

# A case study of andrea yates critical thinking example

[Family](#), [Children](#)



In the summer of 2001, Andrea Yates murdered all five of her young children. When she surrendered to authorities, she said that Satan had had a conversation with her, and she had decided to kill the children so that they would not go to hell. When she went on trial, she was initially convicted but ended up receiving an acquittal by virtue of insanity. There are several different factors that went into her diagnosis.

In my opinion, a combination of biological and behavioral issues combined to lead Andrea Yates to kill her children. Given the fact that each childbirth gave Yates more issues, and her doctors had recommended against her having a fifth child, the fact that her husband went ahead and decided that they would have that fifth child is definitely a contributing factor. Within Andrea Yates herself, the worsening biological and behavioral issues created a downward spiral that made what happened to her children perhaps not inevitable, but much more likely.

Growing up in a conservative Christian home, Andrea Yates was certainly not in a position to recover from these burdens. The expectations of a woman in her situation are to provide children, raise those children and maintain a home for them. In the face of those expectations, the postpartum depression would have been treated as a weakness on her part. Her inability to fulfill God's "mandate" for her made her somehow less than acceptable, at least in her own eyes and most likely in her husband's as well. It was this religious set of beliefs that led her husband to keep asking her to have more children, even in the face of a growing body of medical evidence. This is supported by a statement that she made in her confession: "I realized that it was time to be punished for not being a good mother" (Diamond, 2008, web). She went

on to express that she had made the choice to kill her children so that the criminal justice system would provide the sort of punishment that she felt that she deserved. The reason why this led to her initial conviction was that this statement made her sound like she was aware of the morally wrong nature of her actions. One of the litmus tests for an insanity defense is the defendant's awareness of the fact that what he or she is doing is wrong, and because it was clear that Andrea Yates understood the moral nature of her actions and wanted the consequences for herself showed, in the eyes of many, that she did not deserve to use the insanity defense (McLellan 2006). However, the fact that she was rewarded for having children meant that she would keep on having them, even though her own body was rebelling against the entire situation. Her punishments began to come more and more from herself, as she believed that she was doing an increasingly poor job of mothering her children.

Given Andrea Yates' social and cultural environment, there were many factors that contributed to the killing of her children. First of all, many religious individuals will repress or deny their own feelings or impulses that come across as hostile, aggressive or angry (or even sexual), branding them as demonic. From a psychological standpoint, these social and cultural beliefs give all of these unacceptable ideas a symbolic attachment to Satan, or the devil. No matter what one's religious or spiritual background, these types of impulses appear to us as negative or even shameful; however, in a conservative background like the one in which Andrea Yates lived, this tendency would be even stronger. This is the point at which projection becomes a factor. Andrea Yates was aware that she had feelings of anger

and aggression, but she associated them with an outside agent - in this case, the devil. She felt as though she was under the control of this force, and auditory hallucinations, which are common in these cases, took the form of the devil's voice. It is clear that she saw the actions toward which she was being compelled as wrong; she may have even provided some moral resistance to them as time went by; it was the combat between this voice and her resistance that led to the worsening of her depression and the growing depth of her symptoms with each subsequent child.

In general terms, it is likely that Yates felt a degree of resentment for the growing responsibilities that came with her family. However, her conservative Christian upbringing made it impossible for her to admit this on a conscious level to herself, let alone to her husband or to anyone else in her social circle. It may have been that this denial that turned into a tragic catastrophe. This is a classic example of what C. G. Jung called the "shadow" - those parts of ourselves that are, at best, morally ambivalent, and so we classify them as unacceptable or taboo in some way, and then we dissociate from them as a result. One possible interpretation is that Andrea Yates' shadow self - something like a Mr. Hyde - emerged and acted out to complete this tragic deed. It also fits the definition of what more modern psychiatrists categorize under the heading of aberrant biochemistry. In this scenario, it is the chemical storm that comes from postpartum depression with its raging imbalances of hormones that caused the development of voices in her head, leading her to complete this awful deed.

So what would have kept all of this from happening? Deciding that one (or perhaps two) children was enough? Setting up a regular routine of

psychotherapy? It is clear that simply trying to have more positive thoughts, as one therapist told her (McHugh, 2012), was not sufficient. Ultimately, no one may ever know the precise combination of the biological and the psychological that led to the death of the Yates' five children. It appears that her husband and church failed her; ultimately, that series of failures led to the destruction of Andrea's mind, and to the deaths of her children.

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