

Chains and Whips Excite Me

I-Search by Cori Harris, English 101

Sadism is something that is rarely discussed or questioned in my everyday life. This may be because when people hear the word sadism, they automatically assume you are talking along the lines of a dominatrix or sexual acts. However, with little to no true knowledge about the subject, I always thought sadism could relate to far more than just sexual behavior. For instance, when someone trips and falls, the immediate reaction I expect to hear from people around me is laughter. Why is that? Why does our society find great enjoyment in a person's injury? Although I try not to, sometimes I will catch myself finding pleasure from another's misfortunes. To many people, the reaction of happiness from others' hardships seems natural and non-problematic. In my opinion, there is something seriously wrong with a society if it takes the downfall of a person to bring joy.

I found myself extremely curious about the whole idea of sadism and wanting to know about the different forms of it. My interest in this topic mostly began from seeing incidents, like the one previously mentioned, of someone falling. I have never understood why people have the initial reaction of laughing rather than having sympathy and asking if the person is all right. I would like to see different cases of sadism and try to more clearly understand what makes cruelty so attractive to our society. I am not sure if there is a clear answer to this question, but I am interested to see other people's interpretations of the topic and if they see sadism as a problem or not. From observing small acts of sadism in everyday life, it seems as though it is just part of our society. Therefore, I am also curious to see whether any scholars have discovered ways to prevent the sadistic behavior that has become so natural in society.

After thinking about this topic quite a bit, there are a few things that I seek to find through research. First, I want a thorough definition of sadism. Furthermore, I want to explore different cases of sadism: including minor to extreme cases. The most important aspect I seek to question is why sadism is such an attraction for people in our society. Finally, I will research scholarly ideas about the prevention of sadism. There may not be a right or wrong answer to my questions, but I am curious to learn about other opinions on the topic and determine whether or not sadistic behavior is problematic in our culture.

On the Search for Sadism

When going about the research for my chosen topic, first, I used the resources that the librarian taught us on our library day. This demonstration provided the means through which I obtained access to multiple sources with information on sadism. From Internet sources I was able to find journals, books, and videos about sadism and the many different views on it. Searching for and reading the research was enjoyable because of my genuine interest in the topic.

I began the research process with the library catalog to find books on sadism. I checked out *Cruelty* by Kathleen Taylor, which specifically questions why sadism exists. Another text, *The DSM-IV Personality Disorders*, edited by W. John Livesley, has a section dedicated to Sadistic Personality

Disorder. I also utilized the *Academic Search Premier* database to look at different journal articles on sadism. One article that I found relevant to my topic is “Shadows of Cruelty,” by Frida Beckman and Charlie Blake, which reviews different reports of sadism. The other was “Sadism Revisited,” by V. Siomopoulos and Jewett Goldsmith—an overall discussion of the dimension of sadism. For my popular culture sources, I incorporated songs because of my interest in music and the types of lyrics that artists use. In the music industry today, there are many cases that show the popularity of sadistic behavior through artists’ song lyrics. I found it astonishing to read sources about sadism and how the perspectives vary from person to person.

Curiosity Killed Me And The Sadist Liked It

The first thing I wanted to do in my research was to see the various ways that sadism is defined. I figured this would help me obtain fundamental understanding of my subject. Kathleen Taylor describes the general term of sadism as “the delight in hurting” and when “the victim’s suffering is enjoyed for its own sake” (204). Sadism is described as a personality disorder in *The DSM-IV* and is conveyed as “the desire to inflict pain upon a sexual object” (Livesley 329). These are two vastly different descriptions of sadism; however, both are correct. In “Sadism Revisited,” sadism is described as “a variety of behaviors extending from plain nonsexual, physical, or mental cruelty to infliction of pain, or perpetration of mutilations, or even murder, during, before, or after sexual activity of any sort” (Siomopoulos and Goldsmith 631). These definitions are closely aligned to my definition of sadism, yet I recognize that the tripping and falling example I used previously does not seem like a solid example. Most of the definitions I found during my research involved someone inflicting pain on another, rather than watching someone get hurt. I learned that for something to be considered sadistic, the situation will be different from my original observation.

When searching for different cases of sadism, I found examples that were extreme and disturbing, along with other examples which our culture ignores without thought. “Shadows of Cruelty” talks about the case of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq where United States Army police personnel were committing sadistic acts against the prisoners. The case was broadcast consistently on the news and pictures were leaked of the various acts of torture the police did to the prisoners. The article states that “it was the existence of these prison photographs in themselves that created the most potent reaction to the atrocities of Abu Ghraib” (Beckman and Blake 2). I interpreted this to mean that people do not consider sadism a problem until there is actual proof of it. Since I never think about such extreme incidences occurring, I find I agree with this. However, after looking at the pictures from the Abu Ghraib case, I was so disturbed and could not understand how someone could do the horrific acts these officers were doing to other people. Beckman and Blake’s article also discusses other well-known extreme cases, such as Nazism and slavery. I understand that the people who know about these cases consider the actions wrong, but I still sought to determine whether people realized that sadism still exists in everyday life.

I found sadistic lyrics in many of the popular songs that my generation listens to today, and am pretty amazed that these grotesque lyrics go unnoticed. In Rihanna’s recent song titled “S & M,” which

stands for sadomasochism, she says “chains and whips excite me.” This illuminates the fact that some people really do get ‘sexually excited’ from painful acts. Many of these songs include messages that are extremely vulgar, and I find it ridiculous that they were even produced. In “Sadistic,” by Torture Killer, one part says “To every drop she’s bleeding, I laugh and masturbate. Your torture is my pleasure, I kill and violate!” In “Roman’s Revenge,” Nicki Minaj and Eminem rap that he “[t]ied her arms and legs to the bed, set up the camera and pissed on her twice.” I found many other songs that contained other lyrics of this vulgar content. I find it abhorrent how it has recently become popular to talk about such violent actions. From these situations, I thought it was very puzzling that though extreme cases sadism are disturbing to the public, yet talking about engaging in these actions in a song is socially accepted. Is this not how most actions begin—with the idea of it? I do not find it acceptable for people to talk about sadistic behavior as if it is not an important issue. These artists seem to have no idea that they are negatively influencing someone to act upon the violent acts portrayed in their song lyrics. After seeing the negative results, I feel that sadism in either form, acted out or talked about, should be avoided.

In my last research paper, I came to the conclusion that discrimination was inevitable and would never be completely gone, because it is hard to eliminate how people feel. I also had previous doubts that sadistic behavior could be eliminated. This also deals with people’s thoughts and feelings and seems unexplained. However, Kathleen Taylor makes an influential closing remark that helped answer my questions about the prevention of sadism:

Understanding cruelty . . . is the only viable means, in the long term, of dealing with [sadism]. Recognizing the warning signs and patterns of cruel behavior and acknowledging our own susceptibilities may help us put in place the beliefs and the social incentives, which can make cruelty less likely to occur—though it will never be eliminated. If we can come to see cruelty not as otherized evil, but as comprehensible, if morally vile, behavior, it may be a little less painful to grasp that being cruel is part of being human. (232)

This excerpt shows that cruelty cannot fully be avoided, but it can be lessened. As stated earlier, I admit that I sometimes catch myself getting pleasure from other people’s pain and I have to remember that. After reading this, I realized that in order to help the cruelty issue, I must to remember that we as humans are not excluded from this cruelty.

After completing this research, I feel I have a much clearer understanding of what sadism is, and its effect in our world. I know there are many other sources I could find and I am still interested in continuing this area of research. Some of the things I researched made me uneasy because I do not support any forms of violence. However, I know educating ourselves about the topic will help people to become more aware of sadistic issues in our culture, and I hope to be able to prevent minor acts that I may see in my community. Not only did I find that physical cases of sadism can be extremely terrible, but I also discovered that sadistic language is not a positive thing either. For instance, I will not want my children to grow up listening to the types of music that my generation has made popular. I feel that sadism could not be completely prevented, but there are efforts to eliminate the attractiveness of sadism and its influence in our culture.

Works Cited

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