act; the phrase criminal is not found anywhere in the definition and would suggest, then, is also not considered a criterion. This is an important demarcation, as typically the use of the word criminal suggests that the action has been recognized by some type of government authority or responsible agency, such as law enforcement. The exploration into hybristophilia specifically focuses upon the classification and description of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon, and within the literature there are significant differences amongst the recognized categories and characteristics of individuals

described as experiencing hybristophilia, as well as theories into possible origins of the paraphilia within individuals or known correlations.

Despite the significant differences amongst the recognized categories of types of hybristophiles, the literature solidly shows commonalities amongst and within the population; a history of childhood trauma and physical or sexual abuse is prevalent amongst females with potential paraphilias, such as hybristophilia (Gurian, 2013; Sharma, 2003; Vitaliano, James, & Boyer, 1981; Vitello, 2006). The use of the potential qualifier will occur throughout this text, as there is some question as to whether some of the women discussed within the literature have been formally diagnosed with the paraphilia or if they are lumped into the discussion due to anecdotal information or assumptions based upon known details of specific cases.

Other potential correlations within the population, as expressed by Cooper (2000) and Gurian (2013), fall in line with commonly used defense strategies within criminal trials for female defendants, including low self-esteem, social isolation, and low levels of education. Vitaliano, James, and Boyer (1981) echo these experiences, as well as adding childhood experiences of rejection or estrangement. A lot of the literature, in review, does seem to place a spotlight on the female's history of victimization as some type of summary of potential causality; there is great variation within the topic as to whether this history is seen as mitigating, aggravating, or correlative.

Diametrically, there has also been significant variation within the population of women described as experiencing hybristophilia, including descriptions of women with significant professional status (Isenberg, 2014), no reported history of sexual or physical abuse (Vitello, 2006) or a lower percentage of past sexual trauma than comparable sample sizes (Federoff, Fishell, & Federoff, 1999). It should be noted, however, that within an overwhelming majority of the literature, there is a distinct acknowledgement of prior trauma exposure. Takas (2004), referring specifically to women who are involved in relationships with incarcerated offenders, found that "in general, women who become involved with incarcerated men were previously in problematic marriages and experienced alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, infidelity and sexual deviance within their family unit" (p. 44). Friskics-Warren (1996) found that 80% of women who participated in prison-

based offender support programs had a history of sexual or physical abuse, Slavikova and Panza (2014) found that within a diverse sample of women, a “moderate” history of childhood victimization was reported, and Warren and Hazelwood (2002) found the “majority” of women in their study were survivors of childhood sexual and physical trauma (p. 78).

Along with the focus on the backgrounds of women experiencing potential hybristophilia, there was one major construct noted across an overwhelming majority of the literature: the notation of a phenomenon known as “Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome” (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004; Gavin, 2014; Isenberg, 2014; Money, 1986; Parker, 2014; Takas, 2004; & Vitello, 2006). The Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome, in terms of hybristophilia, seems to be a moniker placed upon any publicized incident of criminal behavior involving a male offender and a female offender that are romantically involved with each other. The term, perhaps because of its potentially glamorizing connotation, is seen repeatedly within media reports and news stories of crimes meeting the above criteria, such as in the 2015 CBS news report of Dalton Hayes and Cheyenne Phillips’s capture in Florida after a multi-state crime spree, where the couple are repeatedly referred to as Bonnie and Clyde (Arenas, 2015). Also captured in Florida, Blake Fitzgerald and Brittany Harper led police on multiple high-speed chases before their violent capture by law enforcement, leaving Fitzgerald dead (CBS/Associated Press, 2016). This is not strictly an American phenomenon, as in the 2015 report of Luke Wall and Teresa Connors’s capture in Southern England after a six-month crime spree that totaled almost £1 million (Hull, 2015).

The usage of the Bonnie and Clyde label is seemingly applied without discretion and noticeably only to couples engaged in criminal behavior if they are male/female relationships, which suggests either a paucity of known examples of same sex couples engaging in similar behavior, a hesitance in the media to place a male/female moniker upon same sex couples, or a lack of the moniker applied to same sex couples displaying similar criminal behaviors. Money (1986) addressed this briefly, but the mention is simply that “the partners in crime may also be same-sexed lovers, either two men or two women” (p. 56). Found media reports also do not provide details as to the involvement of each partner, which would allow for a deeper investigation into

the role the female offender played in the planning, perpetration, motivation, and maintenance of the criminal behaviors.

Gurian (2013) clarifies that within partnered criminal behavior, specifically homicide, it “may be both a participation and spectator event” (p. 521), and Fox and Levin (2006) remark that mutual involvement in a criminal activity can lessen personal feelings of responsibility. The stereotypical view that within these male/female relationships the male is the controlling core and the female is the emotionally manipulated sidekick can be seen within some of the literature, however Gurian (2013) remarks upon the more recent focus amongst some researchers of the complexity of female sexuality and female criminality, which is reflected in a concentration on the female offender in the pair as a willing and motivated participant, if not the controlling factor (Gavin, 2014; Money, 1986; Myers, Gooch, & Meloy, 2005; Parker, 2014; Scott, 2005; Vitello, 2006; and Warren and Hazelwood, 2002). Parker (2014) asserts that within hybristophilia there are two categorizations: passive and aggressive, and that within aggressive hybristophilia the individual “actively participates in committing the crime, and derives sexual pleasure from it as well” (p. 21).

This concept of partnered criminal behavior, with the partners also being sexually involved, is mentioned often in conjunction with literature on hybristophilia, with the connotations that the female is perhaps more passive in their involvement in the criminal behavior. This is likely true in some of the instances, where the female may be participatory in the crime or crimes for various motivations relating to developing or maintaining their relationship with their partner, but it does seem reasonable to assume that there are also likely instances of these partnered criminal behaviors occurring because of some type of emotional, mental, or physical satisfaction that the female receives from their involvement.

This satisfaction may also occur because the female garners pleasure, sexual or nonsexual, due to their status as an individual willing to commit these actions, or perhaps from their status as being attracted to or involved with someone else who could commit criminal behaviors. Money (1986) elaborates by stating that “in many instances, a person does not fall in love with a partner, per se, but with a partner as a Rorschach love-blot” (p. xv).

The term hybristophilia appears within the literature as a term used in multiple contexts, but across the information there does seem to be four clear patterns that are identifiable, at least in relation to the use of the term:

- Women who pursue romantic relationships with incarcerated offenders
- Women who participate in/facilitate criminal behavior with a romantic partner
- Women who are sexually attracted or sexually satisfied by partners participating in criminal behavior
- Women who pursue relationships with and/or are sexually attracted to serial violent offenders (i.e. serial killers)

There is a wide variance in the contexts of each of these potential circumstances where the literature has shown the use of the term hybristophilia, either as a descriptive component of the female or as a defining diagnosis of a relationship. This lack of a proper taxonomy may be of a disservice to researchers and practitioners alike, as the definitions of the term seem to vary based upon the context of the topic. This may necessitate either a more formal and recognized definition of the term or perhaps further discussion of the various constructs in which the terminology is used.

This concern may be correlated with the more well-established discussion of a lack of formality and attention to female sexual behavior, especially in relation to female paraphilias or deviant sexual behaviors. It may be suggestive, but perhaps the discussion of one will increase in parallel with attention paid to the other.

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