



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2006

18 Did Graham Young Suffer From Asperger's Disorder?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn the basic diagnostic aspects of Asperger's Disorder and its potential relevance to understanding serial poisoning behavior and other types of serial offenses.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing the psychiatric and neuropsychiatric aspects of serial poisoning and serial killing behavior.

Graham Young was first convicted of poisoning people when he was 14 years of age. At that time, he was convicted of non-lethally poisoning his father, his sister, and a school acquaintance. Although he was never charged with the killing of his stepmother, he eventually acknowledged having killed her by poisoning her with thallium. At the time of his arrest, a large supply of poisons was found in his home, sufficient to kill 300 people. Following his convictions, he was sent to Broadmoor Hospital where he was confined for a period of eight years. Although, there was substantial evidence that Mr. Young continued to be fixated on poisoning and on themes involving death, he was declared sufficiently rehabilitated to allow for early release into the community.

Within six months after his release, he killed two of his co-workers by poisoning them with thallium. In addition to two murder convictions resulting from these two homicides, he was also convicted twice with attempted murder as a result of having non-lethally poisoned two other co-workers. Four other charges were made as a result of non-lethally poisoning other co-workers. He was found dead at age 42, apparently secondary to a myocardial infarction. Although the possibility that he committed suicide via poisoning has been raised, no evidence exists that he died due to self-induced poisoning.

Graham Young was the second of two children born to a housewife and a father who was an engineer. His birth delivery was associated with having been a "blue baby." His mother died when he was about three months old. He was raised by his father and other family members. When Graham was about three years old, his father remarried. Thereafter, his stepmother raised him until he killed her approximately 11 years later.

Although he was not a particularly good student, he was considered to be an intelligent person. He appeared to have had a heightened olfactory sensitivity, and during his adolescence he abused ether. Eventually he developed Alcohol Abuse. Graham Young also presented with a history of psychopathology dating back to his early childhood that is strongly suggestive of high functioning autism. With regard to a history of qualitative impairment in social interaction, there was evidence of marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors involving social interaction and a failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to his developmental level, and there was a lack of social or emotional reciprocity. With regard to restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, he manifested an encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus. He also manifested an apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals. Specific examples of Young's autistic psychopathology are presented.

There is no evidence that Graham Young suffered from delays in language, cognitive development, acquisition of age-appropriate self-help skills, or adaptive behavior skills other than socialization. There was insufficient evidence for schizophrenia. During his early childhood he exhibited repetitive movements. Given the available information, it is concluded that Mr. Young likely suffered from Asperger's Disorder.

The case of Graham Young highlights the notion that serial poisoning may be intrinsically associated with Asperger's Disorder. Poisoning associated with autistic spectrum pathology may be more common than currently reported. A more contemporaneous case of Asperger's Disorder associated with criminal poisoning appears to be that of Robert Alsberg, who was recently convicted, after having prepared the highly poisonous agent, ricin, and stating "It's now exciting working with poisons. Perhaps I'll find a way to end all life on Earth through some interesting items."

Given that Graham Young killed three persons at different times, as well as the nature of the killings; he also qualifies as a case of a nonsexual serial killer. The present study indicates that combined biopsychosocial and psychohistorical approaches constitute viable strategies in the study of serial crimes such as a serial poisoning or nonsexual serial homicide, which is intrinsically associated with high functioning autistic psychopathology (Asperger's Disorder).

Serial Poisoning, Serial Killing Behavior, Asperger's Disorder