



I11 Gender, Personality Disorders, and Intimate Partner Homicide: An Unusual Case of a Murder by a Woman

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be better able to understand the dynamics which play a significant role in the commission of an intimate partner homicide.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by illustrating the interaction of personality traits and disorders with gender specific characteristics related to intimate partner homicide.

Intimate partner homicide is, by definition, a murder which takes place within the context of a dyadic relationship. These crimes are usually carried out by men, as confirmed by the literature, with only a very small percentage being perpetrated by women, who are generally the victims in such cases. In order to offer a better perspective on the representation of this phenomenon, it may suffice to report that studies conducted by various Italian statistical agencies have found that in 90% of these types of cases, men are the ones to murder their female partners.

According to the literature there are also other common features shared by male perpetrators of these crimes. For example, there is often a very high level of violence carried out in these cases. Another common feature is that a significant age disparity often exists between the man and the woman, with the man usually being the older of the pair. But when the perpetrator is a woman, the dynamics are usually quite different; most notably there is a much lower level of violence associated with the homicidal act, and it is usually the final reaction to a history of battery and abuse. In addition, when the perpetrator is a woman, she is usually the younger of the two.

The unusual case presents features which are more consistent with those characteristics associated with male perpetrators, often described in the literature. The only difference here is that the perpetrator was a woman, and the victim, her younger boyfriend.

The most striking and immediately apparent feature of this homicide is the level of violence associated with the act, which resulted in overkilling. The victim was found with multiple stab wounds (38) which were located at the neck, thorax, abdomen, and hips some of which had been inflicted postmortem.

The female perpetrator was 51-year-old and the male victim 28-year-old. They had an intimate relationship over a two-year period. The woman, who was previously married, left her husband to live with her new and much younger boyfriend.

The homicide took place in her bedroom, soon after the boyfriend had informed the woman of his decision to leave her to marry another woman, several years his junior, and with whom he had been having a simultaneous affair for a number of years. It was at that point the woman, who had been deeply committed to the relationship, and who was unable to tolerate her sense of frustration and feeling of abandonment, displayed an outburst of violence with the goal of destroying the object of her love. In an attempt to symbolically annul the abandonment and concretely make it impossible for him to leave her for a much younger woman, she went to the kitchen and returned to the bedroom, where her partner lay waiting for her and repeatedly stabbed him with a knife as he tried to defend himself and escape from the bedroom.

The dynamics described here are usually associated with males who kill their partners after realizing that their significant others will no longer remain with them. It is highly uncommon that such a modus operandi is carried out by a woman with such an exaggerated level of violence.

Following psychiatric evaluation, the subject was diagnosed as having a borderline personality and narcissistic traits. Psychodiagnostic testing (Rorschach, O.R.T.) was administered, illustrating a tendency toward regression and the use of projective defenses, autistic fantasies, affective inadequacy, fragility of the Ego, ambivalence, high impulsivity, and a tendency toward aggression.

These personality characteristics appear to be similar to those of male perpetrators who have committed intimate partner homicide in the same manner, in similar contexts, and with similar precipitating factors.

In light of these considerations, the hypothesis could be put forth that personality organization may play a significant role in similar homicidal acts, and that in some cases, personality organization may also be more significant than gender.

Intimate Partner Homicide, Personality Disorders, Gender