

## Sexually Motivated Burglaries

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Burglary is defined as the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft. The rate of burglaries in the U.S. increased 30% between 1972 and 1976. Of the persons arrested for burglary in 1976, one-third were juveniles.<sup>1</sup> Although I believe that most crime is stimulated by social environmental causes,<sup>2,3</sup> it is important to recognize that some crimes, including burglary, have a compulsive, symbolic character with overt or covert sexual motivation.

Guttmacher felt that burglary, assault, and cutting cases often have a sexual origin, and he wrote that the burglar's basic personality structure "resembled that of the rapist far more closely than that of the exhibitionist. In fact the legal term breaking and entering bears such a connotation" (p. 383).<sup>4</sup> Banay also remarked that there "are burglars who tell of achieving orgasm at the moment of entering a window or breaking a locked door" (p. 94).<sup>5</sup> The initial studies by Brancale and others of the cases referred to the New Jersey State Diagnostic Center under the purview of the New Jersey Sex Offenders Law\*\* clearly indicate that the bulk of sex offenders are basically innocuous, passive, immature individuals committing non-violent and non-coital offenses.<sup>7,8</sup> Only 5% were referred for sexual assaults. I found that in 43 cases of serious attacks on women, including beating, choking, knifing, and nine murders, only three offenders had a record of previous sex offenses; twelve had a record of breaking and entering. Four out of the twelve combined breaking and entering with assaults on or threats to the female occupant.<sup>9</sup>

In my experience, breaking and entering committed alone and in bizarre circumstances, stealing of female underwear, destruction of female clothing, and torture or killing of cats have ominous significance.<sup>9</sup> The well known case of William Heirens,<sup>10,11</sup> is illustrative. At age 17, Heirens entered a house through the window, removed a six-year-old girl from her bed and cut her body into several pieces. Prior to this he killed two women in their homes. His career of murders was preceded by burglaries which started at the age of nine years. Initially he stole female underwear. A few years later he

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\*\*"Whenever a person is convicted of the offense of rape, carnal abuse, sodomy, incest, private lewdness, open lewdness, indecent exposure or impairing the morals of a minor, or an attempt to commit any of the aforementioned offenses, or assault with intent to commit rape, carnal abuse or sodomy, the judge shall order the commitment of such person to the Diagnostic Center for a period not to exceed 60 days. While confined to the said Diagnostic Center, such person shall be given a complete physical and mental examination."<sup>6</sup> In practice patients referred under the purview of the law received only an outpatient examination, while inpatient facilities were reserved for juvenile offenders only.

experienced sexual excitement with erection and occasional ejaculation while breaking into homes through windows. These acts were accompanied by a state of depersonalization. On many occasions Heirens tried to resist his compulsion, but this effort resulted in headaches, sweats, and tearing the sheets off his bed.<sup>12</sup> Krafft-Ebing described a patient's similar feeling of anxiety with copious perspiration when he attempted to control his compulsion to slap, pinch, or cut the genitals of women.<sup>13</sup>

I have previously reported three cases of attacks on women and breaking and entering.<sup>3,9</sup> One case burglarized a home and ripped female clothes at the age of 13, and at the age of 19 he strangled a 15-year-old girl. The second case, with a history of voyeurism and sadistic fantasies directed against women, broke into a house through the window and hit the sleeping female occupant with a pipe. The third case, a 37-year-old man, broke into several dwellings and choked and raped the elderly female occupants; he did this within a month of his release from serving a prison sentence for burglaries. His history was replete with violence and sadistic acts against animals.

Unfortunately we do not have data on the relative frequency with which burglaries are sexually motivated. My impression is that the phenomenon is not uncommon. Some cases taken from my files over the years will illustrate the problem. Because most of the cases were collected at the New Jersey State Diagnostic Center, there is a disproportionately large number of juveniles, for juvenile offenders were more likely to be referred for inpatient evaluation than adult offenders. Many offenders give logical explanations for their offenses, though the "logical" act such as larceny or robbery is only a cover-up for bizarre and frequently obscure impulses. This is illustrated in my report of a 40-year-old man, without previous criminal history, who served a sentence for attempted robbery. His offense, however, was stimulated by a longstanding compulsion to tie women's legs.<sup>14</sup>

### Case Reports

#### Case #1:

A 19-year-old soldier was examined on the prison ward of an army station hospital during World War II following an arrest for breaking and entering and assault on a sleeping female occupant of the house. In the interview he was neat and cooperative, describing his life history and the present incident in great detail. He described a life of deprivation, poverty, and poor school and work adjustment. In the army, however, he performed to the satisfaction of his superiors. He reported that since age 12 he had had an urge to enter homes and to hit the female occupant while she was asleep. The woman's screams and fright gave him a feeling of triumph and dispelled his feeling of dejection.

He described the most recent incident as follows. He felt an urge to enter a home earlier in the day. For this purpose he obtained a pass to town. After drinking beer with another soldier and having intercourse with a pick-up, he walked through the town. At 2:00 a.m. he noticed a house with the front door open so that he could see the light reflecting into the polished hallway floor. He told his friend to wait and he entered the house with a brick and a piece of rock he had picked up earlier

on the street. "I entered the room and saw a woman sleeping. I then just went over to her and hit her head with the brick. She started screaming. I dropped the brick and ran down the hall and out. I do not know just why I hit this woman. I guess I could not help myself. I've always had a desire to hit somebody. I would also hurt my brothers and sisters. When I feel sad or blue and I hit somebody and hurt them and make them scream it makes me feel happy again."

**Case #2:**

A 16-year-old boy was referred for psychiatric evaluation on charges of breaking and entering, run-away, and sniffing gasoline. According to his mother he was verbally and physically abusive, destructive, and uncontrollable. He was hostile and belligerent upon admission to the ward. In two interviews under the influence of intravenously injected amobarbital sodium he revealed a series of voyeuristic incidents hoping to see a woman in the process of undressing. At home he masturbated revisualizing the women he spied upon. Only one episode of breaking and entering was known to the court. In the interviews he reported several additional incidents. The first incident took place in the evening. When he saw a house with an open window he suddenly had an impulse to "look around" and to inspect the interior of the dwelling. He entered through the open window and inspected the livingroom, bedroom, and kitchen. He took 35 cents out of a pile of a few dollars and left. The seven entries he reported took place in similar circumstances and only in the last few incidents did he take a few dollars upon leaving.

**Case #3:**

A 16-year-old boy was referred by the juvenile court because he was found at night on the street wearing female clothes. He had appeared previously in court on charges of breaking, entering, and larceny. While in the dwelling he attired himself in female clothing and masturbated. Upon admission to the ward he was withdrawn and uninvolved. In the interviews he admitted to four incidents of breaking and entering for the purpose of stealing female clothing. He used the clothes for masturbation in the bedrooms of the homes he entered. While masturbating he visualized himself as being a girl. On the projective tests aggressive feelings and death wishes toward parents were elicited.

**Case #4:**

A 16-year-old boy was referred for inpatient study by the juvenile court on a technical charge of incorrigibility. He had been treated previously in a psychiatric clinic where he was described as isolated, withdrawn, hostile, with unrealistic thinking, and with a tendency to transvestism. He had been a premature infant and had to repeat kindergarten and first grade. His family history was replete with epilepsy and mental illness. Since early life he had handled and ripped female clothes. The projective tests pointed to isolation, poor self-image, poor reality testing, and female identification. In the

interviews he reported an urge to masturbate while wearing female apparel and to "think crazy thoughts." After some prodding he revealed masturbatory fantasies of breaking into stores through a window, of seeing his mother naked, and of looking through a window with a telescope and seeing couples engaged in intercourse. On one occasion, unknown to the court, he actually entered a store through the window, and he became sexually aroused. He wanted to masturbate, but he was too frightened to complete the act.

Case #5:

A 12-year-old boy was referred for inpatient evaluation by juvenile court because of repeated breaking and entering. In several homes he had stolen money, beer, or food. In others he had left without taking anything. On the ward he was unpopular with his peer group. He was big for his age, overweight, with small genitals, so that the diagnosis of Frohlich's Syndrome was considered. He was exceedingly preoccupied with sex. He drew a penis over the door of a boy's room; he approached other boys with an offer to commit sodomy; and he bragged about having sexual relations with girls. He treated smaller and weaker boys sadistically and forced one of them to suck his nipple. In the interviews he was evasive and lacked spontaneity. He revealed, however, a dream of entering a store and opening the cash register. He admitted to entering a home through an open door, looking around, opening drawers, and inspecting their contents. He felt proud of this exploit. In two interviews under the influence of intravenously injected amobarbital sodium and methedrine, he was spontaneous and talkative. He spoke about being sexually aroused by seeing his mother naked in the bathtub and said that while breaking into homes he fantasized about seeing a naked woman. On one occasion he actually saw a woman sleeping in the house, and he had an urge to lift her skirt, but he was too fearful. Nine years later I contacted his parents and learned that he was then serving a three- to six-year sentence for burglary.

Case #6:

A 42-year-old male was examined in the state prison and then referred by the authorities to the Diagnostic Center for further evaluation and possible therapy. He had spent at least 20 of his 42 years in various penal institutions throughout the United States, serving sentences for breaking and entering. The current imprisonment had been a consequence of burglaries committed within one month following the completion of an eight year sentence in a midwest prison. I saw him in three interviews in six weeks. The third interview was conducted under superficial stages of hypnosis. Following the third session he claimed to be relieved because he could talk to someone and be understood. Although he left the office, he returned while I was out and escaped through the window with my coat and gloves. When apprehended by the guards he cried and looked pitiful.

In the interviews he wept while reminiscing about his past and gave an appearance of seeking psychiatric help for its own sake rather than

for secondary gain. He said that he started stealing at the age of eleven years. He described a deprived childhood and rejection by his mother. He indicated feelings of inferiority, inner tension, and multiple somatic complaints. On many occasions he stole instead of keeping a date with a girl. With stolen money he treated people in bars thus feeling important and admired. He described himself as very sentimental and said that he wept at a movie when "they showed an orphanage with little children and a movie actress giving them toys."

Under hypnosis he revealed killing cats and then burning them. Then he added, "A cat is dainty like a woman. It keeps itself clean, washes itself. It is small. A cat has a woman's face. In fact you can associate a woman with the cat family by their features. Cats, they are slinky like women. During sexual intercourse I never tried to hit a woman or bruise her." In another interview he said, "When I set fires or killed cats I had the same feeling as when I entered homes and took jewels or hundreds of dollars." He freely associated when he said, "Once I followed a woman and hit her with a stick and then I ran away. I did not want to rape her." He could not explain the reason for this sudden and unprovoked act. He expressed a great deal of resentment against his mother and added that he had begun killing cats when he felt particularly rejected by her.

#### Case #7:

A 35-year-old married man was referred for psychiatric evaluation after convictions on one charge of breaking and entering with intent to commit assault and battery and two charges of lewdness (exhibitionistic acts). He was a college graduate who occupied a good position in industry. Six years prior to the charges he had been on probation for making indecent phone calls. Two years later he had started exhibiting himself to females, and on many occasions he masturbated during the act. The last two exhibitionistic episodes had occurred in the following circumstances. He had a strong urge to exhibit himself when he noticed a woman stopping the car in front of her house. Since the door was not locked he entered the premises with his genitals exhibited. When the woman screamed he covered her mouth with his hand and made threatening gestures with a knife he carried with him. A few days later he called the victim on the phone and apologized. A month later he had another urge to exhibit himself. This time he stopped his car, picked out one of the dwellings and knocked at the door. He left when the lady of the house appeared and saw him with his genitals exposed.

The projective tests indicated confused sexual identification, hostility and aggression toward women, and an underlying homosexual component. In the face to face interview and in the interview conducted under the influence of intravenous amobarbital sodium and methedrine he revealed a poor relationship with his wife and such closeness to his mother that he visited her at least four evenings a week. He also admitted to passing homosexual fantasies.

He rationalized his carrying a knife by saying that he needed it to protect his wife in case someone should attack her. The exhibitionistic

acts were accompanied by a feeling of triumph, but as soon as the act was over he felt guilty and depressed. When he entered the home with his genitals exhibited and threatened the woman with his knife, he experienced a triumphant feeling of having proved himself. He expressed voyeurism during his indecent phone calls by asking the female victims whether they had sexual relations with their boyfriends or with other men. During the calls, he fantasized and masturbated.

### Comment

The seven cases presented here were chosen to illustrate the various features of sexually motivated burglaries. Some of these burglaries may impress the court or other observers as offenses committed for gain, particularly if valuables had been stolen and no female occupants had been sexually molested. However, psychiatric evaluation bolstered by projective tests may disclose the symbolic nature of the act. Voyeuristic impulses in breaking and entering among compulsive burglars seem to be quite common (Cases #2, 4, 5, 7). This may be expressed in an urge to look around, to inspect open drawers, to see a naked woman, or in various voyeuristic fantasies. Overt sexual excitement upon illicitly entering a house was illustrated in the case of Heirens and also in Case #4. Masturbatory fantasies of breaking into a house in some cases further illustrate the sexual symbolism of the act.

Transvestism, stealing of female underwear, or ripping of female clothes are sometimes encountered in juvenile burglars and may be of ominous significance. The case of William Heirens is an illustration, but objective statistical data of such a connection are not available. In addition to covert, symbolic expression in sexually motivated burglaries, there are also openly expressed aggressive acts against females connected with the illicit entering. These acts are accompanied by a feeling of revenge and triumph. Case #7 experienced triumphal feelings when he exhibited himself to unsuspecting females and particularly when he entered the house with his genitals exposed and threatened the female occupant with a knife. Exhibitionists, however, are generally innocuous and nonaggressive. I have seen only one other exception, a man who threw women down to the ground and experienced a feeling of triumph while exhibiting himself. During the act, most experience a fantasy of being admired by the victim and a feeling that the act will result in closeness with the victim, who will eventually exhibit her own genitals.

Case #6 deserves a special mention, for it illustrates the connection between seemingly gain-oriented repetitive burglaries and covert sexual motivation. This patient equated the emotions experienced while breaking into homes with triumphal feelings he experienced in killing cats. In light hypnosis he compared cats with women and spontaneously stated that he had started killing cats after experiencing severe rejection by his mother and that on one occasion he had followed a woman and hit her with a stick for no obvious reason. It takes little imagination to follow the sequence of breaking into homes, resentment of mother, killing cats, and hitting a woman.

The possibility of dangerous attacks on women by sexually motivated burglars is suggested by the fact that some have an overt sadistic component

and hatred of women similar to that elicited in cases of lust murder.

Elsewhere I have expressed my view that "unprovoked assaults on women, particularly choking and stabbing; offenses of breaking and entering committed solo and in bizarre circumstances; fetishism of underclothing; expression of hatred, contempt or fear of women; violence against animals particularly violence against cats; violent and primitive fantasy life; confusion of sexual identity" may presage a murderous attack on women.<sup>9</sup>

By this I do not mean to imply that any sexually motivated burglar will kill or seriously assault a woman, but that in cases of bizarre murders of females, compulsive burglars with a history of minor attacks on women should be investigated by the police.

Only isolated cases can be followed by one examiner, and this material is not sufficient for a comprehensive statistical analysis. Issues of criminal responsibility are irrelevant for prevention because the majority of these cases, albeit sometimes dangerous and always disturbed, do not fall under the legal definition of insanity.

### Summary

Overt or covert sexual motivation was found in several repetitive, compulsive burglars. Voyeuristic impulses, transvestism, confused sexual identity, and hatred of mother transferred to women in general are common findings. The possibility of eventual serious attacks on women should be considered in those who in addition to burglaries, particularly committed in bizarre circumstances and alone, have a history of minor attacks on women and mistreatment of animals. The cat appears to symbolize a woman, so mistreatment of cats in combination with sexually motivated burglaries should be considered an important prognostic sign.

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