



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2005

I18 The Forensic Neuropsychiatric Developmental Analysis of Spy Robert Hanssen

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about a neuro-psychiatric developmental approach developed to optimize understanding of serial criminal behaviors from a comprehensive biopsychosocial perspective. The case of Robert Hanssen will be presented to highlight this approach.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by assisting forensic mental health professionals, law enforcement, and attorneys/judges to understand serial criminal behaviors from a psychiatric-legal as well as a neuro-psychiatric developmental perspective.

In 2001, 57-year-old Robert Hanssen, former FBI counterintelligence agent, pleaded guilty to espionage and was eventually sentenced to life in prison. He had a long history of spying for the Soviet Union and later the Russian government. His spying activities are considered amongst the most damaging sustained by the United States in modern history. He was a politically and religiously conservative man, and apparently a devoted father and husband.

Both psychiatrists and members of the intelligence community examined Robert Hanssen, but no credible diagnosis has publicly emerged. Hanssen has been described as eccentric, aloof and rigid, as well as a "loner" who was possessed of a rich and unusual fantasy life. In his childhood and adolescent years he was described as, oddly dressed, odd looking, intolerant of change and, secretive. He was generally seen as a high school student with poorly developed social skills but proficient in science and math. Hanssen had an obsessive-like interest in ham radios, the 50's equivalent of computers. In his later college and adult years he was described as brilliant, aloof, socially inept with noticeable oddness of clothing and demeanor.

He is reported to have had an excellent memory and an obsession for detail and precision. His speech is reported as pedantic, monotone, and narrowly focused in content. He reports dealing with social situations with rehearsed stories and conversations. Hanssen sought to be in secretive organizations such as the FBI and the Catholic Opus Dei but remained noticeably marginal in his interpersonal connections within these organizations. He developed highly compartmentalized repetitive and intense interests that included computers, espionage, religion, and unusual sexual interests.

Some observers have suggested that Hanssen suffered from antisocial and narcissistic character pathology. Other suggested diagnoses have included dissociative identity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and impulse control disorder. In this presentation, information on Robert Hanssen will be explored that is currently available in published sources including information on the Internet. The authors propose that none of the will elaborate on why most of the previously considered diagnoses can adequately explain Robert Hanssen's psychopathology and subsequent spying activities.

In this presentation the Neuropsychiatric Developmental Model will be used a paradigm that evaluates serial offensive behavior from a biopsychosocial perspective. The Neuropsychiatric Developmental Model consists of five parts of which its neuro-psychiatric developmental/neuropsychiatric component is its most important aspect. The other components of the Neuropsychiatric Developmental Model are sexual psychopathology, aggressive psychopathology, and psychopathy and ecological factors, especially stress. Available published information will be used in order to arrive at a tentative multi-axial DSM-IV-TR diagnosis and will attempt to link his psychopathology to the origin of his spying behavior. Lastly we will briefly address the issue whether Hanssen could have been detected earlier. First, the authors will focus on the question of whether the intelligence community should be able to prescreen or identify vulnerable individuals within their ranks. Second, they will briefly discuss if 21st century espionage, with its increasing reliance on technology, is more likely to draw individuals such as Robert Hanssen. Third, the role of psychological, neuropsychological and neuro-psychiatric techniques to help identify vulnerable individuals in potentially sensitive positions will be briefly covered.

Forensic Neuropsychiatry, Developmental Disorders, Espionage/National Security