

## CASE REPORT

## PSYCHIATRY

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# Matricide and Two Sexual Femicides by a Male Strangler with a Transgender Sadomasochistic Identity

**ABSTRACT:** While violence against sexual minorities is a well-known phenomenon, sexual homicides committed by men with cross-dressing or transsexual identity are not, because they are relatively few. We report a 23-year follow-up of the case of a transvestite, possibly transsexual, man who killed his mother by strangulation at the age of 20, and later in two separate cases strangled a female victim towards whom he felt sexual desire. He reported being sexually aroused by being strangled himself. The case raises questions concerning legislation which does not allow life-long control of criminals.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic science, homicide, forensic psychiatry, transvestism, transsexual, serial killing, psychopathy

While violence against sexual minorities is a well-known phenomenon, sexual homicides committed by men with cross-dressing or transsexual identity are not often described. The research in this area is sparse, and publicity around the issue is complicated by the differences between transgender and transsexual desires. Gender identity disorder individuals may or may not be aroused by dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex, and may or may not have transsexual desires.

In a recent survey, examining the association between autoerotic asphyxiation, sadomasochism, and serial sexual murders, five cases of serial sexual killers who engaged in autoerotic asphyxiation were identified worldwide: four in the United States and one in Russia. All were sexual sadists, all committed murders by strangulation, and two out of five were transvestites (1). One of those who enjoyed autoerotic asphyxia, sometimes with his eventual victims, is Wayne Adam Ford from California, sentenced to death in 2006 (personal communication, R. Meloy, 2008).

We did not find previous cases of matricide and sexually motivated femicides by a man with a transgender identity in PubMed search, although matricide was among the murders committed by the serial murderer Edmund Kemper, now incarcerated in Folsom prison. Four cases of other types of homicides by transsexuals have been reported (2,3).

### Case Study

Patient X was born in a working-class family with a half-sister from his mother's first marriage. The family was economically comfortable, but alcohol was used excessively. His father was

described as abusive, but there was no evidence or claims concerning sexual abuse or violence towards the children. X had a poorly documented head injury at the age of 3, but it was not considered to have any consequences. He suffered from concentration difficulties, and at 14 he was twice treated in a child psychiatric unit. X was shy and abnormally dependent of his mother, but tended to have fits during which he lost his temper and shouted obscenities.

At 20, after drinking heavily together, X strangled his mother to death. She had begun a relationship with a new man. X was not suspected of the homicide until the next year when he did the same to a 12-year-old girl. According to X, he had considered the victim older as she was physically mature. There was a witness, another girl whom X also tried to rape, and according to whom X had wanted to have sex with the victim who resisted. When arrested, during a state of confusion because of alcohol and anxiolytic drugs, X claimed that his mother would come and rescue him, and that he had killed "a whore." This led to a suspicion that he had also killed his mother, and this was confirmed by technical investigation by the police. In forensic mental state examination he acted quite a lot in a very immature and omnipotent way, threatening the hospital staff, boasting about his crimes, and showing no feelings of guilt, but no psychotic features were detected and his intelligence was normal. He was paroled already 6 years later, and soon he strangled to death his intimate female partner, 14 years his senior. This time in the forensic mental state examination he denied the killing but tried to impress the staff by claiming the role of a member of organized crime, rather unconvincingly. He had repeatedly borderline findings in the electroencephalograph. Later, on another occasion, he reported that the killing was an accident caused by sadomasochistic role playing.

During the assessment of dangerousness according to the Finnish legal system 12 years later, X denied any interest in female role playing, although he admitted that his main interests were beauty, women's fashion, and cosmetics, and he subscribed to a women's magazine. During imprisonment he became engaged to a woman

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Received 8 July 2008; and in revised form 30 Oct. 2008; accepted 1 Mar. 2009.

who had murdered her husband, but the engagement was short-lived. She was about the same age as his mother. He was superficially polite and gave the impression of a sensitive man with no asocial identity or aggressive behavior. He had normal male karyotype and magnetic resonance imaging of the brain did not reveal abnormalities. When confronted with the fact that he had argued bitterly with prison officers about his right to cross-dress and make up himself in his own cell, he was embarrassed but still did not admit that this was a fact. There were also documents from various sources that he had claimed that he was transsexual and wanted to be operated on to acquire female gender. He said that this was nothing but a prolonged joke, a protest against the oppressive prison system.

In interviews, he was superficial, theatrical, often nervously laughing, and full of female mannerisms. He emphasized the role of intoxicants in his aggressive behavior and said that all the killings were nothing but bad luck. When confronted with the fact that the use of alcohol is common but very few people kill and none strangle to death three women on separate occasions just accidentally, he did not have much to say. He simply refused to discuss the "crazy" idea that he might have aggressive feelings towards women as he adored them so much. This time he claimed that he did not remember anything about the last killing, which was already the third version of his story.

As a man, his partner selection seemed to have been exclusively heterosexual, with a few contacts with prostitutes. After the examination he sent a letter in which he apologized for not admitting his feminine identity, claiming that he had thought it could be disadvantageous in some way. The letter was accompanied by a photo of him dressed as a "drag queen" in shiny black leather clothes. He expressed his wish to become a woman with a traditionally feminine and beautiful intimate partner who would share the same interests. According to X, he once had a relationship with a beautiful erotic dancer, with whom he shared consensual, safe, and mild sadomasochistic role play, X himself always as the submissive partner. According to X, their shared interests included some slapping with a small riding crop and strictly safe strangulation. He absolutely did not accept any connection between his *modus operandi* in the three killings and his own enjoyment of being strangled.

During various psychiatric examinations X invariably changed his story concerning the last killing and his own sexual identity. There were no amnesic features but always a kind of purpose to change the story. His novel argument is that his newly found religious conviction makes it absolutely safe to marry. Despite his previous alcohol dependence and his support of the idea that his violence was only because of alcohol and drugs, he considers himself fit to drink some wine when dining as good Christians like himself are able to do. His motivation in using disulfiram appears to be weak. Sadomasochistic urges, likewise, are still quite egosyntonic for him. He has always resisted the idea that he could need any psychiatric treatment, but only surgery to become either a woman or a more attractive and youthful man.

X has refused to learn any practical profession in prison since he wants to do something more glamorous as a living, hotel work if

not something to do with beauty or fashion. His psychopathology does not appear to be dissociative but psychopathic, and enhanced by the use of alcohol. There were no cardinal features of planned serial killing but uncontrolled behavior when intoxicated. At the age of 43, he fulfills the criteria of asocial, narcissistic, and borderline personality disorder, but there have never been symptoms or signs of psychosis. Psychological tests are in line with the clinical diagnoses. The Rorschach Comprehensive Computerized System suggested a childhood trauma. X received 34/40 points in Psychopathy Checklist Revised (PCL-R), which is used to assess dangerousness (4), the result suggesting high risk. In the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (5), he belongs to a small extreme group where 100% have reoffended within 7 years.

## Discussion

The life of X partly resembles the fictional story of Norman Bates in Robert Bloch's novel and Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film adaptation *Psycho*, which in turn were loosely based on real life serial killings. His PCL-R score put him in severe psychopathy range, and we expect serial sexual murderers to be moderately to severely psychopathic.

The Finnish legal system does not make it possible to refer X to any compulsory psychiatric treatment or extend his prison sentence beyond 15 years. This system is liberal and considered even ultra-liberal by some forensic experts. One possible explanation is that legislation in a small country is not designed for cases which are extremely rare. Thus, the only hope is to inform X that use of any intoxicants, sexual strangulation, and disappointments in intimate contacts are in his case associated with a very high risk of new imprisonment. His psychopathic and omnipotent traits are covered by his role as a good Christian and his gentle manners, and he has inherited a sum of money which he intends to use for the start of a new life in another city or country where no-one knows his past.

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