Paraphilias

A paraphilia is a condition in which a person’s sexual arousal, interest and activities differ from the “norm”. Their sexual activities could revolve around themes of nonhuman objects, the humiliation and/or suffering on oneself or their partner, toward children, or toward non-consenting adults. Pedophilia, Exhibitionism, Voyeurism and Frotteurism are the most common paraphilias. In some individuals, the paraphilic behavior might be present much of the time, but in some, they may engage in the behavior only occasionally, such as when under stress. A person with a paraphilia usually begins to spend more and more time preoccupied with these thoughts and behaviors and may find that non-paraphilic sexual activity begins to lose its “turn-on” potential. Many patients have multiple paraphilias, with the average being 3 or 4. All paraphilias are much more common in men than in women. The following are some paraphilias:

**Fetish:** In fetishism, the individual has intense sexual desires, fantasies, or behavior concerning the use of inanimate objects that are not intended to stimulate the genitals (an object, such as a vibrator, whose purpose is to stimulate the genitals, is not included). The more common fetish objects are women’s underpants, stockings, bras, shoes, gloves or other wearing apparel. Other common fetish objects include specific materials such as leather, rubber, silk, or fur. Some individuals collect a large number of their preferred fetish objects. They might smell, rub or handle these objects while masturbating, or they may ask their sexual partners to wear them. The individual may be unable to obtain an erection without the use of a fetish. Fetishism usually begins in adolescence and nearly all fetishists are male. It is important to note that this paraphilia does not include cross-dressing in order to achieve sexual excitement (see below). While drawings or photographs of the fetish object arouse a few fetishists, more commonly the fetishist prefers or requires an object that has already been worn.

**Transvestic Fetishism:** A heterosexual male who cross-dresses in order to achieve sexual excitement is identified as possessing Transvestic Fetishism. There is variation in the frequency of the behavior and the amount of women’s clothing they may wear. They might cross-dress occasionally while alone, or they might do so frequently and in public. Some may limit the amount of clothing to underwear while others may dress entirely in women’s clothing. Some may also wear women’s clothing under their usual male attire. Many will masturbate or engage in intercourse while cross-dressing, and like other types of fetishism, their behavior may eventually replace “normal” sex. Transvestic fetishism is distinguished from female impersonators and from male homosexuals who occasionally cross-dress. These types of cross-dressing are not associated with sexual arousal, and there is no psychological dependence on wearing feminine clothing.

Cross-dressing usually begins in childhood or early adolescence. It is noted that the majority of persons with this paraphilia were not noted to have been seen as effeminate boys, which is contrary to commonly held beliefs. This is the only paraphilia limited to males, specifically to heterosexual males.

**Voyeurism:** A voyeur is a person who obtains sexual gratification by watching others, without their knowledge, who are nude, disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity. The sexual gratification is obtained by watching others, typically strangers, who would
probably not permit this behavior if informed. Most voyeurs will usually masturbate while watching the target, or later while fantasizing of the event. They rarely seek contact with the person(s) they are watching and take precautions to avoid detection. For some voyeurs, this is their preferred form of sexual activity, while others have normal sex lives otherwise. Cases of female dependency on voyeurism for sexual response are very rare (women are much less aroused by visual stimuli than males—which led to the lack of success of Playgirl magazine.) Voyeurism usually begins in adolescence, typically before age 15, and becomes a chronic disorder. Voyeurs frequently have a great deal of difficulty in developing dating relationships. In fact, being a voyeur allows such a man to avoid social and sexual interaction with women. Many voyeurs confine their sexual activity to masturbation while peeping or while fantasizing about previous peeping escapades. The voyeur usually prefers to peep at women who are strangers, since this confers a novelty and forbidden quality on the act. The voyeur is often most sexually excited by situations in which the risk of discovery is high, which may also explain why most voyeurs are not particularly attracted to nudist camps, nude beaches, and other places where observing nudity is accepted. This behavior is different than someone who enjoys watching pornographic media as the “actors” in such media are well aware of the intent of the media.

Exhibitionism: Exhibitionism, one of the most common sexual offenses, is a condition in which a person repeatedly exposes their genitals to unsuspecting strangers to obtain sexual arousal. While exhibitionism is found almost exclusively in males, a few cases of female exhibitionism have been reported. (It is important to note that female “strippers” are usually not exhibitionists as they don’t become sexually aroused from exposing, and they are not exposing themselves to unsuspecting strangers.) Exhibitionism usually begins before age 18 and may persist into their 30’s or later. Most exhibitionists tend to follow the same pattern with each offense and alcohol is seldom a factor. Some exhibitionists expose with an erection, others while flaccid. Some may masturbate while they expose, while others masturbate later while fantasizing of the event. Many exhibitionists fantasize of being sexual with the person(s) they expose themselves to; however, most do not attempt to enact this fantasy.

Frotteurism: Frotteurism refers to touching or rubbing against the body of a non-consenting person for sexual arousal. This behavior usually occurs in crowded situations such as subways, buses or elevators. The individual may rub his genitals against the person, or he may grab her breasts, buttocks or genitalia with his hands. Frotterism is derived from the French word “frotter” which means “to rub”. The individual may select a person they perceive to be “attractive” and usually wearing tighter fitting clothing. Frotteurs also often fantasize about being in an intimate relationship with the person victimized. The act of touching or rubbing the person, not the reaction of the person being touched, is arousing. This behavior usually begins in adolescence and the frequency of these offenses may decline after their mid-twenties.

Sexual Sadism: Sadism is the intentional act in which the individual obtains sexual excitement from the infliction of physical or psychological pain or torment, or the humiliation of another person. Common methods include blindfolding, bondage, spanking, cutting, beatings, etc. Humiliation may result from the use of urine, feces, being forced into humiliating positions, being forced to imitate an animal, etc. Forms of sadism run the entire gamut from carefully controlled play-acting with a willing
partner to assaultive behavior that may include torture, rape or even murder. Sadism usually begins in childhood and with time; sadists usually need to increase the severity of the torture or humiliation in order to produce the same degree of sexual excitement. A rape by a sexual sadist is typically brutal and they will use more force than necessary to obtain the compliance of the person being victimized. The fantasies of sadists usually include themes of dominance and the use of restraints.

**Sexual Masochism:** Masochism is a condition in which a person derives sexual excitement from the real act of being beaten, bound, humiliated, or made to suffer. As in sadism, masochism can range from mild versions to extremes. In the mild forms of masochism, activities may include bondage, being spanked, etc. under carefully controlled conditions with a trusted partner. Masochists obtain sexual pleasure from pain, degradation and humiliation, but may not surrender control. Contrary to the mistaken notion that most masochists are women (dominatrix), both sadism and masochism occur as paraphilias predominantly in men. As in Sadism, the Masochist may require an increasing amount of torture to obtain the same sexual satisfaction. A masochist who desires “heavy” pain may have great difficulty in finding a cooperative partner, and may inflict the pain on himself through choking, pricking, shocking, or hire the services of a prostitute who will provide the necessary stimulation.

The psychological meanings of sadism and masochism are unclear, but some researchers have noted that many masochists are men who occupy positions of high status and authority (such as executive, politicians, etc) and theorize that private acts of submissiveness and degradation provide the masochist with an escape valve from their rigidly controlled public lives. Some researchers also hypothesize that sadists may be seeking a means to bolster their self-esteem by “proving” how powerful they are, or may be venting an internal hostility by which they cannot discharge in other ways.

**Pedophilia:** Is the most common of the paraphilia. A pedophile finds prepubescent (sexually immature, usually 13 or younger) children sexually arousing. Most pedophiles molest children that they know, such as neighbors, relatives, children of friends, or their own children. Their offending behavior can range from watching the child, to undressing and touching the child, to oral, digital, and penile penetration of the child. Individuals with this paraphilia usually report their attraction is strongest toward children in a particular age range. Some prefer males, some females, and some are aroused to both male and female. Some individuals with pedophilia are only sexually attracted to children, which is identified as “Exclusive Type”. Others may also possess an attraction to adults, which is “Nonexclusive Type”. This behavior usually begins during adolescence, but some begin this behavior during their mid-life. Many individuals with this paraphilia were sexually abused as children and many use alcohol as a prelude to offending behavior. As with other paraphilias, individuals with this disorder produce many distortions or justifications regarding their behavior. They state that sexual experiences are important to a child’s development, that children enjoy it, that the children they victimized were “provocative”, that their behavior was “educational” to the child, etc. Many pedophiles try to blame their behavior on their alcoholism to try to convince people that all he really needs to do is avoid drinking. Many individuals with pedophilia do not use physical force in the commission of their offenses, but engage in a process of “grooming” the child through the use of friendship, persuasion, or coercion. Many offenders may also engage in a process of gaining the trust of (grooming) the child’s parent or caregiver or may marry a woman with a child in their preferred age range. Persons with this disorder may
also abduct children, trade children with other pedophiles, or take in foster children; however, this process of obtaining children to victimize is much less common. Many pedophiles who molest boys state that they do not consider themselves to be homosexual, and when trying to redirect their arousal to adults, choose women as the stimuli. Many pedophiles that molest very young children (2-3 years of age) molest both boys and girls.

In the past, individuals whose sexual attraction is toward adolescent boys or girls, or was identified as possessing hebephilia. This was distinguished from pedophilia in that pedophiles tended to choose children who had not yet reached puberty, while hebephiles chose children who had just begun puberty. This paraphilia is not listed in the current DSM-IV-TR, although it is currently diagnosed as Paraphilia, Not Otherwise Specified.

Paraphilia, Not Otherwise Specified (Paraphilia NOS)

The less common paraphilias are listed below. They do not meet the criteria for any of the specific diagnostic categories listed above and are therefore identified as Paraphilia NOS.

**Coprophilia**: A less common paraphilia, where the individual obtains sexual excitement from contact with feces.

**Urophilia** refers to sexual excitement from contact with urine.

Note: Coprophilia and Urophilia are differentiated from the use of urine or feces in order to cause torment or humiliation in oneself or another, as in masochism or sadism.

**Telephone Scatalogia**: This paraphilia is defined as a preoccupation with repeatedly making obscene phone calls as a means to obtain sexual excitement. The persons that engage in this behavior are almost always male.

**Klismaphilia**: In this paraphilia, the individual derives sexual excitement/pleasure from giving themselves enemas.

**Zoophilia**: Engaging in sexual contact with animals is known as bestiality. Zoophilia is a preoccupation of engaging in sexual acts with various animals, or when this act is a repeatedly preferred means of obtaining sexual excitement.

**Necrophilia**: is sexual arousal from viewing or having sexual contact with a corpse. This paraphilia has sometimes been expressed by people removing corpses from cemeteries, or seeking jobs in morgues or funeral homes.

**Infantilism**: Individuals with this paraphilia obtain sexual excitement/pleasure from being treated like an infant, which can include the wearing of diapers and drinking from a bottle.

**Partialism**: Individuals with this paraphilia are preoccupied with a portion of the body, such as feet, nose, breasts, or buttocks. Negative partialism is the attraction to individuals with missing body parts.
There are many other paraphilias, (including some rare ones such as sexual arousal from contact with stumps following amputations); however, the ones mentioned above are the most common.