

## Homicide and Dismemberment, Body Parts and Trophies: Exploring Sarxenthymiophilia

Case Report

Dr. Mark Pettigrew\*

Arden University, England.

### Abstract

Whilst existing research literature contains numerous entries regarding the collection of souvenirs and trophies, as a behaviour involved in homicide and, particularly, serial killing, within that literature little attention has been given to the collection of body parts. Although noted as an example of a trophy that an offender might take from a victim, the sexual significance of that behaviour remains largely unexplored, even though several notable cases have involved such activity. A case is presented of an offender who dismembered victims and desired to keep parts he had amputated. The sexual significance of that desire is explored here to demonstrate the behaviour can be considered necrophilic in nature.

**Keywords:** Sarxenthymiophilia; Homicide; Trophies; Paraphilic Disorder; Necrophilia.

### Introduction

In existing research literature the terms ‘dismemberment’, ‘criminal mutilation’, and ‘body part removal’ have been used interchangeably. In their seminal study of criminal mutilation, for example, Rajs et al [1] use the term criminal mutilation to include dismemberment, specifically the “amputation of a limb or part of it”, but exclude the excision of minor body parts such as ears, fingers or segments of skin [1]. Kahana et al [2] begin their analysis of post-mortem dismemberment more generally, the separation of body segments, before categorising types of dismemberment more specifically. Sea and Beauregard [3], meanwhile, include severe disfigurement in their analysis of body disposal whilst Di Nunno et al [4] specify severing of limbs and cutting a body into small pieces. To remedy the confusion yielded by the varying uses of different terms, dismemberment here is simply defined as the post-mortem amputation of any part of the human body.

Dismemberment of a homicide victim is statistically rare. In the United Kingdom, Almond, Pell and McManus [5], using the ViCLAS at the National Crime Agency’s Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS), identified 58 homicide cases involving body part removal between 1975 and 2016. In Osaka, Japan, Sugiyama et al [6] only identified 4 homicide cases involving dismemberment between 1984 and 1993. In Finland, Häkkänen-Nyholm et al [7]

found only 13 such cases in the ten year period from 1995 to 2004. Similarly, Rajs et al [1] identified just 22 cases involving criminal mutilation in Sweden between 1961 and 1990 whilst Konopka et al [8] identified just 23 cases examined by the Cracow Department of Forensic Medicine in Poland between 1968 and 2005.

Somewhat more clearly differentiated than criminal dismemberment, in existing research, as relates to homicide, are trophies and souvenirs. As Bartol and Bartol [9] note, making a distinction between the two is important as each can infer something slightly different about the personality and motivation of the offender. For Holmes and Holmes [10] the immediate reason for an offender to take a souvenir from the homicide victim is so there is a tangible reminder of the crime,

The rational decision to take a souvenir involves the same mental process as might be used by someone collecting souvenirs while on a vacation. It reminds the killer not only of the event, but of what has taken place during that event.

Making a distinction, Holmes and Holmes [10] assert that a souvenir may be a memento that recalls an experiential high point whereas a trophy is not only a reminder of that experiential high, it is a visual reward that serves as an aphrodisiac, such as a body part. As noted by Holmes and Holmes [10] a trophy is best con-

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Dr. Mark Pettigrew,  
Arden House, Middlemarch Park, Coventry CV3 4FJ, England.  
Tel: 0808 163 4376  
E-mail: mpettigrew@arden.ac.uk

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sidered as something intensely personal such as a lock of hair; underwear; or a body part whilst a souvenir is something more innocuous, a watch; a wallet; a piece of jewellery, for example, something which the offender could openly carry with him without arousing any suspicion. Warren, Dietz and Hazelwood [11] assert that trophy taking, for the offender, validates their conquest and victory over the victim, and can also serve a linking function, keeping the offender psychologically connected to the victim. For some offenders the motivation to take souvenirs and trophies from victims can be sexual, as Geberth [12] documents, they can be used by the offender as masturbatory aids in recalling a homicide. When such a compulsion exists, the offender might suffer from a paraphilic disorder, particularly if the trophy is a body part. Mellor [13] labels that specific paraphilic disorder as sarxenthyiophilia “sexual arousal to pieces or parts of the human body that have been taken from the corpse”.

Sexual arousal from body parts, as a distinct behaviour, has not been clearly categorised in existing classifications of necrophilic behaviour. In Aggrawal's offering of a classification of necrophilia, for example, the behaviour could fall into at least three of the different typologies of necrophilia that the author proposes: romantic necrophilia; tactile necrophilia; and fetishistic necrophilia [14]. The romantic necrophile “cannot bear separation from their loved ones... They mummify their loved ones' dead body (or body parts) and continue to relate sexually to them as much as they did in life”. The tactile necrophile needs to touch a corpse is an erotic way in order to achieve an orgasm, “they enjoy stroking parts of the dead such as genitalia or breasts or perhaps licking them”. There is no stipulation, however, that the body parts remain attached to the corpse. Fetishistic necrophiles, according to Aggrawal, would, if they came across a corpse and the chance arose, cut up the body and keep some part of it, such as the breast, for later use in “fetishistic activities”. The dissection of behaviours then fails to provide much elucidation or edification of body part removal but, instead, impedes understanding of a homicidal behaviour or impulse more generally.

Although poorly reflected in current categories of necrophilic behaviours, several examples of sarxenthyiophilia have been noted in the research literature, particularly as a behaviour involved in serial killing. Perhaps most notable amongst such examples is the case of Jeffrey Dahmer. For thirteen years, until his arrest in 1991, Dahmer killed 17 young men and boys, the bodies of which he dismembered and cannibalised. When police searched his apartment they found scores of polaroids taken of various dismembered body parts. Other serial killers, although perhaps less well known outside the United States, have also been documented as harvesting body parts from their victims. Jerry Brudos, who murdered four women between 1968 and 1969, amputated a woman's foot, which he kept in a freezer, and cut off the breast of another which he preserved in an epoxy mould and kept on his mantle [15]. Douglas Clark, responsible for the deaths of eight women during the summer of 1980, would keep decapitated heads in his refrigerator [15]. Edmund Kemper would decapitate all his victims, dissect the corpses and save several body parts “for sexual pleasure” [16], whilst serial killer Charles Albright is reported to have harvested the eyes of his victims [17]. Although dismembering and harvesting parts of the body is commonly linked with serial killing, the same behaviour has been observed in single homicide offenders, such as in the case presented by Geberth [15]. The subject reported having wanted to kill his lover and had developed

masturbatory fantasies of dismembering the corpse and playing with the body parts. At the scene of their long-planned murder/suicide he stabbed his lover in the stomach and proceeded to amputate the victim's penis, ears, tongue, and armpit. After washing the various body parts, he masturbated with them. When arrested he was found to be carrying the excised pieces of flesh in his pocket [15].

## Methodology

As part of a wider research project examining the role of sexual paraphilic disorders in homicide, after securing permission from an institutional ethics board and the informed consent of the research participant, access was granted to a range of case materials. Those materials included the offender's police confession; trial testimony; psychiatric reports; an unpublished autobiography; and were supplemented with interviews and correspondence. Thematic analysis of material was undertaken to determine themes in the research data, one such theme identified was the desire to keep parts of homicide victims, upon their dismemberment, to maintain a sexual connection between the offender and those he had murdered.

## Case Report

Over a period of five years the offender murdered, at least, 12 men, in his home, in order to secure corpses for use in his necrophilic fantasies. After strangling his victims, as a necrofetishist he would mimic relationship behaviours with the corpses, bathing with them, watching television, eating together, sleeping together, as well as performing sexual acts. The body of each victim became his significant other; the offender believed they were in fact in a loving relationship, the type which had eluded him for his entire life. He himself recalled, “These sexual partners could be whatever I wanted them to be, unlike ‘real’ people”.

When the progression of post-mortem decay rendered the corpses of his victims unable to continue to participate in his necrophilic role playing fantasies they required disposal. Unaccustomed with how to dispose of corpses without detection, the offender decided to burn his first victim. To that end, he constructed a bonfire at the rear of his residence; the first victim was burned whole and without arousing the suspicion of neighbours. Yet, despite the success of disposing of his first victim, whole, he chose to dismember future victims. He has never been able to articulate why he changed the means by which he disposed of victims, particularly when the disposal of the first victim was successful. The change in the manner of body disposal is all the more perplexing as he claims he would need to be under the influence of alcohol to carry out the task of dismemberment, “When I decided to dismember I was stone cold sober but needed to get drunk to do the job because the smell was obnoxious and nauseating”. It is that claim of necessary intoxication which has been disputed by successive prison psychiatrists who have evaluated him during his incarceration.

There are discrepancies between [his] descriptions of being heavily under the influence of alcohol when disposing of the bodies, and the careful attention necessary for carrying out such actions effectively. [His] descriptions of being heavily under the influence of alcohol when disposing of the bodies, and the careful attention

necessary for the carrying out of such actions effectively. This description is likely to be used as a way of minimising the calculated and focused nature of the dismemberment.

The observation made by psychiatrists during his incarceration are lent credence by the offender's own account, when not given to an attendant physician. Indeed, his own diarised account reveals very calm reflection and methodical decision making during the process of dismemberment.

In the dissection of corpses of the first two at [home] I was able to reflect rationally on the culinary possibilities of fairly fresh human meat. It occurred to me when I was cutting up on the wooden board across the bath. When you slice through human buttocks the slices of meat looks just like beef rump steaks with the colour being slightly lighter than in beef.

It was in such a contemplative mood that the offender first considered keeping various body parts from different victims. Already he had begun to take polaroids of the corpses and keep personal items from his victims, such as wristwatches, but he had not yet collected any flesh souvenirs.

In 'ideal' conditions if I had a good cellar and chemical means I would have kept some parts of some victims. XXXXX hands were small, marble white, pretty and very delicate, he was only a month away from his seventeenth birthday.

When contemplating how he would store such body parts in a manner that would prevent decomposition, he surmised,

I may have well kept them in a jar of alcohol or some [other] liquid preservative.

Whilst individual physical characteristics of some victims may have held a particular attraction for him, when considering the preservation of sexual organs he was less discriminating.

I would probably [have] done the same to all the scrotums and penises. Ideally I would have liked to have sufficient skill and chemicals to retard decay altogether and preserve them by embalming them in a lifelike colour.

Ultimately, lacking the necessary means and materials for the storage of any body parts, he could not keep any physical remains of any of his victims. However, he freely admits his desire to have done so,

My circumstances, being so limited, confined such thoughts to the realm of idealistic dreams.

Unable to pursue his 'idealistic dream' of storing the various body parts of his victims, the offender was forced to dismember their corpses, the disposal of which eventually led to his arrest, conviction and subsequent imprisonment for the remainder of his life.

## Discussion

Despite being poorly categorised in current typologies of necrophilic behaviour, if at all, the research literature regarding necrophilia does provide examples of persons becoming sexually

aroused by, and thus motivated to collect, dismembered body parts. Indeed, some of those reports date back centuries. Schurig [18], for example, cites the case of a woman who treasured the amputated penis of her husband, whilst Ellis [19] similarly describes the case of a wife who embalmed and perfumed her husband's genitals after he died. Yet, despite examples of such behaviour having been recorded for hundreds of years the behaviour remains poorly understood. Indeed, the term sarxenthyiophilia was only coined by Mellor [13] in 2017.

It should be noted that the offender's only interest was in keeping body parts, he did not express an interest in keeping any skeletal bones which could have been easily preserved without any specific means, materials or scientific knowledge. However, only parts with flesh stimulated his desire to preserve any part of his victims. Indeed, the flesh was the key motivation in his desire for storage, even the hands of one victim, which he so admired, were not considered for presentation in skeletal form which, unlike the genitalia of victims, could have been saved. For, once the flesh is removed, and it should be noted that the offender in this case would boil the heads of his victims on the stove in order to more easily dispose of the skulls, the body part – the skeletal remains – no longer resemble the love object that the victim had become for the offender.

Whilst Holmes and Holmes [10] assert that a body part should be considered as a trophy for an offender, a symbol of victory over a victim, results from this study would suggest that the assertion is not necessarily true for offenders who wish to use the body part for sexual stimulation. A head, for example, kept on a mantle would perhaps validate the claim of Holmes and Holmes. However, the offender in this instance did not want to keep body parts to remind him of a victory but, instead, of what he had lost. Remembering that the offender kept the bodies of his victims for days and weeks after their murder, mimicked relationship behaviours with them such as conversing, eating together, and bathing, as well as for sexual gratification, once they could no longer fulfil their role in that fantasy he wanted specific parts of them which he liked and admired so the relationship could continue in some form. That is to say, he could use them for psychosexual stimulation, if able to preserve the body parts, after the full body of the victim had begun to decompose.

Body parts, however, must be distinguished from whole bodies. The sexual stimulation derived from a body whole, even when that body is preserved or mummified, is necrophilia, regardless of the motivation for preserving or mummifying a corpse. Indeed, Foraker [20] reports the case of an elderly gentleman who became infatuated with a young girl who would, soon after meeting, die from tuberculosis. Upon her death he built an elaborate tomb for her remains which he would frequently visit, in a public cemetery, and talk to her corpse using a specially installed telephone. Two years after her death he removed her corpse from the tomb and took it to his home where he reconstructed the face, arms, legs, breasts and trunk and inserted a vaginal tube so that intercourse could be simulated. By his own account he,

...rebuilt the lost parts, bandaged the broken parts and the destroyed parts which had to come out, I replaced. I put in sufficient absorbent material for packing to soak her in solutions and feed her and develop the tissues.

Figure 1.



When it came to light that the girl's remains were no longer in the tomb the police seized the embalmed corpse from the gentleman's home. After he was released from jail, some months after his behaviour was discovered, he was seen to have constructed some sort of effigy of the girl which he kept in his bed [20]. Although extreme, such a case does not exist in isolation. More recently, in Russia, a man in his mid-forties was found to have disturbed the graves of at least 29 women and girls whose corpses he would take home and mummify into dolls (fig.1) [21]. It is not clear, however, whether any sexual gratification was derived from his behaviour. However, the desired preservation of particular body parts in this case was, specifically, sexually motivated.

Sarxenthyiophilia is the sexual stimulation produced by an amputated body part to which the offender is particularly attracted. Such behaviour and arousal regarding ante-mortem body parts (partialism) is well documented in the research literature regarding human sexuality and attraction. Shaffer and Penn [22] list 26 different paraphilic attractions to various body parts including: breasts; buttocks; legs; teeth; and armpits. Some body parts are relatively common sources of sexual arousal; foot fetishism (podophilia), for example, was found to be particularly prevalent in a study conducted by Scorolli et al [23]. The authors recorded a relative frequency of 47% in their analysis of 381 internet based discussion groups involving, by their own admission, "conservatively", 5000 individuals. Similarly, Lehmilller [24] asserts that as many as one in seven Americans have sexual fantasies regarding feet. However, sarxenthyiophilia is sexual arousal dependent upon the post-mortem condition of the body from which particular parts are amputated. For it is both a specific source of arousal but also a part of a particular person that can be stored and maintained which is sexually gratifying to the individual. As such, this type of behaviour is a distinct form of necrophilia and distinct from its ante-mortem equivalent, partialism.

## Conclusion

A distinction has already been made in the research literature between trophies and souvenirs, in the context of homicide and offender behaviours; this case study adds to that literature. It offers a new way of understanding the harvesting of body parts, not necessarily as trophies, which the offender can use to recall a victory over another person, but as a source of sexual arousal, a keepsake unique to a particular person. However, there is a distinct paucity of research in this area, with the sexual arousal dependent upon amputated body parts, sarxenthyiophilia, having only recently been articulated. Future research should source and

examine similar case studies, for it is assumed to be a rare sexual behaviour and so the number of instances presented to clinicians will be small. In establishing a body of case study research it is hoped that a fuller understanding of this sexual behaviour can be cultivated and, thus, appropriate treatment options developed.

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