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Polygraph examination of a serial killer with sexual motives

It is assumed that murderers with sexual motives are generally good subjects of polygraph examinations (Abrams 1989). According to current knowledge on such murders and their perpetrators (Halzelwood R., Douglas J.E. 1980, Douglas J.E., Ressler K.E., Burgess A.W., Hartman C.R. 1986), these killers typically exhibit personality disorders, whereas murderers categorized as “organized” typically exhibit a dissocial (antisocial, asocial) personality previously termed “psychopathic” (in the DSM-IV-TR classification: 301.7 and in the ICD-10 classification F.60.2). On the other hand, killers classified as “disorganized” as a rule exhibit a schizoid personality (in the DSM-IV-TR classification: 301.20 and in the ICD-10 classification F.60.1).

Thus, since we know that psychopaths are generally good subjects for polygraph examinations (Barland G.H., Ruskin D.C., 1974, Krsnich D.A., 1997), theoretically organized murderers should clearly be good polygraph examination subjects. Little, however, is known about the capacities of

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persons with a schizoid personality – the “disorganized murderers.” Since it is known that schizophrenics as a rule are unsuitable for polygraph examinations (Abrams S., 1974), it is suspected that persons with schizoid personality disorders may pose difficulties for polygraph examinations.

Joachim Knychała was a serial sexual killer. Ultimately, he was sentenced for committing five murders and seven attempted murders. According to contemporary criteria, he would undoubtedly be classified as an “organized murderer” (Widacki J., 2006). Psychological examinations confirmed his high intelligence (IQ 125) and an abnormal (psychopathic) personality with sadistic characteristics.

The polygraph examinations to which he was subjected (a total of three times!) confirmed that, consistent with his exhibited personality traits, he was a good subject for such examinations. The murderer, when examined for the first time as a suspect in a single murder unrelated to the others, but which was in fact the last of the series, reacted very strongly to relevant questions and essentially did not react to control questions.

The examination was carried out using the Reid technique, by conducting five tests: RCQT, number test, RCQT II, MQT, and RCQT – as a Silent Answer Test. No POT tests were conducted, since the examinee knew all the details of the event and was in the victim’s presence the entire time, a fact which he did not contradict.

In the control question tests, the following questions were relevant: “Did you hit Bogusia in the head?” (question 3), “Did you kill Bogusia?” (question 5), “Did you intend to make a pass at Bogusia?” (question 8), and “Did you lie when you said that Bogusia fell by herself?” (question 9).

The control questions included: “Have you ever in the past wanted to engage in perverse sexual intercourse?” (question 6) and “Did you commit any crime before 1971 about which the police does not know?”

As mentioned, no one during the examination suspected that the subject was the wanted serial sexual murderer. In the pre-test interview, the subject said that in 1971 he had been falsely accused of participating in a rape.

The magnitude of the reaction was scored using the numerical method.

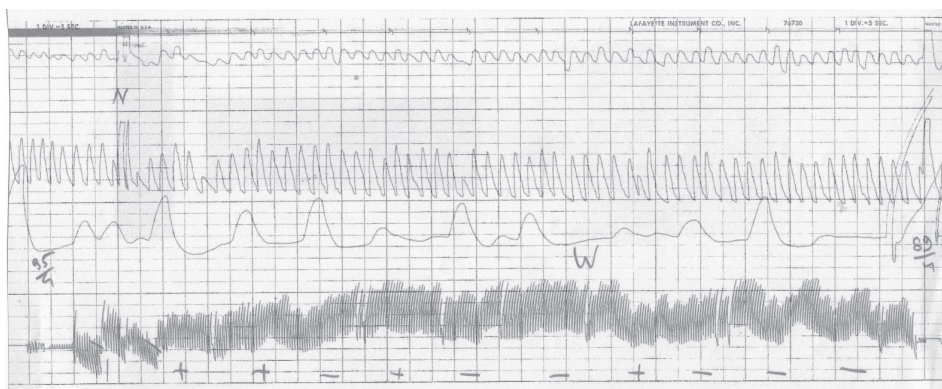


Fig. 1. Registration of the RCQT test

As is evident, the subject clearly reacted to relevant questions and did not react to control questions. The most distinct reactions occurred on the GSR reading and the cardiovascular reading. The expert calculated the total value of the reactions at 10 points.

After the number test, the RCQT test was repeated.

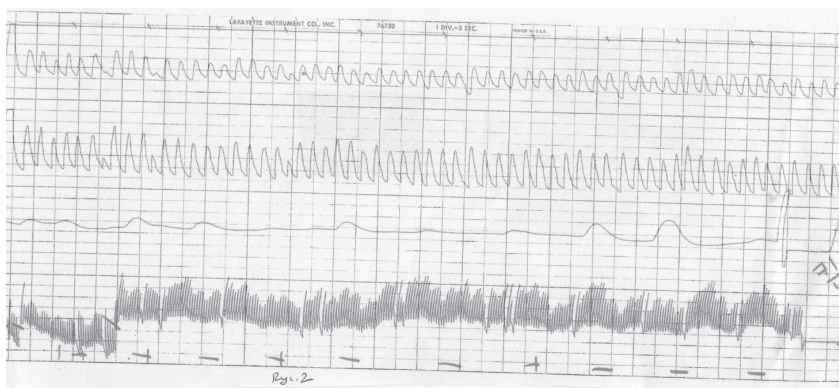


Fig. 2. Registration of the RCQT II test

As is shown, the reactions to the questions in this test were even greater than in the first; the expert scored these reactions at a total of 18 points.

These reactions occurred again in the MQT and SAT tests.

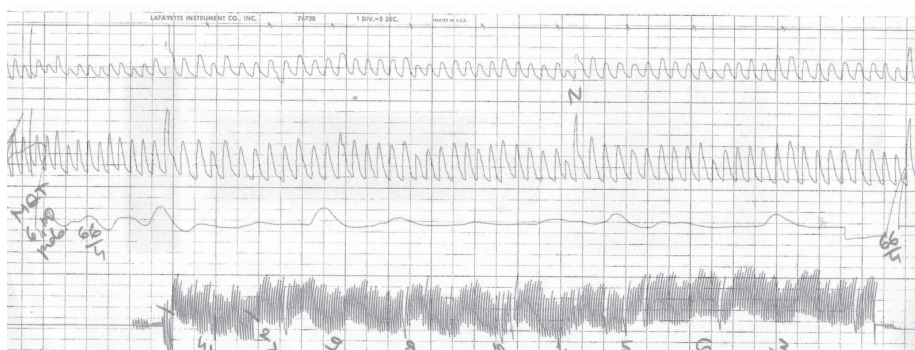


Fig. 3. Registration of the MQT

It may seem strange that a subject with such a past (of which the expert was not aware) did not react to control question 6 (“Have you ever in the past wanted to engage in perverse sexual intercourse?”). Perhaps this can be explained by the functioning of the psychopathic personality in a stressful situation.

For some researchers (Lykken D.T. 1957), one of the main features of psychopathy is the deficit of anxiety. This deficit usually applies to distant events (e.g., future consequences of present actions) and not to situations of immediate threat. The subject was undoubtedly concentrating on the examination of one concrete murder about which he was asked. Past events, distant both in time and in subject matter to the examinee were not significant to him. For this reason, the subject did not react when asked about them in the control questions.

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