



## Sex Predators Can't Be Saved

by Andrew Vachss

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Westley Allan Dodd was scheduled to be hanged at 12:01 a.m. this morning at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla. Sentenced to execution for the torture-murder of three boys, Mr. Dodd has refused all efforts to appeal his case. He may not have exhausted his legal remedies, but he has certainly exhausted society's efforts at "rehabilitation."

A chronic, calcified sexual sadist, Mr. Dodd stated in a recent court brief, "If I do escape, I promise you I will kill and rape again, and I will enjoy every minute of it."

Mr. Dodd's threat demands a response because we know he is not unique. There can be no dispute that monsters live among us. The only question is what to do with them once they become known to us.

The death penalty is not a response. Racially and economically biased and endlessly protracted, it returns little for its enormous economic and social costs. Though it is effective—the killer will not strike again—the death penalty is limited to murderers; it will not protect us from rapists and child molesters who are virtually assured of release and who are almost certain to commit their crimes again.

If we do not intend to execute sex criminals, does our hope lie in killing their destructive impulses? Mr. Dodd and his ilk are sociopaths. They are characterized by a fundamental lack of empathy. All children are born pure egoists. They perceive their needs to the exclusion of all others. Only through socialization do they learn that some forms of gratification must be deferred and others denied. When a child's development is incomplete or perverted—and child abuse is the most dominant cause in that equation—he or she tends not to develop empathy. There's a missing card, one that cannot be put back in the deck once the personality is fully formed.

While early childhood experiences may impel, they do not compel. In the end, evil is a matter of choice. Sociopaths can learn to project a veneer of civilization—for predators, it is part of their camouflage—but they will always lack the ability to feel any pain but their own, pursuing only self-gratification. Not all sociopaths choose sexual violence. For some, the outlet can be political or economic skullduggery. But those for whom blood or pain is the stimulus act no less efficiently and at a terrible and unacceptable cost.

Some predatory sociopaths can be deterred. None can be rehabilitated, since they cannot return to a state that never existed. The concept of coercive therapy is a contradiction; successful psychiatric treatment requires participants, not mere recipients. What makes sexual predators so intractable and dangerous is that, as Mr. Dodd candidly acknowledged, they like what they do and intend to keep doing it.

The obsession of sexual predators is typified in the case of Donald Chapman, a New Jersey rapist who was released in November after serving 12 years, the maximum for his crime. He underwent continual therapy in prison, and was utterly unaffected by it. He vows to continue to attack women—a threat that reflects his total absorption with

sexual torture. As a result of his threat, he sits in his house in Wyckoff, N.J., surrounded by a 24-hour police guard.

A 1992 study of 767 rapists and child molesters in Minnesota found those who completed psychiatric treatment were arrested more often for new sex crimes than those who had not been treated at all. A Canadian survey that tracked released child molesters for 20 years revealed a 43 percent recidivism rate regardless of the therapy. The difference between those simply incarcerated and those subjected to a full range of treatments appears statistically negligible. And the more violent and sadistic the offense, the more likely it is to be repeated.

Another factor that thwarts rehabilitation is the need for offenders to seek higher and higher levels of stimulation. There is no observable waning of their desires over time: sexual predators do not outgrow their behavior. Thus, while most sadistic sex offenders are not first arrested for homicide, they may well try to murder someone in the future.

What about traditional self-help programs? Should we concentrate on raising their self-esteem? Imprisoned predators receive as much fan mail as rock stars. They are courted by the news media, studied by devoted sociologists, their every word treasured as though profound. Their paintings are collected, their poetry published. Trading cards celebrate their bloody passage among us.

I recently received a letter from a young woman who gushed that after a long exchange of letters, she was "granted visiting privileges" with Mr. Dodd and subsequently appeared on "Sally Jessy Raphael" "due to my relationship" with "Wes," who she believes is "sincere." So do I. We simply disagree about the object of his sincerity.

Sexual predators are already narcissistic; they laugh behind their masks at our attempts to understand and rehabilitate them. We have earned their contempt by our belief that they can change—by our confusion of "crazy" with "dangerous," and "sick" with "sickening."

If we don't intend to execute sexual predators, and we have no treatment, what is our final line of defense? Washington State has a so-called sexual predator law permitting indefinite confinement of sex offenders deemed to be dangerous if released. The law's critics argue that psychiatry has been a woefully inadequate forecaster. Others cite the constitutional problems of imprisonment based on prospective conduct.

Recently there has been much discussion of voluntary castration. Such a "remedy" ignores reality. Sexual violence is not sex gone too far, it is violence with sex as its instrument. Rage, sadism and a desire to control or debase others are the driving forces. Castration can be reversed chemically with black-market hormones, and sex murders have been committed by physically castrated rapists. People have been raped by blunt objects. And how do you castrate female offenders?

Our response to sexual predators must balance the extent and intensity of the possible behavior with the probability of its occurrence. An ex-prisoner likely to expose himself on a crowded subway may be a risk we are willing to assume. A prisoner with even a moderate probability of sexual torture and murder is not. Such violence is like a rock dropped into a calm pool—the concentric circles spread even after the rock has sunk. More and more victims will be affected.

When it comes to sexual violence, the sum of our social and psychiatric knowledge adds up to this: Behavior is the truth.

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 or release them, we have but one choice: Call them monsters and isolate them.

When it comes to the sexual sadist, psychiatric diagnoses won't protect us. Appeasement endangers us. Rehabilitation is a joke.

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.

A proper experiment produces answers. Experiments with sexual sadists have produced only victims. Washington State's sexual predator law will surely be challenged in the courts and it may take years before constitutional and criminological criteria are established to incarcerate a criminal beyond his or her sentence.

Perhaps no-parole life sentences for certain sex crimes would be a more straightforward answer. In any event, such laws offer our only hope against an epidemic of sexual violence that threatens to pollute our society beyond the possibility of its own rehabilitation.

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