

CJUS 440 Final Research Paper

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Of all the depraved crimes against my fellow human beings I have watched and read about, nothing comes close to affecting my emotions and psyche the way researching the case of young, beautiful, and precious Karly Sheehan did. Aside from the horrendous nature of how this sweet little girl was tortured and murdered, this case also hits home for me because I am from the location and know and/or am acquainted with many of the players in this tragedy. Aside from that, I chose this case (and the “Special Topics In Criminal Justice it represents) because I believe it illustrates the heart of why some people go down the path of being sociopaths and murderers. It will also show the depths of selfishness some will descend to based on their extreme narcissism and lack of care or compassion for anyone but themselves. Shawn Wesley Field was an average kid on every level imaginable whom my brothers and I grew up with. He did, however, possess that one vital trait I believe is inherently necessary for every sociopathic murderer. Shawn Wesley Field was the epitome of a bully.

Sarah Brill Sheehan (the mother of Karly) was an attractive and charismatic young woman. She too represents the epitome of self centered narcissism in how she negligently chose (against all basic maternal instincts) not to protect her daughter in the weeks, days and hours leading up to the horrific murder of baby Karly Sheehan.

As such, the fundamental ‘thesis’ of this research paper will focus on the role human evil and narcissism plays in the motivations and psyche of murderers.

On 3 June, 2005 at 1:57 p.m. a 911 call came into the emergency dispatch center of a small Oregon university town called Corvallis. The person on the other end was the frantic, hysterical and incoherent mother of a beautiful blonde little girl. When she finally gave the dispatcher the necessary information, police and paramedics were dispatched to the home of her boyfriend

Shawn Wesley Field. It was there they discovered the beaten, bruised, and lifeless body of 3 year old Karly Sheehan (Of note for me was the fact the Fire Chief and lead paramedic were guys I worked with as a resident volunteer fireman back in the mid 80s). After almost an hour of heroic attempts on the part of my former colleagues and Emergency room medical personnel, little Karly Sheehan was pronounced dead at 2:41 p.m..

After thoroughly investigating the crime scene and interviewing multiple witnesses (to include the Mother- Sarah Brill Sheehan, the Father- David Sheehan, and the Mother's Boyfriend- Shawn Wesley Field) the following was determined;

1. Precious Karly Sheehan was systematically tortured and abused over a period of about 7 1/2 months from mid October, 2004 to Karly's death on 3 June, 2005
2. This torture and abuse included over 60 wounds and bruises from her head to the bottoms of her feet along with a massive amount of hair that was forcibly removed from her head
3. The actual cause of Karly's death was ruled "substantial trauma to the head and physical symptoms consistent with asphyxiation by smothering"
4. Shawn Wesley Field of Corvallis, Oregon quickly emerged as the prime suspect not only in her murder but also the horrific abuse little Karly endured over that 7 1/2 month period of time
5. It also became apparent that Sarah Brill Sheehan, the child's mother was complicit or at the very least criminally negligent in the abuse and death of her daughter. In fact, when questioned by Child Protective Services investigators in the months leading up to the murder, Sarah Sheehan actually stated that Karly was never left alone with Shawn Field. This was one of the primary factors that caused child abuse investigators to suspect the father (David

Sheehan) instead of her live in boyfriend Shawn Field. Based on numerous factors, Sarah Sheehan was never (to the shock and shagrin of many close to the case) criminally charged in this case.

6. Shawn Field was charged with two counts of murder, three counts of murder by abuse, four counts of first-degree manslaughter, three counts of second-degree assault, two counts of first-degree criminal mistreatment and delivery of a controlled substance
7. The prosecution's theory (based on various incidents leading up to Karly's death) was that the main motivation for Field torturing and abusing Karly was to project it on the father in order for he and Sarah to get sole custody of the child and collect a large amount of monthly child support from David Sheehan
8. During the trial it was revealed that Field had systematically tortured little Karly by pulling her hair out, punching her multiple times over the entirety of her body and beating and bruising her feet. Prior to her last hour of life, Shawn Field took a photo of her staring blankly into the camera with multiple bruises to her eye and face. It is from the time stamp on that photo and the fact field was the only one with the little girl that eliminated all doubt about Field's guilt to the jury
9. Field was found guilty of murder, assault, criminal mistreatment, and manufacture of a controlled substance
10. During the sentencing hearing, Dr. Frank Calistro, a forensic psychologist for the state, testified that Shawn Field is a psychopath. In general he defined a psychopath as "someone who is antisocial and lives off others. He fails to accept responsibility for his actions, and often

his criminal behavior begins in adolescence. Psychopaths have an exaggerated sense of self-worth. They connect with people only to take from them." He also said "they are glib, superficially charming and adept at mimicking normal behavior. Because they are so good at deception". Dr. Calistro went on to say that "the typical diagnostic interview, with a psychiatrist asking questions and the subject responding, is worthless because they lie".

11. On 15 November, 2006 Shawn Wesley Field was sentenced to 46 years and 5 months making him eligible for parole when he is 82 years old.

With this background established, I will now attempt to delve deeper into what makes the likes of Shawn Field and Sarah Sheehan tick.

Let's begin with Shawn Wesley Field. Much of what I will source is derived from the book "A Silence Of The Mockingbirds" by Karen Spears Zacharias.

Upon hearing of all the buzz surrounding this case on one of my many trips home to Oregon in November of 2006 to see my teenage daughters, what struck me was the fact that the murderer (who graduated from the same high school that I and my brothers did) was always known as a bully and all around arrogant punk. This is further validated by the fact my youngest brother Mike (who is no stranger to a good scuffle having grown up with me) had a confrontation with this specimen early on in their freshman year. In this case since Mike (as opposed to little Karly) was in no way shape or form to be menaced by a bully. As such when Shawn Field attempted to push my brother around, my brother proceeded to punch Field square in the nose. From that point Field attempted on many occasions to befriend my brother (to no avail of course). Field did however, bully and intimidate numerous other people throughout his teen years (some of which I knew personally).

To further validate Dr. Calistro's analysis- according to court documents, "as a 16-year-old, Shawn Field committed a series of burglaries with two friends. They imprisoned the mother of one friend, robbed the friend's house, and set off to steal a truck owned by Field's brother. The plan was to head across country and take up a life of skiing in Aspen, Colo. They didn't get far before sheriff's deputies caught up with them. Because the crimes occurred when Field was a juvenile, most of the record was later expunged". Court documents also went on to state Shawn Field was "unemployed, sporadically employed or under-employed most of the time" and that he engaged in several "easy-money" schemes. One of those schemes, prosecutors charge, involved abusing Karly. The district attorney's office said Field had seen David Sheehan's tax return and had encouraged Brill to get full custody of Karly by accusing Sheehan and his girlfriend of abusing the girl. The idea, prosecutors said, was to get child support money from Sheehan. The documents said that Field took photos of Karly's bruises and told Brill that Sheehan must have caused them. When Brill said that Sheehan had not been abusing Karly, according to the documents, Field told her, "If you don't start lying, you'll never get anything." (Ref; Corvallis Gazette Times; http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/a-toddler-s-last-days/article_1d323bda-a2cb-5f05-8da0-c1fb9d4b5785.html).

According to Dr. M. Scott Peck, in his book "People Of The Lie- Hope for Healing Human Evil"; evil character structure is clinically defined as "as both a form of narcissistic personality disorder and a moral break-down, or perversion, of conscience. Concepts of denial, scapegoating, threatened narcissism, lying, self-deception, and cover-up, illuminate in parallel ways both individual and collective evil".

Dr. Peck goes on to further define malignant narcissism as being “characterized by an unsubmitted will. All adults who are *mentally healthy submit themselves one way or another to something higher than themselves, be it God or truth or love or some other ideal. They believe in what is true rather than what they would like to be true.*

In summary, to a greater or lesser degree, all mentally healthy individuals submit themselves to the demands of their own conscience. Not so the evil, however. They are men and women of obviously strong will, determined to have their own way. Such people literally live "in a world of their own" *in which the self reigns supreme.*

This is the heart of why someone like Shawn field has no trouble descending to the depths of depravity he did in this case. When you combine his arrogance, self deception (i.e. by claiming to be a PHD and financial expert to get control of Sarah’s money), willingness to torture an innocent girl for the purpose of extorting money from her father, and refusal to show an ounce of remorse or acknowledgement for his horrendous crime, you illustrate this concept of evil and malignant narcissism in their purest forms.

Furthermore, what is missing most in the equation of what makes a narcissist like Field is that vital component necessary in all of us to call ourselves human and operate in a civil society. That would be EMPATHY. The American Heritage Dictionary defines empathy as “Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives”. Based on Shawn Field’s callous disregard and refusal to give an ounce of consideration to the agony and terror he subjected little Karly to, there is no doubt in any rational person’s mind a narcissist like Field has zero concept of the word empathy. The most poignant illustration of this was an

analogy given by Dr. Calistro (which I was in the courtroom to see and hear myself) in which he stated “a psychopath like Shawn Field has no more conscience or feelings of guilt for torturing and murdering a little girl than he would gutting and cleaning a freshly caught fish” (my paraphrase).

An evil narcissist such as Shawn Field places zero value on the feelings or worth of another human being. The essence of why he is what he is derives from the combination of his absolute self absorption combined with the dehumanization of his victims and other relations. The textbook describes a psychopath who kills children as having a tremendous need to control and dominate others (pg. 333). Webster's dictionary gives the following definition of a bully; “a blustering browbeating person; *especially* : one habitually cruel to others who are weaker”. Beyond the prosecution's highly plausible theory of his desire to use Karly's abuse as an extravagant scheme to extort money from the father, I believe (based on what I know of his past) that Field's main drive was his need for power and control over someone weaker and absolutely powerless under him. His ability to not only (with impunity) perpetrate the most agonizing level of cruelty towards little Karly but also intimidate her into blaming her father says it all. Put simply, more than anything else Shawn Field was baby Karly's bully.

The dictionary describes the word ‘conscience’ as “the awareness of a moral or ethical aspect to one's conduct together with the urge to prefer right over wrong” and “conformity to one's own sense of right conduct”. A psychopathic narcissist like Shawn Field at one time did in fact have a conscience. His self absorption over a period of many years drowned his conscience out to the point he was able to perpetrate what he did to little Karly sans an ounce of remorse or

guilt. Since conscience is the essence of what distinguishes us as humans from other life forms, Field by his own choice has descended to something other than human; a subhuman if you will.

But what of “Mother Of The Year” Sarah Brill Sheehan? How is it that someone like Shawn Field could have ever have had the level of unlimited access to poor little Karly without her stepping up to stop this horrific train wreck? I guess when you’re too busy living the life of a single party girl (with an insatiable desire to hook up with any guy that meets your fancy) you’re entirely too busy to pay attention to who’s torturing your precious daughter.

According to Karen Spears Zacharias, author of “Silence Of The Mockingbirds” (the one comprehensive book written about this case) “narcissism remains the most commonly held assessment of Sarah by people familiar with her. Police and attorneys alike use the term to describe her, as do those who, at one time considered themselves some of Sarah’s dearest friends. People like me.” Mrs. Zacharias should know. Sarah Sheehan lived with Mrs. Zacharias for over a year.

The most revealing point in the book as to Sarah Sheehan’s culpability in this crime (gross negligence at the very least) was when she dropped off little Karly to David Sheehan battered and bruised with massive hair loss. As she was leaving David asked her what the hell had happened to their precious daughter. To which she replied “it happened on my watch” and continued to leave without a care. Therefore, when it was determined (based on the importance of her testimony against Shawn Field) that Sarah Sheehan was not to be charged in any way, shape or form it sent shock waves and outrage through the Corvallis community on every level. Especially towards those who knew her for what she is.

I recently had a wonderful visit with a very close family friend and his wife in Corvallis. To illustrate what a “Fishbowl” we live in, I found out my buddy Lowell actually shared an apartment (platonically I must emphasize) with Sarah Sheehan in between her two separations from her husband David Sheehan. He saw firsthand the level of selfish disregard and irresponsibility with which Sarah approached her parental responsibilities when Karly was a little baby. This as opposed to the dedication and love that David Sheehan approached his responsibility as Karly’s father. It’s too bad Sarah was so blinded by her selfishness that she couldn’t see clear to give David sole custody.

I’ve heard it said often that “Like attracts Like” (which puts me in an interesting conundrum since I at one time flirted Ms. Brill Sheehan up when she was bartending at a pub I frequented on my many trips to Corvallis). In this case I can only say the evil chemistry and passion between two obvious sociopaths was enough to produce the terrible and heartbreaking end result for young Karly. Nothing puts an exclamation point on this for Sarah more than what she said in her victim impact statement in the sentencing hearing for Shawn Field; “I can’t believe God allowed you into our lives”. There you have it, it was all “God’s Fault”. As if she was the hapless victim watching it unfold as some powerless third party. Narcissism anyone?

To conclude, I must say that digging into this situation has taken me through a plethora of emotions. All of them not good. It most definitely makes me question whether or not I have the stomach to pursue a career in law enforcement upon my retirement from the Air Force. As natural as it is to be repulsed and disgusted with these two cretins I am always reminded of something from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans: “There is none righteous, not even

one” (Romans 3:10). We all are fallen beings with an equal propensity for evil and good. The gift of free will is what distinguishes us as humans from the animals, fish and plants that surround us. Our ability to choose light over darkness is what defines our humanity and ability to operate successfully in a civil society. Thus the reason those among us who choose the kind of darkness Shawn Field did must be removed from said civil society.

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