

NECROPHILIA: A REVIEW

Donald I. Templar
&
Erika Eberhardt
California School of Professional Psychology
Fresno, California

Abstract

A review of 16 cases of necrophilia reported in the literature revealed it to be ordinarily associated with serious psychopathology. It was suggested that necrophiliacs can be roughly divided into two categories; the passive-inadequate type, and those that have a preoccupation with death, destruction, and decay.

Almost all of the textbooks of psychiatry and abnormal psychology deal with necrophilia very briefly, without much more than defining it. It is because of this paucity of knowledge about the necrophiliac that the present authors did a review of the English and German language literature. This review uncovered no research and only 16 case histories that contained more than cursory information about the necrophiliacs and their acts. Not included were cases in which the necrophilia was altogether in fantasy. A distinction was made by Rauch (1947) between such which he called "ideational necrophilia" and "true necrophilia."

1 Foester, Foester, and Roth (1976) wrote about a 17-year old girl who was sexually attracted to live women and dead men. Beginning at age 13, she kissed and caressed male corpses at funeral homes. She was very emotionally attached to a picture of a deceased man and frequently stroked it against her body. She wrote "my little corpse" on the back of the picture and also referred to it as the "lucky stiff" and "the happy corpse." This girl masturbated with a variety of objects including a revolving phonograph record and a machine in a storage room at work. She thusly used this machine three times a day to the point of bleeding. Her self injurious behaviour extended to her employing razor blades and injecting needles to obtain pain and the sight of blood. Other abnormal behaviour included a suicidal attempt, considering a sex change operation, desiring to keep a corpse at home, and fantasizing cutting up corpses. Psychological testing revealed poor affect, depression, and an IQ of 90 (Verbal 82, Performance 98). There was a family history of schizophrenia, alcoholism, mental retardation, and brain abnormality.

2 Ehrenreich (1960) reported the case of a 43-year old man who, upon command hallucinations, dug up graves and had sexual intercourse with the deceased women. He

Address requests for reprints to: Donald I Templar, Ph D., California School of Professional Psychology, 1350 'M' Street, Fresno, California, 93721



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suffered from auditory hallucinations, feelings of depersonalization, and severe headaches. He was given a 35-year prison sentence for the stabbing to death of a prostitute.

3. Klaf and Brown (1958) presented the case of a 40-year old man who frequented funeral parlors and, becoming sexually aroused, would quickly return home to masturbate. He was given a schizophrenic diagnosis in the army where he had paranoid ideation, auditory hallucinations, depression, emotional instability, and fear that pigeons would attack him. Subsequent to his psychiatric based military discharge, he exhibited depersonalization, outbursts of rage resulting in abuse of his wife and children, and two suicidal attempts that precipitated psychiatric hospitalizations.

4. Rapoport (1942) wrote about a 50-year old man who would go to funeral parlors and kiss the lips of female corpses or touch their breasts and, thereby, obtain an erection. He would then go to a lavatory or home to masturbate. He was occasionally aroused by male corpses, but never touched them. He was preoccupied by a small scar on his scrotum from a hydrocele at age 22. One reason he gave for never attempting intercourse was his fear that somehow this residual of his medical condition could hurt his testicles or penis, or the woman's vagina, or prevent her from having children. Psychological testing revealed an IQ of 104 and schizoid tendencies. Bizarre Rorschach responses were noted.

5. Brill (1941) reported upon a 30-year old homosexual man who had repeatedly attempted fellatio upon corpses in the funeral parlors where he worked. As a boy he had "a holy dread of dead people." He was told he could cure this fear by touching a dead person; and by repeatedly touching corpses and being in their presence, he acquired an attraction for them. He would then attempt to frighten people who are afraid of corpses by suddenly sitting up in their presence while lying in a coffin. Brill stated that this passive man "showed some secondary characteristics of the feminine type so that his general appearance, though not typically 'fairly like,' was distinctly effeminate."

6. De River (1956) wrote about a student of embalming who had sexual intercourse and performed cunnilingus upon many female corpses where he studied. He was especially excited by the corpse of a 15-year old girl. One night he drank her blood, sucked urine from her bladder through a tube he inserted into her urethra, bit into the flesh of the buttocks near the rectum, and then performed anal intercourse. He first developed a sexual desire toward deceased persons when at the burial of his sweetheart, he wanted to be buried with her and, generally, created quite a disturbance. It was after this that he decided to enroll in embalming school.

7. Kraft-Ebing (1936) wrote of a grave digger who "exhumed cadavers of females ranging from three to sixty years of age, sucked their breasts, practiced cunnilingus upon them, but rarely coitus or mutilation." He took home the head of one woman and referred to it as his bride. He also took home the body of a 3 1/2 year old girl and, "On this he gratified his sexual desires even while the putrid body was falling to pieces. The stench filling the house betrayed him. Laughingly, he admitted everything." This man was described as being of "very limited intelligence." He would drink the urine in women's rest rooms. He loved to eat cats and rats. He "also had a history of attempting to rape women." He was dismissed from the army for his conduct but was not punished because he was regarded as not responsible for his behaviour.



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Kraft-Ebing (1936) also told of a man who would frequently kiss and have sexual intercourse with female corpses in Paris cemeteries, even with people nearby. He would also cut up the bodies and pull the intestines out. He would sometimes injure himself while digging up graves, but would not feel or respond to pain. The impulse to carry out these acts was accompanied by violent headaches. The courts declared him to be of diminished capacity.

9. Rauch (1947) described eight additional cases derived from German and French court records. One is that of a 24-year old man who would frequently masturbate next to female corpses in cemetery chapels. He sometimes took their clothes off and, on one occasion, inserted his finger into the vagina. He once undressed a one-year old boy. This man was described as not retarded but "slow." He was an epileptic and had a seizure every four weeks. His affect was flat. A psychiatrist said he had an "infantile personality."

10. Rauch described the case of a grave digger who had sexual relations with two female corpses, an adult woman and a one-year old child who had died of smallpox. He afterward fell asleep next to the open grave in both instances, and was found asleep by the police after the second. He was an epileptic and alcoholic who would beat his wife.

11. Rauch wrote of a 50-year old alcoholic who, while under the influence, had oral sex with his sister who had just died. This man, who was also a homosexual, frequented houses of prostitution where he ate human hair and finger nails, had knife tips stuck into his skin, and had his penis twisted. He also had prostitutes dress in white and pretend they were dead, and he masturbated while looking at them.

12. Rauch presented the case of a 43-year old alcoholic who cut off the breasts and pubic hair and cut out the uterus of a woman who had just died. He cut open her abdominal cavity and stuffed it with her hair. He unsuccessfully attempted to have sexual intercourse and then masturbated against her abdomen. He took home the breasts and pubic hair and threw them away the next day. He had been romantically involved with this woman and she had rejected him. He was under the influence at the time of the act. He had been previously incarcerated for thievery, forgery, attempted rape, and sodomy with a goat.

13. Rauch wrote of a retarded epileptic who had sexual relations with the corpses of young girls and boys, using the vagina and anus, and when not successful in so doing, masturbated next to the corpse. He also cut up the corpses and cut off the boys' penises. He had previously been incarcerated for exhibitionism and theft.

14. Another alcoholic discussed by Rauch went to morgues and masturbated next to female corpses, touched the breasts, and looked at the genitalia. He was usually under the influence of alcohol at such times. This 35-year old man was married and previously had normal sexual relations with his wife before she became ill, but was not currently having marital relations when he engaged in the necrophilia. However, even in his youth he was fascinated by corpses.

15. Rauch wrote about a 58-year old orderly who deflored a corpse in a hospital. He had arteriosclerosis, alcoholism, and syphilis. He reportedly "lacked a sense of morals."

16. Rauch briefly described the case of a 50-year old retarded man who unsuccessfully attempted to have sexual relations with corpses in funeral homes.



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The above cases lead the present authors to the opinion that necrophilia is ordinarily not a relatively isolated act in a relatively normal person. The necrophiliac has grossly defective interpersonal functioning and impulse control. Necrophilia is usually a bizarre manifestation of more pervasive psychopathology involving psychosis, mental retardation, brain pathology, or deleterious alcohol influence. Necrophilia is a serious symptom that should alert the clinician to a serious syndrome.

However, since only a tiny fraction of grossly abnormal persons are necrophiliacs, serious psychopathology does not provide a complete explanation of necrophilia. The present authors maintain the above cases can be divided reasonably well into two categories with respect to personality: those necrophiliacs who could be classified as inadequate-passive, and those who fit Erich Fromm's (1973) conceptualization of the "necrophilous character." Although incisive in choosing this term, Fromm meant not the act of necrophilia, but a personality structure he regards as "the malignant form of the anal character." Fromm's necrophilous character refers to destructive persons who are preoccupied with death, decay, and related matters such as sickness, foul odors, feces, and urine. Hitler was Fromm's prime example

We view cases 4, 5, 9, 14, and 16 as falling within the inadequate-passive realm. Patient 4 was a schizoid man who had been a virgin. Patient 5 was effeminate, passive, and fearful. Patient 9 was intellectually limited with "an infantile personality." Patient 14's necrophiliac activities were restricted to looking, touching, and masturbating, and occurred when he was under the influence and his wife too ill for intercourse. Patient 16 was retarded. None of these five men were reported as destructive or cruel.

Cases 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13 seem to display necrophilous character traits. Patient 1, the only female necrophiliac, inflicted wounds upon herself and enjoyed the sight of blood. Patient 2 stabbed a prostitute to death. Patient 3 physically abused his wife and child. Patient 4 drank the blood, sucked the urine, bit the buttocks, and performed anal intercourse upon a corpse. Patient 7 drank urine, ate cats and rats, and had a putrid body in his home. Patient 8 pulled the intestines out of the violated corpses. Patient 10 was a wife beater. Patient 11, who ate hair and finger nails, had his penis twisted and had knife tips stuck into his skin. Patient 12 cut off the breasts and pubic hair of the corpse and had previously committed both sodomy with a goat and rape. Patient 13 had anal intercourse with the corpses of young boys and cut off their penises.

Necrophilia in the inadequate-passive personality would appear to be a basically sexually motivated act in an individual psychologically and socially unable to have a normal sexual outlet. In the necrophilous character the sexual nature of the act appears incidental to the pervasively destructive life style. In psychodynamics, the former seems more similar to the voyeur or pedophile, those of the latter, to the rapist or sadist. But it must be borne in mind that by conventional psychiatric standards, both types of necrophiliacs are more disturbed than the other sexual deviants.

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Résumé

L'examen des recherches faites jusqu'à data ne révèlent que seize (16) cas de nécrophilie. Nous en concluons que de tels cas sont habituellement associés à un niveau de psychopathologie élevé. De plus, nous proposons une division grossière des nécrophiliaques en deux catégories: une comprenant ceux du genre passif-inadéquat, et l'autre comprenant ceux préoccupés par la mort, la destruction et la putréfaction.

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