

# Case analysis of andrea yates

[Health & Medicine](#), [Mental Health](#)



Nathan Merrill XXJUN2012 PS208 Case Analysis of Andrea Yates After close review and careful analysis of the case of Andrea Yates and the circumstances which led to the drowning death and murder of her five children, I first would like to state my personal opinion on the conclusion of the case which was the majority consensus at the time of her trial and sentencing.

She was guilty of a horrible murder and although certainly had mental problems, which is apparent by her actions that most completely rational thinking human being and mother would be incapable of committing, and expertly used an insanity plea to lessen the sanctions that should have and inevitably would have been brought upon her. The major dilemma in this entire case was not based upon whether Andrea Yates had or had not committed the crime of murder five times over on her own flesh and blood or even if she was mentally sick.

The defining line in this case is the interpretation by which we judge insanity and the scale by which we weigh the accuracy if someone convicted of a crime and pleads insanity was actually aware that the crime they committed was a wrong doing. The interpretations are subject to base line analysis which has changed over time since its inception on how we decide if a person is mentally capable of knowing their actions and thus should be held responsible for those actions to the farthest extent of the law.

Basically this case comes down to if Yates knew her actions were wrong and if she made the conscious decision to murder her children, which in my personal opinion is a resounding yes. I would not argue the fact that Yates is mentally ill but the this case seemed to revolve around the fact of if she

<https://assignbuster.com/case-analysis-of-andrea-yates/>

comes up with a good enough reason to commit such a horrible crime then it can appear that she honestly thought by her actions she was protecting her children. The circumstances based on religion become confusing but could also be the result of a masterfully constructed defense.

Granted, a life in a mental institution would be no walk in the park or even enjoyable but far less intrusive than death itself or a life in the general population of penitentiary living. My conclusion is that yes, Yates is sick, but I feel a strong possibility of her understanding the wrongness of her actions to the rest of society but in her opinion acted in the greater good based on religiously psychotic feeling of heaven and hell which was a foundation of making a decision to take her children's lives while understanding it was wrong and should have been dealt with by a swifter and stronger hand of justice.

My opinion aside this is the conclusion and information brought forth by unbiased research as to the case and analysis of Yates. Only one of a twelve mentalhealthexperts who testified concluded that the Yates was legally sane when she drowned her five children in thefamilybathtub. The witness, called by prosecutors, was Park Dietz, a forensic psychiatrist and the prosecutors' only mental health expert, Dietz and his testimony helped convict Yates. The conviction later was overturned. When Yates is retried, much of the attention again was on Dietz, who is back on the prosecution's witness list.

And now, there are questions about Dietz's conclusions in the Yates case because of his testimony in another trial involving a Texas mother who killed two of her children. Questions have added intrigue to a case in which prosecutors' initial decision to seek thedeath penaltyignited a national

<https://assignbuster.com/case-analysis-of-andrea-yates/>

debate over how mental illness and postpartum depression are viewed in criminal courts. The Yates case now has become a symbol of the influence that expert witnesses hold in trials in our country each day, and a test of how psychiatrists' opinions are used in court.

The standards judges use in deciding whether to admit psychiatric opinions in court are less precise than those used to allow testimony about scientific evidence that is more obviously measurable, such as DNA or fingerprints. George Parnham, who was Yates' lead attorney, said the defense hopes to raise doubts about Dietz's analysis of Yates. The defense, Parnham said, was to focus on why Dietz found Yates to be sane and therefore legally responsible for her actions and also why he came to the opposite conclusion in 2004 in a similar case involving Deanna Laney, a Texas mother who killed two of her sons.

Kaylynn Williford, who was a Harris County prosecutor, said Dietz's analysis in other cases is not relevant to the Yates case. She says she will ask the judge to limit Dietz's testimony to his analysis of Yates. If convicted, Yates was facing life in prison, but not execution. That issue was settled at her first trial, when the jury rejected execution. Texas law defines insanity as the inability to know right from wrong. At Yates' trial, Dietz testified that Yates knew that drowning her children was wrong. Jurors agreed with Dietz's opinion and rejected her insanity defense.

A key difference in the Yates case from other similar cases was that she didn't state that she attacked her sons at God's direction. Yates had told Dietz that she had drowned her children — Noah, 7; John, 5; Paul, 3; Luke, 2; and Mary, 6 months — at the direction of Satan, according to the trial

<https://assignbuster.com/case-analysis-of-andrea-yates/>

transcript. She also told Dietz she thought it was wrong. Although Yates readily confessed to what she had done, and the crimes were committed in less than an hour, what led up to her killing her children had been building for almost two years she had said.

Odd family dynamics, fundamentalist religious beliefs, clinical care that was fragmented at best, and the quirks and inadequacies of the American medical-insurance system all had some role in the Yates' family tragedy. The case also highlighted the lack of recognition of the potentially deadly consequences of postnatal disorders, and the limitations of the justice system in dealing with individuals who are mentally ill. Andrea Yates began to show signs of mental illness shortly after the birth of her first child, when she had a hallucination that involved a stabbing.

After the birth of her fourth child, she attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sedatives. She was taken to hospital, but was eventually discharged before her symptoms were resolved because her insurance company limited the number of days of inpatient care it would pay for. She was prescribed antidepressants, but did not take them. In a second suicide attempt, she held a knife against her throat and began to mutilate herself and heard voices that told her to “get a knife”.

When she became near catatonic, doctors suggested electroconvulsive therapy, but the family rejected this option. Finally, she received a drug cocktail containing an antipsychotic agent. The medication was apparently effective, but Andrea believed she had been given “truth serum”, which caused her to lose control of herself. Despite a psychiatrist's warning that

having another child would more than likely provoke another psychotic episode, the Yates had a fifth child.

The implication was that Andrea had got the idea for her actions from the television program. However, no such episode had ever aired. This was the false testimony, a mistake Dietz acknowledged, on which the case was eventually overturned and a new trial granted. Rusty Yates, Andrea's husband, divorced his wife and remarried. Andrea's commitment to a state mental institution is subject to court supervision and is reviewed periodically but chances are she will remain in a mental hospital for the rest of her life.

Several professional communities have used Andrea's case to try to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring. The Mental Health Association of Greater Houston established the Yates Children Memorial Fund to educate the public about issues affecting women's mental health after birth and the effect of post partum depression and disorders. In 2003, the Texas state legislature passed the Andrea Yates Bill. The bill requires all providers of prenatal care to give new mothers information about resources available to help them with postnatal depression.