

**Hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee:
“Prohibiting Obscene Animal Crush Videos in the Wake of
United States v. Stevens”
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for inviting me here today to testify. My name is Dr. Kevin Volkan. I am Chair and Professor of the Psychology Program at California State University Channel Islands, where I teach courses on atypical psychopathology and culture-bound syndromes. I was formerly a faculty member at Harvard Medical School and I have training in both clinical psychology and public health. I also author a blog titled “Bizarre Behaviors and Culture-bound Syndromes” with my colleague Dr. Neil Rocklin, who lectures in my department and who has been in private practice for the last 35 years. Dr. Rocklin co-authored this written testimony.

My testimony today will focus on explaining the sexual nature of “crush” paraphilias, and describing how crush videos are sexual in nature and that those who watch crush videos do so to obtain sexual gratification. I will also explain the nature of this paraphilia from a variety of theoretical viewpoints.

Paraphilias are sexual disorders that involve recurrent and intense sexually arousing fantasies, urges or behaviors related to non-human objects, non-consenting persons or children, and the suffering and/or humiliation of oneself or a partner. Generally, to be considered pathology, a paraphilia should result in clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning (Association & DSM-IV, 2000). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Association & DSM-IV, 2000) lists the following specific paraphilias that we believe are related to crush videos:

fetishes, sexual sadism, and sexual masochism. In my professional opinion, the crush paraphilia and crush videos contain elements of these specific forms of paraphilia in varying degrees and I believe that the crush paraphilia and crush videos are clearly sexual in nature.

Fetishes

A “fetish” is a strong recurrent sexual attraction to a non-living object. The most common fetish objects are clothing such as underwear, shoes and boots. With regard to the crush paraphilia, the fetish aspect is likely most related to the object that is doing the crushing—most often a foot or shoe. Crushing objects can vary and may include objects such as the buttocks or even a car. In fact one of the most notable crush fetishists who enjoyed the crushing of live animals, Bryan Loudermilk, was himself crushed to death by a vehicle in a scenario where he voluntarily had a car driven on to his abdomen. (Reischel, 2006). Simply put, the crush paraphilia can be thought of as an extreme version of a “foot fetish” where the individuals with the paraphilia derive sexual pleasure from watching the object of their desire crush a living creature to death.

Sexual Sadism

The desire to see animals crushed to death by the fetish object (foot or shoe) may be explained in terms of sexual sadism and masochism. Sexual sadism is where sexual gratification is achieved through the fantasy of harming a partner or as a consequence of directly subjecting the partner to pain and humiliation. Typically, sexual sadism involves a human partner. In the case of crush paraphilias the partner is an animal. The animals used for sadistic purposes range from insects to larger mammals such as dogs. Many crush

videos use small mammals such as mice, rats, puppies and kittens but regardless of the “victim,” the cause and purpose of the action appear to be the same.¹

Sexual Masochism

This is the feeling of sexual arousal or excitement resulting from receiving pain, suffering, or humiliation. The pain, suffering, or humiliation is real and not imagined and can be physical or psychological in nature. Many who are involved in crush paraphilias take sexual pleasure in being crushed, squashed, or being put under pressure. Masochists often suffer from personality disorders in which they are only able to experience feelings in the context of situations where they are hurt or in pain. These people need to surrender their needs and identity and experience extremely disturbing things to feel that they exist and to feel pleasure (Saretsky, 1976). Masochism in which a person receives sexual gratification from being crushed has been reported in academic literature, but such reports are uncommon (Shiwach & Prosser, 1998), perhaps due to a paucity of reporting of such cases. There are also reports of autoerotic asphyxiation due to chest compression, which may involve a masochistic component (O'Halloran, R., & Dietz, P., 1993). In terms of the crush paraphilia, it is possible that masochists identify with the animals being tortured and killed, actually seeing themselves as the animal being crushed, and these individuals obtain sexual gratification through this identification.

Discussion of Crush Paraphilias

Paraphilias and fetishes (which are often not well-differentiated in the psychological literature) have been described as far back as the turn of the last century as the association of something pleasurable (usually sexual) with some object other than a whole human.

¹ It should be noted that there is a well-established relationship between animal sadism and violent crime (Stone, 2007) and some studies suggest there is a mental association between animal sadism and severe abuse in childhood. Taken together, this points to animal sadism as an important warning sign of violent crime.

These early writers also noted the association of sexual gratification with pain (Binet, 2001; Krafft-Ebing, 1922). Freud associated fetishes with the fear produced by the castration anxiety of the Oedipal complex. In this conception using the fetish object for sexual gratification was safe (Freud, 1961/2001).

Sexual sadism is thought by Freudians to be a defense against the anxiety produced by an aggressor. The sexual sadist identifies with this aggressor which reduces the sadist's anxiety. Masochism on the other hand represents pain that has become associated with pleasure. This also has a defensive characteristic in that by accepting the pain that is given the individual may avoid worse pain. Freud also talked about masochism being sadism turned in upon itself; from being active to passive.

Most of the psychoanalytic explanations refer back to the original idea that paraphilias serve to ward off castration anxiety and this explanation would explain why most individuals who derive sexual gratification from paraphilias are men. While psychoanalysis does not have anything specific to say about crush paraphilias it would recognize the relationship of crush paraphilias to humiliation. As Susan Creede, a police investigator with the Ventura County District Attorney's Office, testified before the House Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary in 1999, (Creede, 1999), crush videos primarily appeal to men and are of most interest when the person doing the crushing is a woman.

Men with this type of masochistic fantasy have, through personal life experience, linked their sexual gratification with personal humiliation. Exhibitionism is an example of this process. Personal humiliation causes an unacceptable amount of pain and risk, so these individuals resort to watching the torture of animals, imagining what it would be like if they were the animal being tortured and/or squashed by a controlling, domineering, overbearing female partner. The ultimate sexual release occurs with death, but the benefit of

killing an animal is that the crush practitioners can return the next day for another opportunity to fulfill their sexual needs. Other explanations of the causes of paraphilias typically involve the association of pleasure with varying stimuli during childhood. These associations are reinforced and the person learns to experience sexual pleasure from the stimuli when they are older. This conditioning model has been verified in a series of studies done in the 1960s and 1970s (Marquis, 1970; Quinn, Harbison, & McAllister, 1970; Rachman, S., 1966, 1968). These researchers were interested in whether or not normal males could be conditioned to acquire a fetish. In one experiment, males were shown pictures of nude women while simultaneously viewing pictures of fur-lined boots. Penile plethysmography was used to measure the presence of arousal. After repeatedly seeing nude women with pictures of a variety of footwear, the men began to be aroused at the sight of the footwear alone.

With regard to crush videos this type of association may be seen in the foot that is doing the stomping. The act of stomping found in many crush videos typically features women's feet or shoes doing the stomping. The association of the foot with sexual pleasure may have pre-existed the sadomasochistic response to crushing animals, or the foot may have become eroticized by association with the abnormal sexual response to scenes of animal torture and killing. Both explanations are possible.²

The greater capacity for paraphilias in human males may be a byproduct of the successful evolutionary strategy whereby human females remain fertile throughout the

² Paraphilias can also be seen in primates, though not to the elaborate extent as in humans (Wilson, 1987). Epstein describes a chimpanzee that developed a foot fetish with a rubber boot. It is unknown how the fetish developed but the author speculates that the boot either became associated with the pleasure and food given by the caretaker or that the shiny color of the boot reminded the chimp of the genital display of a female chimp in heat (Epstein, 1987). As a recent *youtube.com* video graphically demonstrates, chimpanzees are quite capable of using different species of animals as a paraphilia (*Chimp Rapes a Frog*, 2010).

year instead of seasonally like most primates. For fertility in females to be useful, males also need a correspondingly greater interest in sex, i.e. a stronger sex drive. This obviously had survival value for our primate ancestors. However, access to primate females exists in the context of a male dominance hierarchy that may not allow all males easy sexual access to females. Therefore human males, like other primates, may have evolved the behavioral capacity to find substitute sexual outlets (Wilson, 1987).

Treatment

Typically, people who have a paraphilia do not seek treatment unless the paraphilia has resulted in legal consequences. Treatment modalities include psychodynamic psychotherapy, behavior therapies, cognitive behavioral treatment, pharmacological treatment, and relapse prevention. Paraphilias, especially the more egregious types such as pedophilia, are notoriously difficult, but not impossible, to treat with high rates of relapse (Marvasti, 2004; McKay, Abramowitz, & Taylor, 2009; Nathan & Gorman, 2002; Rowland & Incrocci, 2008). One of the problems with successfully treating individuals with paraphilias is that they have a high rate of co-morbid mental disorders (Leue, 2004). Treatment combining different modalities is thought to be more effective than single modality treatment (Guay, 2009). Given the rather more primitive nature of the crush paraphilia and its high level of social unacceptability, it is likely that most individuals involved with crush paraphilias will not seek treatment or even be willing to acknowledge that they engage in this activity. These characteristics would indicate that there would be a strong commercial market for crush videos that can be watched in secret.

Conclusion

An important implication supported by all of these theories of the origins of paraphilias is that humans have the capacity to develop paraphilias in a wide variety of ways. A basic drive, such as sexual gratification, can be conditioned to occur while feeling

humiliated or hurt. Adults, especially adult males, who have been so taught may also realize that subjecting others to pain is dangerous and socially reprehensible, so animals become the “safe” objects who, when tortured, give these men sexual gratification. Men who are unwilling to torture and kill the animals, or who want to hide their crush activities from society and others close to them, can obtain similar gratification by watching crush videos.

Certain human males have the capacity to learn to become sexually aroused by watching crush videos. In these videos the torture and killing of animals becomes associated with something males normally find sexually arousing, such as a beautiful woman. The treatment prognosis for those involved in crush videos is very poor. Treatment is not likely to prevent the acquisition of a crush paraphilia, curb the current practice of this paraphilia, or prevent a relapse. Given the above characteristics associated with crush paraphilias, I believe that a prohibition on the sale of crush videos is one of the few ways in which the practice and enjoyment of crush paraphilias can be reduced.

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