

Chapter 9 Case Study

The Case of Eric Cooper: Part 1

Excerpt From the Assessment of Eric Cooper by the Court Psychologist

MUNICIPAL COURT

Psychological Assessment

Date: December 4, 2011

Client: Eric Cooper

Instruments

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory–2 (MMPI-2)
Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-IV)
Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (PCL-R)
Clinical interview

Psychologist: Dr. Aaron Lusted

Referral: Judge Warren

Reason for Referral: Judge Warren requested this presentencing report on Eric Cooper, a 30-year-old man who has been previously convicted of several crimes, including robbery and assault.

Behavioral Observations: Although the client was cooperative and friendly, he rarely made direct eye contact. Also, despite his general good mood, he would swear out loud and pound the table whenever he missed any questions on the intelligence test. There were no signs of delirium or alcohol intoxication, and the client was able to complete all tests with little prompting. The client reported that he had tried to rob a bank, while drunk, in order to pay his bills. He expressed concern that a guard was hurt during the attempted robbery and said he was pleased that no permanent damage was done. He asked whether there was a cure for his problem but when asked what his problem was, he said, “Bad luck, mostly.”

Social History: [See Document 10.3, Social Work Report.]

Intellectual Assessment: The client’s scores on the WAIS-IV intelligence test place him in the above-average range of intelligence. His scores on the verbal scales were higher, in general, than his scores on the performance scale. This is not surprising in someone with the client’s educational achievement.

Personality Assessment: The validity scales of the MMPI-2 were all in the average range, indicating that the test profile could be safely interpreted. The main feature of the profile was an elevated score on the psychopathic deviate scale. The client's responses revealed a self-centered person, whose own feelings always take precedence over those of other people, and a person who lacks empathy for the feelings and rights of others. He also has a strong tendency to act impulsively. . . . The client's TAT responses reflected a preoccupation with violence—there were numerous references to death, blood, and corpses—but no mention about how the characters in the story might respond or be affected by the violence. It was as if the client could not imagine what might be going through the heads of his own characters. . . . The client's responses to the PCL-R (which assesses manipulative behavior and impulsivity), were those found among people who have been labeled “psychopaths”—people who lack empathy and are likely to use violence to achieve their goals.

Based on the test results, behavioral observations, and my clinical interview, it appears that the client is a person who has little empathy for or understanding of other people. He thinks mainly of himself, his needs, and his feelings. He is prepared to use violence to further his ends.

Because he lacks empathy, the client is almost certain to have trouble in personal relationships. In addition, his self-centered attitude as well as his impulsiveness and willingness to use violence are likely to bring him into continued conflict with the law.

Diagnostic Considerations: The client meets the *DSM-5* criteria for antisocial personality disorder; he also meets many of the criteria for a borderline personality disorder. In addition, he seems to have a pattern of substance abuse. He recently experienced stress from business problems, but his global functioning is only mildly impaired, and he is capable of a high level of psychological functioning.

Alcohol use disorder
Antisocial personality disorder
(possible borderline personality disorder as provisional secondary diagnosis)

The Case of Eric Cooper: Part 2

Court-Ordered Social Work Report on Eric Cooper

Date: December 1, 2011

Social Worker: Greg Sheridan, MSW

Referral: Judge Warren requested this presentencing report on Eric Cooper, a 30-year-old man who had been convicted of robbery and aggravated assault.

Sources: Court records, arrest reports, school records, interviews with Eric Cooper and Lenore Cooper (Eric's mother).

Eric Cooper is the only child born to Lenore and Edward Cooper. (Edward died in a hang-gliding accident when Eric was 5; Eric was raised by Lenore, a single mother.) Lenore Cooper reports that Eric always had a “bit of the devil” in him. When he was only 7, Eric stole money that his school was collecting to buy Christmas presents for needy children. His crime was detected when the piggy bank in which the money had been stored was found in his locker. At first, Eric denied any knowledge of how the bank had found its way into his locker, but when asked to explain the money in his pocket, he admitted his crime. Eric seemed contrite and remorseful, but the pattern of stealing (and getting caught) continued. During his elementary and junior high school years, Mrs. Cooper found her son in possession of toys, pens, wallets, a knife, an air rifle, and a radio. When asked to explain how he obtained these things, Eric would usually say he found them. In most cases, Mrs. Cooper would later discover that they were stolen. Eric would always apologize and promise not to steal again, but he never kept these promises.

In junior high school, Eric was suspected of setting several fires in his school. These fires caused considerable damage to school property. On several occasions, Eric was seen in the vicinity of these fires, but there was never any proof connecting him to them.

In high school, Eric developed the habit of not coming home from school. The first few times, his mother panicked. She asked the police to search for him. Although it sometimes took as long as two days, Eric would always return unharmed. He usually refused to say where he had been, but from what his mother could find out, he had spent much of his time gambling. Eric played dice games, poker, bet on horses, and visited illegal casinos. Eric’s interest in gambling continues to this day. Much of the money he has made (or stolen) has been lost in gambling.

In his last year of high school, Eric began an intimate relationship with a teacher. He was 17 and she was 24 (and married) when the affair began. The couple would meet after school at the teacher’s apartment. The relationship was detected when the teacher became pregnant and named Eric as the father. Eric said he wanted to marry the teacher and raise the child, but when the teacher initiated divorce proceedings, Eric changed his mind. He claimed that he was seduced by the older woman.

Despite his extraordinary extracurricular life, Eric performed well enough at school to be admitted to college. Although his college marks were generally good, his academic career was punctuated by unpleasant incidents. For example, he was accused of cheating by another student but cleared when his accuser withdrew her claim. He had a string of girlfriends, but he did not stick with any one for very long. His style was to simply stop calling—no goodbyes and no explanation. While in college, Eric began to use alcohol and drugs, and he continues to use both today.

After graduation, Eric married his last college girlfriend. It was a violent relationship. Eric would “explode” and beat her, and he left her when she became pregnant. He never contacts his son, and rarely pays his required child support.

Over the years, Eric has managed to get a few jobs, but he has never kept one for very long. Often, there was no obvious reason for him to leave his employer; he just failed to turn up at work one day. He has also been constantly in debt and has a long history of paying bills with bad checks. Because he did not conceal his identity, his creditors had no trouble finding him, and he was convicted of fraud. He has also served time for robbery, drug dealing, burglary, possession of stolen goods, and selling pornography.

Eric began several businesses, including a stint running a legal brothel in Nevada. His enterprises have always failed because he lost interest in them. His latest failure is the jazz club, whose unpaid bills precipitated the bank robbery that brought him once again into court.

Evaluation: Eric Cooper has led a life marked by irresponsibility. Stealing, lying, and a lack of concern for others have characterized his behavior since he was a child. Although his charm and intelligence allow him to give the appearance of remorse, there is little sign that he has reformed. Therapy may help, but it seems likely that Eric is destined to repeat his irresponsible behavior in the future.