

Free case study on criminal law

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Introduction:

This paper is a case study about a crime that occurred at Old Annapolis Road, Columbia on 11th March 2000 at 0030 hours. The nature of the crime was homicide and the victim of the crime was a teenager by the names Ashley Nicole Smith. She was found brutally murdered by stabbing in a pool of her own blood in a wooden area that was located just behind 9170 Old Annapolis Road. The suspected murderers of the teen were Scott Roy Jones and Frederick James Johnson. This paper analyses how investigations were conducted from the time her body was found. It also discusses the investigation process that was executed by the investigators and the responses offered by the suspects and some witnesses. The various constitutional challenges that faced the case while in court have also been looked at. The investigating steps and techniques that were used by the investigators have also been analyzed.

The case:

The crime scene investigation in the case was conducted professionally. The detectives began by securing the crime scene to prevent tampering with and destruction of evidence. In every crime scene this step is always very crucial. Mistakes at this point can permanently interfere with the evidence to a crime and give the case a very different turn. The detectives carefully collected all the physical evidence that was at the crime scene. No slight detail was ignored. Investigators carefully noted the position at which the victim was lying, the way she was dressed and how she had been killed. At the crime scene the victim lay in a puddle of blood. This shows that most of the

stabbing on the victim done on the victim was executed at the point where the body was found. Otherwise, the puddle of blood would not be concentrated at one point. From the large blood puddle there were several drops of blood going towards the South west direction. The drops show that a few stabs may have been inflicted a short distance from where the body was actually found. Since the victim appears to have been dragged on her back from the parking lot, it can be concluded that the victim may have been unconscious as she was dragged to the scene. This conclusion is supported by Jone's claim that he first strangled the victim before he and his friend stabbed the victim. In capturing the details of the crime scene, nothing was left to chance. The scene was videotaped from the ground and an helicopter apart from being photographed. The presence of two dew rags at the scene is a possible indication that there was some sort of a physical struggle at the scene. The dew rags were dropped accidentally during the struggle. No criminal would leave his or her clothing at a crime scene unless by accident. Most if the stab wounds were inflicted on the victim after rolling up her t-shirt. This suggests that the criminals did not execute the crime in a hurry. They had enough time to roll up the victim's t-shirt and stab her slowly most likely to inflict more pain. Jones says that she had to be stabbed on the stomach because she was pregnant. This is in agreement to the probability that they were not in a hurry. The victim's pants and shoes were not located at the crime scene too. Apart from implying that there was a struggle at the scene, it also suggests that the criminals who executed the act may have sexually assaulted the victim. Why did her pants and shoes have to be removed?

The crime scene photographs show that the crime victim was dragged from the parking area behind pizza art into the woods. There are blood marks very close to the parking area. This observation shows that Ashley was strangled in the car or near the car. It also that she sustained some of her stab wounds while still at the parking lot or in the car. The presence of blood along the drag marks support this idea. The two rag hats are located very close to the body of the victim. This shows that the owner of the hats must have got involved with the dead body. The probability that the hats just found their way into the woods is low.

In this investigation, the detectives have employed various investigative strategies and steps. Use of an investigative plan is one of the strategies that have been employed by the investigators. An investigative plan enables an investigator to clearly lay out what needs to be achieved in the course of an investigation. The plan enables an investigator to lay down a plan on how the investigation will be conducted to deliver the desired results. These plans can be simple or very complex. Their complexity or simplicity is determined by the nature of the work being undertaken. A good investigative plan is supposed to contain one or all of the following elements:

- Needed investigative resources
- Potential sources of information
- An estimation of the time that will be needed to complete a particular investigation
- The resources needed in the investigation
- Probability margins of success
- Objectives of the investigation

Completing up-front backgrounds is another strategy that the investigators have effectively used in the case. This has ensured that their choices of investigation targets are viable. Before interviewing some of the suspects, the investigators in the case commit themselves to checking county, local and state police files. The files give crucial pieces of information related to the targets of their investigation. By analyzing the past criminal records of the suspects, the investigators are able to weigh the probability that the suspect actually committed the crime. Jones and his close ally have pasts full of criminal offences. The probability that they committed the crime under investigation is very high.

Use of critical thinking is a strategy that the investigators in the crime have also used. The strategy involves thorough analysis of the information that has already been collected. From the collected information, investigators try to piece up what is yet to be known. The strategy has also enabled the investigators to not only listen to suspects during questioning but to also analyze the suspect's responses at the back of their minds. Critical thinking has been applied during Jones session at the investigation room. It is noted that apart from being inconsistent with the information that he provides, he uses some words that suggest that he has been coached on what he tells the investigators. When he says that the rest of the information remains the same, he means that he could have chosen to change the information but for the purpose of trying to lie about his innocence, he won't change the information. In the critical thinking strategy, there are a set of standard questions that an investigator should seek to answer. They are:

- What were the gains in the act of crime?

- Who had the perfect opportunity to commit the crime?
- What is the probable motive for committing the crime?
- Where was the crime located?
- Who was the possible beneficiary of the crime?
- Is it a group or an individual who committed the crime?
- Which weapons were used in the crime and why?
- Who has the skills to operate the weapons that were used in the crime?
- Who were the victims of the crime and why were they targeted?

Using data analysis techniques is another investigation technique that was effectively used in the case. Data that was collected at the scene was carefully analyzed to enable the investigators come up with concrete conclusions about the investigation. Sometimes data analysis in investigations can be a very complex process. Advanced proprietary soft wares developed by the analysts or analytic products that are simpler in nature can be used to conduct the data analysis. The conclusions that are derived from data analysis should reflect what the investigators know and what can be inferred from what they know. Investigators who have chosen to synthesis skills and analytic organization should prepare the following items to help package their cases:

- List of proofs acquired and the needed additional evidence
- Summary of players in the case
- Graphic representation of the case
- A good inventory of documents

At the court level, the case against Scott Jones and Frederick Johnson was faced by several constitutional challenges. The challenges came in the form

of motions hearing which were filed by the defense team to suppress the knife evidence, DNA evidence and confessions by the criminals.

I believe that the items were legally obtained by the law enforcement agents. If the knife that was recovered was not the knife used to commit the crime, it would not be stained with blood that later matched with the victim's blood samples. The knife could also not fit into the descriptions of the knife which coincidentally was owned by Johnson. It is worth noting that Johnson kept playing with the knife after the victim denied him sex. This shows that there was pre meditation to use the weapon in committing the crime. The confessions made by the victims were another challenge that faced the case. The defense argued that the confessions were not genuine. It is worth noting that the suspects provided and talked about information that had not been availed to the public before their interrogations. This shows that they were not innocent at all. How had they known the information for example the methods that were used to kill the victim? How did they know that the victim was strangled before being stabbed? The defense also tried to challenge the DNA evidence that was collected throughout the investigation. A person's DNA can never match with another person's. One question the defense should have considered before challenging the evidence was how did samples of the suspect's DNA get to the crime scene? After all sperm samples were found in the victim's vagina and anus.

While being interviewed, Jones gives inconsistent information throughout the investigation. He begins by saying that he never stabbed the victim even once. He also says that he never got off the car but only watched Johnson commit the crime from the vehicle since he was the driver. In the interviews

that follow, on realizing that all is not well or the detectives have outsmarted him, he agrees that he stabbed the victim once in the stomach as a way of assuring his friend that he was cooperating. At first he denies that he had sex with the victim but on being informed that his sperms may have been found in the victim's vagina, he agrees that he had sex with Ashley. The information that was given by Johnstone was also very inconsistent. Some of the witnesses who were interviewed in the investigation were reluctant to cooperate at first because the suspects were their friends. This was the case with Tavon Waller. When Waller saw the detectives approaching his home, he rushed back into the house. He was uncooperative at first but began to cooperate on hearing that Jones had confessed to having killed the victim. He agreed that Jones had confided to him that he had participated in killing Ashley. Some of the witnesses to the case were cooperative while others were uncooperative. The uncooperative witnesses were former friends to the accused.

In class I have learnt that good detectives conduct investigations in a highly sober mind. They do not rush into conclusions nor do they allow themselves to be overtaken by emotions. If they were to lose these attributes, they would mess the whole investigation process and the available pieces of evidence. Case is a very patient detective who throughout the investigation manages to dig up the right information just at the right time. In class I have learnt about various investigation strategies that should be employed by an investigator to achieve results. The investigators in this case applied the strategies well and eventually they were able to get identify the main suspects and secure arrest warrants for the suspects. A high level of good

investigative planning has been demonstrated by the investigators. The investigators interviewed each of the suspects at a time that was well planned so that they could get results. The questions posed during the investigation to witnesses and suspects were asked in an organized sequential manner to prevent them from withholding crucial information. The officers also used the strategy of completing background information well. They would check the past records of some specific individuals before interviewing them.

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