

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and National Lifers of America, Inc.

MICHIGAN

Lifers Report

Newsletter

MAY 2023

SEXUAL OFFENDERS: ARE THEY CRIMINAL SEXUAL PSYCHOPATHS?

ARE PRISONS THE PROPER PLACE OR SHOULD THEY BE IN TREATMENT

CENTERS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY? WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Willis X. Harris

The American Psychological Association agrees sexual assaults (rape) are acts of violence with no signs of mental illness. They are well thought out and planned. Therapeutic treatment may not be the solution. The APA tends to agree that imprisonment for specific length of time has a greater impact than therapy, but it, too, is not a solution.

For example, John (not his real name) is a Michigan prisoner who was initially sentenced to 30-to-60 years for rape. He served 18 years. He had been intensely involved in a sex therapy program called SONAR (Seeking Out New Approaches To Reality). With good time and special parole consideration, he was paroled. He gained employment as a school custodian, a job he held for two years. A female teacher was in the women's dressing room changing clothes. Classes were over and the kids were gone. John entered the dressing room, saw the teacher half nude, threatened her not to scream and sexually assaulted her. Unknown to him, she knew who he was. She reported him to the school principal and police. John was arrested, charged with CSC-First Degree, convicted and sentenced to another term of 30-to-60 years. Now, John is a parole violator with a new sentence running consecutive (not concurrent) to his initial 30-to-60 years sentence. This means John has to complete/discharge off his original sentence and ... (Cont. on p. 3)

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**MICHIGANS LIFERS REPORT
NEWSLETTER**

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(Limit articles to 600 words)

THE GENETIC FACTOR

UNDERSTANDING NO REMORSE

Richard Althouse, Ph.D.

The headline was stark: "Black Twitter Reacts: Derek Chauvin, Sentenced to 22.5 years in prison, offers no remorse to George Floyd's family" (Clark, 2021). Prompting the very important question: How do we understand no remorse in the wake of national outrage or tragedy - particularly from a criminal justice context?

On November 15, 2021, in his closing prosecutorial argument, Thomas Binger, Kenosha Wisconsin's Assistant District Attorney, referred to Kyle Rittenhouse as showing "no remorse" for what he had done (CNN), suggesting that if Mr. Rittenhouse was able to feel remorseful, he would have behaved differently and not killed or wounded those he did.

What Is Remorse?

The word "remorse" comes from the Latin roots re ("again") and mordere ("to bite"), as if your past action is "biting you back", making you "feel" regretful. Consequently, remorse is popularly defined as a "distressing emotion experienced by an individual who regrets actions which they have done that they come to believe are shameful, hurtful, or wrong" (Wikipedia). A shorter definition is offered by Oxford Dictionaries, "Deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed."

Remorse In Criminal Justice Settings

Since we often assume that individuals who do not readily exhibit remorse potentially pose a continuing threat to our social order, we often search for remorse during offender interviews, trials, sentencing, and parole hearings, and use its apparent presence or absence as a measure of an individual's future risk to public safety. Consequently, we can become anxious, fearful, and/or angry when we don't see it when we believe we should, as in Derek Chauvin's or Kyle Rittenhouse's case, and our conclusions can sway public opinion regarding the moral or ethical character of an individual. However, despite its widespread use, few of us have given much thought to the complexities of remorse, its vulnerabilities, when the term should be used, and the degree to which our continuing search for and beliefs about remorse are warranted.

Separated into its component parts, remorse is the end result of a complex set of genetically organized neurological processes that overlap with, but are somewhat distinct from, those of empathy, sympathy, or regret. Remorse involves a combination of both reconsidered judgment about and ... (Cont. on p. 6)

(Sexual Offenders, from p. 1) ... start his new 30-to-60-years sentence. He is now 76 years old.

Paul (fictitious name) was incarcerated in Michigan at the age 16. He was repeatedly molested from age 12 to 16 by a woman. She would bury his face between her legs, rub herself across his mouth, and require him to do a variety of other sexual acts. When he told his mother, she and her daughter did not believe him and accused him of being "mad" because he couldn't go out and roam the streets.

Paul, at the age 16, went "wild" and sexually assaulted 10 women as a means of "getting even" for the sexual abuse he endured growing up. He was apprehended, charged with 10 counts of rape, convicted on each count and sentenced to 150 years imprisonment. He went to prison in 1965 and is still incarcerated. He is now 74 and has served 58 years.

Joann (fictitious name, age 17, and three female friends in Kentucky sexually assaulted a 14-year-old boy until he went unconscious. They had performed multiple sexual acts on him. He was left lying in the grass near a vacant lot.

The Kentucky State Police found the boy laying in the grass still unconscious and called for emergency medical services who examined the him and transported him to the hospital. He was placed on oxygen, further examined by medical staff, who found spermatozoa drippings on his legs, in his mouth, and on his face.

When he regained consciousness, police questioned him on what had happened. He told police that he was sexually assaulted by four neighborhood girls who pulled his pants down and grabbed his private parts, played with it until it was erected, sat on it, while one girl sat on his face and took turns on him until he passed how. He knew who the girls were and where they lived. They were arrested, charged with CSC-First Degree, found guilty of four counts, and sentenced to 25-to-50 years each. They are still in prison.

If psychiatric and psychological professionals are not convinced that rape and other sexual offenses are mental illness, then who is? If rape, i.e., criminal sexual conduct/assault, is a crime, premeditated, unlawful course of action/behavior, then why are no cures available in prisons to rehabilitate men and women with this aberrant, antisocial state of mind? We are witnessing that neither electrotherapy, psychotherapy, psychiatric counseling, nor psychotropic medication seem to change these people, especially males.

If sexual offenders can be called sexual deviants, psychopaths, or endowed with a genetic predisposition for sexual abnormalities, then we must find the appropriate facilities for them: Sexual Treatment Centers, Civil Commitment Hospitals, Study Laboratories, or Prisons.

No one knows how many inactive, active, and proactive criminal sexual psychopaths we have roaming around in society. They flourish in every area area of humanity. We find them in our homes, schools, universities, places of worship, workplaces, bars, nightclubs, law enforcement, and government.

In conclusion, we have many different schools of thought on our abnormal criminal sexual mindset. We donate money and fund many research projects to find answers, cures, and solutions to our many aberrations, mental, moral, physical, pyschological, and sexual abnormalities. Criminal behavior interacts with them all.

Where do we draw the line for inclusion and exclusion? Is there a solution or do we continue to birth, breed, nurture, and integrate the antisocial and anti-human conduct toward each other? These conditions are nurtured into our children, boys and girls. Many of our seniors are coming "out of the closet" and are proactive sexual psychopaths.

What do you think? How do we solve these problems? Is there a solution?

NOTE: The real names of people listed were changed for obvious reasons and personal safety.

POLITICS AND PAROLE

Robert Alfiero

Politics plays a major role in parole decisions in Michigan and likely other states as well. It is an unfortunate reality that interferes with a prisoner's ability to get a fair hearing and decision.

This especially affects prisoners serving life sentences and sex offenses who are subject to unfair and often inaccurate stigmas that politicians and others have given as explained in a previous article.

Parole decisions should be based on objective and verifiable information which accurately helps determine the likelihood of someone reoffending. This was much more the case when we had a civil service parole board.

This drastically changed when laws were changed to having an Executive parole board. This board became subject to political influence and as a result the parole rate plummeted significantly while using the same basic criteria and information.

In most cases, current parole decisions go against the recidivism rates. According to the Department of Justice and other reliable sources, the highest recidivism rates are for drug related and property crimes which is around 70%. Unfortunately, they also have the highest parole rate and the highest parole violation rates.

There are reasons for this disturbing fact. Drug offenders are often addicts and have no interest in getting rid of their addictions. Drug dealers and property offenders often have a criminal mentality and many are career criminals with no interest of changing.

The parole board categorizes them as non-violent offenders and have a very liberal attitude about granting them parole. This is despite the statistics

that establish that they are far more likely to reoffend. A true example of this indifferent attitude by the parole board is when they granted parole to a person without an interview who had been to prison 13 times. It is clear that he is a career criminal with no interest in changing.

The parole boards rationale in paroling this person and others similarly situated is baffling and contrary to public safety policies. The theory behind granting parole is supposed to be based on their readiness to be released and likelihood not to reoffend. No reasonable person should ever be able to justify granting such people parole absent mitigating circumstances.

On the flip side, prisoners with homicide and sex offenses are treated with an ultra conservative approach by the board despite the fact that they have by far the lowest recidivism rates. They look for any excuse or justification to deny them parole, or a public hearing despite evidence of substantial rehabilitation and an excellent institutional record.

The main reasons are political pressure and concern about job security for the parole board members. Their appointments by an executive team member are politically motivated and subjects them to unfair scrutiny and loss of employment if they go against what the politicians want.

This, and other reasons are why politics should play no role in the parole process. Politics is all about looking good, not doing what is right. Parole decisions should be made by fair and objective people with no personal or political agendas. The theory of the criminal justice system is that justice is blind. That means that they have no prejudices or bias ... (Cont. on p. 6)

DESERVING OF A SECOND CHANCE

THIS ISSUES FEATURED LIFER: MELISSA BELANGER

On October 13, 2001, Melissa Belanger made the worst decision of her life. It cost her the rest of her life in prison. Melissa ended up being sentenced to 3 life terms and 8 to 20 years for her role in a crime with her husband. Melissa's worst decision in her life nor the nearly 20-years she has already spent in prison is the focal point of why she is deserving of a second chance, it is what she has overcome in her life that has gotten her to where she is now.

Like many women whose stories we often do not hear, Melissa was strongly influenced and intimidated by her husband who was addicted to drugs and alcohol. While Melissa's troubled story does not start with her husband, her childhood was not one we can call normal. Her first encounter with the criminal justice system came at a young age of 13, when she was charged with her first felony. From this point in her life, Melissa spiraled out of control landing her in 14 different foster homes and 2 juvenile facilities. This all occurred by the young age of 15. To top what she had already been through, she became pregnant at the age of 15. Now Melissa was a troubled teenager having a child.

Melissa's troubled youth, unstable home, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol addiction is more than anyone reading this could endure. Melissa felt alone and abandoned by everyone including her parents. This feeling of abandonment at such a young age would lead her to attempting to take her own life. With such abandonment issues, Melissa's need for acceptance and companionship put her right in the hands of abusive men, including her husband.

Melissa takes full responsibility of her role in the crime that has put her in prison for life. Melissa has overcome so much in her life that has led her to where she is now. She no longer uses drugs or alcohol. Melissa now has a relationship with her mother. She has become an advocate for other women and sits on the National Lifers of America (NLA) Local Chapter 1014 Legislation and Aiding & Abetting Committee as the vice-chair. Melissa is also currently advocating for herself and other women serving life to be able to participate in GED classes. She often says she wants to take college classes but can't because she can't earn a GED. Because of what Melissa has endured in her life and has overcome and because of who she has become in her life, Melissa is deserving of a second chance.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you are interested in getting to know Melissa Belanger and potentially supporting her transformation and second chance, you can contact by writing her at Melissa Belanger #491509, Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility, 3201 Bemis Rd., Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or by opening a JPay account at www.jpays.com by clicking Michigan and adding Melissa's prison number to your account.

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(The Genetic Factor, from p. 2) ... emotions about past behavior, and is thus vulnerable to circumstantial and interpretative variations.

For example, one might have empathy or sympathy, but not remorse, over a past action that resulted in the unwarranted suffering of another, but that the person creating the suffering (e.g. a career criminal or someone who assists a suicide) did not believe was morally wrong. One might regret a past injurious action because of its negative consequences to one's self (e.g., punishment), but not experience remorse if one thought the action was acceptable. One might have compassion for another's suffering, but not feel remorse for having caused it, such as the CEO who had to fire many employees to save a business, a surgeon whose painful intervention saved a patient's life, or accidentally shooting and killing someone. It has also been my observation that remorse is occasionally confused with compassion, as in attorney Burger's reference to Kyle Rittenhouse, when compassion was likely the more correct descriptor in his closing argument. Finally, an assessment of authentic (as opposed to faked) remorse; often a matter of opinion than fact in criminal justice processes and correctional settings, let alone in public discourse.

The Genetic Factor To Remorse

However, in addition to the above considerations, advances in neuroscience research have shed additional light on the relationship of brain functioning and the ability to feel compassion, empathy, and remorse. For example, neuroscientists have discovered that there are distinct neurophysiological differences between the brains of those able and unable to feel or express remorse (e.g., sociopaths and psychopaths), particularly in the anterior insula, anterior midcingulate cortex, the somatosensory cortex, the right amygdala, and the hippocampus (e.g., Frontiers, 2013; Schweizer, 2016).

This type of research suggests that being able to feel compassion and/or express remorse is not so much a matter of

voluntary choice, but rather genetic factors and epigenetic influences that determine our behaviors and influence our emotions. In the light of such advances, it seems as though neither Mr. Chavin nor Mr. Rittenhouse could have behaved or felt any differently than they did, notwithstanding our expectations or opinions to the contrary.

Conclusions

Being able to feel and express remorse is admittedly a socially desirable component of human interactions, public safety, and social order. However, remorse is a multidimensional concept subject to circumstantial and genetically modulated neurological contingencies that should moderate both our understanding of and responses to those contingencies, particularly in social and criminal justice settings.

More thought and research may assist us in better understanding the ethical and moral parameters of assessing someone given their ability to feel or not feel remorse, how best to manage the differences, and decide whether or not our current search for and emphasis on the importance of remorse is warranted.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Richard Althouse, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist with 37-years of clinical experience in correctional and forensic settings in both staff and supervisory capacities. Although retired from state services, he remains active in the field of corrections with an enduring interest in genetics and neuroscience as they relate to criminal behavior. He is currently secretary of the Executive Board of the International Association of Correctional and Forensic Psychology.

(Politics And Parole, from p. 4) ... towards prospective parolees.

When a civil service parole board was in place, politics played a much smaller role in their decision making. There was no life-means-life policy which is contrary to law. The courts, despite this obvious violation, have been unwilling to follow the law and strike down this policy. Politics once again sticks their nose in matters that they ... (Cont. on p. 7)

(Politics And Parole, from p. 6) ... should not.

By doing so, they violate their oaths of office and are only interested in looking good in order to advance their careers. They forget that despite their offenses, prisoners are human beings with feelings and aspirations. It is established that over 93% of prisoners will eventually be released and become tax payers. Do you want these people to be contributing members of society or tax burdens?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Robert Alfiero is a former Michigan prisoner and state corrections officer. He can be reached at 715 Clinton River Drive, No. 7A, Mt. Clemens, MI 48043.

WOMEN IN JAILS ARE THE FASTEST GROWING INCARCERATED POPULATION, STUDY SAYS

The increase of women in US jails has far surpassed the growth of male prisoners, study said, which is linked to trauma, sexual violence and mental health issues.

Women held in local jails represent the fastest growing population of incarcerated people in the US, according to a new study. The researchers found that trauma, sexual violence and mental health issues were all closely wrapped up with the swelling numbers.

"While we started to see a decline in the incarceration and jailing of men, we haven't seen a comparable kind of trend for women," said Laurie Garduque, director of Justice Reform for the MacArthur Foundation, which co-published the report with the Vera Institute. Since 1970, the number of women in US jails has increased by 14 times, far outstripping the growth in the male prison population, even though in raw numbers there remain many more men locked up.

The majority of those women entering jail are black and Hispanic, mirroring demographic trends that cross gender lines. Women, however, tend to enter jails in more vulnerable situations than men, as a higher

percentage of women in jail were using drugs, unemployed or receiving public assistance at the time they were arrested.

"The same factors that result in many men being in jail are certainly the case for women, but they're at even greater risk because of a number of factors that come into play," Garduque said.

For example, about a third of all women in jail have a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression - more than twice the rate that exists for jailed men and about six times that of women in the general public.

Sexual assault is also a common thread for women who find themselves in the criminal justice system. Women represent just 13% of the jail population, but make up more than two-thirds of the victims of staff-on-inmate sexual victimization. Eighty-six percent of women in jails reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their life, roughly four times the rate of women in the US at large.

Most people detained in jails, as opposed to prisons, have not been convicted of any crime and are awaiting trial. The vast majority of women in jail have been charged with nonviolent property and drug crimes, and so-called "public order" offences, which include prostitution.

Elizabeth Swavola, one of the authors of the report, said women who become incarcerated are "encountering a system that was created for the majority of people who are in the criminal justice system, who are men. It doesn't really account for the differences that women bring to the system."

This means that in addition to often entering jail in more perilous situations than men, women also tend to leave more damaged as well, the report said, even though women are much less likely than men to be in jail for the commission of a violent or otherwise serious crime.

"For women, jail can be especially destabilizing because most jail environments were not designed with them in mind and do not take into account the particular adversities they have experienced," according ... (Cont. on p. 8)

(Women In Jails, from p. 7) ... to the report.

"Many women leave jail with diminished prospects for physical and behavioral health recovery, with greater parental stress and strain, and even more financially precarious than they were before becoming caught up in the justice system."

About 80% of the women in jails have dependent children, and the report noted that the fees and fines attached to criminal justice proceedings can have a long-term detrimental on the financial and physical well-being of these households. In a majority of these cases, the mother is a single mother.

Strategies outlined in the report to combat this trend range from supporting more lenient pretrial release, to diversion programs meant to pair offenders and suspects with community resources. A program in King County, Washington, for example, trains officers to recognize "eligible people" for certain social services and to encourage them to "refer them to a case management process after arrest but prior to booking them into jail".

Swavola said that while these cases are encouraging, they don't do enough holistically to address the underlying issues that have been increasingly driven women into jails. "I haven't seen any reforms that are system-wide, looking at women specifically, and how they might be experiencing the system differently at every single decision point," Swavola said, adding: "And that's really what we need."

Highlighting the outsized role that local jails play in sustaining mass incarceration has been a major priority of the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice challenge program. Earlier this year, it paid out more than \$10m in jail reform grants to cities who pledge to cut their jail populations by at least 15%.

"We're becoming increasingly convinced about how significant a problem this is, and what it reveals about our society," Garduque said. "The people who are being held in jail are predominantly low-incomed people from communities of color who are

being held pretrial or have committed low-level offenses."

Garduque added: "The returns in terms of public safety are questionable, and the costs - the social, the moral, not just the fiscal costs run quite high."

TO OUR INCARCERATED READERS FOR BOTH CURE LIFELONG AND MICHIGAN LIFERS REPORT NEWSLETTERS

We receive many letters from prisoners wanting pen-pals with our women staff and/or women incarcerated who are permitted prisoner-to-prisoner correspondence.

We are also receiving letters asking us to do legal research and other legal work, some even offering to pay for our services.

Please be advised that we do not provide pen-pal services. Under no circumstances will we provide the home address nor phone number to any of our women volunteer staff.

Also, please be advised that we do not employ attorneys or paralegals. We do legal research only when necessary to highlight portions of our articles for statement validation or court litigation relative to our newsletters.

RESOURCE

The Marshall Project, 156 West 56th St., Studio, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10019, 212-803-5200 is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. The Marshall Project publishes News Inside three times a year and people incarcerated can subscribe to it by writing to them. It is free.

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National Lifers of America, Inc.



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The expressed purposes of the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and the National Lifers of America, Inc. to publish the "Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter" are to educate and uplift the lifer population, to seek changes in laws that restrict clemency and parole, to educate the general public, and to encourage criminal justice reform, especially in corrections.

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NAME OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: _____

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS: _____

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NAME: _____

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