



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2016

I19 Interpreting and Assessing Benign and Malign Sexual and Non-Sexual Necrophilous Interests in Criminal Cases

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand and be able to articulate critical distinctions across cases in which individuals engage in necrophilous acts, including those causing harm (i.e., broader behaviors/interests relevant to a thematic understanding of such interest). This includes an awareness of personality- and lifestyle-relevant indicators, paraphilic-relevant interests (i.e., somnophilia), relationships (pseudo vs. genuine), and indicators of potential terrorist activity.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by developing an understanding of the previously rarely recognized breadth of necrophilous activities and the ways in which these manifest in offending behavior within a wider paradigm of paraphilic interest and victimization. This will be applicable to criminal investigation, interrogation, community management, and therapeutic interventions in correctional facilities. The identification of the subtypes of necrophilous interest will be readily applicable for practitioners to implement into their work in forensic settings.

This presentation considers and discusses a personality-led approach to the development of malign and benign sexual and non-sexual necrophilous interests to differentiate elements between the subtypes and the implications for understanding and responding to such behavior in applied multi-disciplinary forensic settings. Hence, the focus is broadened from purely considering such acts as the sexual desecration of corpses and widens the understanding incorporating a personality perspective and red flags for the assessment of risk.

The intricacies of the behavior displayed by individuals who present with an interest in the more extreme aspects of negativity — necrophilous in theme — can be challenging to interpret and assess from the perspective of police investigation, case management, and therapeutic intervention. Due to the often-secret or isolated subculture of individuals who engage in necrophilous activities, criminal and non-criminal, it is important to consider further the etiology and development of extreme negative interests. Case examples will be presented to illustrate the variations in focus of the behavior and the contingent risk in addition to the factors that can indicate an increase in potential harm. In particular, the functional links between necrophilous and broader paraphilic interests are identified and it is argued that there are a range of strategies used — interpersonal and physical — to evade detection or exposure of their dark interests and risks. The challenges for practitioners working with such cases will be discussed in regard to the presentation of individuals and the link to mental health assessment, sexual offence risk, and public protection arrangements.

The presentation will conclude with focus on a discussion of the practice-based implications for professionals who engage with individuals who are drawn to negativity and, in particular, sexual and non-sexual necrophilous acts with consideration given to motive, mindset, and risk.

Necrophilous, Risk, Negativity