

Introductory Homicide Case Study #1

This subject was a White male with a highly unstable upbringing wherein his father frequently verbally and physically abused him. In elementary school, he demonstrated belligerent behavior and low self-esteem after learning that he would have to repeat the third grade. He had no history of juvenile arrests. At 16 he dropped out of high school to join the military. Though he earned his G.E.D., his service lasted only 19 months, due to an “underlying immature personality.” As a result, he was recommended for a general discharge, but upon reconsideration he ultimately received an honorable discharge. His three-year marriage was stormy and included at least one incident wherein he threatened his wife by putting a shotgun to her head. The marriage ended in a bitter divorce, leaving him with an intense hatred of women.

Over the next nine years he committed armed robberies in multiple states. He served several prison sentences and probations. He was sporadically employed and frequently used illicit drugs. He was arrested once for possession of marijuana.

Starting at the age of 35, he killed eight White victims (three males and five females). Their ages ranged from eight to 55. Five of the eight were college students. These murders occurred in four separate incidents over a nine-month period. This offender also scored in the “very high” range on the PCL-R psychopathy measure, with a score of 36. He committed a variety of crimes including assault, burglary, grand larceny, armed robbery, auto theft, and trespassing. He led an irresponsible and nomadic lifestyle. Though some planning went into his murders, he was exceedingly impulsive. He had a shallow affect, and was extremely conning and manipulative. He lacked the ability or desire to set or maintain long-term goals. His attempts at displaying charm were superficial, and he was in continuous need of stimulation. He told interviewers that he prowled around frequently at night, sometimes for hours at a time, and said that peering into windows was exciting to him. This voyeuristic behavior may have led to the methods he employed when he began to commit these murders, which involved breaking into victims’ homes at night.

Following the murders of his last two victims, he fled the area and survived financially by committing property crimes, including automobile thefts and burglaries. He later confessed to some of the murders, but demonstrated little convincing remorse. His limited efforts to express shame and regret were superficial and largely directed outward, indicating that his repentance was more for having been caught than for any feeling of empathy for his victims.

His preferred weapon was a large knife, which he felt enabled him to become a more efficient “killing machine.” He reported that his choice of this weapon was derived from his desire to exact revenge for the pain and suffering he had endured throughout his life, at the hands of his ex-wife, his parents, and law enforcement and correctional personnel. As an example, he stated that he had suffered immensely during one period of incarceration for robbery, when the prison cell he occupied flooded frequently with raw sewage, as he put it, “... day [in], day out for months. I went nuts. I went stir crazy ... I was very angry.” It is noteworthy that he used this perceived maltreatment as one of the justifications for his later crimes, again failing to accept responsibility for his behavior.

He believed he was successful as a killer because he could assimilate easily into society, while embracing his own unique, rage-filled view of the world, without others suspecting he could commit such crimes. He stated, “People like me are ... right on the fringe of society. They blend right in just like you, like me. They’re like everybody.”

Finally, he related that he was influenced by a “force,” in the form of an imaginary person, who identified specific residences for him to enter, and then instructed him to kill at those locations. It is significant that he used this invented individual as a partial explanation for his crimes, though it falls short of acceptance of responsibility for them and allowed him to dissociate himself from his actions.