

Vorarephilia: A Case Study in Masochism and Erotic Consumption

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Abstract Vorarephilia (“vore”) is an infrequently presenting paraphilia, characterized by the erotic desire to consume or be consumed by another person or creature. Few data exist on vore though several cases have been reported which appear to be consistent with basic vorarephilic interests. Because this sexual interest cannot be enacted in real life due to physical and/or legal restraints, vorarephilic fantasies are often composed in text or illustrations and shared with other members of this subculture via the Internet. Similarities with aspects of bondage/dominance sadomasochism interests, more specifically dominance and submission, are noted. The current case report describes a man with masochistic sexual interests which intersected with submissive vorarephilic fantasy.

Keywords Vorarephilia · Vore · Paraphilia · Sexual masochism · DSM-5

Introduction

Vorarephilia, or “vore,” is a paraphilic interest involving the erotic desire to consume or be consumed by another person or animal. Vore appears to represent a fairly distinct sexual interest

for those involved in the subculture. A brief content analysis of vorarephilic fantasies posted to Internet sites for like-minded individuals reveals overlap with dominance and submission activities and other paraphilic interests. To date, there is little empirical research published on this sexual interest; it barely receives mention even when the term is used in published literature (e.g., Ågmo, 2007). Other venues do provide some mention of the background and presentation of this unusual paraphilia.

The pairing of eating/consumption with sex is common in the animal kingdom and exists in humans as well though obviously constrained by various social mores and legal factors. Pfäfflin (2008) commented on the many phrases that exist in the English language to relate sex/love and consumption, including referring to someone as “looking good enough to eat,” that “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach,” and describing a sexually appealing person as “sweet,” “juicy,” “appetizing,” or “tasty.” Christian religions even sanction metaphorical cannibalism through their sacrament rituals, during which participants consume bread or wafers meant to represent the “body of Christ” and wine intended to represent the “blood of Christ”—a show of Jesus’s love of his people and, in turn, their love for him, by sharing in his “blood” and “flesh.” This act was intended to “merge as one” the divine and the mortal.

The literature contains a handful of case studies that have highlighted the relationship between eating and sex. While not actually vore, but perhaps the closest approximation to it in the real world, there is the case of Armin Meiwes, a German computer programmer who killed and ate a male partner who consented to it. Beier (2009), who provided expert opinion in the ensuing court case, described Meiwes’ paraphilia as a “preference for male flesh” and stated that “[he] could only experience attachment when the other person was inside of him.” One documentary noted that, during his childhood, “He imagined dismembering and eating other children so they’d be within him

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forever” (Channel 4 documentary, 2004). For most of his adolescent and adult life, Meiwes sought out partners who role-played being consumed by him. Meiwes sought male partners who were willing to be eaten, which is how he met Bernd Brandes (the man who would eventually become his victim) in 2001. After over a year of correspondence detailing aspects of the shared fantasy of Meiwes killing and eating Brandes, the two met in March 2002 and consummated their arrangement. Consent by both parties was documented on a videorecording of the event, which showed Meiwes physically binding Brandes with restraints, severing his penis and attempting to eat it, and then killing him and eating a large amount of his flesh. Meiwes stored Brandes’ body and consumed approximately 20 kg of his flesh in total.

Two other cases also apparently related to vorarephilia are the “Turkey Man,” as described by Gates (2000), and another man mentioned by Gates who fantasized about being cooked and eaten by the witch of the Hansel and Gretel story. The Turkey Man was a travelling businessman who regularly hired a dominatrix to meet him in his hotel room to “cook” him. He had designed a facsimile of an oven from a cardboard box, including rudimentary knobs and a door that could be opened and closed. He would lie down in this box, on his back, wearing only socks, while the dominatrix would describe in great detail the process of his body being cooked and eaten by her. The Turkey Man could become so aroused by this fantasy that he was able to orgasm without any physical stimulation of his penis. It is unfortunate that Gates (2000) only briefly discussed these cases, as a more in-depth analysis of vorarephilia fantasy is missing from published literature. Gates noted that the Turkey Man could quite easily find an online community of people who shared his sexual interests.

There exist websites that cater to individuals with vorarephilia interests (e.g., Gaia Online Exeon Vore Guild, www.vore.net, www.mindlessconsumption.com). These can suggest the range of fantasy content that such individuals experience. The characters in these written fantasies or anime showed wide variation. They were sometimes human, but, just as commonly, the dominating main characters (the “Consumers”) were anthropomorphized animals (such as wolves or cats that walk upright and speak), sometimes fictional creatures (such as dragons), or enormous snakes that easily swallowed their victims whole. The Consumers were most often described in predatory terms, experiencing an insatiable hunger. Following the consumption of another individual, great attention was paid to descriptions of the huge “pregnant” belly. The individuals who were eaten (the victims) were often much smaller physically and were mostly portrayed, not only as willing to be consumed by a dominant creature but intensely desirous of it. Sometimes, series of stories involved well-known characters, such as Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf or animated characters from television shows, such as *Family Guy*.

In most cases, the victim is swallowed whole—in fact, several requests for fantasies included a specific ban on the

chewing of the victim. This is an important aspect that separates persons interested in vore versus those interested in sexual cannibalism—in vore, the victim is swallowed whole, while still alive. Though consumption most often occurred through the mouth, it also occurred through the vagina, the anus, or the breasts (through the nipples) of the Consumer. Stories often described whether the victim was swallowed head or feet first and descriptions of the swallowing process for the victim emphasized feeling every inch of their bodies being touched and held snugly by the Consumer’s throat. As previously stated, the victims were usually (though not always) willing and, in almost all cases, they were described as enjoying being consumed, despite any initial resistance. The victims usually survived the swallowing process, but died as part of the digestive process, either suffocating in the stomach or dissolving in stomach acid. Following consumption, there was often a description of the Consumer’s enlarged belly and of him/her belching. The consumption act itself was sometimes described as a loving act (e.g., “I would eat my girlfriend so that she could become a part of me,” <http://www.gaiaonline.com/guilds-home/exeon-vore-guild/g.25133/>) and sometimes as a vengeful act (e.g., “I would eat Bush or Cheney so that I could destroy them”). Sexual arousal in either of the main characters often occurred during or after the act, as indicated by descriptions of erections or masturbation, but this was not always the case.

Themes of dominance and submission pervaded these stories and vore fantasies often evidenced a variety of crossover themes, including macrophilia/microphilia (sexual attraction to unrealistically large or small people, such as giants or people the size of mice), pregnancy fetishes (sexual attraction to pregnant women), humanoid animal involvement consistent with “furry” fetishes (persons who don animal costumes and engage in sexual activity with each other), “unbirthing” (the idea of being swallowed alive by the vagina and returning to the uterus), and sexual cannibalism (sexual arousal associated with consuming human flesh). The consistent theme running throughout all the fantasies accessed for descriptive purposes is the erotic desire to consume or be consumed by another being.

Case Report

Background Information

“Stephen” presented to the Sexual Behaviours Clinic (SBC) of the Law and Mental Health Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Toronto, Canada) with concerns about “sexual addiction.”¹ He was also concerned about

¹ The subject of this case study consented in writing to the use of his de-identified information being used for research purposes. All aspects of the present investigations followed the pertinent guidelines of the CAMH Research Ethics Board.

his sexual orientation. Stephen was 45 years old at the time of the assessment, which was his second at the SBC in 10 years. He presented as a socially anxious but pleasant and cooperative man. Stephen was dressed casually and exhibited good hygiene. There were no signs of psychosis and he demonstrated intact reality testing. Stephen was initially quite shy, but was more forthcoming as the interview progressed. The information reported below was obtained through a 2-h assessment interview with the first author (unless otherwise indicated).

Stephen was raised in a two-parent family. He was unaware of any gestational or birth complications and he described himself as an average student in primary and secondary school. He did not pursue any education after high school graduation. In adulthood, Stephen worked mostly as a laborer. He had been inconsistently employed for approximately 8 years prior to the current assessment and was unemployed at the time of assessment.

With regard to medical history, Stephen had suffered from severe asthma since childhood, for which he had been hospitalized on numerous occasions throughout his life. He denied any additional history of severe or chronic medical diagnoses, treatment, surgeries, or head injuries, although he described frequently experiencing a “ringing” in his head that was not aural. Several Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT) scans had been conducted to assess that issue, with null findings. Stephen reported a past history of daily marijuana use and he smoked 8–16 cigarettes per day. Stephen first sought psychiatric treatment approximately 10 years prior to the current assessment because he was feeling ostracized at work and was having difficulty communicating with and trusting people. He was hospitalized for 1 month for depression and suicidality approximately 1 year after first accessing psychiatric services and he reported having been depressed for the previous 6 years. Stephen carried prior diagnoses of Dysthymic Disorder and Personality Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (NOS), and he was receiving treatment for his mood disorder at the time of the SBC assessment. He acknowledged having considered suicide, but stated that he would not actually follow through because of his religious beliefs. Stephen was unaware of any family history of psychiatric illness.

Sexological History and Presenting Concerns

Stephen reached puberty around age 13 and reported typical physical and sexual development. He reported only infrequent difficulty achieving orgasm during masturbation and denied any other sexual functioning problems. Stephen reported having had three adult female sexual partners in his life and denied ever having engaged in sexual activity with an adult male. He had been in a partnered relationship, but this relationship had ended 2 years prior to this assessment. At the time of the assessment, his primary sexual outlet was masturbation (approximately 2–3 times per week). Stephen reported a primary erotic

preference for females between 28 and 34 years of age, with a range of 22–55 years of age. Although he reported including males in his sexual fantasies, he denied any sexual attraction to men as romantic partners outside the context of dominance/submission activities. He denied any sexual interest in children or adolescents either currently or previously. Phallometric testing at the time of his first assessment indicated a clear sexual preference for adult females over prepubescent and pubescent females and males of any age group.

When Stephen presented to the SBC for assessment the first time (in 2002), his main concerns related two primary sexual interests: anilingus and partialism (feet). He estimated then that approximately 50 % of his sexual fantasies pertained to anilingus and the other 50 % involved him interacting with women’s feet. Stephen also reported a history of voyeuristic interests and behavior although the episodes of voyeurism had occurred many years prior to the 2002 assessment. In the current interview, he reported that that behavior had involved watching women in their private swimming pools through a fence and later masturbating to thoughts of these events in the privacy of his home. During the first interview, Stephen revealed that he had an intense interest in “being” a woman’s anus. No additional information from that assessment was available.

Stephen’s concerns at the time of the present assessment related to two broad categories: (1) his paraphilic interests and (2) guilt surrounding sexual contacts with children when he was an adolescent. Stephen reported continuing to experience partialism for women’s feet, often fantasizing about them clothed in stockings. He reported that he used to go to libraries and other places where he could surreptitiously watch women taking their shoes off and putting them back on. He indicated that, on some occasions, he crawled under tables, without the women’s knowledge, so that he could smell their feet. It was unclear how he was able to engage in this behavior without getting caught or whether it actually happened (i.e., versus occurring only in fantasy). Stephen reported that he once paid a dominatrix \$250 to allow him to sit under a table and lick her feet for 30 min. He frequently fantasized about being underneath women’s feet and smelling and sucking on them. He also reported an interest in having women step on his face, either while they were wearing shoes or barefoot. Stephen reported having paid women on live Internet feeds (i.e., private online broadcasts) to show him their feet and he described having put stockings and/or women’s underwear on his face while masturbating.

Stephen described an intense sexual interest in anilingus. He reported this interest to have begun around age 13–15, during which he reported having performed anilingus on five to ten children (both male and female, ranging in age from 3 to 12 years). He described having done this when the children were asleep and he stated he believed they were unaware of what he had done. He reported experiencing sexual arousal both during those events and subsequently during masturbation, despite

experiencing significant guilt and distress about having engaged in the behavior, and he denied any specific interest in children as sexual partners.

Stephen's interest in anilingus crossed over into sexual arousal associated with coprophilia and seemed also to be related to his vorarephilia interests. He described fantasizing about being consumed and destroyed by a very large, dominating woman, who would later defecate him as her feces. He often fantasized about being feces or semen and being expelled by a person. Stephen reported having stuck his hand in human fecal matter, smelling it on several occasions, and having eaten feces out of a toilet on two occasions. On one occasion, he reported feeling traumatized and distraught about an unexpected negative event: To cope with those feelings, he went into the woods and masturbated while eating cow feces. Consistent with his previous assessment, Stephen reported sexual arousal associated with the thought of being someone's anus.

Lastly, Stephen reported significant arousal associated specifically with dominance and submission/humiliation activities. He reported that he often fantasized about being forced by a large, dominating female to perform anilingus and fellatio on a male, or about being penetrated anally by a male partner. Stephen reported frequently fantasizing about being "used" by a heterosexual couple (particularly the female). He also reported an interest in bondage (i.e., being tied up by a dominant female), but denied any interest in inflicting pain on others or in experiencing pain himself during sexual activity.

Following the assessment, we diagnosed Stephen on DSM-IV-TR Axis I with Paraphilia NOS (partialism for women's feet), Paraphilia NOS (vorarephilia), and Sexual Masochism, with a prior diagnosis of Dysthymic Disorder, a rule-out diagnosis of Social Phobia, and diagnosis deferred on Axis II.² It was explained to Stephen at the time of the assessment that he was not likely sexually attracted to men, even though his sexual fantasies often involved males (he was quite concerned about his sexual orientation). Persons with paraphilic interests often report sexual arousal to both sexes in the context of their paraphilic fantasies. Stephen's previous phallometric results (which assessed only age and gender preference, not other paraphilic preferences) which indicated a clear preference for adult female partners, considered with the majority of his sexual fantasies involving adult females in some manner, suggested that this was likely the case with Stephen. Though he reported that he no longer had an interest in acting out the sexual fantasies detailed in the above, this may have been due to decreased libido associated with his depressive state. If so, it was possible that once his mood began to improve, his interests in those activities would resume. Thus, we recommended more aggressive treatment for his depressive

symptoms and the development of specific plans for coping when his libido increased. Because there is no method shown to change a person's paraphilic sexual interests into non-paraphilic interests, we recommended that his treatment help him to adjust to, rather than change or suppress, his sexual interests. We further recommended that, if Stephen found his sexual urges to interfere with other life activities even after engaging in psychotherapy, he consider sex-drive reducing medication. Stephen did not follow up with the SBC following this assessment, so it is not known whether he followed through on our treatment recommendations and, if so, the outcome of that treatment.

Discussion

The present case study reports a middle-aged man with multiple paraphilias, highlighting in particular aspects of an unusual paraphilia (vorarephilia) and sexual masochism. With regard to vorarephilia, one of Stephen's primary sexual fantasies involved him being consumed by a large, dominant woman and then defecated by her. He had no obvious wish to die; rather, he reported the desire to be "taken in" by someone and then expelled (as feces). Stephen did not report any interest in wishing to consume anyone or any interest in any other more dominant sexual activity. He was quite clearly interested in the victim role in his vore fantasy. Stephen's reported fantasies highlighted the focus on both the act and the result of consumption—total destruction of being and personhood—and his sexual arousal associated with such acts. Consistent with fantasies produced by the vore community, Stephen reported no interest in cannibalism (having his flesh eaten or chewed). It seems possible that Stephen's interest in feces and anal play may relate to the most tangible outcome of the possibility of having acted out these behaviors, specifically human waste and its immediate sources. Alternatively, it also seems reasonable to posit the reverse: that his interest in feces and anal play may have led him to vorarephilia fantasy. This directionality remains difficult to ascertain. Stephen's fantasies were not entirely consistent with the typical vore fantasy, in that he appeared to be much more focused on the end result (himself as feces) than the majority of the fantasies found in online vore erotica.

In many ways, Stephen's presentation conforms to what is known about sexual masochism. Consistent with the typical presentation of sexually masochistic clients (Freund, Seto, & Kuban, 1995), Stephen (1) reported erotic arousal to the idea of his suffering and submission to another; (2) identified the primary executor of this suffering (i.e., a large, dominant female); and (3) reported associations with other paraphilias (e.g., vorarephilia, partialism, coprophilia). Also consistent with Stephen's presentation, Freund et al. reported that, in 87 % of their masochistic clients, the executor was female, and about half of the sample reported erotic interest in being dominated/controlled and/or in being physically powerless. Approximately 25 % of the sample

² The corresponding DSM-5 diagnosis would be: Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder (Vorarephilia), Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder (Partialism for women's feet), and Masochistic Disorder, with prior (DSM-IV-TR) diagnoses of Dysthymic Disorder and a rule-out of Social Phobia.

also reported a preoccupation with the anal/rectal region, and 33 % reported interest in urine and/or feces. Baumeister (1988a) also reported as a common theme among masochists having a dominant female instructing a third party to anally penetrate the masochist.

Baumeister has written several theoretical articles hypothesizing motivations for sexually masochistic behaviors and interests. Baumeister (1988b) initially focused on the idea of masochistic behavior acting as a means of transformation into a new identity, which would typically result in a loss of dignity and personhood. He noted that degradation, status loss, and humiliation were more often reported by male than female masochists, which he argued was partially a reaction to (or means of escape from) the social power endemic to men's social roles (Baumeister, 1988a). That team (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Sommer, 1997) argued that masochists are motivated primarily by two factors: (1) a desire to transform and transcend their everyday, normal identities; and (2) a desire to form a union with powerful, often desirable, others. The concept of merging with a more powerful other (specifically through the act of consumption) finds resonance in religious practices from ancient times. Some Mystery cults originating in the Near East incorporated the consumption of the god as a central act of communion, through which the participants merged with the divine, through a eucharistic act (Vermaseren, 1963). In cultivating this relationship characterized by submission to a powerful other, masochists may also seek to escape an aloneness they experience in their daily lives (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997).

These latter motivations seem particularly applicable to submissive individuals engaging in vore fantasy and we considered the possibility that Stephen's vorarephilic fantasy may have been influenced by a desire to never again be alone or lonely. He presented as a very socially isolated individual, whose most recent romantic relationship had ended several years prior. Did this type of fantasy represent a wish to escape loneliness permanently, as well as present itself as an opportunity to forever merge with another, more powerful individual? Interviews with sexual cannibals, such as Armin Meiwes and Jeffrey Dahmer, suggest that escaping aloneness may serve as part of the motivation for eating another human being. Both made comments such as "I suppose in an odd way it made me feel as if they were even more a part of me" (Masters, 1993) and "I killed a man... and ate him; since then, he is always with me" (Stein-Rostaing, 2008) with regard to their having eaten people. Dahmer elaborated further in an interview (Phillips, 1994), saying that "It made me feel like they were a permanent part of me. Besides, besides the mere curiosity of what it would be like, it made them feel that they were a part of me, and it gave me a sexual...uh... satisfaction to do that," highlighting the interconnectedness between consuming parts of a human being and sexual gratification. It should be noted that it is not uncommon for paraphilic individuals to experience loneliness secondary to their fear of rejection by anyone who discovers their sexual interests. Indeed,

this may be a core feature for individuals with vorarephilic interests.

It is interesting to speculate whether the set of interests Stephen experienced represent a cluster of multiple interests or a single interest which happens to overlap or only superficially resemble multiple, more common categories. Stephen presented at two different times, 10 years apart, reporting distress from different sexual interests (foot fetishism and anilingus in 2002 and vorarephilia and masochism presently). Although paraphilias are often referred to as unchangeable, Stephen's case suggests itself as an example of a progression in paraphilic interests. It is unfortunate Stephen ceased clinical contact again after the latter interview. Although some individuals refer to a very specific episode in early life in which they first experienced a fascination with a stimulus that later served as their erotic focus, Stephen may have experienced a slower progression over the course of adulthood. Additional areas for assessment could have included how and when his sexual interests changed (or seemed to change). It also remains possible, however, that Stephen's paraphilic interests remained unchanged between clinical contacts, but that the aspects he found distressing or willing to disclose had changed.

Although Stephen's clinical presentation was, in many ways, consistent with sexual masochism and vorarephilia, he diverged from the typical presentation in a few ways. First, he had a very significant history of depression, much greater than typically reported in this population. In fact, most research on prosocial bondage/dominance sadomasochism emphasizes how psychologically healthy these individuals are (e.g., Connolly, 2006), so his psychiatric history appeared to contrast somewhat with the usual presentation. Also, Stephen reported sexual arousal to the idea of actually being body parts (e.g., an anus) and bodily products (e.g., feces, semen). We could find no mention of these types of sexual interests in either scientific or popular literature—this interest appears to be rare or unique, thus far.

In conclusion, we have reported on a middle-aged male reporting to the Sexual Behaviours Clinic with several paraphilias, one of which (vorarephilia) has heretofore received little empirical attention. It is unfortunate that because it is so rare, the interviewer (AL) was not knowledgeable about the specific types of questions to ask to probe deeper into this client's paraphilic interests. We hope that this case report may serve as a starting point in the exploration of this unusual paraphilia, one that appears to have close ties to sadism and masochism (dominance/submission).

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