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The Intrinsic Appeal of Evil: Sadism, Sensational Thrills, and Threatened Egotism

Roy F. Baumeister and W. Keith Campbell
Department of Psychology
Case Western Reserve University

Three main sources of intrinsic appeal and satisfaction from performing violent acts are described. First, sadism involves deriving pleasure directly from the suffering of the victim. An opponent-process model is suggested. Second, the quest for thrilling sensations to escape from boredom can produce violent acts, including many in which the harmful consequences were not intended. Third, threatened egotism entails that one's favorable view of self (or public image) has been attacked, and violent responses are directed toward the source of this attack. Relevant individual differences (respectively, low guilt, high sensation seeking, and narcissism) moderate these patterns. Analyzing the intrinsic appeal of evil acts is a useful complement to analyzing situational determinants of violence.

Violence, oppression, exploitation, cruelty, and other evil actions have fascinated mankind for centuries. To the social scientist, and to many a layperson as well, they pose a compelling question: How can people bring themselves to do such shocking, heinous things?

Yet this question is misleading. The notion that people must bring themselves to do shocking, heinous things assumes that the perpetrators recognize the acts as shocking and heinous and hence must force themselves to overcome the revulsion (both moral and visceral) with which those acts are regarded. This assumption is quite plausibly wrong. Acts that seem heinous to victims and in retrospect may be experienced quite differently by perpetrators at the time. Evil is defined largely by the victim's perspective, insofar as the victim's suffering constitutes the evil consequence of the action (Baumeister, 1997). Perpetrators, however, may see things quite differently. In the victim's perspective, the enormity of the crime is central (especially because one's own suffering is almost impossible to ignore), and the victim's question is either whether the perpetrator is so depraved as to actually enjoy inflicting harm or, at best, if the perpetrator has somehow managed to conceal the evil of the actions from himself or herself. To the perpetrator, however, the act may be of far less importance, and engaging in it at all may be guided more by positive attractions than the overcoming of barriers and inhibitions. In some cases, conceivably, the perpetrator may regard the victim's suffering as trivial and as irrelevant to the perpetrator's goals and satisfactions.

The purpose of this article is to explore the positive appeal that may make the performance of evil deeds attractive. There is not likely to be a single source of this appeal, and so we offer three different models. They are not mutually exclusive, and indeed, we suggest that each applies to a different subset of perpetrators.

Our focus is on the intrinsic appeal of violence, and by defining the problem that way, we screen out several other (i.e., extrinsic) reasons for performing evil acts. These others include using violence as a means of accomplishing material or other ends, such as in attacking someone to take possession of that person's land or money. They also include the category of idealistic evil, in which people may perform acts of great harm and even mass murder in the service of positive ideals, group values, or utopian projects. For example, the highest body counts in history were achieved in the Stalinist and Maoist purges, each of which is currently estimated at having caused more than 20 million deaths. These killing campaigns, however, were shaped and sustained by an idealistic vision of creating a utopian society based on equality, shared wealth, and dignity for all. Because the killing was largely performed as a regrettable step toward a desirable goal, it qualifies as extrinsic, and therefore, it lies outside our focus.

We proceed as follows. First, we offer a working definition of evil, which requires some appreciation for the discrepancy between victim and perpetrator per-

Requests for reprints should be sent to Roy F. Baumeister, Department of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University, 10900 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44106–7123. E-mail: rfb2@po.cwru.edu.

spectives, and so we also summarize some essential aspects of that discrepancy. Next, we turn to the problem of sadism, which involves direct pleasure in harming others, and we offer a theoretical account of how that pleasure may arise. Then, we consider other forms of pleasure in harm, such as relief of boredom and the attainment of thrills. Last, we consider rage based on threat to self-esteem and the consequent desire to harm others who have humiliated the perpetrator.

Victims and Perpetrators of Evil

Although many writers may prefer to reserve the term *evil* for very limited categories of wrongdoing, we use the term in a broad and inclusive sense. One explanation for this is that there is reason to think that such grand heinous acts may actually conform to similar patterns and principles as relatively minor transgressions, and therefore, studying the smaller ones may offer valuable guidelines to the understanding of large-scale evil. Another reason is that some restrictive definitions may necessarily rest on the victim's perspective, which, although important to understand in its own right, may hamper free inquiry into understanding how the perpetrator (who may see things quite differently) could perform such acts.

Indeed, a particular problem with defining evil in terms of the magnitude of the harm is that perpetrators and victims often have strikingly different views on that magnitude. After reviewing an interdisciplinary literature on violence, aggression, crime, and other transgressions, Baumeister (1997) proposed that there is generally a *magnitude gap* between victims' and perpetrators' perceptions of the same act. The essence of the magnitude gap is that the victim loses more than the perpetrator gains. As examples, the amount of money for which a thief can sell stolen property is generally less than the replacement cost to the victimized owner. Rape victims may suffer anxiety, nightmares, and impaired sexual functioning for years, in contrast to the fleeting and feeble pleasure gained by the rapist. Murder costs the victim his or her life, plus inflicts considerable grief and suffering on the victim's social network, whereas nothing the murderer gains by the act can match that value.

Among other things, the magnitude gap explains why longstanding disputes and vendettas may be so difficult to resolve. Each violent act increases the discrepancy between the two perspectives. Just when one side may regard the score as settled, because in its view the other's suffering matches its own, the other side is likely to see a huge imbalance calling for violent redress.

For the purposes of this article, the key point is that the magnitude of an act may be much less in the perpetrator's than in the victim's perspective, and therefore, to understand the psychology of perpetrators, it may be necessary to distance oneself from the victim's view. The question with which we began this article, namely, how someone could bring himself or herself to perform an enormously evil action, is often inappropriate, because the perpetrator failed to see it as enormous.

Other differences between victim and perpetrator perspectives are also relevant. Based on a study of relatively minor interpersonal transgressions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; see also Mikula, 1994), these differences can be summarized as follows.

First, victim accounts tend to have longer, more inclusive time spans than perpetrator accounts. Victim accounts often integrate the transgression into a prior history of problems and a set of subsequent effects, often extending to the present. In contrast, perpetrator accounts tend to deny connections between the past transgression and the present situation. Transgressions clearly fade into irrelevant "ancient history" much more rapidly for perpetrators than for victims. Outside the laboratory, similar patterns are evident: Slavery and reconstruction in the United States, the Holocaust and religious massacres in Europe, and the Crusader invasions of the Middle East remain much fresher and more relevant to the present in the view of the victims' descendants than in the view of the perpetrators' descendants.

Second, victim accounts tend to see stark moral issues with clear lines, whereas perpetrator accounts see many more gray areas in the relevant moral judgments. Perpetrators often acknowledge some wrongdoing but also see extenuating circumstances, provocations by the eventual victims, and some degree of legitimate justification for some of their actions, but victims judge perpetrators much more harshly and unambiguously. Victims rarely acknowledge any causal or provoking role to themselves, whereas perpetrators often perceive the victims as having contributed to the conflict, even if the perpetrators acknowledge that their own responses were excessive.

Third, perpetrators usually have reasons and explanations for their actions, whereas many victims describe the perpetrator's actions as utterly gratuitous. A victim may emphasize that the perpetrator's action was for no reason at all, or in other cases, victims describe perpetrators as acting out of sheer malice. Sadistic pleasure and sadistic motivations thus figure centrally in victims' pictures of perpetrators. Perpetrators rarely describe themselves in those terms, however.

Sadism

Sadism, defined as the direct achievement of pleasure from harming others, is the most obviously intrin-

sic appeal of evil acts. Insofar as people get sadistic pleasure from hurting or killing others, there is little need to develop further explanations of evil. People do it because it feels good; enough said.

Does Sadistic Pleasure Exist?

Yet, sadism is an elusive, puzzling phenomenon. Accounts and memoirs by perpetrators do not commonly claim that inflicting harm was a source of pleasure or joy (e.g., Arlacchi, 1993; Browning, 1992; Sereny, 1983). More commonly, they emphasize uncertainty, fear, awkwardness, and some struggle with guilt.

A further obstacle to constructing a theory of sadism is that the well-documented reactions of perpetrators and harmdoers indicate that, far from being pleasant or satisfying, harming others leads most perpetrators to suffer physical and emotional distress. Thus, accounts by participants in the massacre at My Lai, in which American soldiers killed Vietnamese civilians, emphasize that many soldiers were crying while carrying out their orders, and some shot themselves as a way of getting excused from the work of killing (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Although posttraumatic stress disorder is often understood as deriving from the sufferings and fears of being in combat, one study of Vietnam veterans in such therapy found that 30% of them were suffering from problems caused by their own violent acts (as cited in Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986). Likewise, a psychiatrist who dealt with German soldiers assigned to shoot civilians early in World War II estimated that 20% of the soldiers on such duty suffered psychiatric problems such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disorder, and many others suffered physical complaints such as vomiting and other gastrointestinal disturbances (see Lifton, 1986).

One of the best studies of perpetrators is Browning's (1992) work *Ordinary Men,* which explored the subjective experiences of a group of middle-age reserve German policemen who were assigned occupation duty in Poland and rather unexpectedly received assignments to execute groups of civilians. Browning's evidence made clear that the initial reactions were extremely aversive and encompassed nightmares as well as emotional distress. Browning emphasized that the courtroom testimony of these men might have been expected to be self-serving by phrasing the distress in terms of moral qualms and guilt, but such responses were largely absent. Instead, the men described their negative reactions in terms of physical disgust, such as the horrific sound of screams, the revolting sensation of being splattered with blood and brains from shooting someone at close range, and the simple fact that it feels profoundly unpleasant to kill someone. Indeed, many men were unable to bring themselves to shoot the person and would repeatedly "fire past" or miss the victim even at point-blank range.

Professional torturers suffer similar problems. A study of Greek torturers was conducted after the repressive military regime ended, and they, too, reported many problems and sufferings connected with their cruel work. These afflictions included nightmares, depression, and severe irritability (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986).

At a much less severe level, and much closer to home, participants in Milgram's (1963) obedience studies appeared to have suffered substantial distress over the seemingly minor act of pressing a button to deliver electric shock to another participant who was not even directly visible. In his initial article, Milgram boasted that the distress of his participants far exceeded what is observed in the majority of psychology experiments, which in his view attested to the subjective power and experimental realism of his procedures. He also observed that some participants engaged in fits of nervous laughter during the procedure, which "seemed entirely out of place, even bizarre" and which in several cases reached the point of "full-blown, uncontrollable seizures" (p. 375).

The laughter is important because it undoubtedly contributes to some of the discrepancies between victim and perpetrator accounts of crimes. Victims tend to focus on perpetrator laughter (e.g., Nordland, 1996), whereas perpetrator accounts hardly ever mention laughter. Moreover, victims take the perpetrators' laughter as a compelling sign that the perpetrators were enjoying themselves and hence as a sign of evil, sadistic pleasure. As Milgram's (1963) observations made clear, however, reluctant harmdoers may laugh out of discomfort. Milgram knew that his research participants were not enjoying themselves, even if they were laughing, but one may forgive victims of violence for failing to make such subtle attributional adjustments regarding the laughter by their tormentors.

Still, one should not overstate the negative attitude toward violence. People do at least seem to enjoy watching violence, as shown by the immense revenues generated by violent movies and television shows. This is also not an exclusively modern phenomenon: In bygone eras, hangings and other public executions frequently attracted large crowds of spectators. Likewise, the "autos-da-fé," public burnings of heretics during the Spanish Inquisition, often were timed to coincide with public celebrations and attracted huge numbers of people, many of whom traveled great distances to see the spectacle. Bullfights, and even the ancient Roman spectacles of feeding Christians to the lions, were less motivated by the desire to get rid of bulls (or Chris-

tians) than by the wish to provide entertainment to the spectators.

More to the point, perpetrators' accounts and other observations often do acknowledge that occasional individuals (not usually the writer himself, though) did develop a capacity to enjoy cruel or hurtful activities (e.g., Arlacchi, 1993; Bing, 1991; McCall, 1994; Pakenham, 1979, 1991; Wyden, 1983). Toch's (1969/1993) influential study of violent men concluded that around 6% of his sample found pleasure in harming or bullying others and went out of their way to be unfair, unmerciful, and violent. Groth's (1979) influential study of rapists concluded that about 5% of rapists derived their principal pleasure and satisfaction from the victim's suffering. Jankowski's (1991) important study of gang members concluded that most of them disliked violence and fighting and sought to avoid it, but a few of them did enjoy it. Zimbardo's (1972) prison simulation likewise noted that, although the majority of students assigned to play the guard role fell into either the gentle, sympathetic category or the tough-but-fair category, a minority did become sadistic in that they seemed to delight in tormenting the helpless, vulnerable prisoners.

A last aspect of the puzzle of sadism, at least on extensive anecdotal evidence, is that it seems to emerge only gradually. Comments by the violent men in Toch's (1969/1993) study or the rapists in Groth's (1979) study suggest that the person slowly develops the habit of inflicting harm, and indeed, some explicitly compared it to an addiction (see Scully, 1990, p. 158). Even in Browning's (1992) work on the German reserve police, the instances of cruelty and gratuitous violence appeared to increase with the later killing operations rather than the first one.

Among professional torturers, one might predict that novices would occasionally get carried away and be excessively cruel, whereas old hands would remain in control and conform to proper procedures and limits. However, there is some evidence that the opposite is the case. In other words, novice torturers remain hesitant and tentative, but the old hands are more likely to commit excessive acts (Stover & Nightingale, 1985). (Some may object that all torture is "excessive," and we are inclined to agree. Still, from the point of view of the oppressive regime, torture is typically a means of interrogation, and therefore, when the infliction of harm becomes so severe that victims become unable to reply, such as when they pass out or die, the torture is counterproductive. It is these instances to which we refer here as excessive, insofar as even the torturers themselves recognize them as mishaps.)

Sexual sadism is also perhaps useful as a guide to how people may derive pleasure from hurting others. Evidence suggests that actual sadists are quite rare, and even in the community of sadomasochistic practitioners, people desiring to play the submissive role far outnumber those wishing to play the dominant one (e.g., Scott, 1983). Among those who qualify as sadists, it appears that this enjoyment emerges only gradually, and indeed, most people (even professionals) who play the dominant role typically started out as submissives (see Baumeister, 1989). Thus, evidence from sexual sadism converges with what we find from violent sadism: It emerges gradually and in only a minority of cases.

Based on these observations, we can outline the following requirements for an adequate psychological account of sadism. First, the initial reaction to hurting others (at least among adults) appears to be quite aversive, and the distress seems to be at a visceral level rather than a moral or abstract one. Second, the distress one experiences over inflicting harm appears to subside over time. Third, the pleasure in harming others also seems to emerge gradually over time and is described by some as comparable to an addiction. Fourth, the majority of perpetrators do not seem to develop sadistic pleasure or a feeling of addiction.

Opponent Processes and Sadism

Opponent-process theory offers one promising way to account for sadistic pleasure. Opponent-process theory was first proposed by Solomon and Corbit (1974; also see Solomon, 1980), based on physical homeostasis. It holds that each response that takes the body away from its stable, resting state must be followed by an internal process that returns the body to its normal state. Furthermore, they contended that the initial, departing (the A process) response is often strong at first, whereas the restorative B process is relatively inefficient, but over time (i.e., through many similar experiences), the B process becomes increasingly efficient and powerful, whereas the A process becomes weaker. In effect, the B process comes to dominate.

For example, when someone unaccustomed to strenuous exercise runs up a flight of stairs, the body responds by pumping the heart faster and increasing the tempo of breathing. These A processes are necessary responses to adapt to the unusual circumstance of exertion. They are followed, however, by a B process that returns heart rate and breathing to their normal rates (otherwise, the person would continue breathing fast forever). The first time this is done, the B process may seem to work rather poorly, and it will take the person a long time to return to normal. After many days of running up that same flight of stairs, however, the A processes (such as the increment in heart rate) will diminish, whereas the B process will become in-

creasingly efficient, so that the person quickly recovers his or her normal state.

This theory provides a good fit to what was observed about sadism. As noted, the initial reaction to inflicting harm on another human being is severe distress that is typically of a visceral rather than an apparently moral nature. Novice perpetrators may feel quite ill. Over time, these upset reactions diminish in power, so that presumably killing one's hundredth victim is far less upsetting than killing the first.

Meanwhile, a B process is necessary to end the aversive, distressed response, and it would likely have a fairly pleasant, positive quality. Initially this might be quite slight and weak, so that the person's overall experience of hurting or killing would have a predominantly negative tone (consistent with most reports). Over time, however, the B process may come to predominate, in the sense that it would become more powerful, efficient, and subjectively salient. Because the B process would involve a pleasurable feeling—indeed, something approaching euphoria would be the most effective antidote to the severe disgust and distress engendered by the initial acts of harmdoing—the overall quality of violent acts would take on a positive, pleasant nature.

Indeed, the occurrence of laughter among harmdoers could conceivably be one indication of the opponent (B) process. When one is shocked by one's own actions into remorse and disgust, the response of seemingly involuntary, bizarre laughter may reflect the body's efforts to counteract the distress with a response that is normally pleasant and happy.

The habit-forming or pseudoaddictive quality of harmdoing, which has been suggested by some perpetrators, would be readily explained in opponent-process terms. People would be held back from committing harm, in part, by the initial A reaction, which is highly upsetting, but over time, this would become less powerful, and therefore, the main restraint on behavior would diminish and even disappear. Meanwhile, the slow improvement of the B process would gradually make the episodes of hurting increasingly pleasant. Performing the same harmful actions over and over, however, eventually would cease to have much effect at all (just as running up the flight of stairs every day would cease to produce much reaction at all), insofar as the A reaction becomes so weak that only a small B process is needed to overcome it. Hence, the individual might gradually indulge in escalating acts of cruelty to activate the full power of his or her B response in the quest for euphoria or satisfaction.

Guilt as Moderator

The most apparent flaw in this theory is that it should hold true for everyone, and hence, all perpetrators should turn into sadists—whereas the data suggest that only a small minority of perpetrators take that step. It is necessary, therefore, to postulate some substantial moderator variable that prevents most people from evolving into full-blown sadists when they perform repeated acts of harm.

A likely candidate for this moderator is guilt. People are taught to feel guilty when they inflict harm on others, and guilt, therefore, would be a deterrent to embracing sadistic pleasure. We assume that guilt is a highly socialized emotion that depends on cognitive processing, and therefore, the innate mechanisms of the body would not likely have prepared an opponent process that would produce euphoria in response to guilt. Guilt is also based strongly on empathy (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Hoffman, 1982; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991), and empathizing with a victim's distress would make empathic perpetrators feel bad themselves. For these reasons, guilt will make most harmdoing aversive, thereby effectively spoiling the potential enjoyment. Only the small minority of people who manage to avoid guilt and empathic distress could benefit from the opponent process that gradually would render harmdoing pleasant. This would fit the empirical evidence that only a small minority of perpetrators evolve into sadists.

Thus, we suggest that most people are sufficiently socialized to feel guilty when they harm others, and therefore, they would not allow themselves to notice or accept any pleasant aspects of an opponent process reaction that would accompany inflicting harm. The operation of guilt would be aided by the fact that, initially, the B process is likely to be weak and inefficient, and therefore, guilt feelings could combine with the physical disgust to make the person reject the entire harmdoing episode.

One way to test the moderator hypothesis would be to see whether people more readily come to enjoy inflicting harm when guilt is minimized. Some evidence suggests that people can more readily come to enjoy violence when they do not feel guilty. For example, hunting is regarded in many circles as morally acceptable, and even if hunters initially have the disgust reaction to killing prey, they might strive to overcome these reactions. It does seem that many more hunters enjoy the activity than the 6% figures we noted previously for people who learn sadistic enjoyment of killing people. Thus, in a context in which killing animals is morally acceptable, guilt is prevented, and people can enjoy the activity.

By the same token, sexual sadism is morally acceptable in many circles, especially insofar as the activity is undertaken with the consent (and often eager initiative) of the masochistic partner. (The term *victim* seems inappropriate for consensual sadomasochistic

activity.) If people who take the dominant role in sex come to enjoy it at a higher rate than the 5% or 6% figure, this, too, would suggest that sadistic pleasure in actual interpersonal harm is restrained by guilt.

Other spheres in which morality is less opposed to harmdoing include police work, military combat, and officially sanctioned torture. If people who perform those roles learn to derive pleasure and satisfaction from their work at higher rates than those in morally questionable activities (such as criminal violence), then, again, one tentatively could conclude that guilt is indeed an important moderator of sadistic pleasure. Even the widespread rates of enjoyment of violent movies and violent entertainments could suggest that guilt-free violence can become pleasant.

Still, we acknowledge that the amount of evidence presently available is not adequate to permit a clear or strong conclusion that sadistic pleasure derives from opponent processes moderated by guilt. This model provides a good fit to what is known, but further research is needed.

Seeking Thrills, Reducing Boredom

Sadism is undoubtedly the prototype of intrinsic enjoyment of evil, but it is necessary to recognize that many violent acts may be enjoyed in a different, shallower way. For many people—especially, perhaps, undersocialized male adolescents—the quest for thrills and excitement is a frequent experience, arising perhaps from the sense that most of life is boring (Larkin, 1979; Pfefferbaum & Wood, 1994). Acts of violence and aggression can provide such thrills, and therefore, in an important sense, evil acts can be fun.

The emphasis on the thrill of illegal activity was the focus of work by Katz (1988). For example, he collected a set of personal narratives of shoplifting. Although one might assume that shoplifting is motivated primarily by a desire for particular goods, he found that many narratives indicated a low desire for the stolen item. In fact, he said, many people reported that the item for which they had risked detection and criminal prosecution was quickly discarded or forgotten. Instead, the narratives focused on what Katz called "sneaky thrills": the forming of a plan, the concealment of the item, the high suspense of leaving the store with the stolen item, and the euphoric sense of having gotten away with it.

To be sure, shoplifting is in most cases a small-scale crime hardly worthy of the label "evil." However, as we have suggested, there is a continuity between small-scale and large-scale crimes, especially insofar as perpetrators themselves regard many of their acts as relatively small and inconsequential even when victims consider them much more momentous. The quest for such thrills can undoubtedly lead to severe consequences in some cases.

From Boredom to Unintended Evil

In many cases, the perpetrator may not even be seeking or intending to cause harm. The goal is to find something arousing and enjoyable, and this could be reached by a broad variety of excitement such as pranks or diversions. Exuberant, risky, physically stimulating activities are sought. The outcome may seem evil to the person who unfortunately ends up being harmed by the acts, but it is very possible that evil was the farthest thing from the perpetrator's mind prior to the event.

For example, a group of adolescents might find sitting at home to be insufferably boring, and they would prefer to drive around together. Perhaps driving fast is more fun than driving in a slow, cautious, law-abiding fashion. Perhaps they do not own a car and must borrow one, even perhaps without actually getting permission, or perhaps even temporarily taking possession of a stranger's car with the assumption that they will return it eventually. Alcohol intoxication is also fun and could be combined with the activity. All these pleasures may relieve boredom and provide fun, and the legal technicalities (grand theft auto, driving while intoxicated, and speeding or reckless driving) may be kept far from awareness, as opposed to the laughter and pleasant, alcohol-enhanced sensations of speed. If no one is hurt and the car returned without damage, the episode can end before almost anyone would describe the activity as evil. However, if the speeding, stolen car with its drunk-driving teenage boys happens to run over a pedestrian or crash into another car, killing and maiming a family, the episode quickly takes on the label of evil, and the boys will find themselves mumbling inadequately into the television cameras that they never intended to hurt anyone.

Apter (1992) described the seductive appeal of risky behavior as an escape from boredom. In one memorable passage, Apter related the story of an 18-year-old man who worked as a railroad signalman in an isolated part of England. The job required little effort and, indeed, the endless boredom was only slightly relieved by watching trains go by. One day he began to stack cement building blocks on the train tracks. The next train collided with the blocks, knocking them into the air and making a huge grinding sound. The man found this stimulating and began to repeat and refine the cement block procedure, until eventually he was caught. He was quite fortunate that his amusement never derailed a train, which would

have resulted in death and injury to innocent people—a result that easily could have happened and most likely would have occurred had he continued this hobby. The young man does not appear to have thought about these potential consequences, however, and he also did not regard his actions as evil. He was simply trying to relieve the boredom.

A far more destructive and historically important example of the drift from bored fun-seeking into evil is provided in the history of the Ku Klux Klan (Wade, 1987). The organization was founded by a small group of young men in an acutely boring situation: In the American South right after the Civil War had been lost, most economic, military, and social activity had come to a standstill, and several jobless ex-Rebels with absolutely nothing to do formed a club whose express purpose was only and explicitly to "have fun, make mischief, and play pranks on the public" (Wade, 1987, p. 34). To make costumes, they raided the linen closet of the home where they stayed and had to make do with white bedsheets, which were serviceable as ghost disguises. They began to play pranks on the community and found the former slaves to be excellent targets, especially insofar as the freedmen were largely uneducated and superstitious and hence gullible enough to believe in ghosts.

Later, of course, the Klan was notorious for its violence, and to many it has become one of the leading embodiments of evil in the United States. Murder, rape, assault, and destruction of property have been repeatedly attributed to Klansmen. Much of its violence has sprung from racial and religious antagonism, and these patterns of victimizing helpless individuals on the basis of race or religion are particularly central to the perception of the Klan as evil. Even so, it continues to attract new members, often far more explicitly on the basis of offering fun as well as its programs of charitable good works than on the basis of its use of racial and religious violence (Wade, 1987).

Such instances suggest that the search for initially innocent fun can lead into violent, evil acts. In these cases, the perpetrators did not initially set out to hurt anyone, but over time or in unforeseen ways, the amusing activities did gradually lead to harmful, destructive outcomes.

Violent Thrills

A more important and disturbing category of evil thrills finds the violence explicitly enjoyable. Damaging buildings or inflicting harm is likely to be arousing and can perhaps be pleasant, too. As such, it is certainly an antidote to boredom. At the extreme, it shades into sadism, but in many cases, it probably represents merely a use of violent acts to entertain the self and relieve the boredom of life.

A recent incident reported by Kornblut, Rutenberg, and McFarland (1997) illustrated this form of evil as boredom relief. Two young men, aged 17 and 18, were unable to find anything stimulating to do in the very small town in rural New Jersey where they lived. They walked around, hung out near the bowling alley, and generally felt they had exhausted the meager opportunities to stimulate themselves. They hit on the plan of telephoning pizza places until they found one that would make a late-night delivery to the address they gave, which was an abandoned house in a remote area. When the pizza delivery arrived, the boys shot the drivers to death. They made no effort to rob the pizza employees, and they did not even eat the pizza but simply threw it around.

The seemingly pointless, senseless violence had no purpose other than to relieve the boys' boredom. It does not conform to the patterns we saw for sadism, in which there is a gradual development of the capacity to gain pleasure from the harm suffered by others. The act itself was simply exciting, and, as such, it provided a welcome escape from boredom. These cases do not, perhaps, conform to the opponent-process model we identified (although empathy and guilt presumably would prevent most people from getting enjoyment from such an act). It is thus more closely related to the fun-seeking activities we describe in this section than to the sadistic pleasures we discussed previously.

Sensation Seeking

The desire for excitement that, we argue, can lead to evil acts in certain circumstances has been termed *sensation seeking* (e.g., Zuckerman, 1979). Individuals who are high on this trait actively search for adventure, act impulsively, and dislike boredom. Sensation seeking is related to a host of acts that sometimes can result in evil. Examples include drunk driving, drug use, and assault.

Teenagers drink and drive for several reasons. Often, it is because it is the only way they can think of to get home. Some teenagers, however, drink and drive more than others. Those teenagers are often high in sensation seeking (Arnett, 1990, 1996). Driving can be fun, especially when one is a novice driver, and this fun aspect of driving may be enhanced when one is intoxicated. To a young person, both drinking and driving are forbidden activities until a certain age, and in combination, they are of course illegal at any age. The rebellious adolescent may find that breaking the rules enhances the fun

even further (see Brehm, 1966). None of this will seem evil—unless or until the drunk driver happens to cause an accident that harms an innocent victim.

Sensation seeking also is related to drug and alcohol use more generally. A large part of the motivation for consuming drugs or alcohol seems to be driven by the need to find excitement or reduce boredom (Arnett, 1996; La Grange, Jones, Erb, & Reyes, 1995; Tang, Wong, & Schwarzer, 1996). Yet, alcohol and some drugs seem to impair self-control and increase tendencies to respond aggressively to perceived provocations (e.g., Bushman & Cooper, 1990), and therefore, they increase violent acts. In fact, alcohol is implicated in a majority of the violent crimes in the United States (National Research Council, 1993). Indeed, when violence is desired, alcohol is often used to increase the willingness to aggress. The doctors and guards in the Nazi concentration camps, for example, typically used heavy amounts of alcohol to make their jobs more bearable (e.g., Lifton, 1986). More generally, serving alcohol rations to troops just prior to battle has been a standard military practice for many centuries (Keegan, 1976).

Although other drugs have less bloodstained records than alcohol, this may be largely due to the greater availability of alcohol throughout history and the greater amount of research done on alcohol than other drugs. There is no reason to assume that alcohol is unique in its capacity to promote violence. Some (although certainly not all) recreational drugs are undoubtedly as dangerous as alcohol.

Thus, one path may lead from sensation seeking to violence, even though that result was neither intended nor foreseen. Sensation seekers are vulnerable to boredom, and one escape from boredom is to get drunk. Once drunk, the person is more likely to engage in violent acts. Moreover, the alcohol does not appear to lead directly to violence, but rather it makes the person respond violently when he (or, less often, she) believes himself to have been provoked or insulted by someone else. Taylor, Gammon, and Capasso (1976) showed that intoxication did not produce higher levels of aggression in a reciprocal electric shock paradigm—unless the person felt provoked, in which case intoxicated students escalated to higher levels of aggression than sober ones.

From the clinical perspective, certain elements of sensation seeking, specifically boredom intolerance and impulsivity (although not necessarily adventure seeking), can be seen in individuals with *antisocial personality disorder.* Individuals with this disorder, which is very similar to what used to be referred to as *psychopathy,* are known for drug use, drunk driving, sexual impulsivity, and aggressiveness and violence. It is not necessarily that antisocials commit violent acts only for fun, but they likely are motivated by an intolerance for boredom coupled with a mean streak (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Are these sensation-seeking acts likely to result in criminal prosecution? There is some evidence that sensation seeking is linked to criminality more generally. In their influential theory on crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued that low impulse control and boredom intolerance are important elements in understanding criminals. The typical burglary, for example, involves an adolescent boy who wanders into an unlocked dwelling within a mile of his residence. The adolescent then takes anything easily available (cash, stereo equipment, alcohol). During the crime, the individual may spend some time in the entered dwelling drinking alcohol, eating food, or listening to music. Clearly, there is an element of thrill seeking and boredom relief in this kind of behavior, and this may help account for the finding that prisoner populations are higher than nonincarcerated normals on sensation seeking (Haapasalo, 1990). Furthermore, there is speculation that sensation seeking may be a particularly potent factor in adolescence (Baldwin, 1985), which may, in part, account for the large proportion of crime committed by youth. Vandalism, for example, is higher among adolescents who score high in sensation seeking than among other adolescents (Arnett, 1996).

Sensation seeking itself is hardly evil. Plenty of individuals manage to relieve boredom and find thrills through innocuous, legal means. Navy divers, for example, report elevated scores on some elements of sensation seeking (Biersner & LaRocco, 1983). Many people get the same satisfactions from activities that bring risks only to themselves. The problem is simply that some violent and interpersonally dangerous activities offer comparable thrills, and therefore, some sensation seekers will find their satisfactions in these ways.

In short, this pathway into violence primarily is used by a certain group of individuals who are characterized by high sensation seeking and low self-control. They are prone to feeling bored, and they seek to escape this aversive state by engaging in arousing activities. Such activities likely include things that break rules and are physically stimulating, as well as substance abuse. The low self-control means that these people do not always think ahead to the potential consequences of their actions (see Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Leith & Baumeister, 1996), and therefore, they may be extra willing to perform actions that could cause harm to others. These perpetrators are unlikely to regard themselves and their actions as evil, but of course, their victims may see things quite differently.

Threatened Egotism

The third and final form of intrinsic appeal that evil acts enjoy involves threatened egotism. More precisely, when people feel that their favorable self-images or reputations have been impugned by someone, they may become motivated to attack that person in a violent or aggressive fashion.

Whether to label such aggression as intrinsically or extrinsically motivated is difficult. They are not engaging in aggression for the pleasure of aggressing, and the enjoyment of the other's suffering depends on the context (i.e., the other may have insulted them), which could be described as extrinsic. Still, the insult does create a state that seeks satisfaction in causing harm to the other, and the aggression is not genuinely extrinsic in the sense that it is a means toward some further end.

As a parallel, research on the overjustification effect can be invoked. Early studies established a powerful distinction between doing an activity for its own sake (intrinsic) and doing it to gain some exterior goal (extrinsic); these findings established that intrinsic rewards sustained motivation, whereas extrinsic rewards undermined intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Still, this distinction became somewhat blurred when self-esteem became involved. Rosenfeld, Folger, and Adelman (1980) showed that, when rewards carried a symbolic message affirming the performer's competence, intrinsic motivation was not reduced. Rewards involving self-esteem thus resembled intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards in their consequences and should perhaps be considered a quasi-intrinsic form of reward.

By the same token, then, aggression that derives from self-esteem concerns also can be considered as having a form of intrinsic or quasi-intrinsic appeal. In support of this argument, Brown (1968) found that people will sacrifice extrinsic rewards (in that case, their own money) to gain revenge on someone who had caused them to lose face.

The view that threatened egotism is a major source of aggression runs contrary to conventional wisdom in psychology, however. A longstanding tradition has held that aggression is caused by low self-esteem. Although it is quite difficult to locate an original or authoritative statement of that theory, many authors do mention low self-esteem as a cause of violence, as if this were common knowledge (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Gondolf, 1985; Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Long, 1990; MacDonald, 1975; Oates & Forrest, 1985; Renzetti, 1992; Schoenfeld, 1988; Staub, 1989; Wiehe, 1991).

Contrary to that view, Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) reviewed considerable evidence and concluded that aggressors tend to have quite favorable views of self. Thus, the highest scores on a hostility scale are achieved by people who show high but unstable self-esteem (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989). Psychopaths, who are responsible for a high number of violent and exploitative crimes, have grandiose views of their own superiority (Hare, 1993). Many convicted rapists likewise show grandiose, inflated concepts of themselves as well as remarkably self-flattering distortions of events (Scully, 1990). Violent groups such as the Nazis and Ku Klux Klan generally operate from a basic assumption of their own innate superiority over others. In *bipolar disorder*—in which a person's self-esteem oscillates between extreme highs and lows—aggressive and violent acts generally are performed during the manic stage, in which self-esteem is very high (Goodwin & Jamison, 1990). Alcohol intoxication, which generally is accepted as an important cause of a great many violent acts and crimes, tends to bring about an elevation in self-esteem (Banaji & Steele, 1989; National Research Council, 1993).

However, such findings did not lead Baumeister et al. (1996) to conclude that high self-esteem per se causes violence (which would be the direct opposite of the traditional view). Although violent people tend to have high self-esteem, there are other people with high self-esteem who are exceptionally nonviolent. For example, we already reported that Kernis et al. (1989) found the highest scores on aggression and hostility among people with high but unstable self-esteem; the other side of the coin is that the lowest hostility scores were attained by people with high but stable self-esteem.

Threatened egotism, however, did provide a good fit to the evidence reviewed by Baumeister et al. (1996). People with favorable views of self who felt these views were being questioned, undermined, or attacked were the most likely to behave aggressively in response. This may explain why Kernis et al. (1989) found that hostility scores were so low among people with high and stable self-esteem: The stability indicates that nothing threatens their high self-esteem.

Likewise, the domestic violence literature seems best explained by the concept of threatened egotism. An early view held that abusive men had low self-esteem (Walker, 1979), but subsequent controlled studies have failed to confirm that theory (see Baumeister et al., 1996, for a review). More recent work has abandoned the low self-esteem view in favor of the concept of status inconsistency, which was introduced by Hornung, McCullough, and Sugimoto (1981). They found, for example, that the most violent men were those who had radical inconsistencies between their educational level and their occupational achievements, such as the PhD who drives a taxi.

Yet, the notion of status inconsistency failed to fit the full pattern of data, even in Hornung et al.'s (1981)

own study. Indeed, they did find high violence among men with high-status backgrounds and low-status occupations. They found exceptionally low violence, however, among men with low-status backgrounds but highly successful careers. Both groups have status inconsistency. Only the violent group seems to suffer from threatened egotism, however, insofar as the high-status background (such as education) creates expectations of life success, and an unsuccessful career would be a severe blow to one's ego. In contrast, the men whose careers had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams would not feel their egos threatened.

Thus, the findings in research on domestic violence suggest that only some forms of status inconsistency lead to violence—and these forms seem to be the ones most likely to produce threatened egotism.

Laboratory tests of the link between self-appraisals and aggression were largely lacking from the literature reviewed by Baumeister et al. (1996). Bushman and Baumeister (1998) conducted a pair of studies to examine links between self-esteem, narcissism, and aggression. Their results confirmed the threatened egotism view: The highest levels of aggression were exhibited by narcissists who had been insulted. Moreover, this aggression was directed only toward the source of the insult. Narcissists were not made generally aggressive by the insult, as shown by their lack of aggression toward an innocent third person. Self-esteem yielded no significant effects on aggression at all, either by itself or in interaction with other variables.

Narcissism thus deserves attention as the most relevant self-concept variable for studying aggression. Narcissism is defined by highly favorable, even grandiose views of self, as well as the desire to be admired by others. Hence, when others evaluate them negatively, narcissists are extremely upset and prone to respond in an aggressive or violent manner.

Conclusions

Much human violence may be attributed to instrumental or ideological motives. In those cases, the attitude of the perpetrator toward the actual harmdoing may be neutral or even regretful, and certainly the evidence supports the view that some instances of aggression involve perpetrators who regard their own violent acts as distasteful and unfortunate. The contribution of those actions to the toll of human misery is immense.

This article, however, has focused on instances in which people find harmful, destructive acts to be satisfying. Three distinct sources of satisfaction have been identified, and available evidence suggests that they all exist. We also have sought to offer theoretical explanations for how these satisfactions arise, and the data are consistent with those explanations, although further research is needed.

The first source of satisfaction is sadism. Ample observations from many sources and contexts suggest that some people (although usually only a small minority of harmdoers) get pleasure directly from causing their victims to suffer. We proposed an opponent-process explanation for sadistic pleasure: Over time, the initially unpleasant response to causing harm is outweighed by the opponent process of pleasure and euphoria. This only occurs in individuals with a weak sense of guilt, because guilt will prevent people from accepting and recognizing the pleasure.

The second form of appeal involves seeking thrills and reducing boredom by means of performing risky, potentially destructive acts. Vigorous physical activity may provide pleasant sensations, perhaps especially when it involves breaking or defying some rules. The causing of harm may be incidental to the perpetrators, such as being a side effect of the quest for sensations, and often, it may be unintended or at least not premeditated. Our account of this appeal invoked the desire to escape from boredom and to achieve intense, thrilling sensations, as well as low self-control.

The third form of satisfaction involves affirming the self by harming someone who has threatened or attacked one's favorable view of self (or public image). Such aggression defends the favorable self-image and discourages others from questioning it, and people who are strongly invested in sustaining a favorable image may be especially prone toward such violence. It can operate at either the group or the individual level.

Although, in principle, these satisfactions are available to almost anyone, in practice they are each likely to appeal only to a small category of individuals with particular predispositions. First, sadism depends on being undeterred by guilt and empathy so that one can gradually embrace the acquired pleasure that is the natural bodily response to the distasteful act of harming someone. Second, violent thrills may appeal especially to adolescent boys who have high sensation-seeking tendencies and low self-control. Third, the violent response to threatened egotism may characterize individuals (or groups) who have both a strong emotional investment in being superior to others and a deep concern with having this favorable self-image validated by others. Narcissism, rather than high self-esteem per se, is the predisposing factor for this third path to violence.

Social psychologists long have been interested in the situational forces that induce people to perform acts of which they disapprove (e.g., Milgram, 1963). Undoubtedly, some evil acts are performed by reluctant individuals who feel unable to resist situational

pressures. On the other hand, many other evil acts are performed because of the positive, intrinsic appeal that they offer. By elucidating both the situational push and the intrinsic pull of violence, the field may yet attain a balanced understanding of the roots of evil.

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