



### 145 The Eyeball Killer: Serial Killings With Postmortem Globe Enucleation

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After attending the presentation, attendees will: (1) be aware of the details surrounding an unusual series of serial killings in which the offender dissected and removed the eyes of his victims; (2) understand the various underlying psychological factors which likely played roles in the offender's actions; and, (3) understand the importance for death investigators to recognize various clues which may link one murder to another as possible serial killings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of forensic psychiatry and forensic pathology to death investigations in the evaluation of a unique series of serial killings.

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out."<sup>1</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines "serial killings" as the "unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s) in separate events."<sup>2</sup> Many of these criminals are believed to be psychopaths, meaning they use charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others to satisfy their own selfish needs.<sup>2</sup> The motivation for their actions is complex and can involve sexual gratification, anger, or the sadistic thrill of completely controlling another person.<sup>3</sup> When anger is a motivation, it is often because the killer has a rage against a subgroup of people.<sup>2</sup> When the crime is sexually motivated, the killer often eroticizes violence during their development, so that violence and sexual gratification became intertwined.<sup>2</sup> The killer can show complete emotional detachment, aggression, and hostility at the same time.<sup>4</sup>

The body of a 34-year-old woman working as a prostitute was found lying face-up, wearing only a bra and t-shirt, which were pulled up to expose her breasts. She had a gunshot wound to the head. At autopsy, it was discovered that the globes of both eyes had been surgically removed postmortem with such precision that there was no extraneous damage to the palpebra.

Two months later, the body of a 27-year-old female prostitute was found. She was also found lying face-up, wearing only a shirt that was pulled up over her breasts. She had three gunshot wounds. Again, the eyes were cut postmortem and the globes removed.

The third victim was a 42-year-old woman working as a prostitute. She was found dead one month after the second victim, and she was completely nude. She had two gunshot wounds to the head. She had multiple stab wounds around the eyes and face, and part of an X-ACTO<sup>®</sup> knife blade was found in one of the wounds. Both globes were absent postmortem.

The police charged Charles Albright with the murders of all three victims. Various circumstantial evidence and trace evidence were utilized in his trial, at which he was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.<sup>5</sup>

Intentionally-inflicted, postmortem mutilation injuries are relatively uncommon in forensic pathology practice, but their recognition can be important for a variety of reasons: that a case likely represents a homicide; that a case may represent a hate crime, a crime of passion or rage, or a serial/sociopathic killing; and/or that a series of murders may be linked to one another.<sup>6,8</sup>

Addressing the question of psychological motivation in these cases must include their most unique aspects: the targeting of prostitutes and the postmortem removal of the eyes. Aspects of Albright's past, which may have played roles in his homicidal behavior, including a fascination with taxidermy and eyes, as well as a disdain for prostitutes.<sup>5</sup> He demonstrated features of the paraphilias of saliromania and piquerism. He also exhibited characteristics of anti-social personality disorder as well as psychopathy, marked by impulsivity, remorselessness, manipulation, a lack of empathy, callousness, and thrill-seeking behavior.<sup>9</sup> The preparation and patience required to remove the eyes postmortem do not support rage killings. Instead, psychopathy, anti-social personality disorder, and various paraphilias represent a better psychological explanation for this serial killer's motivations.

#### References:

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### **Serial Killer, Postmortem Mutilation, Forensic Psychiatry**