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PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE*Brian Holoyda,¹ M.D., M.P.H.***Bestiality in Forensically Committed Sexual Offenders: A Case Series**

ABSTRACT: Although bestiality has occurred since prehistoric times, it remains a poorly understood aspect of human sexuality. Prevalence studies in the mid-20th century suggested that bestiality was a relatively common phenomenon. Since that time, researchers have studied bestiality among specific populations, including self-identified “zoophiles” and inmates who report a history of bestiality. Findings from inmate research suggest that bestiality may represent a risk factor for future interpersonal violence. This study presents a case series of bestiality among sexual offenders committed under forensic commitment schemes. The case series demonstrates the range of animal partners, sexual acts, and comorbid paraphilic and nonparaphilic diagnoses in individuals who report a history of bestiality. In addition, it helps clarify potential motivations for sex with animals and how such motivations may influence the forensic psychiatric assessment of offenders who have sex with animals.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, bestiality, zoophilia, paraphilic disorder, sexual offender, violence risk assessment

Bestiality, or sex between humans and nonhuman species, has occurred since prehistoric times (1). Taboo in many cultures, bestiality remains a poorly understood aspect of human sexuality. Research on bestiality is limited and lately has focused on specific groups of individuals who have sex with animals, making it difficult to generalize findings to the population as a whole. One line of research suggests that individuals with a history of sex with animals pose a risk for future interpersonal violence, making bestiality a forensically useful marker. This study presents a case series of individuals reporting a history of bestiality and identifies motivations for this behavior. It describes how an understanding of motivation can potentially aid forensic psychiatric examiners' assessment of offenders' risk for future violence.

One of the first individuals to study human–animal sexual acts was sexologist Alfred Kinsey. In the 1940s, he surveyed individuals in the United States regarding their sexual behavior. His research noted a relatively high lifetime prevalence of bestiality, with 8% of all males reporting a history of sexual activity with animals and nearly half of boys growing up on a farm reporting at least one episode of sexual activity with an animal (2). His follow-up report on female sexual behavior noted that 1.5% of female respondents had sex with an animal before adolescence and 3.6% had sex with an animal after adolescence. Subjects reported that three-quarters of the animals in these encounters were dogs (3). Alvarez and Freinhar's more recent prevalence study demonstrated a lifetime bestiality prevalence rate of 30% in a group of 20 randomly selected psychiatric inpatients as compared to 0% in control groups of 20 medical inpatients and

20 psychiatric staff. This study suffered from small sample size and did not consider the presence of active symptoms of mental or general medical illness such as delusions, disorganized thought process, manipulative personality traits, or delirium that may have influenced their results (4).

Kinsey's findings seem to suggest that bestiality may be a relatively common phenomenon. There are no known studies since that time that evaluate the prevalence of the behavior in the general population. Research has focused on specific subgroups of individuals who have sex with animals including self-identified “zoophiles” and inmates. For example, Miletski surveyed a group of 82 men and 11 women online who self-identified as “zoophiles,” or animal lovers, who reported engaging in bestiality. She found that most individuals in this sample identified being sexually attracted to the animal and wanting to express love and affection for the animal as primary reasons for their behavior (5). Williams and Weinberg conducted a survey of 114 male “zoophiles” online who reported similar reasons for having sex with animals (6).

Alternatively, there is a line of research suggesting that individuals who engage in bestiality are motivated by cruel intentions and that bestiality is a form of animal cruelty indicative of a heightened risk of violence toward humans. Multiple studies have demonstrated that inmates who report a childhood history of bestiality are more likely to have been convicted of a personal crime such as rape, sexual assault, assault, and robbery and to have a greater number of personal crime convictions than subjects who denied a history of bestiality (7,8). When considered as a form of animal cruelty and compared to drowning, hitting, shooting, kicking, choking, or burning animals, bestiality was found to be the only form of cruelty that significantly predicted recurrent interpersonal violence among inmates (9). Research on juveniles suggests that those with a history of bestiality tend to report prior sexual offenses against humans and more offenses than sexual offenders of the same race and age without a history of bestiality (10). Finally, there is research noting that juvenile

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sexual offenders frequently have a history of bestiality and may not report this behavior unless faced with polygraph testing (11). This limited body of literature suggests that bestiality may represent a risk factor for interpersonal violence or sexual offending. Some have criticized this conclusion as premature due to the focus on inmate populations (12) and others have called for more extensive psychological evaluation of individuals arrested for or reporting a history of bestiality (13).

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* delineates mental health diagnoses and the criteria that an individual must fulfill to receive a diagnosis (14). The text defines a paraphilia as “any intense and persistent sexual interest other than sexual interest in genital stimulation or preparatory fondling with phenotypically normal, physically mature, consenting human partners” (p. 685). It distinguishes between a paraphilia and a paraphilic disorder, however, noting that a paraphilic disorder “is a paraphilia that is currently causing distress or impairment to the individual or a paraphilia whose satisfaction has entailed personal harm, or risk of harm, to others” (p. 685–686). Zoophilia is a paraphilia in which the object of sexual interest is an animal (5). The DSM-5 does not delineate the criteria for zoophilia or zoophilic disorder, but rather notes that a paraphilic disorder involving animals can be diagnosed under the “other specified paraphilic disorder” category.

There has been much less research on individuals with a specific diagnosis of zoophilia as opposed to individuals who report a history of bestiality. This may be due to the difficulty of proving that an individual who engages in an act of bestiality has a genuine sexual interest in animals. Gene Abel assessed 561 nonincarcerated men who presented for voluntary evaluation and treatment of paraphilic sexual behavior and found that individuals with zoophilia (referred to as “bestiality” in his study) had an average of 4.8 total paraphilic diagnoses (15). This study and Abel’s follow-up research suggest that there is a high degree of paraphilic “cross-over” in individuals with zoophilia, meaning that there are frequently multiple comorbid paraphilias in such individuals (Gene Abel, personal communication, November 27, 2012).

This study presents a case series of forensically committed sexual offenders who reported histories of bestiality. Cases were identified during the course of an extensive file review of medical records, official criminal histories, police reports, parole reports, and alienist reports of 84 sexual offenders forensically committed based on a mental disorder defense or as dangerous following completion of a determinate prison sentence. From these, three subjects reported histories of bestiality. These cases are summarized below. To protect the identities of the subjects, specific details related to demographic, geographic, and historical variables have been withheld.

Case 1

Mr. A was committed based on a mental disorder defense in his 30s for assaulting and abusing his partner. He reported an intact family throughout his childhood. He took some special education classes in grade school due to a learning disability. He stated that he was sexually molested by older peers and an adult during his teen years. He graduated from high school, had some jobs as a manual laborer, and married briefly. In early adulthood, Mr. A experienced his only arrest for a sexual offense. Records indicate that over the course of a year, he developed relationships with two preteen boys with whom he engaged in oral and

manual copulation. He was arrested after one of the boys notified his parents of the behavior, and he was charged with lewd and lascivious acts with a child. He was initially found incompetent to stand trial, but was restored to competence, convicted, and served a few years of jail time. A few years later, he was committed under a mental disorder defense for assaulting and abusing his partner. The record indicates that this finding occurred in part because Mr. A reported experiencing auditory hallucinations during the event.

Mr. A has received multiple diagnoses including major depressive disorder, borderline personality disorder, pedophilic disorder, and other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia). He reported that he engaged in hundreds of episodes of sexual contact with male animals of various species since his early teenage years. He said that he thought having sex with animals was normal until his late teens when friends told him it was atypical. He initially reported that he stopped having sex with animals at this time, but subsequently indicated that he continued to have sexual contact with male canines into adulthood. He continues to participate in sexual offender treatment.

Case 2

Mr. B was committed based on a mental disorder defense in young adulthood for sexual activity with a child. He reported that he came from an intact home and did not experience physical or sexual abuse during childhood. His developmental history was notable for learning disabilities, intellectual delay, and hyperactivity from an early age. Records document a history of oral and insertive anal intercourse with farm animals beginning in his early teens. His sex acts with animals occasionally preceded sadistic torture and killing of the animal. Mr. B experienced his only arrest for a sexual offense in young adulthood. For a period of months leading up to his arrest, he developed a relationship with a preteen boy with whom he engaged in a variety of inappropriate sexual behaviors. Mr. B reportedly provided the young boy with pornography, had sex with farm animals in front of the boy and encouraged him to do the same, and requested that the boy manually copulate him. The boy ultimately told his parents, who contacted police. Following arrest, Mr. B was found not responsible for his sex offense due to mental disorder.

Mr. B has received multiple psychiatric diagnoses including schizoaffective disorder, antisocial personality disorder, pedophilic disorder, and other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia). Recent documentation indicates that Mr. B remains grossly delusional with erotic and grandiose themes. He refuses to attend sexual offender treatment because he does not see the need.

Case 3

Mr. C was forensically committed as dangerous following completion of his prison term for sexually assaulting his girlfriend’s daughter. He reported that his parents were divorced and that his father physically abused him, which caused him to run away from home frequently. He dropped out of high school due to drug use and worked odd jobs during his late teens. He indicated that once while working briefly on a farm, he vaginally penetrated a goat, but that he did not enjoy the experience, so he did not engage in further sexual acts with animals.

Mr. C has spent the majority of his adult life incarcerated or hospitalized. Mr. C’s juvenile and adult criminal history is notable for multiple violent acts, including assault on humans and

killing animals. Following a prison term for sexually assaulting his girlfriend's daughter, he was forensically committed due to dangerousness. Mr. C has received multiple psychiatric diagnoses including schizophrenia, antisocial personality disorder, pedophilic disorder, and other specified paraphilic disorder. His other specified paraphilic disorder was diagnosed due to a history of violent thoughts, fantasies, and behavior against women, as well as testing positive for rape stimuli on prior penile plethysmography tests. He is not currently participating in sexual offender treatment.

Discussion

The three cases summarized above were identified during the course of an extensive review of records of sexual offenders committed pursuant to a mental disorder defense or due to a finding of dangerousness following completion of a determinate prison sentence. Of the 84 subjects whose records were reviewed, three had evidence of a history of bestiality. This represents a prevalence rate of 3.6%, which is substantially less than Kinsey's and Alvarez's prevalence rates. Compared to Alvarez's prevalence rate of 30%, one would expect an even larger prevalence of bestiality in this sample, given that all subjects were sexual offenders determined to be suffering from severe mental illness. Active symptoms of psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, substance use disorders and even severe personality disorders can impair an individual's insight, judgment, executive functioning, and impulse control, foreseeably increasing the likelihood that one might engage in bestiality. This makes the low prevalence rate particularly noteworthy. Potential explanations for this include the chart review methodology. Subjects were not specifically asked about prior episodes of sexual contact with animals, so a history of bestiality was obtained solely using data procured by other clinicians, forensic examiners, or police/probation officers. In addition, patients may minimize or deny a history of such behavior, as revelation of such details may result in a determination of the need for further treatment.

The subjects' diagnoses lend support to the contention that individuals with zoophilia (or simply a history of bestiality) are likely to have other paraphilic disorders. Both Mr. A and Mr. B had diagnoses of other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia), meaning that they demonstrated evidence of an intense and persistent sexual interest in animals. In addition, both Mr. A and Mr. B had diagnoses of pedophilic disorder. Mr. C did not have a diagnosis of other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia) and instead reported only one episode of sex with an animal. He had two paraphilic disorder diagnoses, however, specifically pedophilic disorder and an other specified paraphilic disorder related to sexual interest in violent, coercive sexual behavior. Notable is that all subjects had two paraphilic disorder diagnoses, which is less than the 4.8 total paraphilic diagnoses that Abel identified in his zoophilic patients (15). Given that only Mr. A and Mr. B had diagnoses of other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia), one might expect a greater number of paraphilic diagnoses in these individuals. The explanation for this is not entirely clear, but may relate to committed individuals' unwillingness to volunteer atypical sexual interests and behavior for fear that it will impact their course of treatment or conditional release.

In 2011, Aggrawal developed a classification scheme of bestiality (presented as a classification scheme of zoophilia) in which he categorized human-animal sexual behavior based on the specific sexual acts and ranked them from least pathological

to most pathological (16). The classification scheme is briefly summarized in Table 1. Classifying acts of bestiality using Aggrawal's system may be helpful in assisting forensic examiners and clinicians to better understand what specific sex acts an individual performs from the breadth of potential sex acts. For example, Mr. A described a history of hundreds of sexual encounters with male animals throughout his teenage years. Because his behavior ultimately ceased when he began to engage in regular sex acts with humans, his behavior may be classified under Aggrawal's "Class VII zoosexuals: opportunistic zoophiles." This category describes individuals who would prefer to have intercourse with humans, but will engage in sex with animals if a human partner is not available. Alternatively, Mr. B's acts of bestiality included sex acts involving sadistic cruelty and even killing of animals. Such behavior would most likely meet Aggrawal's classification of "Class VI zoosexuals: sadistic bestials," which describes individuals who obtain sexual excitement from sadistic activities with animals, including torture. Lastly, Mr. C's one episode of sexual intercourse with a goat would likely be considered opportunistic, placing his behavior in the "Class VII" described above.

Although defining the specific sex acts related to bestiality can be instructive, consideration of individuals' motivations for engaging in bestiality may prove more useful to a forensic psychiatric evaluator. Current research suggests that individuals who have sex with animals may do so out of love for animals (5), as a form of cruelty (9), or for situational reasons, such as culturally sanctioned bestiality or out of curiosity (2). None of the case subjects reported being exclusive "zoophiles" who engage in sex with animals as a means of demonstrating love and affection for an animal. This is not surprising, as such self-identified "zoophiles" with restricted sexual interest in animals would be foreseeably less likely to engage in sexual offenses against humans that could lead to criminal justice involvement and forensic commitment. Mr. A endorsed repeated sex acts with animals as a teenager and young adult because he assumed that such behavior was culturally sanctioned. The persistence of his sex acts with canines suggests the possibility that he developed a more regular, perhaps emotional attraction to animals over time, but this is not clear from available information. Mr. C had sex with a goat seemingly out of curiosity, but did not enjoy it.

TABLE 1—Aggrawal's 2011 classification scheme of bestiality.

Class, Name	Description of Sex Act
I, Role player	Has sex with a human who pretends to be an animal
II, Romantic zoophile	Keeps an animal as a pet for sexual stimulation, but does not engage in sexual activity with animals
III, Zoophilic fantasizer	Fantasizes about intercourse with animals and may masturbate in the presence of an animal. Does not have intercourse with the animal
IV, Tactile zoophile	Strokes erotic parts of an animal or rubs genitals against an animal
V, Fetishistic zoophile	Uses parts of animals like furs as a fetishistic object
VI, Sadistic bestial	Obtains sexual gratification from sadistic behavior toward an animal
VII, Opportunistic zoophile	Has sex with animals when consenting humans are unavailable
VIII, Regular zoophile	Has sex with humans when animals are unavailable
IX, Homicidal zoophile	Prefers sex with dead animals over living animals
X, Exclusive zoophile	Exclusively has sex with animals

Mr. B most clearly demonstrated bestiality motivated by cruel intentions, given his history of severe animal cruelty, which he sometimes coupled with his sexual acts with animals.

Experts have contested that a history of bestiality automatically represents a risk factor for future interpersonal violence (12). How then should a forensic examiner understand this behavior when he or she encounters it in an offender's history? Even though this case series presents the histories of three sexually violent offenders, the role of bestiality as a risk factor for future violence appears different in each case. Mr. A's history of indiscriminate sexual encounters with multiple animals and paraphilic arousal to animals raise concern for other forms of paraphilic sexual behavior with nonconsenting partners, such as the pedophilic acts of which he was convicted in the past. Given his long history of recurrent sexual acts with animals, Mr. A's history of bestiality would likely play an important role in his assessment for future sexual violence against humans and animals. Mr. B's form of bestiality, characterized by sadism, torture, and killing is intuitively concerning as a risk factor for potential future interpersonal violence due to the intensity and frequency of his violent sexual behaviors, his lack of remorse toward his victims, and the concomitant pedophilic behavior in which he engaged. Mr. A's and Mr. B's histories contrast starkly with Mr. C's single, opportunistic sex act with an animal. Although other aspects of his history would certainly influence Mr. C's violence risk assessment, his history of bestiality would likely not play a significant role. Even in three cases of forensically committed sexual offenders, a history of bestiality may impact an assessment of an offender's violence risk differently. Although there are insufficient data to instruct forensic examiners exactly how to incorporate a history of bestiality in violence risk assessment, this case series suggests that one must consider each case individually and within the context of other historical factors.

This study has numerous limitations that bear mentioning. The chart review methodology significantly impairs the ability to obtain specific information regarding individuals' history of sexual acts with animals. It is possible that interviewing each sexual offender about the topic would have yielded a greater number of histories. In addition, all three subjects were forensically committed sexual offenders, which limits the ability to draw meaningful inferences regarding bestiality among the general population. The forensic population also means that sexually violent predators were excluded from the study. Inclusion of sexually violent predators may have resulted in a higher rate of bestiality in the sample. Lastly, there is the risk that psychotic thought processes and a dysfunctional interpersonal manner could have contributed to subjects' endorsement of a history of bestiality; in this case, however, reports were verified by data collected from collateral informants and legal documents.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the scientific understanding of bestiality in multiple ways. It provides a new base rate of the behavior in a unique population. It supports the notion that individuals who present with a history of bestiality are likely to have multiple comorbid paraphilic disorders. Alternatively, it demonstrates that a history of bestiality alone does not qualify someone for a diagnosis of other specified paraphilic disorder (zoophilia), as individuals may have a variety of disparate motivations for engaging in sex with animals not limited to a persistent sexual interest. These different motivations

suggest that a history of bestiality may differentially impact the violence risk assessment for an offender.

Conclusion

More research is needed to inform our understanding of who has sex with animals, why people have sex with animals, and how sex with animals informs the risk assessment for future interpersonal offending. As this case series demonstrates, individuals may engage in bestiality for a variety of reasons not limited to a paraphilic disorder. The cases are also evidence of the breadth of sexual acts, varying frequency of sexual acts, and other concomitant offending behaviors in sexual offenders with a history of bestiality. Future research will further elucidate individuals' motivations for engaging in bestiality and help forensic evaluators to better understand the role of this sexual behavior in conducting risk assessment.

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