

Sexual predators cannot be saved

The state of Washington executed Westley Allan Dodd in 1993 for the torture-murder of three boys after he refused all efforts to appeal his case. A chronic, calcified sexual sadist, Dodd stated in a court brief, "If I do escape, I promise you I will kill and rape again, and I will enjoy every minute of it."

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.



ANDREW VACHSS

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? 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.

Some predatory sociopaths can be deterred. None can be rehabilitated, since they cannot return to a state that never existed. What makes sexual predators so intractable and dangerous is that, as Dodd candidly acknowledged, they like what they do and intend to keep doing it.

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.

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.

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 (like Missouri) has a 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.

There has been much discussion of voluntary castration. Such a "remedy" ignores reality. Sexual violence is not

Two Drury students' heroism valued

Recent newspaper accounts of the despicable assaults on the two Drury students were chilling. Although I do not know these young women, I grieve with them and their families.



Ermold

However, I am sincerely grateful that both women got away from their attacker and took quick, positive

action that led to his capture. They must find great comfort in knowing they did exactly the right thing when they contacted the police. I applaud these women for their determination to be survivors rather than victims. I thank them for preventing others from being harmed.

I hope these two Drury students — and anyone else who has ever been a victim of a violent crime — know they can turn to The Victim Center in Springfield for help or advice.

At a time when criminals seem to hold claim on legal perks, it's heartening to find an agency that actually supports victims and never charges a fee!

The hotline number is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week (864-SAFE).

Congratulations, dear anonymous ladies. You are survivors, and you are heroes. Please know there is professional support available to you when you need it.

Judy Ermold, Springfield, is a volunteer at The Victim Center.

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.

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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