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FANTASY, FUSION, AND SEXUAL HOMICIDE*

Abstract: This paper presents an analysis of the confessions of two men who kidnapped, raped, killed, and mutilated a young woman (though not necessarily in that order). Following their initial denials of involvement, both men provided lengthy iterations of the crime, although, as you will see, their recollections of what occurred—or at least their recounting of events for the police—differ somewhat dramatically from one another. In addition to mining these narratives for clues about the dissociative structure of perpetrators' interiority and actions, I have attempted to find within the stories information relevant to the most widely disseminated theory in the forensic and criminological literature as regards the antecedents of sexual homicide, namely that it is the overreliance on sexualized, aggressive fantasies that undergirds these fatal interactions (Burgess et al., 1986; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1992; Prentky et al., 1989; Meloy, 2000; Schlesinger, 2000). While so many in the forensic field have concentrated on the criminogenic power of the paraphillic fantasy to transform dreamers into deviant actors, this analysis suggests that it is the formative power of deviantized, preoedipal object relations, and the ensuing reliance on dissociative defenses (including quasi-delusional fantasies), that determines who crosses the line from fantasy into action.

Keywords: aggression, violence, murder, homicide, rape, fantasy, dissociation

I LIVE in a room filled with violent narratives. Law enforcement ships us cases; we analyze them. The literature that informs the analyses is most often concerned with patterns and motives, modus operandi and criminal signatures, the organization or disorganization of crime scenes and those who create them. The analyses work toward the identification of variables that can inform a predictive model of violent perpetration (fire-setting plus enuresis plus cruelty toward animals equals . . .), or that will at least tell you the best places to look for suspects (Veteran's hospi-

* The names of the perpetrators and the victim, as well as other identifying information deemed insignificant to the analysis of this case, have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the subjects.

tal? Post office? Their mothers' houses?) once the victims' bodies are bagged.

I don't know the victims personally, although I am intimate with the ligature scars that circle their necks, the precise way their nipples were excised, and the exact amount of blood that soaked the carpet where they were stabbed. I don't personally know these perpetrators whose eyes watch from colorless mug shots, although I've talked to scores of others. I know them only through the gruesome photos of their handiwork and the spontaneous or elicited confessions they offer to law-enforcement officers and court-appointed psychiatrists.

The murderers' disembodied words testify to the vitality of their fantasies and the clumsiness of their cognitions, their presyntactic *modus operandi*, their massive mismanagement of accounts and accountability. These words, and what is captured by the coroner's camera and the medical examiner's report, are as close to an accurate history as I'll get. It is my conduit to the fixing of events in time, and my way of inferring meaning and agency from perpetrators whose own "capacity for historicity" (Grand, 2000, p. 18) may have been functionally erased.

Much of the forensic literature has concentrated on the paraphillic fantasy as a dry run for solitary rape-murder and serial sexual homicide (Burgess et al., 1986; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1992; Prentky et al., 1989; Meloy, 2000; Schlesinger, 2000). Despite an overwhelming agreement among these authors that a preoccupation with sadistic or controlling sexual fantasies potentiates murder, only a few forensic clinicians (Lewis, 1998; Carlisle, 2000; Meloy, 1997) have written about these ultimately realized fantasies as having been nurtured in the cradle of dissociated trauma. Meanwhile, the psychoanalytic literature has theoretically demonstrated a compelling link between dissociated trauma and some forms of sexual perpetration (Grand, 2000).

Former FBI profiler Robert Ressler and his colleagues (1992), largely responsible for the theoretical views that prevail in the forensic literature, strongly reject the idea that sexual violence is primarily rooted in childhood trauma, but rather believe that it stems from an overreliance on sexual and aggressive fantasies developed in response to various threats, only some of which may involve child maltreatment. The fantasies supposedly constitute a cognitive rehearsal for sexual murder, but, the theory goes, because repetition erodes the fantasies' masturbatory power over time, the individual begins to seek out opportunities to act upon them. Sexual homicide, thus conceived, is an event largely driven by

improperly regulated cognition, particularly if regulatory mechanisms are attenuated by environmental stresses (Ressler et al., 1992, p.34; Burgess et al., 1986, p. 265). The idea that trauma has little of importance to do with aggressive sexual fantasies and enactments is proffered by Ressler and his colleagues, despite the fact that in their own study of thirty-six sexual murderers, *every single subject* had been severely maltreated or neglected in childhood, and not withstanding a separate study by their collaborator, Ann Burgess, in which she proposed a link between sexual abuse and sexual offending through the “cognitive operation” of “trauma learning” (Burgess et al., 1987, p. 1436). In this information-processing model, dissociation is conceptualized as the “encapsulation” of traumatic events, a definition that flirts with, but does not embrace, the full spectrum and weight of psychopathology entailed by severe dissociation.

In a more psychodynamic vein, Schlesinger (2001), an experienced forensic clinician, highlights both childhood maltreatment and eroticized maternal relationships by placing them at the top of his list of “ominous signs” dotting the road to sexual predation. Yet he concludes that what differentiates those who act upon murderous sexual fantasies from those who do not is very likely “a drive to act out in order to relieve the inner discomforting feelings” produced by selected fantasies (p. 56). He notes that “the fantasy grows out of sexual sadism” but does not acknowledge the contribution of dissociated trauma to the development of either the fantasy’s content or its extraordinary power to compel behavior. In fact, although conceding that gynocide for some killers is likely displaced matricide, Schlesinger adamantly rejects dissociation as the mechanism through which that sexual aggression is transjected, insisting that the offender “knows exactly what he is doing [and] can control his actions to a large extent.” He reiterates Krafft-Ebing’s astute observations about the driven quality of sexual murder as support for a compulsion theory of homicide: “[We] have concluded that those individuals who act out their sadistic fantasies do so because of a compulsion to act out.” (Schlesinger, 2000, pp. 10–13). Unfortunately, by reducing the stimulus for sexual homicide merely to an overwhelming, conscious urge to act out fantasies, he does not elucidate the roots of sadistic behaviors much differently than *Psychopathia Sexualis* did over a century ago, when Krafft-Ebing (1886) wrote

What [the sadistic criminal] feels is, as a rule, only the impulse to cruel and violent treatment of the opposite sex, and the coloring of the idea of such

acts with lustful feelings. Thus arises a powerful impulse to commit the imagined deeds. [p. 57]

Contrast all of this with the view that murder is not an event, but a step in a very long, sometimes covert, internal process, which begins in childhood and continues even after the homicide is committed (Gilligan, 1996, p. 125). The latter position acknowledges the resonant power of distal events, both in shaping proximate intrapsychic content and in drafting particular fantasized elaborations into active defensive service when other contextual cues for criminality are present. Inasmuch as fantasies of sexual control and surrender through physical force are incredibly common in the general, nonoffending population (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995), and because sexual offenders fantasize about and engage in consensual sex at least as often as they seek out coercive sexual encounters (Marshall & Marshall, 2000), it seems equally if not more important to focus on factors that may blur the fantasy-reality line for certain individuals, as to deconstruct the fantasies themselves.

I have written before about the dissociative context in which many violent enactments occur (Stein, 2000, 2001, 2003). I have joined such writers as Grand (2000), Lewis and her colleagues (1991, 1997), Meloy (1988), and Steinberg and Schnall (2000) in the opinion that dissociation is the default defensive position of the perpetrator, its probable genesis the realization and subsequent elaboration of annihilative-reconstructive fantasies during terrifying scenes of actual abuse and neglect in childhood (Stein, 2001, 2003). I have had trouble, however, in conjuring criminogenic traumata as going from wholly submerged, to fully realized and projected, to totally resubmerged, as the violence of dissociative offenders is sometimes characterized (Saks, 1997). Rather, my analyses of the narratives of violent criminals have underscored the delicate way in which conscious and unconscious forces parry each other for dominance in pre-, peri- and postcrime mentation. Thus, I remain attuned to the conscious component(s) of criminal thought and activity, and perceptive to the faint outlines of volatile selves that lurk in the corners of conscious awareness (Lifton, 1986; Rank, 1971).

Traditionally, forensic clinicians and criminal profilers have borrowed the paradigms of cognitive-behavioral psychology, working from a set of assumptions that see human behavior as largely conscious and rational, and fantasy materials as goal-oriented, hedonic visualizations. Psychoanalysts have concentrated on unconscious motivations for behavior and

the more symbolic modes through which needs and desires may be expressed, including in the creation and distribution of imagery in daydreams, night dreams, delusions, and ruminations, as well as more specifically sexual fantasies.

In understanding the role of fantasy in acts of criminal violence, it is my hope to demonstrate the utility of shouting politely across the theoretical divide. Unconsciousness is a leaky boat on the waters of consciousness; nowhere is the concept of “know(ing) *more* than one thinks he knows” (Ogden, 1989, p. 197, italics mine) more pertinent than in the analysis of human predation. Conversely, it is particularly important for the individual perversely conjoined with a sexual object to maintain a state of dumbness because, to paraphrase Stoller (1985, p. 34), “Insight is the death of (sexual) excitement.” The insight to which Stoller refers is the knowledge that the actual aim of what he calls “erotic hostility” is to undo humiliating, painful childhood traumas that threatened the development of core identity (1985, 1986). The perverse sexual fantasies and performances that develop in response to the annihilating behavior of early caretakers are as much a barricade against anxiety and ego dissolution (Socarides, 1973) as they are a behavioral response to the stimulating aspects of mental and physical pain (Freud, 1919). The incipient fantasies, and their adult corollaries, are as much symbiotic as they are sexual. Violent sexual daydreams embrace without intimacy, risk engulfment (this supplies the excitement), evoke terror, and justify retaliatory violence. Given the nuclear power of the experiences from which such fevered dreams are derived, is it any wonder that some people cannot resist the temptation to symbolically revisit the scene of the original crime?

How sexual murderers use their fantasies, and how the fantasies use them, is the subject of this analysis.

The Murder of Kim Standard

[We] brutalized, traumatized, raped, and strangled her with a piece of rope. [She] was convulsing and losing her bladder, then [we] disposed of her like so much garbage in a lake.

(From the confession of Alan Plethory)

I was invited to a friend's house. He pulled a knife on a gal. At that point everything went downhill. We ended up killing her. Why, I wish I knew, but we did, and I cannot change that.

(From the confession of Dave Justus)

Alan Plethory was an acquaintance of the victim, Kim Standard, that day they met in a bar where he made occasional repairs. He offered Standard a ride and the two, according to Plethory, proceeded to the house he shared with his wife, who was at work. Once home, he called his close buddy, Dave Justus, asking that he come over with a six-pack of beer. (The two men had met in prison, where they were both serving time for sexual offenses. Later in their relationship, Dave had sex with Alan's wife, in her husband's presence.) The three drank for a considerable time and chatted amiably; Alan insists they spoke about group sex. At some point, Alan became concerned that his wife would return from work and not take kindly to an alien female presence in her house. Dave, too, was becoming anxious: he was scheduled to retrieve his child from day care.

Plethory later said that they decided to kidnap the girl because she refused to have sex with them. The men subdued Standard, undressed her, tied her hands and feet with rope and duct-taped her mouth, then put her in the trunk of Justus's car and drove off. When she managed to untie her hands and pop the trunk they restrained her and drove instead to an isolated area. Plethory said he then watched Justus rape and strangle Standard, but denied his own participation, other than in dumping the body. Justus initially denied, but later admitted, the rape-murder, saying that together he and Plethory had strangled Kim with a rope and disposed of the body.

The young, divorced mother's decomposed body was found in a nearby lake, a circle of plasticized duct tape around her neck. There were wounds to Kim's hands and one breast, sharp perforations of her pelvis; her abdomen had been eviscerated. Blunt force injuries ringed the upper body; her tongue had been severely lacerated. Kim Standard had been horrifically sexually violated, although neither assailant had penetrated her vaginally with their penises.

Were the men compulsively reenacting a traumatic sexual engagement from their own pasts? Little is known about Alan's childhood, but interviews with Dave's friends and family supply some provocative material. Justus's mother once told a friend that Dave always "licked the plate clean," a reference to his preference for cunnilingus, not his childhood eating habits. Justus's father sometimes tried to have sex with his son's friend's girlfriends, the house was filled with pornography, the parents sexually inappropriate in front of the children, and Dave was apparently introduced to sexual bondage techniques by his older brother. He wrote

and shared his sexual fantasies—including having sex with a girl who had not yet developed pubic hair—with a married woman with whom he had an affair after his wife left him. His wife said that he liked rough sex, once putting a large knife to her throat during foreplay. Other sexual partners found him excessively brutal and disgustingly unclean. He took nude pictures of many of the women with whom he had consensual sex.

Lear (2000, p. 89) suggests that rather than seeing these repetitive engagements as driven (in the Freudian sense), they should be seen as “dramatic instances of mental self-disruption that are met with a repetitively failed attempt to lend meaning” to an event. Thus, violent sexuality may not only be an attempt to extinguish, or master, a timelessly recurring trauma (Shengold, 1999; Herman, 1992), but also an attempt to find the logic of one’s own catabolism through the destruction of others. We don’t know if Justus and Plethory were sexually assaulted in childhood, but we can surmise that, at least in Justus’s case, the sexual atmosphere in the home was deviant and, on some level, threatening to a young child, who likely responded by selectively attending to such overwhelming and invasive sexual stimuli.

The killers were apprehended attempting to flee the country. During interrogation, Alan offered scant information, most of it denying, or justifying, aspects of the crime. Dave, clearly shaken, provided a more detailed account of what happened that day. Yet both men’s narration of events are retrieved from a place so stark and dreamlike the stories seem, at times, more fanciful than real. In particular, the dissociated quality of Dave Justus’s interaction with his victim appears stunning in its claustrophobic symbiosis. Where Alan projects, Dave adheres. Where Alan mentally flees, Dave virtually disappears.

The Justus-Plethory Narratives

He and Kim were just talking when, Justus says, Alan Plethory emerged from the kitchen holding a butcher knife with a foot-long blade. He put the knife to Kim’s throat and said, “This is a rape.” According to Justus, she laughed and pushed Alan’s hand away. Although there was no audible communication between the men, Justus says that he sensed that something was about to happen. Simply, somehow, Justus “found” himself undressing her. “She lifted up to help me take her pants off. She got down on the floor and said ‘if you’re going to rape me, let’s go out to the woods,’ because she likes it there. Alan tossed me the rope and

some duct tape. She let me tie her hands, but said that the rope around her ankles hurt, so I brought her some socks to put on.” She was hog-tied and put in the trunk of the car. “I said, ‘Now what?’ and Alan said ‘Let’s take her to your place.’”

Adhesion

Justus’s communication is quite magical: his fancied communion with the victim and his wordless implementation of Plethory’s wishes is remarkably seamless for what was, in essence, a very sloppily executed crime. In his story, the victim laughs (“Yes, I found that puzzling. We both did.”) and even dictates the location where she will be violated. She assists in the stripping of her clothes, and only tangentially objects to the roughness of the rope tying her ankles, whereupon Justus immediately cushions her feet. All agency seemingly redounds to the acquiescing Standard and the knife-wielding Plethory who, in concert, create the parameters for the rape. Justus “only” binds the victim, but is himself unbounded, already affectively leaking and leeching. It is as if Justus sees himself and Standard as working toward similar ends: she is pictured over and over as a cooperating—even giddy—partner in the assault. Justus, in the protective act of bringing her socks, engages in a magical reparation: untying and psychologically undoing. The retying now softened so that it is no longer experienced as an authentic binding, the sadistic act is experienced as *not really real* (Grand, 2000). In this, Justus rewrites himself as a helper rather than a perpetrator.

The selective attention that served him in childhood is in abundant supply here. By not owning aspects of his own behavior (he simply *finds* himself in an abduction scene, directed by his friend), and by disavowing the victim’s fear (she *laughs* at butcher knives, she *prefers* to be raped in the woods), he spins a tale where the victim has no claim to innocence, while he is already not guilty of a crime he has yet to commit.

Because, in this kind of adhesive state (Ogden, 1989; Mitrani, 1994), there is no sense of self as distinct from other, one cannot be the knowing agent of either active perpetration or active resistance. Instead, there is an imagined intimacy with the victim, Justus anticipating her comfort needs as Kim has anticipated his need to remove her garments. But the gratification of closeness will ultimately turn to the terror of engulfment (Socarides, 1973) that activates the murder. Whereas perceived separateness and felt agency might precipitate a view of one’s objects as three-

dimensional and capable of being hurt (Ogden, 1989), here there is only a delusional transference that magnifies annihilation anxiety, and a reactive omnipotence that exacerbates sadistic retaliation (Meloy, 1997).

Such pseudoidentifications as appear here between Justus and Standard reflect the need to devour and incorporate—a fanatized symbiotic fusion most likely constructed in the absence of a need-gratifying object during the earliest stages of separation-individuation (Mahler, 1968; Socarides, 1973; Meltzer, 1975; Mitrani, 1994; Meloy, 1997). As the most autistic-symbiotic aspects of the fantasy unfold in horrifying detail during the actual rape-murder-mutilation, Justus will be confronted with the terrifying, destructive magic of his own fantasies.

Justus is simultaneously engaged in an analogous identificatory process with his co-perpetrator. The communication between Plethory and Justus is wordless and seamless, and one senses that there are not even illusory boundaries between them. Justus's experience of Plethory's directives to truss and gag the victim unspool almost telepathically in this improvised—and impoverished—pathodrama. An autistic interface is effected, where objects are related to one another through what Ogden (1989) calls "rhythmicity and sequencing," where experiences of "me-not me" and "inside-outside" don't exist.

Plethory is inside of Justus, dictating his actions, while Justus is also an appendage of Plethory, making the necessary arrangements for Standard's rape-murder. Although not tacitly acknowledged, the homosexual overtones of their relationship (it appears that much of their sex lives involved sharing fantasies and then finding women who would agree to have sex with the two of them simultaneously) suggest an impairment in the development of masculine identification (Stoller, 1986), perhaps harkening back to an unsuccessful separation from the mother that is later compounded by castration anxiety during the oedipal phase (Socarides, 1973). If the inappropriate sexuality of the parents documented in Justus's life history is true, it is easy to understand the parental threat posed to the subject throughout his development.

Justus's adhesive orientation, coupled with his questionable gender identification, makes him especially vulnerable to seeking resonance with powerful male objects like Plethory. In the dynamic of sexual aggression, Justus follows Plethory's initiatives. As Meltzer (1975, p. 297) has said in explicating Bick's autistic patients, this type of person bases his morality not on introjected objects that are precursors to superego, but on the imitation of others. It is not an uncommon trait in certain

criminals to transmute in this way, to easily take on the form of the other. Such simulative ease points to a kind of “dissociative flexibility” (Meloy, 1997, p. 143) and finds its most toxic home in the goodness of fit between two potentially violent psychopaths.

Projection

Unlike Dave’s portrait of a submissive, even willing victim, Alan remembers Kim Standard as being boisterous and belligerent in the living room, obnoxious and excessively noisy: “I started getting paranoid because she was loud. She started saying that she was gonna yell rape. No one had touched her. We were seated fully clothed. We told her we were gonna tie her up and cover her face and she started to shut up a little more.” Was there a conversation between he and Dave? “It was more than just a look ‘cause we both . . . because of our backgrounds, the threat of someone crying rape . . . is pretty hard on a guy.” She was bound. Gagged. They put her in the trunk, although she very nearly escaped. They drove to an out-of-the-way park.

Plethory seems to have had a much more conscious antagonism toward the victim than did Justus: she posed a real peril as well as a fanciful, projected one. I imagine that her initial response to Plethory’s rape warning (if, indeed, she did “laugh”) was excruciatingly dismissive, and diminishing. Standard must have seemed a potent, castrating witch with the power to send Alan back to jail, a threat to be neutralized at any cost. The terror of returning to jail cannot be underestimated, given the almost daily diet of assaults, rapes, robberies, and more symbolic castrations (Gilligan, 1996) to which inmates are subjected. In response, Plethory proceeds to make Standard into “a controllable puppet” (Searles, 1960, p. 278), a hogtied symbol of all of the dangerously unpredictable earlier objects he feared would dismember or dismantle him, and a stand-in for a previous victim whose testimony had sent Plethory to prison.

Perverse people deal with their partners as if the others were not real people but rather puppets to be manipulated on the stage where the perversion is played. In the perverse act, one endlessly relives the traumatic or frustrating situation that started the process, but now the outcome is marvelous, not awful, for not only does one escape the threat, but finally immense sensual gratification is attached to the consummation. The whole story, precisely constructed by each person to fit exactly his own painful

experiences, lies hidden but available for study in the sexual fantasy of the perversion. [Stoller, 1976, p. 105]

Fusion

According to Justus, she emerged from the car trunk asking for beer and a cigarette. She wanted to know what was going to happen. Alan tied her up again and put her back in the trunk and continued driving. The two men never spoke of what they were doing. When they arrived at the new location, they removed Standard from the car and carried her to a more densely wooded area. Dave said that Kim requested something to lie on. He says that she then asked to be held: "I sat down next to her and she put her head on my shoulder. Alan went and got a floor mat from the car. Someone said 'Now what?'" At this point, Dave says that Alan tried to penetrate the victim with his fist. "And I tried, too, because Alan wanted me to. She never said anything or cried." Then Alan found an old can, which he partially inserted into Kim's vagina. Justus found this strange and instead flipped her over and tried, unsuccessfully, to commit anal rape. When the investigator expressed surprise that the victim never screamed, whimpered, or cried during what must have been a very painful sexual assault, Dave ventured, amazingly, that "maybe she'd done it before."

The comment that "maybe she'd done it before" (referring to the vaginal penetration by fist and inanimate object, and the anal rape) is one of the more stunning pieces of criminal commentary I have come across. (It is reminiscent of the time a middle-aged man described to me how his four-year-old stepdaughter had seduced him.) Clearly, on a cognitive level, the words dovetail with observations that rapists tend to view their victims as sexually experienced and willing, sometimes even aggressively provocative (Marshall & Marshall, 2000). But I find both the violative acts and the narration that selectively attends them suggestive of a level of fantasy more symbiotic than sexual.

It is a not uncommon feature of serial rape and sexual homicide to force large objects, including inanimate ones, into the victim's vagina. This activity has mostly been examined for its sadistic dimensions relative to a variety of behaviors coded on a "torture" axis in the criminal-profiling literature (Dietz, Hazelwood & Werren; 1990; Stone, 1998). Few have noted the almost childlike—even innocent—fascination with the proportions of the womb that is reflected in these acts, although Meloy (2000,

p. 2) does refer to the “curiosity” that often symbolically infuses certain aspects of sexual crimes, particularly genital mutilation (also a component of the Standard murder).

Plethory especially is concerned with how much, how many objects are needed to fill up a female container (his prior conviction was for raping a waitress with a bottle). In addition to the almost certain sense one gets that Plethory and Justus didn’t imagine their own penises to be sufficient for the task of filling a female (neither attempted penile penetration of Standard’s vagina), the act seems a perverse attempt to create a missing birth tale.

The perpetrator’s obsession with filling the womb is somehow synonymous with crawling back inside it, and enacts a fantasy of symbiotic fusion. In this context, it is no accident that perpetrators most often attempt to fill the victim with varied detritus, having the vagina and uterus double as a garbage can. For the perpetrator it’s a redux of the old adage: garbage in, garbage out.

Theoretically, a “good” mother gifts the birth narrative to her child, satiating his phenomenal hunger with a monotonous retelling of how he got here (only she witnessed the birth, after all—he has no recoverable memory of it). In doing so, she confirms the child’s existence as well as her pleasure in it. A bad or absent mother never validates the child’s aliveness in any meaningful way. Through traumatic imposition, the abusing or abandoning mother may actually assist in the perceived *undoing* of birth. Searles’s (1960) proposed stages of ego development have relevance to Plethory’s inanimate extension of himself with the foraged can:

- (1) experiencing oneself as being *alive*, and therefore distinct from the inanimate things in the environment; (2) awareness of oneself as not only alive but *human*, and therefore distinct from the animate sector of the non-human environment (i.e., animals and plants); and (3) awareness of oneself as a living human individual, distinct from other human beings, including one’s mother. [1960, pp. 43–44]

Plethory and Justus must get back inside to stem the tide of existential panic. But then they must pay the “consequences of retreating inside the maternal body” (Socarides, 1975, p. 434): the dreaded, irreversible loss of self. In this claustrophobic moment, only the destruction of the maternal symbol can reinstate separateness and restore homeostasis.

Dissociation

Maybe she'd done it before. Of course, it was Dave Justus and Alan Plethory who had “done it before.” Alan, as noted, had already served time for a bizarre, brutal rape. Dave had abducted and sexually assaulted an adolescent girl at gunpoint with his friends. His wife had left him after charging that he had sexually abused their infant child.

Alan says that he walked back to the car to get the mat because he thought that Dave was “going to have sex with her and I didn’t want to be there.” He “stared off into space” but at some point turned and saw Dave Justus having sex with Kim, with her on her belly. “I continued spacing out.” When Alan eventually returned to the scene, both physically and mentally, Dave was kneeling beside the victim. She appeared dead. “I don’t want to say [what I saw].” He helped carry the body back to the car. “I did not see one drop of blood anywhere. I didn’t. I swear I do not see blood.”

In Dave Justus’s version of events, when the rape ended, it was Alan who picked up her head and put a rope around her neck. He handed one end to Dave and they both pulled. No words were exchanged.

“She didn’t make a noise. She didn’t move.”

“How long did you do it?”

“I didn’t know. Time just seemed to take forever.” She didn’t struggle. She convulsed.

“Everything seemed to take forever and then, too, it didn’t take very long either. She convulsed and lost control of her bladder.” Dave tried to find the pulse on her neck, and then Alan untied her hands. They drove to a convenience store, to purchase soda and candy, with Kim Standard’s body in the trunk. Dave called his wife to say that he wouldn’t be able to pick up their child from daycare, after all.

Afterwards

Justus and Plethory headed out to a river to dispose of the body, but the car got stuck within sight of the shoreline and Justus went to get help. He walked to town—a considerable distance—and flagged down a police officer, who helped him to make assistance calls.

It is not uncommon for criminals to tempt capture in this way. Is this a guilty conscience lacing its own trap (Freud, 1916)? or merely diagnostic evidence of a grand and brazen psychopathy (Millon, Simonsen, Birket-

Smith & Davis, 1998) that convinces its host of his own invulnerability? Is it, perhaps, that Justus can ask an officer for help—unencumbered by any real fear of arrest—because the memory of the murder has been successfully converted to a kind of unreality, a conscious unconsciousness that many violent offenders articulate as “waking dreams” (Stein, 2003).

“I kept walking, kept expecting her to walk out on the pavement anytime. Kind of stupid, huh?” The investigator asked if Justus thought that Standard was going to come after him. He admits, “I wouldn’t blame her.”

When Dave returned to the beach, Alan Plethory had already disposed of the body. Most of the victim’s personal things were discarded, although Justus retained Kim’s running shoes, as well as a soiled piece of her clothing, perhaps a memento to aid him in reliving the crime, perhaps a trophy to signify his triumph over this threatening object.

Although her pelvic and abdominal region had been gutted, both men denied knowing the origin of Standard’s wounds. Justus conjectured that Plethory had mutilated the body in the hours when Justus had sought help for their disabled automobile. Plethory claimed not to have seen any wounds. “I don’t know of any damage. It frightens me ‘cause I don’t. I don’t remember anything like that. I don’t want to picture it. I do not remember seeing a single drop of blood anywhere. It’s scary to think. I . . . I can’t picture Dave doing anything . . . I don’t want . . .” (At this point the investigator reminds Alan of the other horrible things he has seen Dave Justus do.) “Everything I saw . . . I told you . . . I swear I did not see any blood. I know I did not see any blood.”

Plethory and Justus have each accused the other of the pelvic evisceration of Kim Standard, and the forensic evidence cannot decisively assign blame. Interestingly, it is in discussions of mutilation that criminal profilers do accept the gravity of sexual trauma histories, finding that “undisclosed and unresolved early sexual abuse may be a contributing factor in the stimulation of bizarre, sexual, sadistic behavior characterized in a subclassification of mutilators” (Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, Douglas & McCormack, 1986).

Indeed. The ritual components of a sexual mutilation conceivably constitute a scream for purification in the face of one’s own perceived defilement at the hands of early caretakers.

[the] exemption from defilement is not produced in any total and direct action, it is always signified in partial, substitutive, and abbreviated signs:

burning, removing, spitting out, covering up, burying. Each of these acts marks out a ceremonial space, within which none of them exhausts its significance in an immediate and, so to speak, literal usefulness. They are acts which stand for a total action addressed to a person taken as an undivided whole. Hence, defilement, insofar as it is the "object" of ritual suppression, is itself a symbol of evil. [Ricoeur, 1967, p. 35]

Discussion

The fantasies of the perpetrators in this paper have been inferred through an analysis of their words and deeds. I remind the reader that I have never met Plethory and Justus. Of course, even in cases where a direct assessment of subjects' fantasies can be made, there is little guarantee of the veracity of the information given. The reports of deviant fantasies given by offenders following arrest are particularly questionable, given the secondary gain to be realized by defendants whose accounts appear bizarre, disorganized, or psychotic.

Often forensic clinicians are left to draw conclusions about the use of fantasy from projective tools like the Rorschach, or must rely on penile plethysmograph data to ascertain the connection between thought and arousal in perpetrators (Meloy, 2000). But even if we find that sexual offenders are aroused by so-called deviant material, or resort to it with greater frequency than do "normals" (neither of which has been even close to conclusively documented), that still tells us little about why certain men or women—unlike others with similar fantasies—end up acting out the most violent and perverse aspects of their inner dramas.

Most motivational models of violent sexual perpetration have posited that a number of conditions tend to adhere for active offenders. These include poor social circumstances, psychopathic personality, autonomic dysregulation, cognitive dysfunction, a history of abuse, and deviant arousal patterns. Of these, particular emphasis has been placed on the role of paraphilic fantasy, consciously modeled, as a cognitive rehearsal for violent sexual crime. Here is what the most eminent of criminological theorists say:

Whereas psychological motives for violent behavior are usually conceptualized in the literature as having roots beginning with trauma, insult, and/or overstimulation in early childhood, our thesis is different. We hypothesize that these men are motivated to murder by their way of thinking.

Murderers are consciously aware of the central role of fantasy in their lives and their preference for fantasy over reality. . . . Such thinking becomes an important component in the maintenance of sexually aggressive violent behavior. [Burgess et al., 1986, pp. 257–258]

Indeed, over the years, a virtual cottage industry has arisen among cognitive behaviorists who treat the fantasies of deviants as the independent variable in the equation, attempting through aversive techniques to change the fantasies, and hence, the dependent variable of behavior. The long-term effectiveness of these interventions has not been clearly demonstrated (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).

Psychoanalysts, on the other hand, have most often treated paraphillic fantasy as an effect, rather than a cause, of conduct. Some, however, have taken an intermediate position, seeing fantasy as both a derivative and a determinant of behavior (for a review of both the behavioral and psychoanalytic literature, see Abel & Blanchard, 1974). This latter position seems the most fruitful avenue of discovery on the subject.

Robert Stoller (1985, 1986), a prolific writer on the topic, believes that the wish to harm may be the organizing factor for *all* sexual excitement.

the details of the script underlying [sexual] excitement are meant to reproduce and repair the precise traumas and frustrations—debasements—of childhood; and so we can expect to find hidden in the script the history of the person's psychic life. [1986, p. 13]

The hostility in perversion takes form in a fantasy of revenge hidden in the actions that make up the perversion and serves to convert childhood trauma to adult triumph. [1985, p. 8]

Expanding the Freudian perspective, which dictates that *all* people have suffered and repressed trauma (and thus possess the raw material for perversion), Stoller hypothesizes that the character of paraphillic fantasy stems, “not from some generalized state of Oedipal alarm,” but from the fact that “in childhood, one was *truly* threatened with a danger to one's sexuality This trauma was very severe . . . it was prolonged too far, or else hit too suddenly, *or when one was too young for adequate defense* (Stoller, 1976, pp. 118–119, italics mine).

Not all traumas are created equal. Preoedipal annihilation fears that are realized rather than simply imagined, because the caregiver brutally abuses or chronically neglects, form the basis for a dissociative adapta-

tion that exponentially magnifies the destructive power of ensuing elaborations. Stoller believes, as do I, that it is in the very potency (and early timing) of the experience igniting the perverse and vengeful fantasy that the propensity for violent enactment can be found.

A very high percentage of violent offenders have horrific histories of maltreatment at caretakers' hands, and there is clinical evidence suggesting that much of this early trauma has been dissociated (Stein, 2001, 2003; Lewis, 1991, 1997, 1998; Saks, 1997). The manner in which early, prelinguistic experiences of defilement become embellished and internalized should be of great interest to forensic clinicians, precisely because the experiences so often find their ultimate representation in the graphic "reproduction of evil," to borrow an evocative phrase from analyst Sue Grand (2000).

In my work with offenders of all stripes, I have found this to be largely true—that violent thoughts and deeds are primarily a reparative response to the enduring trauma of perceived annihilation in early childhood, whether trauma took predominantly sexual or physical forms (Stein, 2001, 2003). Often, even the purely physical violence that gets expressed in crimes has symbolic sexual components (see Schlesinger & Revitch, 1997 for a review of findings in this area), just as a good deal of sexual perpetration conveys conflicts not directly sexual. As J. L. Silverstein (1994) has observed, the aggressive daydream is essentially a way of reasserting one's power in relationship to exceptionally oppressive, or sadistic, parents. Sexually aggressive fantasies especially, because they signify union, express both the terror of separation from, and the terror of engulfment by, early objects who have set up a suffocating entanglement with the child. The more legitimately terrifying the actual interactions were on which the fantasies are based, the greater the likelihood that a terror-inspiring resolution will be attempted. The abduction and rape of Kim Standard demonstrated the perpetrators' need for symbiotic fusion. Her murder and mutilation communicated the need to sever those same haunting ties.

Conclusion

As spotted with dissociative amnesia as their accounts are, Plethory and Justus's crime is not easily reconstructed. But the dissociative structure of their narratives is revealing. The narratives suggest that, in elaborating the stimulation of initially dissociated traumata, a powerless child

can generate a compartmentalized dream of sufficiency, which gives him or her a way of staying intact. Carlisle (2000), commenting on the inner lives of serial killers, writes:

Intensely painful memories and deep emptiness can lead to intensely experienced fantasies, which over time take on a greater and greater degree of reality. When a person is totally absorbed in a fantasy, he dissociates everything around him.

Over time, the person may turn to this pseudo-existence with increasing frequency when he feels stress, depression, or emptiness. This leads to a dual identity, one . . . associated with reality . . . and the other the secret identity in which he is able to manifest the power and control he would like over others. [p. 109]

Interestingly, although Ressler and his colleagues (1986) strongly opine that “men murder because of the way they *think*” (p. 272, italics mine), even they admit that cognitive content may be structured by early trauma. In fact, belying their own argument that it is primarily the conscious dedication to fantasized themes (and not experiences of child abuse, neglect, or trauma) that allows offenders to perform and retrospectively justify rape and murder, their own article is heavy with examples of the horrific traumas suffered by their subjects in early childhood. Indeed, Ressler and his colleagues do not mention any examples of subjects who engaged in sadistic sexualized fantasies who were *not* traumatized in childhood. Even worthier of mention, they repeatedly cite examples given by subjects that detail the peculiar excessiveness and intensity of their own daydreams, even during preadolescence.

Hence it seems that it is not only the content of the fantasy, but the constant resort to deep reverie in times of stress, that indicates psychopathology, probably of a dissociative nature. Inside the sexual imagination, both agency and identity blur (Malone, 1996), making dissociative fantasy the logical retreat for individuals whose boundaries are eternally compromised. In the case of Plethory and Justus, the crime committed, as well as the fantasies that partially engendered it, as well as the trauma(s) being elaborated in its service, are all intermittently dissociated. Thus, the acts of rape and murder *are* practiced, but not in the logical, goal-oriented manner alluded to by forensic clinicians and criminal profilers. I quote (1953) Sullivan at length.

When we see a person moving through life with a striking type of selective inattention, like the boy who everyday had sadistic fantasies . . . we are justified in assuming something like this: that if we had a full record of this boy's sadistic fantasies, day by day, we would see in this record certain continued stories, certain elaborations, and so on, which would literally represent a development of the skill, detail and refinement of his sadistic fantasies. There would be a growth in refinement and increased specificity of the impulse to injure innocent bystanders So we have to assume that such things as dissociation—which go on quite suavely, but entirely exterior to the personal awareness of the creature that is showing them—also become elaborated and refined. Thus what may start out as a rather clumsy dissociated activity may finally become a performance which is strikingly and exquisitely refined—in the sense of showing a vast amount of experience—even though the person is blissfully unaware of it. [pp. 69–70]

The criminal profilers are largely correct about the uses of fantasy, although they may be italicizing the wrong words. It isn't the overreliance on *deviant fantasies*, but the *overreliance* on deviant fantasies that should sound the first warning bell, because it signals an inability to negotiate lived experiences of closeness and threat. Second, rather than viewing the fantasies themselves as totally volitional visualizations, I would recognize that imaginative material also occurs as borderline delusional phenomena that mix—not only sex and aggression—but shame and grandiosity, violent separation and symbiotic fusion. Third, and most importantly, such dependency on dissociative reverie can usually be traced back to startling, perverse traumata that become elaborated and reenacted in the service of saving one soul, dreadfully and irrevocably, at the price of another.

Analysts are beginning to understand just how often the story of the maltreated child is the story of the violent perpetrator is the story of the maltreated child. . . . Around it goes, as attested to in both the empirical and clinical literature (Widom, 1989; Lewis, 1992, 1998; Lewis et al., 1997; Grand, 2000). It is thus imperative that those who work with the very violent acquaint themselves with the psychoanalytic understanding of malignant dissociation, characterized by Grand as the process that enables those victims of massive trauma to metaphorically transcend the loneliness of annihilation by inflicting it on another person.

Dissociated traumatic experiences fuel the repetitive fantasies of union (both consensual and not) that cohere the internal world of the victim-

perpetrator. The elaboration of these asyntactic events lend shape and meaning to personal narratives, and trigger a variety of enactments, only a very few of which are criminal. Depression, suicidality, compulsive sexuality, pathological lying—even serial monogamy—can be understood, depending on the patient, as autonarrative extensions of a traumatic manuscript. Often, it is the intractability of these kinds of enactments that most frustrates analysts, precisely because the early experiences on which they are based seem so split off and inaccessible. According to Bromberg (1998), it may be that “trauma and dissociation breed in *every* human being discontinuous realities that are not amenable to interpretation” (p. 259). Dissociated self-states may appear most fossilized when trauma has been especially early, particularly perverse, or simply unrelenting (Stein, 2000, 2001, 2003).

Where repetitive fantasies and behaviors are at issue, there is much that can be gleaned from the study of dangerous individuals, through the lens of dissociation. The inability to learn from experience, the inevitable return to destructive behaviors, the lack of expressive remorse so emblematic of the aggressive criminal, are seen across a wide spectrum of psychopathologies. Understood within the framework of dissociation, the immutability of certain behavioral patterns reflects a *lack* of conflict regarding that behavior (Bromberg, p. 255) precisely because actors are inextricably mired in a particular division of the self-system, a certain subnarration that so closely resonates with their experience of the world that competing subnarratives of sorrow or generativity, among others, cannot be foregrounded. Contorting the narrative into inflexible, but familiar, forms lends coherence to the storyline even as it obfuscates other narrative voices (Stern, 1997). This becomes painfully obvious in the case of serial offenders, whose crimes can seem like one long monosyllabic howl.

When the trauma-dissociation paradigm is imposed on the study of violence, perpetration is placed along a fathomable continuum of human interaction, rather than in the “beyond” to which it is usually exiled. Indeed, investigations of the “criminally insane,” the “stone cold psychopath,” and other “evil seeds” have been unnecessarily set off from the study of less virulent psychic forms, despite the fact that theorists like Lifton (1986) have long argued that these outliers, however alien they may seem, have much to teach us about the range of human adaptation to titanic threats.

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