

# Bestiality: An introduction for legal and mental health professionals

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## Abstract

Bestiality, or human–animal intercourse, has been a concern of the legal and mental health communities for many years. Ancient legal codes delineated punishments for those who engaged in the behavior, denoting a moral and general societal concern surrounding bestiality dating to ancient times. Despite this longstanding interest in and legal efforts to punish humans for having sex with animals, there has been little research on the behavior. Current available research has largely been siloed based on the populations studied, making it difficult to render any firm conclusions about bestiality's prevalence, frequency, and the risk posed by those who have sex with animals. It is important for clinicians to know the legal status of the behavior in their jurisdictions, to understand possible medical and psychiatric complications and comorbidities, and to know how to evaluate and treat individuals who engage in bestiality or have the related diagnosis of zoophilic disorder. This article provides an overview of the terminology and research pertaining to bestiality, summarizes legal and ethical considerations, and describes clinically relevant information for the evaluation and management of individuals engaged in sex with animals.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Bestiality has long been a topic of fascination and revulsion in human society. Ancient legal codes variously allowed or prohibited human–animal intercourse on moral and religious grounds (Holoyda, 2018). Despite its longstanding recognition, bestiality has failed to capture the attention of researchers. Accordingly, the knowledge base to answer

questions regarding its prevalence and frequency and to describe those who engage in it remains limited. This article serves as an introduction for legal and mental health professionals charged with addressing this behavior in legal, medical, and other settings. We clarify relevant terms related to human–animal intercourse, describe currently available research, delineate ethical and legal considerations pertaining to the behavior, and then provide a clinical guide to understanding, evaluating, and treating the behavior.

## 2 | CLARIFYING DEFINITIONS

The term *bestiality* refers to any sexual act between a human and a non-human animal. To state that someone engages in bestiality is not the same as making a diagnosis of zoophilia, nor does it explain why an individual has sex with an animal. As Holoyda and Newman (2016) describe, individuals may participate in sexual acts with animals to satisfy various motivations. A less colloquial synonym for bestiality is *zoerasty*. *Animal sexual abuse* (ASA) is a term recently described in the veterinary literature as the “preferred and encompassing term for all sexual contact between people and animals” (Stern & Smith-Blackmore, 2016, pp. 1058) that emphasizes the harm to animals posed by sex with humans.

The term *zoophilia*, at times incorrectly conflated with bestiality, denotes a paraphilia. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) defines a paraphilia as “any intense and persistent sexual interest other than sexual interest in genital stimulation or preparatory fondling with phenotypically normal, physically mature, consenting human partners” (p. 585). Paraphilias are identified based on the presence of sexual fantasies, urges, or behaviors. Zoophilia is a paraphilia in which the object of one’s intense and persistent sexual interest is an animal. According to the DSM-5, a paraphilia can be considered a *paraphilic disorder* when it “is currently causing distress or impairment to the individual,” or when its “satisfaction has entailed personal harm, or risk of harm, to others” (pp. 685–686).

Although the DSM-5 does not have a specific diagnosis for zoophilic disorder, the text notes that it may be diagnosed under the “other specified paraphilic disorder” category. Based on DSM-5’s definitions, an individual may have the paraphilia of zoophilia if he or she has sexual fantasies or urges involving animals that do not cause him or her distress or impairment, or on which he or she does not act. On the other hand, an individual with zoophilia who has sought to satisfy his or her zoophilic interests by engaging in acts of bestiality, which pose a risk of harm due to potential tissue injury (Stern & Smith-Blackmore, 2016) and involve lack of consent (Beirne, 1997), would meet criteria for zoophilic disorder. In addition, an individual who experiences distress or impairment from his or her zoophilic interests, regardless of whether he or she engages in bestiality, would also meet criteria for a diagnosis of zoophilic disorder.

The vocabulary used to describe individuals who engage in bestiality is similarly varied. Terms such as *zoophile*, *zoo*, *zoosexual*, and *zoerast* all describe individuals who have or desire to have sex with animals. Individuals may self-identify using these terms, at times to distinguish themselves as having a “relationship with the animal, an emotional attachment as well as sexual attraction” (Hani Miletski, 2006, p. 10), in contradistinction to individuals who have sex with animals for other reasons, such as to cause harm or pain, for culturally sanctioned reasons, or for financial benefit (Holoyda & Newman, 2016). The similarity between the words zoophilia and zoophile is coincidental. An individual’s self-identification as a zoophile or zoo does not necessitate that the person has a paraphilia or paraphilic disorder. Furthermore, an individual with zoophilia or zoophilic disorder may or may not view him or herself as a zoophile or espouse the emotional connection and relationship with an animal as is common among self-identified zoophiles.

Perhaps most illustrious of the breadth of possible behaviors (as well as definitional dilemmas) related to bestiality is Aggrawal’s (2011) classification scheme. Based on his own classification system about necrophilia, and touted as a “classification of zoophilia,” Aggrawal describes a variety of acts that may or may not represent bestiality and can be practiced by individuals who may or may not have zoophilia or zoophilic disorder. For example, his first category is

composed of “role players,” or individuals who enjoy having sex with humans while pretending to be animals. Such behavior represents neither bestiality nor zoophilic sexual interest. “Tactile zoophiles” are individuals who stroke animals as part of the act of sexual gratification, whereas “sadistic bestials” obtain sexual satisfaction by torturing animals. Aggrawal indicates that category 10, or “exclusive zoophiles,” are the most pathologic group who might benefit from antiandrogen treatment. Though useful to assist one in considering the various types of behavior that may be categorized as bestiality, Aggrawal’s system lacks a research base to support any conclusions regarding treatment need or violence risk of individuals that fall into these proposed classes.

### 3 | BESTIALITY IN POPULAR CULTURE

Acts of bestiality have been present in popular culture for decades. Bestiality in film defies genre, demonstrating society’s fascination and revulsion with the behavior. Bestiality is the subject of films ranging from pornography to drama. The 1971 film *Dogarama* (Cole, 1971) has become a pornographic classic for its scenes featuring sexual intercourse between a canine and Linda Lovelace (a well-known pornography actress), who later stated that her producer boyfriend forced her to perform in the film. Documentaries and docudramas have attempted to depict real-life stories of bestiality. For example, the 2007 docudrama *Zoo* (Case, Ferris & Devor, 2007) focused on the death of a man who experienced fatal injuries after having receptive anal intercourse with a horse. *Donkey Love* (Chandler & Stoneage, 2012), a 2012 documentary, demonstrates Colombia’s purported tradition of coming of age by engaging in sexual acts with donkeys. Fictional stories have also depicted acts of bestiality. *Sleeping Dogs Lie* (Pasetta & Goldthwait, 2006) is a 2006 comedy in which the protagonist has romantic issues after revealing that she engaged in sexual acts with a dog in college. A popular New Zealand horror film, *Black Sheep* (Campbell & King, 2006), in which killer sheep are terrorizing local people on farms, unveils that the titular sheep were created by a mad scientist’s “animal husbandry” exploits. Finally, *The Shape of Water* (Dale & Del Toro, 2017), the 2017 Academy Award winner for Best Film, includes sex between a woman and a scaly fish creature. The film even inspired sex toys shaped like the imaginary fish-man’s penis (Zuckerman, 2018).

Bestiality in film, however, is long pre-dated by its appearance in art and mythology. European cave paintings over 15,000 years old depict sexual acts between humans and animals. Ancient Egyptian tombs demonstrate images of sexual contact with animals. Ancient Greek mythology is rife with stories describing various gods presenting themselves to humans and copulating. For example, Zeus seduces Leda, the queen of Sparta, after taking the form of a swan, resulting in Leda’s birth to half-human, half-god children (Bullough, 1976). This story inspired a W.B. Yeats poem along with many pieces of visual art. The prevalence of depictions of bestiality in various forms of art throughout the centuries indicates that human–animal intercourse has been a topic in the popular imagination since early human history.

### 4 | BESTIALITY RESEARCH

Despite bestiality’s presence in art dating from thousands of years ago to the present, there has been limited scientific research into the behavior. Data regarding fundamental issues such as the prevalence of human–animal sexual acts and which individuals engage in them remain scant. In terms of prevalence, data are outdated and of questionable validity when applied to today’s society in the United States. Alfred Kinsey, in his groundbreaking sexology work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948), reported that approximately 8% of United States males had any sexual experience with animals. His estimate climbed to 40–50% when restricted to boys growing up on rural farms. His follow-up work, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), stated that 1.5% of pre-adolescent females reported sexual contact with a non-human animal, a number that grew to 3.6% in adult females. Two decades later, Hunt (1974) conducted a voluntary survey of 982 men in 24 US cities regarding their sexual behavior and found that 4.9% reported having had sexual contact with an animal.

Kinsey's and Hunt's results represent the only prevalence estimates of bestiality in the general population. In 1991, Alvarez and Freinhar (1991) conducted a small study on the prevalence of bestiality and fantasies about having sex with an animal among 20 psychiatric inpatients, 20 general medical inpatients, and 20 members of the psychiatric staff at an inpatient psychiatric unit. Asking whether each subject "had some type of sexual relations with an animal" and/or "had some type of sexual fantasy about an animal," the authors found that six psychiatric inpatients, but none of the other two groups, reported prior sexual relations with an animal. Nine psychiatric inpatients, two general medical inpatients, and three psychiatric staff members, however, reported prior sexual fantasies about an animal. Apart from ascertaining "yes" or "no" responses to their questions, the authors did not obtain additional information regarding these contacts and fantasies. In addition, they did not acknowledge or record the presence of possible acute psychiatric symptoms (i.e., delusions, disorganized thinking, disorganized behavior, hypersexuality, grandiosity) that may have contributed to the elevated rates in the psychiatric inpatient group. Though noteworthy for its attempt to identify prevalence estimates of bestiality and associated fantasies, the study's small sample sizes and lack of consideration of confounding factors significantly limit the generalizability and validity of its findings.

Additional research on bestiality has largely been siloed into studies of bestiality among incarcerated individuals and studies of self-identified zoophiles. Hensley, Tallichet, and Singer (2006) found that 16 (6%) out of 261 inmates housed in one maximum- and two medium-security southern US prisons reported a history of childhood bestiality. Those offenders with a history of bestiality had less education, were more likely to have been convicted of an interpersonal crime, and had a great number of prior convictions for interpersonal crimes, compared with those who did not have a history of bestiality. Hensley, Tallichet, and Dutkiewicz (2010) replicated these findings and noted that childhood bestiality may be a precursor to adult interpersonal violence. In a study of 180 inmates at medium- and maximum-security prisons in a southern state, Henderson, Hensley, and Tallichet (2011) found that 20% of inmates reported having had sex with animals. Regression analysis demonstrated that a history of bestiality was the sole form of animal abuse that significantly predicted adult interpersonal violence when compared with drowning, shooting, kicking, choking, and burning. The authors of these studies have suggested that their findings indicate that bestiality is a concerning type of animal abuse because of its link with interpersonal offending in adulthood. Others have tempered this assertion, noting the absence of control groups in the studies and their limited generalizability to potential offenders and the population at large (Ranger & Fedoroff, 2014).

On the other hand, another line of research has focused on understanding the self-identified class of zoophiles or zoos. Miletski (2006) has conducted surveys and interviews of individuals who classify themselves as zoos. For example, she surveyed 82 men and 11 women who made telephone or personal contact with her based on her participation in zoo gatherings. All of the women and 87% of the men in her sample were from the United States and approximately half of the men and women were college graduates or greater. Thirty-seven (45%) men and seven (64%) women were single, 26 (32%) men and one (9%) woman were married, and 10 (12%) men and two women (18%) were divorced at the time of the survey. One-quarter of men and women responded that they had never been in a live-in sexual relationship with a partner for greater than 1 month. Alternatively, 21 (26%) men and one woman (9%) indicated that they were married, living with a spouse, and having sex with animals at the same time.

In terms of their history of bestiality, all the women and 52 (63%) of the men indicated that their first sexual experience occurred with a dog. Fourteen men (17%) stated that their first sexual contact with an animal was with a horse (Miletski, 2017). Sixty-eight men (83%) reported currently having sex with animals at a rate of 2.96 times per week, ranging from once annually to three times per day. The nine women (82%) currently engaged in sex with animals were having sex with them 1.80 times per week, ranging from once per month to once per day. Men tended to masturbate the dog (64%), fellate the dog (42%), and be anally penetrated by the dog (34%). Women tended to masturbate the dog (64%), have the dog perform cunnilingus on them (55%), and be vaginally penetrated by the dog (45%) (Miletski, 2006).

Perhaps most revealing about zoophiles and their behavior is their reasoning for engaging in bestiality. In Miletski's (2002) research, the most common reasons expressed were being "sexually attracted to the animal" (75%), being "curious" (67%), and wanting "to express love or affection to the animal" (60%). In light of her findings,

Miletski (2017) has suggested that some individuals may have a sexual orientation toward animals. Other researchers have identified similar reasons for self-identified zoophiles' sexual activity with animals. Williams and Weinberg (2003) found that out of 114 men (93% of whom defined themselves as zoophiles) who responded to an online survey sent to members of a website that "catered to a network of people who had a sexual interest in animals" (p. 524), the most common reasons for engaging in bestiality were "pleasurable sex with animals" and a "desire for affection." Similar to Miletski's study, Williams and Weinberg found that the most common initial sexual experience involved either a dog (63%) or a horse (29%). Unlike Miletski's study, however, they noted that after performing oral-genital sex on animals (81%), the most common type of sexual activity was vaginal sex with a female animal (75%).

As mentioned earlier, one of the problems with the current state of research on bestiality is that studies remain siloed to different populations, including offenders and self-identified zoophiles. It remains unclear to what degree bestiality is practiced among the general population. In addition, it is unlikely that researchers' conclusions about the link between bestiality and interpersonal violence apply uniformly to self-identified zoophiles, the majority of whom profess to have an emotional or loving connection with their animal partners. Presumably those individuals who have a history of multiple paraphilic disorders and violence against humans would engage in sex with animals with greater violent or cruel intent, but even this remains unclear (Holoyda, 2017). Future research should seek to update prevalence estimates and clarify the link between bestiality and violence, including the types of individuals for whom bestiality represents a risk factor for future interpersonal offending.

## 5 | ETHICAL ISSUES

Beginning in early human history, moral and ethical codes dealt with bestiality in varying ways. Judeo-Christian mores portrayed bestiality as immoral for millennia. Exodus states that those who have sex with animals should be put to death, while Deuteronomy specifically names them as cursed. Leviticus notes that both the humans and the animals who have sex with humans should be put to death. The major world religions often dictate that sexual intercourse must have a procreative intent, and any sexuality not leading to conception is wrong. Adherents commonly believe that God created man in His image, which is superior to the beast. Alternatively, intercourse with animals is thought to produce the offspring of the devil, which are half-human and half-animal (Beirne, 1997).

Belliotti (1979) argued for a secular consideration of sexual ethics. He stated that reciprocity or the obligations to one another (rather than the use of another as a means to an end) and the voluntary contractual consideration of needs and expectations are required for ethical sexuality. For example, rape is unethical because it is involuntary, while parent-child incest is immoral because a child cannot enter a contractual relationship. In this model, bestiality is unethical because animals are sentient beings that lack the ability to provide valid consent or enter into a sexual contract.

Later, Beirne (1997) advanced the idea of re-conceptualizing bestiality as interspecies sexual assault. He based this conceptualization on three major assumptions. First, sexual relations between humans and animals involve coercion in almost all cases. Second, sex acts with animals cause pain (internal bleeding, ruptured anus and vagina, psychological trauma) and sometimes death. Lastly, animals cannot give their consent, nor do they have the ability to voice concerns about being abused. These assumptions commonly hold true when considering pedophilic acts, as well as the experiences of battered women. Beirne further described types of interspecies sexual assault, including zoophilia/sexual fixation; commodification of animals, or the use of animals as a commodity for sale as in the aforementioned pornographic films; adolescent sexual experimentation, as suggested by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) study; and aggravated cruelty, in which both a sexual act and violence occur against the animal.

Singer, a leading ethicist, wrote a book review entitled *Heavy Petting* (2001) that sparked a reconsideration of bestiality ethics. He argued that bestiality cannot be wrong simply because of religious taboo, noting that homosexuality was (and, to some extent, remains) similarly condemned. From a utilitarian point of view, he suggested that some acts of bestiality should be considered crimes because they are cruel and have harmful consequences, without

considering the animal's ability to consent. Levy (2003) discussed animal assent as a form of consent to sexual activity with humans. Notably, this reasoning is similar to distorted logic commonly espoused by pedophiles.

The capacity to consent to sexual relations among humans may become an issue in individuals with dementia, intellectual disability, intoxication, or psychosis. Understanding the potential consequences, rational reasoning and decision-making, and the voluntariness of a sexual encounter is important for humans. These elements of informed consent are not something animals can possibly demonstrate to humans. Parallels to pedophilic acts are evident in the problems related to informed consent, including the power differentials of humans' control of animals' food and going outside for fresh air, as well as animals' inability to voice a reasoned, rational, voluntary decision. If informed consent were not necessary for animals to consent to engage in sex with humans, then bestiality and sex with children would both be ethical acts.

## 6 | BESTIALITY AND THE LAW

Regardless of one's ethical stance on human-animal intercourse, bestiality is illegal throughout much of the United States and internationally. The legality of bestiality has been described extensively elsewhere (Holoyda & Newman, 2014) and within this Special Issue (pp. 000–000). Briefly, as of this writing, only five states (Hawaii, Wyoming, New Mexico, Kentucky, West Virginia) and the District of Columbia lack statutes specifically proscribing acts of bestiality (Animal League Defense Fund, 2018). Organizations such as the Humane Society are actively promoting legislation to make bestiality illegal in these remaining states, as well as adding felony provisions to existing statutes in states where bestiality would incur a misdemeanor charge (Leighann Lassiter, personal communication, 2017). Across the United States, bestiality laws differ in terms of their descriptiveness of illegal behaviors, the penalties imposed, and additional postconviction requirements for offenders (Holoyda, 2018).

There has been a similar movement to criminalize bestiality where it remains legal in other Western nations. Denmark, a nation renowned for animal sex tourism, became one of the last European countries to ban bestiality in 2015 (BBC, 2015). In Hungary, Finland, and Romania, however, sex with animals remains legal. In sharp contrast, bestiality is punishable by death in Iran (Project on Extra-Legal Executions in Iran, 2011) and is also reportedly a capital offense in other Islamic nations. Throughout Asia and much of Africa, however, the legal response to individuals who have engaged in bestiality remains unknown.

## 7 | BESTIALITY INVESTIGATIONS

The criminal investigation of cases involving bestiality presents law enforcement officials with numerous challenges. The first involves the concept of *corpus delicti*, which dictates that a confession alone is insufficient to establish a conviction. Because animals cannot speak to accuse their abusers of sexual acts, corroborating evidence is more difficult to obtain. In alleged cases of bestiality, corroborating evidence may include the statements of individuals close to the suspect or victim, which can aid in establishing timelines that demonstrate one's access to the animal, as well as veterinary forensic evaluations of abused animals (Stern & Smith-Blackmore, 2016).

A second challenge associated with bestiality cases relates to the taboo surrounding bestiality, which can make suspects and witnesses reticent to speak to investigators. There are a variety of potential reasons for this. Hesitancy may result from one's intimate relationship with the accused perpetrator. Disclosing a partner's history of bestiality exposes the discloser to the stigma surrounding the behavior. In other cases, a witness may not believe what he or she has seen or may be concerned that he or she will not be believed.

Although meant to be a networking site for individuals interested in bestiality, the website Beast Forum ([www.beastforum.com](http://www.beastforum.com)) has been used to geotrack possible offenders and obtain corroborating evidence in investigations. Containing over 1.6 million registered users and 11 million posts, the website contains a "classified" section broken down by geographic region to allow users to find and meet people "advertising" animals for sexual use. Open source

investigative methods enable law enforcement officials to obtain date and location information from media posted to the forum that may corroborate suspects' or witnesses' statements. Such techniques have been used to help solve and secure convictions in a variety of bestiality investigations, including in Washington state (Hutton, 2016).

## 8 | CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 8.1 | Medical complications

Medical and mental health clinicians working with individuals engaged in bestiality should be aware of the potential medical complications of human–animal sex. The most commonly described adverse event is physical trauma, which occurs because of the size differential between the copulatory organs of the human and the animal and the unique reproductive physiology of some animals. Canine penises, for example, swell once engaged in the vagina to ensure seminal transmission. This swelling often “locks” the two animals into position and is referred to as the “copulatory” or “coital tie” (Linde-Forsberg, 2007). Wiegand, Schmidt, and Kleiber (1999) described injury from the coital tie in the setting of bestiality in an 11-year-old male who experienced extensive anal rectal injury after penile penetration by a German shepherd dog. Kirov, Losanoff, and Kjossev (2001) reported the case of a 62-year-old farmer who presented with generalized abdominal pain of 8 hours' duration following sexual intercourse with a boar. Laparotomy revealed peritonitis and a tear on the rectum. This injury resulted from the size difference between the farmer's anus and the boar's penis, as well as its ability (similar to a canine penis) to lock into position. Size disparities are sufficient to cause fatal injuries, as in the case of Kenneth Pinyon, more commonly known as “Mr Hands,” who suffered extensive peritonitis and death after being anally penetrated by a horse. The case of Mr Hands was later depicted in the previously mentioned docudrama *Zoo*. In addition to genital tissue damage, there may be tissue injury from biting or scratching in non-genital areas if the animal is agitated.

Apart from physical traumatic injury, sexual contact with animals may result in other illnesses. Zoonotic illnesses are infectious diseases transmitted from animals to humans via bacteria, viruses, or parasites. One possible mode of transmission from animal to human is through sexual contact with saliva, semen, vaginal fluids, and oral–fecal contact. Some zoonotic diseases like echinococcosis, leptospirosis, and rabies may be fatal. The infection of animals with human sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, and HIV via acts of bestiality has not been described in the literature.

There are also non-traumatic and non-infectious complications of bestiality. One early case report described a woman who experienced an anaphylactic reaction after having sexual intercourse with her dog (Holden & Sherline, 1973). The woman had an initial anaphylactic reaction to the dog's sperm, but with repeated exposures became sensitized, as confirmed by a scratch test with the dog's sperm. In a 2012 case–control study, Zequi et al. found that a personal history of sex with animals is a risk factor for the development of penile cancer. The authors hypothesized that animals' foreign genital mucosa and anogenital secretions may be antigenic or carcinogenic to humans. Medical or mental health clinicians working with individuals engaged in bestiality should be familiar with the risk of tissue trauma and zoonotic illness and be able to assess the relative risk based on the species and the specific sexual behaviors.

### 8.2 | Medical comorbidities

There are no known general medical conditions that are clearly associated with bestiality or zoophilia. Some case reports have described the initiation of bestiality in response to treatment with pro-dopaminergic agents for Parkinson's disease. Jimenez-Jimenez, Sayed, Gardia-Soldevilla, and Barcenilla (2002) reported on a 74-year-old man with advanced Parkinson's disease who made sexual advances toward his granddaughter and the female family dog 5 days after starting treatment with levodopa. Raina, Cersosimo, and Micheli (2012) described a 58-year-old man with Parkinson's with dopamine dysregulation syndrome who engaged in acts of bestiality with a female family dog,

which ceased upon discontinuation of pramipexol. In both cases, the acts were thought to result from hypersexuality, which is known complication of dopaminergic therapy (Utti et al., 1989).

### 8.3 | Psychiatric comorbidity

There are limited data describing the relationship between bestiality, zoophilia, and zoophilic disorder and psychiatric diagnoses and symptoms. The small number of studies, as well as the conflation of the terms bestiality, zoophilia, and zoophilic disorder make it difficult to determine the relationship between conditions. Perhaps best described is the co-occurrence of zoophilia with other paraphilic disorders. Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Mittelman, and Rouleau (1988) identified an average of 4.8 paraphilic diagnoses in 14 zoophilic men referred for community treatment of a paraphilia. The authors labeled the diagnosis as “bestiality,” despite using DSM-III diagnostic criteria to identify the paraphilic sexual interests. This terminological issue notwithstanding, their finding of 4.8 comorbid paraphilic diagnoses represented the highest paraphilic comorbidity rate out of any diagnosis studied. Based on these findings, the authors suggested that zoophilic subjects may have a high degree of paraphilic “cross-over” or extension into other disordered sexual interest. This study has not been replicated, but some case reports support Abel's finding of co-existing paraphilic disorders in individuals engaged in acts of bestiality (Holoyda, 2017).

The relationship between human–animal sex and nonparaphilic psychiatric conditions is more poorly defined. As described previously, Alvarez and Freinhar (1991) found a higher prevalence of reported acts of bestiality and fantasies of sex with animals in psychiatric inpatients, but they did not comment on their subjects' other psychiatric conditions. Duffield, Hassiotis, and Vizard (1998) identified comorbid cases of learning disability, posttraumatic stress disorder, and conduct disorder in a sample of seven juvenile sex offenders who committed bestiality. In contrast, Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) found that individuals who have sex with animals may be more educated than the general population, with close to half of their subjects with a history of bestiality reporting that they had obtained a college degree. Case reports have variously documented the occurrence of human–animal sexual acts in individuals with autism (Chandradasa & Champika, 2017); alcohol use (Satapathy, Swain, Pandey, & Behera, 2016); depressive disorder, schizoaffective disorder, and antisocial personality disorder (Holoyda, 2017); and transvestism and pedophilia in the context of mania (Mendhekar & Mehta, 2006). Lesandric, Orlovic, Peitl, and Karlovic (2017) wrote about a case of zoophilia in a young man who had sex with a cow in his early teens, persistent zoophilic fantasies throughout his teen years, then another episode of intercourse with a cow in his early 20s, before ultimately decompensating into psychosis. Amoo, Abayomio, and Olashore (2012) similarly reported a case of a man with schizophrenia who engaged in repeated acts of bestiality with goats when psychotic. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that there is a link between bestiality and nonparaphilic psychiatric disorders. Intuitively, however, psychotic and mood disorders that cause disinhibition, disorganized behavior, and hypersexuality may put someone with or without zoophilic interest at risk of having sex with animals.

### 8.4 | Evaluation

There are no specific tests to assist in the diagnosis of zoophilia and zoophilic disorder. The two objective tests used in the assessment of individuals with paraphilic interests, the penile plethysmograph (PPG) and the Abel Screen of Sexual Interest, are not designed to assess sexual interest in animals. The role of polygraph in this evaluation is not established, either. Schenk, Cooper-Lehki, Keelan, and Fremouw (2014) examined the differences in juvenile sex offenders who admitted to engaging in bestiality on a self-report measure versus a polygraph. They identified underreporting of bestiality when relying on self-report.

Due to the lack of objective instruments for identifying a history of bestiality or a paraphilic interest in animals, the clinical assessment of bestiality and zoophilic interest largely depends on self-report and collateral information sources. Clinicians should conduct a psychosexual evaluation in individuals who present with a history of sexual



contact with animals. A psychosexual evaluation focuses on an individual's sexual interests, attitudes, and behaviors to determine their risk for engaging in future problematic or dangerous sexual behaviors.

A self-report questionnaire may be useful to begin the evaluation. Patients may be reluctant to describe their sexual fantasies or behaviors and therefore find it "easier" to answer questions more discreetly on a self-report measure. During the clinical interview, a general psychiatric evaluation should be performed with a specific focus on the individual's sexual behavior. The self-report questionnaire should be discussed in the context of a review of symptoms to determine if the individual meets diagnostic criteria for any of the paraphilic disorders.

The identification of intellectual impairment may also be relevant in some individuals engaging in bestiality. In addition, a careful review of the patient's sexual acts with animals and other sexually violent behavior may assist in characterizing the person's risk for other sexually and non-sexually violent behavior. Collateral sources of information such as police reports, arrest history, and interviews with family members or significant others may serve to inform clinical and diagnostic impressions.

## 8.5 | Treatment

Treatment is focused on identifying and modifying the underlying etiology of the acts of bestiality. For example, if bestiality occurs primarily as a result of social skills deficits or limited opportunities for normative sexual partners, the treatment should focus on helping the patient address these factors. An individual with genuine zoophilic disorder, however, has a preference for sexual contact with animals. Though the source of sexual arousal for the individual may not be amenable to change, efforts to diminish the sexual interest may reduce problematic sexual behavior. The World Federation of Societies of Biological Society published guidelines for the biological treatment of paraphilias in 2010 (Thibault et al., 2010). Although these guidelines do not focus on individuals engaged in bestiality or those diagnosed with zoophilic disorder (or zoophilia, at the time of its publication), they were developed based on studies of individuals with other paraphilic disorders and sexual offenders.

In the absence of other research, the WFSBS algorithm could be adopted to assist in treating individuals with zoophilic disorder or those engaged in bestiality. Specific treatment modalities include cognitive behavioral therapies, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and antiandrogen medications. The guidelines note that SSRIs are indicated when one's paraphilic behavior and interest are mild and do not pose a danger to others. One case report describes the effective treatment of zoophilia with an SSRI, although the case was complicated by comorbid disorders that may also respond to SSRIs (Chandradasa & Champika, 2017). Antiandrogen medications are indicated in cases of refractory paraphilic behavior and when the behavior poses a danger to others. Although there are no case reports of the use of antiandrogens in individuals with zoophilic disorder, such medications would likely assist in reducing an individual's zoophilic interest. Clearly, studies measuring the effectiveness of such treatments in cases of zoophilic disorder and bestiality are needed.

## 9 | CONCLUSION

Available research on bestiality, zoophilic disorder, and the individuals who have sex with animals generates more questions than it provides answers. The dearth of knowledge is remarkable considering legal, artistic, and folkloric allusions to and depictions of the behavior dating from earliest recorded human history. Despite the lack of scientific literature, societies throughout time have developed legal responses to the behavior, which have been primarily punitive. Bestiality is illegal in most states of the United States and in many nations around the world. For clinicians working with individuals engaged in bestiality, it is important to understand the potential medical complications, as well as medical and psychiatric comorbidities that may be relevant. Lastly, applying methods derived from the evaluation and treatment of other paraphilic disorders may provide a rational approach to managing individuals engaged in sex with animals.

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