

ELVIS

GOES TO SEX THERAPY

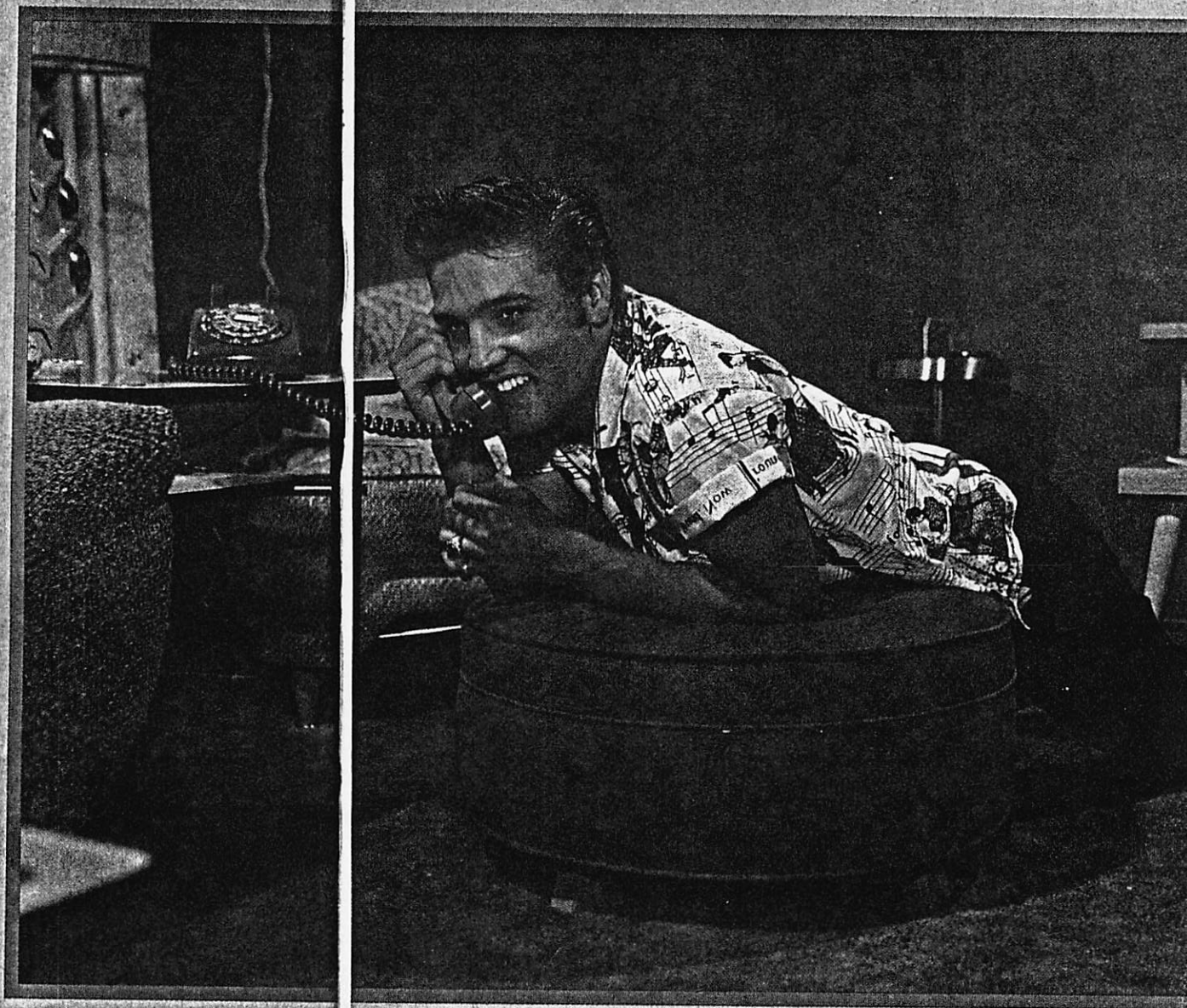
The King loved kink,
but was he a pervert?

BY THE EDITORS

Elvis Presley was a pervert, voyeur and orgiast, with "uncontrollable sexual phobias," according to a controversial biography of the king of rock 'n' roll. Albert Goldman's *Elvis* also portrays an erotic neurotic who could not tolerate total nudity in women and was even reluctant to expose his own genitals. He allegedly demanded scrupulously clean women and never ejaculated inside an unfamiliar partner.

The sexual twilight zone described by Goldman further suggests that intercourse sometimes left Elvis' penis torn and bloody. Voyeurism, on the other hand, was pure

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pleasure. A favorite scenario: watching from behind a one-way mirror as a gaggle of girls stripped to their panties and wrestled. Goldman traces this obsession to an incident in Presley's childhood. As a boy Elvis had observed two little girls tumbling together, their crotches flashing. This "teasing image" represented "the ultimate in arousal to Elvis Presley," Goldman insists. The memory also served as a psychic backdrop for Presley's adult entertainment:

"The best fun Elvis had with Scatter [a chimp] was always some stunt involving sex. . . . There was a little stripper . . . who was a regular at the Presley parties. Elvis would entice this girl to come up to the house; then he would persuade her to sit down on the floor and wrestle with Scatter. . . . If you didn't look too carefully, you would swear that the horny ape and the hot little chick were getting it on. That killed Elvis."

After Scatter died, Elvis discovered videotape and recorded countless bedroom antics. A typical film featured two girls in white panties wrestling and simulating lesbian sex. Elvis sometimes joined, sporting a full erection.

Cat films were Presley's favorite pornography—yet another variation on lesbian roughhousing. Goldman speculates that Presley had a "fundamental hostility toward women," complicated by an obsessive devotion to his mother. These factors contributed to "a profound sexual ambivalence."

Forum invited six therapists to diagnose Elvis and suggest treatment. The symposium sheds light on the methods of sex therapy as much—or as little—as on Elvis Presley's libido. The opinions of the experts diverge wildly, from a sexual clean bill of health to a verdict of profound neurosis.

ELVIS ON THE COUCH

If Elvis consulted me, as a psychoanalyst I would focus on his repressed exhibitionism, his defensive behavior in voyeurism, the impact of his only childhood sexual memory and the erotic implications of being "a mama's boy."

Psychoanalysis tries to make what the analyst sees in the patient's unconscious mind understandable to the patient's conscious mind. The patient gains a better understanding of why he does what he does. This leads to more healthy behavior. What follows are the things I would want Elvis Presley to understand about himself from my analysis of his conscious sexual behavior.

Goodman reports that "no woman ever saw him undressed. . . . He was not modest but ashamed." I think the unconscious situation was exactly the reverse. Elvis was a repressed sexual exhibitionist. Somewhere between one and a half to two and a half years of age he wanted to show his nude body and penis, and have these adored. But clearly his mother rejected his display. This made him uncomfortable with himself and he became a voyeur.

But the unconscious motive to exhibit himself exerted a subtle, intense influence on his conscious behavior. Consider the evidence: Presley's sexual gyrations represent the quintessence of sexual exhibitionism; and his "karate exhibitions" are clearly a display of masculine prowess.

Also Goldman is puzzled because Elvis walked onto a patio naked in front of his guests. This was not really unlike Elvis, however, because the unconscious motive to exhibit himself temporarily broke through repression into consciousness.

Elvis is further reported to be a

voyeur. The account gives numerous instances of his voyeurism. This was a psychic defense against his unconscious desire to exhibit himself.

The only memory given of Elvis' childhood sexual experiences is that of seeing two little girls tumbling on the ground with their dresses in the air. He saw their crotches. That he remembered this incident is significant. I detect a link between this memory and his later ultimate fantasy of wanting to see women's crotches covered with white panties, with black pubic hairs protruding at the edges.

When a male child first realizes that a girl does not have a penis he is shocked. The shock may lead to a fantasy that the girl lost her penis and he could lose his. Deep castration fears may follow. This seems to have happened when Elvis made this accidental discovery as a child. When shocked, an individual returns again and again to the shocking scene or event and tries to master the pieces of the event.

In adulthood Elvis returned to tumbling with girls when he watched women wrestling with each other in his bedroom. He returned to the shocking sight of a crotch without a penis in insisting that the wrestler wear panties.

I can only speculate about his desire to see pubic hairs protruding at the edges of white panties. Children do not have pubic hairs, but adults do. Elvis' wish suggests that these children could grow up to be adults even without penises. This would calm his fantasy fear that castration would mean death.

Goldman also reports that Elvis was "a mama's boy" and that the mother rejected his father. This is an Oedipal victory that the male child does not want, yet does everything he can to achieve. In the normal

course of events the child loses. He then tries to be normal like the father—the man who won his mother. When the situation is reversed, the male child will reject the victory. As an adult he will feel too guilty, because of his love for his father, to claim a woman. This was the case with Elvis.

Goldman tells us that Elvis could not accept making a woman pregnant, or being married to a woman, as a deserving sex partner. Thus he never had successful relations with women. However, when he met Barbara, the girlfriend of the media executive Jim Aubrey, Elvis seduced her. He was able to have an affair with Barbara for years following the seduction. Aubrey represented a father figure to Elvis, and only in replaying his victory over his father could Presley succeed with a woman. —William L. Johnson, M.D., psychoanalyst, New York

SEX AND DRUGS

Albert Goldman suggests that Elvis is a voyeur. What is not clear is how Elvis' other problems may have promoted his voyeurism. Goldman reports that Elvis' foreskin was often mangled during coitus, "sometimes emerging bloody." Elvis may have suffered from dyspareunia (painful coition), which led him to seek out non-painful substitutes like voyeurism.

His interest in watching women wrestle is not any stranger than that of a normal man wanting to look at bare-breasted women. Voyeurism is not necessarily a psychosexual problem. A desire to see the pubic hair of women sticking out of their panties might be diagnosed as fetishism (obtaining sexual excitement from an inanimate object). But fetishism rarely causes problems for the "sufferer," who usually manages to

find agreeable or tolerant partners.

Goldman concludes that Elvis had an aversion to viewing female genitals and was ashamed of his body. But Elvis may just have been uncomfortable with nudity, possibly because he found it arousing or because of his upbringing.

Elvis had an extensive history of drug abuse. He may have used amphetamines and narcotics, both disinhibitors, to overcome his shyness and other sexual problems. The drugs also may have eased the pain of dyspareunia.

Unfortunately, these drugs are not dependable in the long run. As tolerance to drugs increases, higher doses interfere with physiological response. The client may engage in more bizarre sexual activities to increase sexual excitement and thus overcome the physiological malfunction. Any psychosexual diagnosis of Elvis may be secondary to his substance-abuse problems.

Elvis may have been a victim of childhood sexual abuse. If so, traditional sex therapy might have helped him overcome some of the specific symptoms, but not the trauma itself.

It is not clear that Elvis wanted sex therapy. He may have been happy with his sex life. And treatment is spectacularly ineffective for those who do not want to change. Nevertheless, Elvis should have been referred to a urologist for treatment of his dyspareunia.

Elvis' substance abuse should also have been dealt with immediately. Traditionally, sex therapy should not even start until the client has been chemically free for six months. A new approach contends that the sexual concerns leading to substance abuse will reemerge when the drug is stopped, and make sobriety very difficult. Therefore sex and drug therapy must be concurrent.

Like most substance abusers, Elvis would probably argue that he was not an addict. If he could not give up drugs, then he would have to confront his addiction. If he "white-knuckled" it, the underlying sexual concerns would probably have reemerged. If effective sex therapy followed, Presley's need for drugs should have decreased (or so the theory goes).—*Charles Moser, Ph.D., sexologist, San Francisco*

DID ELVIS NEED HORMONES?

There are about 30 different fetishes or paraphilias, the exact number depending on how finely the subdivisions are made. Whether or not Elvis Presley was afflicted with a particular paraphilia cannot be definitely stated on the basis of Albert Goldman's book. It is more interpretative than simply biographical. If Goldman's interpretations are accurate, Elvis could be diagnosed as having a scotophilic/fetistic syndrome. In everyday English, this means that he had a kinky hang-up on watching live shows (lesbian or heterosexual) in which the women wore underwear. Only then could he become sexually aroused so as to achieve erection and orgasm.

This kind of erotic proclivity may be religiously or morally censured as sinful or abnormal, but it is not legislatively defined as a crime, provided the partners are of age and consenting. Therefore, Elvis would not have encountered any social authority demanding that he get therapy.

Elvis would have had to initiate sex therapy and sign his informed consent to be a patient. Once treatment began, Elvis would first have to establish his provisional goal in therapy. The next assignment would have been to examine the extent to which his personal and private erot-

osexual status at home was related to his theatrical and public erotosexual status on stage.

For all people, sex life and work life are closely intertwined. Elvis was no exception. His extravagant appeal to his audiences was, without question, not only musical, but also erotosexual. These two appeals were two sides of the same coin. The price of one was paid for at the cost of the other. This trade-off would have become unbalanced had Elvis become erotosexually transformed, with or without therapy.

No one could have prophesied for Elvis the outcome of sex therapy. But had he knocked on my door, I would not have denied him entry. If the situation were desperate, with the threat of suicide (Elvis's death was, in effect, a drug-induced suicide) or homicide, or prolonged incarceration as a sex offender, I would have advised anti-androgenic hormonal therapy and counseling. The hormonal treatment creates a pre-pubertal sexual quiescence, which makes a change in life pattern easier to accomplish.

Otherwise talking therapy would have been used without hormonal therapy. The therapeutic goal would have been to try to establish a homeostatic balance between sex and career, building the one without destroying the other.—*John Money, M.D., professor of medical psychology and pediatrics, Johns Hopkins University and Hospital, Baltimore*

STEP-BY-STEP THERAPY

I would have helped Elvis only on three conditions: that he get off drugs, including alcohol; that he have a urologist check his foreskin to get rid of the bleeding and tearing; and that he not have intercourse until I saw him again.

Elvis needed direction, authority,

permission and discipline. Drugs and alcohol interfere with good sexual functioning—thus my insistence on condition one. The other two conditions are less crucial and might have to be dealt with during our initial sessions.

The prohibition against having sexual intercourse was designed to reduce Elvis' performance anxiety. Entertainers constantly pressure themselves before each show. Elvis was also pressuring himself to perform at sexual orgies, and I would want to remove this form of display. He would then have less anxiety and a calmer base on which to build.

A flexible treatment plan would be followed. The goal would be pleasurable sexual intercourse—free of pain and anxiety, without Elvis' entourage either in the room or viewing him from behind a one-way mirror.

Penis size, Presley's concept of "little Elvis," would have to be explored, together with his overall body image and self-acceptance. Misinformation about penis size and masturbation would be examined to clarify what was normal. Perhaps it would be necessary to spend some time helping him accept and enjoy his fantasies: pubic hair creeping out of panties, "cat" films of female wrestlers, girls undressing or making love to each other, aggressive lesbians. At the same time attention would be given to socialization and the dating process, perhaps helped by ongoing group therapy. Ultimately, we would begin a series of structured experiences, if possible with a girl he was attracted to.

Start by viewing a previous turn-on scene behind the one-way mirror, when you can be alone and comfortable on a mattress. Masturbate when you are aroused, and ejaculate.

Same or similar scene, but now let your girlfriend masturbate you (all

other conditions similar).

This time let her sit astride you, facing you, and while you watch the scene she can bring you to ejaculation. (You should reciprocate.)

Adopt a similar position with the female astride. She can insert your penis into her vagina just for a few strokes and then continue with her hand on your penis, alternating hand masturbation with a few strokes of vaginal containment.

Progress—depending on the couple—to imagined scene in fantasy plus vaginal containment.

Ultimately have intercourse in a variety of positions with or without fantasy.—*Dolores Elaine Keller, Ph.D., professor of biology, Pace University, New York.*

THE PRISONER OF SEX

Based upon the material presented, and with the assumption that Elvis sought psychological therapy, my primary diagnosis is paraphilia. Paraphiliacs respond to sexual objects or situations that are not part of normative arousal patterns, and consequently may lack the capacity for affectionate sexual activity. My secondary diagnosis is inhibited male orgasm probably due to drug abuse. Specific drugs likely to have caused inhibited orgasm include alcohol, amphetamines, cocaine, methadone, PCP, psychotropic drugs and blood-pressure medication. These chemicals produce a loss of libido, decreased potency, inability to ejaculate and decreased imagistic eroticism. This last factor—decreased imagistic eroticism—may have led to Presley's paraphilia.

Imagery is central to paraphiliac sexual behavior. Unusual or bizarre imagery is necessary to produce and maintain sexual arousal and excitement. The activities that evoke the imagery are graphically described

by Goodman. Presley's varied sexual behaviors are an expression of his need for a variety of sexual images. His imagery and acts were insistent, often non-consenting (voyeurism), repetitive, and involved a preference for specific visual images for sexual arousal (pubic hair/panties) or sexual activity with a non-consenting partner (voyeurism or group sex). Fetishes usually begin in adolescence and often focus on articles of clothing and female pubic hair. The memory/image is usually of a caregiver who probably controlled that person as a youngster.

Presley exhibited elements of zoophilia, an extremely rare disorder that involves the act or fantasy of engaging in sexual activity with animals as a preferred method of achieving sexual arousal. Finally, a strong case could be made for voyeurism, which may have begun as a prank but assumed sexual overtones that soon outweighed normal methods of sexual excitement.

Elvis' masturbatory activity to *Playboy* centerfolds, as well as his sexual intercourse with his girlfriends and wife, are positive aspects of his sexuality. These behaviors assume the potential for normal sexual arousal, orgasm and related sexual imagery.

Clinically, Presley probably learned deviant behaviors because they were so reinforcing and the result of simple conditioning factors. Drug usage and abuse contribute to the pattern.

An individual who requires deviant imagery to produce sexual arousal, and who also takes drugs concurrent with this need, becomes totally dependent on these behaviors as a lifestyle. And Presley's entourage reinforced his activities. Elvis was a prisoner of sex.

I would have treated Elvis with behavior therapy, especially such

techniques as covert sensitization, covert extinction, thought-stopping and rehearsal desensitization. His lifestyle might have prevented treatment from becoming effective. The paraphilias are difficult to treat without complete cooperation from the client. He would have had to stop taking drugs, as well as reassess his relationship with his wife. If they had decided to stay together I would have begun structured sensate focus exercises and homework.—*Reid J. Daitzman, Ph.D., clinical psychologist, Stamford, Connecticut*

CONGRATULATIONS, ELVIS

Elvis was *not* a candidate for sex therapy. He knew what turned him on and he was able to make it happen. Most men would find it too humiliating to act on such unconventional wishes, especially in such a public way. Most closet Elvises spend their lives grimly trying to fit the standard scenario, making both themselves and their partners miserable.

Obviously Elvis had sexual anxieties, as all of us do. It may be of some interest to analyze Presley, although all we have to work from is 16 pages of shrill journalistic hype. Goldman is pitching an exposé; we are supposed to be relieved and delighted to learn that Elvis really was no threat. This account is patently untrustworthy; for example, after telling us repeatedly that Elvis is intimidated by straight-ahead sex, Goldman expects us to believe that Elvis "practically raped" Priscilla when she threatened to leave him.

We are told that Elvis is a mama's boy (as if this is a disgrace) and that Elvis is angry at women (as if he shouldn't be)—thus Elvis' sexual style. Goldman thinks he's got the goods on Elvis. He ignores Elvis' freedom to risk being seen as weird;

Goldman just wants to prove that Elvis was weird.

Elvis was able to risk looking foolish. After all, he could get up in front of everyone and grind his pelvis without a trace of irony. He could be passionate in public—a real turn-on for many women—while the rest of us either act aloof or caricature red-neck horniness.

Unfortunately Elvis' brazenness inflamed larger-than-life expectations that no one could live up to. He picked up Barbara Leigh in the presence of her man and then insisted (successfully) that she give him up. Elvis came on like a sexual commando. He could hardly be expected to keep this up in bed.

Apparently, like most men, Elvis thought his penis was too small and, also like most men, he thought he couldn't perform the way most men think most men perform. Cary Grant once said that he always wished he could be Cary Grant. Elvis obviously always wished he could be Elvis. But maybe there are no Cary Grants or Elvises, only skillful impersonations that we can plug into our fantasies.

Most celebrities are prisoners of their public image. They are afraid of their groupies with feverish expectations and the embrace of a totally devoted love-slave. Elvis found a way to accommodate them all—apparently with no hard feelings.

He did a creative job of continuing, in bed, to be the king, while his subjects cavorted about, making fools of themselves on his orders. Everyone seems to have had a good time.

So, if Elvis walked into my office (which he wouldn't do), I would first congratulate him and, second, commiserate with him about how difficult it is for a celebrity to have any vulnerabilities.—*Bernard Apfelbaum, Ph.D., director, Berkeley Sex Therapy Group, Berkeley, California.* ■