

"Go and Sin No More": Therapy and Exorcism in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Deviance

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Since the Enlightenment, supernatural notions of demonic intervention in human affairs have largely been rendered obsolete by developments in social and behavioral science, and these ideas are commonly derided. In modern thought, acts once regarded as sinful are rather to be treated as personal or social dysfunctions. Yet despite a change in rhetoric, and a shift to medical language, older views of evil remain clearly in view. I want to explore the survival, and indeed revival, of revival of older demonic concepts of evil in modern discussions of wrongdoing.

I will concentrate on the traditionally conceived sin of lust, and its modern manifestation in sex crime. Much contemporary rhetoric about sex crime resembles older ideas of possession, in that the acts are seen not merely as isolated phenomena but as conditions integral to the individual, which can probably never be cured. In addition, affected individuals are believed to suffer from an overwhelming compulsion to repeat their misdeed with great frequency. This is especially true of crimes like child molestation, rape, and sexual murder. In many ways, we are dealing here with a thought-world reminiscent of ancient notions of possession - and that notion itself has enjoyed a substantial revival through theories of multiple personality. I believe that the supposed secularization of attitudes to wrongdoing is largely illusory, and modern notions retain what are clearly powerful and widespread intuitive beliefs about the nature and causation of evil.

I will use three illustrative examples, though there is a great deal of overlap in these areas. Respectively, I will examine the notion of "lust murder" and serial killers; or "sexual predators" and child molesters; and of the "demonic" aspects of the recovered memory movement.

Lust Murder

I will begin with a phrase that is quite familiar to scholars of violent crime. Everybody knows - or thinks they can deduce - the meaning of the phrase "Lust murder". Obviously, it means a killing carried out in circumstances of extreme and uncontrollable sexual desire, and characterized by grotesque mutilations. It is a "monstrous" sexual murder. Unfortunately, that is simply not that the term should mean. The term is a mistranslation of the German phrase Lustmörd, meaning murder for pleasure or, a better rendering, recreational homicide. It has no sexual connotation, still less does it indicate any connection with the traditional deadly sin of "lust". The phrase traces back to the psychiatrists and scholars reacting to the serial murder wave that affected Germany in the early twentieth century, and it was intended to be a technical and secular description, with no connotations of "monsters" or (still less) "evil". The view at the time was, naturally, that scholars just should not think that way. Yet when translated into English, "lust murder" reverted to ancient ideas of moral evil and depraved sexuality.

I am not sure who first introduced the phrase into English, but "lust-murder" appears in early translations of Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis; and Krafft-Ebing differed from many German scholars in his aggressive emphasis on the sexual aspects of multiple homicide. German exiles and expatriates were freely using this terminology by the 1930s, and so were their American pupils. Walter Bromberg's psychiatric studies of homicide

were speaking of lust-killers in these years, and by the 1960s the phrase was thoroughly domesticated. We find titles like Henry Klinger, Lust for Murder (1966), and the language of lust-killing permeated the serial murder scare of the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1988, Joel Norris wrote that about five thousand Americans each year, “fully 25 percent of all murder victims - were struck down by murderers who did not know them and killed them for the sheer ‘high’ of the experience. The FBI calls this class of homicides serial murders and their perpetrators recreational or lust killers . . . the FBI has estimated that there are at least five hundred serial killers currently at large and unidentified in this country.” Interestingly, Norris is aware of the origin of the term lust-killer, but he then goes on to speak as if the offenders are motivated by sexual lust; and he was not unusual in this. Ann Rule's study of serial killer Jerry Brudos was entitled Lust Killer, and a comparable offering from Gary C. King was Blood Lust: portrait of a serial sex killer.

These books can be seen as obviously sensational, but the lust-killing theme was popularized in one of the best-known feminist explorations of serial murder, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer's The Lust to Kill : a feminist investigation of sexual murder (New York : New York University Press, 1987). Cameron and Frazer were obviously working from a highly secular approach, and yet used the emotive and indeed religious language of "lust". The reason of course was that their explanation of serial murder was that it was the product of specifically male characteristics, above all aggressive sexuality, for which this animalistic language seemed appropriate.

The term "lust-murder" has become so familiar that it is easy to forget just how ancient and indeed archaic it is, dating back to the time when religious explanations of crime were basically all that was available. The language is emphatically pre-scientific, and pre-psychiatric. Indeed, it was quite familiar in the days when English criminal indictments regularly began with the declaration that X, not having the fear of God before his eyes, did wilfully and knowingly do a particular deed. I could offer countless illustrations here, but one apposite title appeared from Henry Goodcole, writing in England as long ago in 1635. This was Heaven's speedie hue and cry sent after lust and murder, manifested upon the suddaine apprehending of Thomas Shearwood, and Elizabeth Evans, whose manner of lives, death, and free confessions, are heere expressed. In the nineteenth century, William Jarman wrote an anti-cult exposé of the Latter Day Saints under the title Hell on Earth - scenes of Mormon life - how women and girls are ensnared - lust and murder in the name of religion. Messrs Goodcole and Jarman would no doubt be delighted to know that centuries after their time, expert criminologists would still be employing their essential framework of lust, murder, and the wiles of the devil. Then as now, Lust and Murder seemed logically to go together, like strawberries and cream.

The use of a misleading phrase would be of little significance if it did not have very considerable policy consequences. Once we have concluded that serial murder is "lust-murder", then we have decided that the shape of the problem is strictly defined, and that other possible avenues of exploration are irrelevant. We have nothing to say, for instance, about multiple homicide by women, of crimes against non- "lustful" targets, like the elderly; or of crimes that have no obviously "lustful" content, especially the medical killings that represent so large a component of the serial murder phenomenon. Once we have accepted the notion of lust-murder, the serial killer is strictly defined. He is not just an individual of indiscriminate age and gender, killing in more or less any fashion. The term referred above all to “sex killers” or “rippers”, that is, specifically to men, virtually all white, who kill repeatedly for obviously sexual motives. Moreover, they often engage in extreme acts of sexual violence and mutilation.

In this newer model, serial killers are viewed as predators, metaphorically at least as wolves, preying on weaker human beings who are represented in the historically familiar imagery of victims. The linkage between lust and predation is very old - we often think of lechers as "wolves", and Plato's Phaedrus notes that "The eager lover aspires to the boy just as the wolf desires the tender lamb". Murder victims are the "silent lambs" commemorated in Thomas Harris' celebrated book, and the even more influential 1991 film. Hunting metaphors abounded in the congressional hearings and news stories that proliferated through the 1980s. Hart Fisher, the creator of a comic book devoted to the deeds of Jeffrey Dahmer justified his project by claiming that "Serial killers are the werewolves of the modern age. By day they walk around unassuming, then boom! By night they turn into monsters. People want to know why." By 1994, Time Magazine was remarking on the national fascination with serial killers, in an article memorably entitled "Dances with werewolves". By succumbing so utterly to lust - the deadliest of sins - they have sold themselves to the devil, lost their humanity, and abandoned true human status. Or so the mythology holds.

In this view, serial offenders are explicitly monsters, a word freely used in popular culture accounts for the phenomenon. Former FBI investigator Robert Ressler has written memoirs entitled Whoever Fights Monsters and I Have Lived in the Monster, and in 1993, CNN ran a major documentary on serial murder under the title Monsters Like Us. Some recent popular culture treatments have included titles like Monstrum, Monster, Eye of the Beast, and Shadows of Evil. (James 1997; Jackson 1998; Adams et al 1999; Smith 2001; Ressler and Schachtman 1992, 1997). Developing the notion of predatory wolves, the 1996 film Freeway overtly used the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood as its plot framework, with its itinerant killer named "Bob Wolverton". Equally folkloric in its structure is the whole sequence of Thomas Harris novels and films, in which the relationship of FBI agent Clarice Starling to serial killer Hannibal Lecter is roughly that of Beauty to the Beast (Warner 1994, 1999).

In these treatments, the word "monster" sometimes ceases to be a metaphor, as serial killers acquire supernatural and demonic traits. This is apparent in films like the Nightmare on Elm Street series, in which the demon killer materializes in dreams, or Candyman, where the homicidal ghost is summoned into the world of the living through a mirror. Long-running franchises like Halloween and Friday the Thirteenth likewise exist on the assumption that the killer who died at the end of each episode could be resurrected for the next instalment. At the end of the first Halloween movie, it is the psychiatrist who explains that the killer Michael Myers was in fact the bogeyman. In the 1995 film Seven, the killer is a Mephistophelean figure whose violent deeds are shaped by the traditional concept of the Seven Deadly Sins. The young heroes of The Blair Witch Project (1999) seem to fall victim to an undead killer who survives through pagan and supernatural rituals.

Such predatory beings must be "hunted down", and we read of investigators being engaged in "Mind-hunting." One leading exponent of this idea is former FBI agent, John Douglas, whose books include such potent titles as Mind Hunter, Journey into Darkness and Obsession (Douglas and Olshaker 1995, 1997, 1998). With few exceptions, "serial murder" books or films describe the tracking and capture or destruction of monsters on their home territory, in their lairs, as reason and courage triumph over chaos and evil. The conflict, this "journey into darkness", fits naturally into a Freudian interpretation, with serial killers being portrayed in terms of the lustful and destructive qualities of the id, while the heroes who challenge and suppress them epitomize the controlled and rational forces of the superego. BSU "mind-hunter" Roy Hazelwood describes the sinister region that he explores as one of Dark Dreams (Michaud and Hazelwood 1998; Hazelwood and Michaud 2001).

Predators

And of course, it was not just serial killers who are predators. Just as "lust-murder" has been widely accepted in criminological circles, so judges and legislators speak of "predators" as if it represents a technically proper description of human behavior, rather than a supernatural survival. Persistent child molesters and rapists are of course predators par excellence, the subjects of what are explicitly titled "Sexual Predator" laws, which have been largely upheld by the US Supreme Court. In 1998, the US government passed its own "Child Protection and Sexual Predator Punishment Act".

Though "predators" became central to the legislative debate over sex crimes in the mid-1990s, the term had no established legal meaning prior to that date, and had acquired its sexual connotations only very recently (though it recalls terms used by J. Edgar Hoover many years before). It is of course a metaphor: a predatory animal is one which survives by hunting and eating other animals, and only by analogy is this compared with the pursuit and sexual exploitation by humans of less powerful strangers. Prior to the 1990s, the word "predator" appeared frequently in news coverage, but when applied to human behavior, it was generally in the context of financial activity, describing one corporation aggressively seeking to take over another, and this usage became common in the merger boom of the mid-1980s. Only as recently as 1990 does the term acquire a sexual or violent sense, and even then it was sufficiently unusual to merit quotation marks and some additional explanation.

Before 1990, the word was mainly used in a sexual sense in the literature of crime fiction and true crime, where it appeared extensively in book titles and blurbs, alongside the phrases we have already noticed implying primitivism, animal savagery, and hunting ("mind-hunters" and so on). Descriptions of real-life compulsive sex offenders as predators can be traced to the work of two specific crime writers, namely Andrew Vachss and Jack Olsen. Vachss regularly used the word in this context from about 1990 in his novels and newspaper columns. In 1990, he warned that "Today's Abused Child Could Be Tomorrow's Predator," a pioneering example of the use of predator as synonymous with multiple molester. In 1993, Vachss wrote -incredibly - that "Chronic sexual predators have crossed an osmotic membrane. They can't step back to the other side - our side. And they don't want to. If we don't kill them or release them, we have but one choice. Call them monsters and isolate them.... I've spoken to many predators over the years. They always exhibit amazement that we do not hunt them. And that when we capture them, we eventually let them go. Our attitude is a deliberate interference with Darwinism - an endangerment of our species." (Vachss 1993). Olsen's 1991 book Predator: Rape, Madness, and Injustice in Seattle was a case-study of a serial rapist active in Washington state, and presumably the book's local appeal made it familiar to legislators and media people in that region. The modern concept of "sexual predators" originated in the figurative language of sensational crime writers, and was increasingly associated with sexual violence and stalking, that other hunting metaphor which entered the legislative code in just these years. The predator concept received national currency from reporting of the Washington statute, which in November 1991 was explored in a special episode of 48 Hours, entitled "Predators," and thereafter, it entered popular usage. Within a few years, we began hearing about "cyberspace predators."

The influence of "predator" terminology on recent legal thought is truly remarkable - about as amazing, in fact, as if a modern US Congress passed a law against vampires, ghouls or bogeymen. The underlying goals may be worthy, but the intellectual framework is beneath contempt.

As in the case of "lust-killers", the appropriation of sensationalistic language also has serious social and legal consequences. If someone commits a sexual offense, then there is no necessary reason why she or, more commonly, he, cannot be treated, cured and rehabilitated. But a "predator" is a quite different matter: who ever dreams of successfully treating monsters? Around the time that the term "predator" was entering popular usage, attitudes to sexual offenses against children were also being transformed by a thorough reconfiguration of the notion of "pedophilia". Partly, this was a result of what seemed to be useful new research, since interviews of incarcerated molesters suggested that even their lengthy arrest records were telling only a very small part of the story. In extreme cases, convicted pedophiles were reporting careers in which they had abused several hundred children, mostly without legal consequences. The validity of such confessions was open to debate, as imprisoned offenders of any sort tend notoriously to recount the histories which they know to be expected by counselors and therapists, but it was no longer feasible to repeat the view about molestation being a one-time offense. New perceptions were reflected in the language used by both expert and popular opinion, in which the term "pedophile" was extended to virtually anyone convicted of a sexual offense with a minor, while the term acquired ever more sinister connotations of obsession and violence. The more an act of molestation was a symptom of an inherent personality disorder, the less amenable the offender would be to either deterrence or reform. Meanings were aggravated in the form "serial pedophile" or "serial molester," which became common in the late-1980s under the influence of the phrase "serial killer." (The phantom monster Freddie Kruger of Nightmare on Elm Street had in life been a child molester and killer). Technically, the description of "serial pedophile" was accurate in that a person who commits the same sort of crime repeatedly engages in a series of offenses, but in practice the term implies compulsivity and extreme dangerousness. "Pedophiles" acquired monster status; and monsters cannot be treated. They must be "hunted" and caged.

Remembering the Devil

Blatantly supernatural interpretations of deviance have in modern times been most closely associated with the notion of Satanic and Ritual Abuse, which was at its height in this country between about 1984 and 1994 - though the notion still survives in isolated pockets of academe and the therapeutic professions. The SRA story is too familiar to be told again here, but it should be stressed how extraordinarily pre-modern and pre-scientific were the attitudes betrayed by many investigators of the phenomenon. In theory, there is no reason why extremely destructive cults might carry out countless violent and depraved crimes, and it would be quite proper for law enforcement to try and prevent them doing so. Just because an offender has a bizarre value system does not mean that a police investigator must share those same ideas in order to be effective: all the police officer needs to know is that actual crimes are being committed in the secular world. If a cult genuinely were molesting and killing thousands of children, then it would need to be stopped. The problem with SRA was, of course, that nobody could ever establish that such wrong doing was in progress.

Yet in other cases, investigators themselves adopted beliefs and practices that were thoroughly supernatural, and could really only be explained in terms of demonic or diabolical interpretations of human behavior. This was especially evident in the area of recovered memory therapy, a world that originally had nothing to do with Satanic claims. The idea had its roots in core Freudian beliefs about the power of infantile experiences connected with sexuality, and the repression of memories in later life. These assumptions became a powerful therapeutic trend during the early 1980s, when failings and anxieties encountered by adult

patients were traced to forgotten instances of early abuse, which the therapist recovered through hypnosis or suggestion. In 1987, Judith Herman published what would become a classic study of the recovery of abuse memories by a group of women in therapy. Once identified as incest survivors, patients could confront their problems and begin a process of healing their “inner child,” usually through self-help groups of comparable survivors, following the familiar model of Alcoholics Anonymous. This vision was publicized in self-help books like The Courage to Heal, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis.

Therapists accepted a strong likelihood that abuse had occurred despite a lack of corroborating evidence, except for ill-defined symptoms which others might identify as accidental personality traits. The Courage to Heal assured readers that “If you are unable to remember any specific instances...but still have a feeling that something abusive happened to you, it probably did... If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were.”... “Survivors go to great lengths to deny their memories. One woman convinced herself it was all a dream.” Skepticism was discouraged: E. Sue Blume wrote that “If you doubt you were abused, minimize the abuse, or think ‘Maybe it’s my imagination’, these are symptoms of post-incest syndrome.” That patients believed that horrible acts had been done to them was in itself a fact of enormous significance, while scepticism on the part of the therapist would violate the trusting relationship believed essential for successful treatment. Counselors were instructed in the cardinal doctrines of recovery: “Be willing to believe the unbelievable... No one fantasizes abuse... Believe the survivor.” As SRA was so integral a part of therapeutic culture in the mid-1980s, elements from that mythology influenced the tales which therapists now drew forth from their cooperative subjects, so that the imagined reality of this era was back-projected into earlier decades to form a surreal nightmare pseudo-history. The Courage to Heal included an influential section on ritual abuse and murder.

Though expressed in psychological terms of self-help, the recovery movement owed its strength and resilience to its pervasive ideological and religious quality. The treatment of incest survivors implies archaic themes like the loss of primal innocence through sexual sin, and the recovery of an untarnished child-like state. Equally familiar to the evangelical tradition, this restoration often occurs in a sudden emotional moment of realization, which is essentially a conversion experience. The analogy is not perfect, in that the survivor is realizing not her own lost and sinful state, but rather the evil visited upon her by a victimizer, but the underlying structure of loss, regeneration and redemption is accurate. Also recalling religious systems is the emphasis on faith, of belief in the testimony of others, even if it directly contradicts common sense: the children, external or internal, must be believed at all costs. As with any religion, survivorship implies a total world-view impervious to disproof or even challenge by conventional standards of evidence or rationality.

As the recovered memory developed, its overtly supernatural quality became ever stronger. By the late 1980s, thousands of patients were reporting recollections of abuse that could only be understood in the context of the sort of ritualistic cult-groups described in Michelle Remembers, or the ongoing mass abuse cases, and the claim was that early maltreatment left long-term consequences in the form of psychic fragmentation. These claims were questionable, as allegations derived from therapy were rarely subjected to any kind of factual verification, while the explosion of MPD diagnoses raised suspicions about faddery. This diagnosis was extremely rare and tentative diagnosis prior to the much publicized 1973 book Sybil, but by the late 1980s, thousands of instances were being claimed each year, often with a degree of fragmentation that beggared belief. Patients were said to have dozens or hundreds of separate personalities, some claiming knowledge and linguistic

skills that the conscious personality could never have acquired, some ostensibly drawing on experiences from previous incarnations. MPD was beginning to look more like demonic possession than an authentic personality disorder, with "alters" appearing and vanishing just as demons were said to behave in ancient stories of exorcism. But while allegations seemed fantastic, the same credibility - or credulity - extended to children was felt to be appropriate for adult survivors.

It is no exaggeration to say that the recovered memory movement brought the idea of demonic possession back into modern therapeutic practice. Some therapists had the frankness to admit the "demonic" dimensions of their work. The trend reached its height in 1993 when Craig Lockwood published his book Other Alters: Roots and realities of cultic and Satanic ritual abuse and multiple personality disorder. The excruciating pun, of course, is on alters with an e - that is, split personalities -and altars with an a, on which evil religious groups carry out their sacrifices.

I want to end on an autobiographical note. I grew up in the 1960s, at the height of psychiatric, therapeutic and rehabilitative interpretations of crime, and I internalized many of these ideas in much the same way as any other ordinary consumer of popular science does, through the mass media. The notion of crime as sickness was familiar from television dramas, magazine articles, and from the experts' interpretations of great crimes like the Kennedy assassination. One just did not speak of evil. Perhaps the liberal pendulum had swung a little too far in those years, but looking back over the interval of thirty or forty years, it is incredible to see how far we have gone in the other direction, into the realm of monsters and - literally - demons. Perhaps the worst of these excesses have been corrected, and few would dare stand up to warn of a satanic danger conceived on the lines of the 1980s. Yet we all too freely use and accept thoroughly "monstrous" notions like "serial" offenders, "stalkers", "predators" and the like, with all the rhetorical baggage they have acquired. Without wishing to return to the naïve excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, is it too much to urge that criminological theory should be secularized? Evicting the demons from our theories is long overdue.