

## Patterns of Eskimo Homicide

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The purpose of this paper is to examine aspects of violent behavior demonstrated by Alaskan Eskimos in terms of traditional personality dynamics. Aggression has always been a part of Eskimo society. It has existed in concert with such often described Eskimo norms as sharing, gregariousness and the often apparent lack of verbal and physical aggression. Because aggression has been such a taboo subject, it has, from many stereotypes of Eskimo personality, been totally omitted. The following short descriptions reflect aspects of Eskimo socialization and adult life which must be borne in mind in order to have a complete view of Eskimo personality.

There was no suggestion of hesitation or repugnance in killing the baby seals. Nunivak children are conditioned to a predatory life from the time they can toddle. They desire intensely to kill animals, and they practice by using slingshots, bolas, and darts against birds, foxes, puppies, anything moving.<sup>1</sup>

It is considered an impropriety to wear the hunting knife while in the men's house. Rifles are essentially taboo in the men's house. Conversely no man would venture out on the moving ice without his weapons. Not only are they needed for killing seals, but the moving ice is traditionally considered the realm where one is most vulnerable and in danger of murderous attacks from men and other creatures.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the traditional Eskimo personality values and liabilities have persisted to the present time. The cultural tendency toward the denial of aggressive impulses is severely tested as the Eskimo person encounters the social and psychological challenges of the non-Eskimo world. The processes of social change have been greatly accelerated since World War II. There are, of course, no violence rates available from traditional times. What we have are reconstructions of traditional society described by informants. Excellent examples of this type of data focusing on aggression and conflict management are provided by Briggs,<sup>3</sup> Bogojavlensky,<sup>4</sup> and Hennigh,<sup>5</sup> to name a few.

Formal statistical rates such as those relating to homicide and suicide date back to the early fifties. They show a marked increase since the mid-1960's.

This paper will examine in detail three cases of Eskimo violence. The first two cases involve homicides which occurred in small north Alaskan villages. The third, an assault, occurred in a southwest Alaskan rural town. The village cases will be discussed as a unit, while the town case will be treated separately. The discussion will emphasize the differences between the more traditional Eskimo villages and the transitional towns, differences which are crucial in understanding present-day Eskimo Alaska. The town case illustrates violence associated with the social disorganization of the transitional town. Both village and town cases will illustrate some of the current stress which would help account for the increased violence rates in the last ten years.

A further purpose of the paper is to demonstrate the type of information regarding ethnic diversity which can be presented to the court system as a result of the forensic examination.

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## **I. Village Homicide**

Rural Alaska is made up of vast areas of land spotted with approximately 175 villages or towns. In 1968, of the 53,000 native people in Alaska, 70% lived in villages or towns that are predominantly native and 30% lived in the larger urban centers like Anchorage or Fairbanks.<sup>6</sup> Most of the people still live in the small villages, ranging in size from 50–700 people; however, there is increasing migration toward the towns and cities.<sup>7</sup>

The Eskimo population of approximately 35,000 people inhabit the northern and western coastal regions of the state. They have also migrated inland along the river systems of Alaska, especially along the two great river systems of the Yukon and Kuskokwim. Traditionally semi-nomadic, they now live in permanent villages with seasonal trips to fishing and hunting camps. Many engage in a pattern of circular migration to other parts of the state for employment: firefighting, cannery work, fishing and temporary construction projects.

The village economy is generally based on subsistence activities and seasonal Bureau of Indian Affairs welfare assistance. Employment within the village is limited to a few standard jobs, such as the village health aide, the postmaster, the school janitor, and the teacher aide, and in the larger towns, paid village policemen and employees of native stores. It is significant that in both cases of village homicide to be described below, the offenders held paid positions in the villages. In one case the man was manager of the ANICA native store, and in the second, the man was the village policeman.

### **Robert H., Village Store Manager**

Robert H. was the manager of an Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association store (ANICA), in a small Northwestern Alaskan Eskimo village. Robert was 48 years old and married, and had managed the store for the past four years. The following gives some description of the structure of the ANICA organization:

ANICA is a cooperative that was organized and owned by a number of Alaskan native villages to promote the general welfare of the membership, to engage in any form of activity which will benefit the owners, the village owners. The papers were drawn in 1947 and it was organized under the Department of Interior at that time. It first became functioning as a business entity here in Seattle in 1948. There are now 28 member villages and about 12 nonmember and associate members. A member village has a financial interest in the association. They also have an elected delegate from within the community that is either selected by the community as a whole or by the IRA council, which is a form of village organization. Those representatives form the Board of Directors of the association. They in turn select from among themselves an executive committee composed of five members. These executive board members meet either yearly or more often to set policy of the association. . . . The Seattle Office acts as an employee of the native village employees by providing a purchasing, traffic, bookkeeping branch or extension of their operations in the villages.<sup>8</sup>

Against this background about the ANICA organization, the following are the events of May 18–19, 1972, as reported by this observer to the Superior Court of the State of Alaska.<sup>9</sup> Early in the morning of May 19, 1972, Robert H. shot and killed William P. after an argument.

Robert H. stated that he was "drinking that day" (May 18), beginning about two in the afternoon while at work in the store. The drinking continued on and off through the rest of the afternoon. After supper his wife attended the local school graduation but he decided to stay home. Later in the evening he went to meet his wife, and the two of them dropped in to visit William P. and his wife. Robert H. stated that he was high when they arrived at the P. home, but not drunk. The four people then proceeded to drink heavily. After the liquor supply was finished, Robert stated that he had more whiskey at his house, and he and William went over to get it. At the H. house the two men began to drink from the new supply and never returned to P.'s house. As the

drinking continued, Robert stated, William began to get "funny" and started demanding that Robert give him a snow machine belt which Robert was keeping for him at the store. (Apparently some weeks before a snow machine belt ordered by William P. had arrived at the post office C.O.D. P. couldn't pay for it at the time and he approached H., as store manager, and asked if the store could pay the C.O.D. charges and then sell the belt to him when he had the money. Robert had agreed, and the snow machine belt was purchased with store money and was being held for William P.) According to Robert, William became very demanding and stated that he wanted the belt right then and there. Robert refused and the argument intensified. Robert said that he tried to get William to pay something for the belt, since William already owed the store over \$600.00. Robert refused to let him have it unless he paid half of the \$200.00. According to Robert, William kept arguing and started all at once to "beat" him up. He said that his shirt was torn and that he was beaten around the eyes. Robert said that while William was "beating me up, I must have been knocked out or something . . . I blacked out and don't remember having a gun."

He vaguely recalled William's daughter screaming at him that he had shot her father. He had no recollection of getting the gun and of shooting William as he walked away from his house. Robert felt that he was "blacked out" from the beating he had from William.

Some background history is important in understanding the above described events. This description will focus on the relationship of both men to the ANICA store, since it was a major source of tension between the two men. Robert H. was originally from another nearby village. He came to his new home about five or six years ago after his home had burned down. His new home was in his wife's village and he was able to obtain a house in this village. He never fully felt at home in the new village, feeling as if he was regarded by the local people as an outsider. In 1969, the IRA council offered him the job of ANICA store manager. At that time the store was in very poor shape because of the illness of and mismanagement by the previous manager. Robert started at a salary of \$200.00 per month and understood that it was supposed to increase \$50.00 every six months until he reached \$400.00 per month. He felt that his contract called for these raises but he never obtained them. Robert stated that he would occasionally mention to one of the council members his belief that he should get a raise but that he never pushed it. Asked if he were angry that he hadn't gotten a raise, he said . . . "Yeah, it made me mad, they never kept their agreement, but I can't do nothing about it, you can't go telling people you're mad." I asked him why not. He said, "Maybe they would laugh at me if I tell them I'm mad; maybe they didn't want to give me a raise because I am from a different village. Men over there are that way . . . treat you different than the rest in the village. I never bothered them . . . you can't do nothing alone."

There are substantial inherent pressures on an Eskimo person in the job of store manager, in addition to the personal frustration H. felt over his pay and his feelings of aloneness in the village. The problems involved managing a store with pressure coming from both the native community and the hierarchy of ANICA. If a person is to succeed as a store manager, he must be able to handle the issue of credit. Credit provides the greatest source of conflict between community and store and the greatest source of personal conflict for the management.

In this present case the issue of credit was very important. William P. had already been given a substantial amount of credit at the store, around \$600.00. Further, Robert had made an error as a manager in paying for the snow machine belt which had come to the post office C.O.D. According to the court deposition given by the ANICA superintendent:

In some cases the stores know that they are not supposed to give credit, so they give trapping loans or they'll give cash loans or they'll give post office loans, that is to go

down and pick up C.O.D. packages at the post office, and these loans sometimes are written on pieces of paper that disappear . . . Now somebody like Robert could be doing any one of those things and not really be aware that he might be damaging the store. He might know that if a regional coordinator came to town and saw him doing it, he might be unhappy, but that doesn't necessarily mean that Robert or a native store manager of Robert's experience would necessarily relate what he was doing to dishonesty. He might be feeling that he was helping people.<sup>10</sup>

He further points out that managers of smaller stores like the one in this description might not have the understanding or experience to see the relationship of credit to poor store functioning. Thus, one possible motive for the extension of credit is to help people who obviously need the help.

The information provided in this case seems to point to a very different reason for the credit extended to William P. It seems to me that Robert knew that as store manager he was wrong in picking up the C.O.D. order. Further, he felt that giving out the snow machine belt to William when he demanded it was "wrong." The question would then arise: why did he do it in the first place? Why extend the credit to William P. to the amount of \$600.00 and why pay the C.O.D. charges for the snow machine belt? These questions bring us to a discussion of William P. and his place in the ANICA hierarchy. William P. had been born in this village and was an extremely proud and well-respected man in the community. He had held at various times most of the elected offices in the village and had been a former store manager. Over the same period of time that Robert H. had been manager of the ANICA store, William P. was the president of the ANICA Board of Directors. Prior to that he had been a member of the board and prior to that had been a member of the security board. Thus, William had a position in ANICA which was superior to Robert's and which Robert did not really understand. When Robert was questioned about William's role in ANICA, he said, "He was an ANICA advisor or something. He went to Seattle about the store. There is an office down there in Seattle and John R. would be able to explain what he is." The implication of this material will be discussed below.

### **John A., Village Policeman**

John A. is a 32-year-old man who on April 23, 1972, shot and killed Howard R. after a drinking bout with Howard and his wife.

John was cooperative throughout the interviews and related events as far as he could "remember" them. The accused suffered a much more prolonged period of amnesia in this case, and much information was pieced together from police records. Prior to his arrest John served as police chief of a large northwestern Eskimo village. John stated that prior to the events to be described he had been awake for the previous 48 hours, out of the village at the site of a whale kill. When he returned home he immediately began his work as a police officer. During the evening it was necessary for him to take into custody several village people who were openly drunk. The last person he arrested was his cousin, who was drunk and hostile. The cousin started telling John about sexual advances made to him by John's wife several months before. John became very upset and angry at his wife. He stated that his marriage had been good until the previous March, when he was off with the National Guard and his wife was in Nome. At that time, she apparently had become involved sexually with other men and was also drinking quite heavily. He had subsequently made other discoveries which led him to doubt his wife's fidelity and made him feel extremely depressed and inadequate.

After arresting his cousin he returned to his own home and accused his wife of the actions related to him by his cousin. She denied that anything really happened. Apparently there was a big argument which led to John's striking his wife. This was soon followed by a visit by his aunt, his cousin's mother, who tried to calm him down,

telling him to accept the events and forget about them. At this point, John states, he left the house and looked for one of his assistants to take over the police duty. He then returned to Henry's coffee house and accepted drinks which had been previously offered while he was on duty. After he started drinking, Howard R. and his wife came into the coffee shop and also began to drink. After a while they all went to Howard's house, where apparently the drinking continued.

The quantity of alcohol consumed was apparently very large. John stated that he had been drinking 151 proof rum with beer and side shots of vodka. The exact amount is impossible to determine, but was no doubt extremely heavy. John told me that his goal was to drink until he had calmed his nerves and was able to go to sleep. He stated that his mind was continually on the story that his cousin had told him, including the fact that his cousin had laughed at him because of his wife. The last thing he remembered about the night was saying that he wanted to lie down, early in the morning hours. The next thing he remembered was waking in the morning in the same bed with Howard's wife. The dead body of Howard R. was found in the front shed. He had been shot, and from extensive sifting of stories it appeared that John had shot him after a fight had developed between Howard and his wife.

### **Town Violence**

The following case is presented as a contrast to the material presented from the two villages. There has been an increasing trend toward violence in rural Alaska, both suicide and homicide, and much of this violence is taking place in rural towns like Nome or Bethel. What is more, it seems to be most profoundly affecting the young. The following case history has many elements typical of situations involving young people.

Richard P. is a 19-year-old man who evidently shot Dan R. multiple times, on December 31, 1972. Dan R. did not die and Richard P. was charged with felonious assault. The events are as follows:

From all records available, dating back several years, Richard P. has a long history of adjustment difficulties. He was born to Eskimo parents in a small village in southwestern Alaska. He was adopted as an infant by Paul P.; at the time he was described as malnourished and neglected. He began to get into trouble in his early teens and first came to the attention of the juvenile authorities in 1969. At that time he was admitted to the Youth Center in Anchorage on two charges of breaking and entering into a native store. He spent about one year at the Center and returned to his village, Bethel, in 1970. He was home for a short time when he began to get into trouble again over consumption of alcohol and theft. Later in 1970 he was sent to Anchorage under the auspices of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. He lasted in Anchorage for three weeks, was arrested twice for drinking, and returned to Bethel in December of 1970. In early 1971 he was again arrested for drinking. While in jail he became violent and threatened to stab himself. In April of 1971 he was sent back to the Youth Center and transferred to a correctional boys' ranch. He stayed there until February of 1972. He says he was very bitter about his placement and couldn't wait to leave. In February of 1972, after turning 18, he was released from the boys' ranch and from the jurisdiction of the court so that he could join the service. His career in the service was marred by the same sort of adjustment problems. He went AWOL at least three times and on the third time went home to Bethel. He finally was given a general discharge and went home in September, 1972.

He was arrested in October for drinking and disorderly conduct and was sent to the Anchorage jail from October to December, 1972. He was home in Bethel only about a week before the shooting of Dan R.

During his week at home prior to the shooting of Mr. R., he states, he was again

drinking, and there is evidence that he was quite upset. On the evening of the shooting his father was told by his uncle that Richard was suicidal and had, at his uncle's house, pointed a knife at his own throat. All through the evening he was drinking and his father was not able to find him during that period of time, although he apparently did look for him.

Richard describes the events of that evening as follows: He was drinking with another man at Dan R.'s house early in the evening. Richard left Dan R.'s house to go to a dance but was told by the man to return later on. When he came back later in the evening he did not find the man he was drinking with but found Dan R.

From Richard's description, Mr. R. initially was very angry at him and accused him of breaking windows and messing up the house. Richard says that Mr. R. pushed him down the steps and then started to apologize. From Richard's point of view, Mr. R. appeared to be making sexual advances. He felt that Mr. R.'s behavior was very similar to the behavior that he had experienced at Fort Ord when he had been approached by homosexual men. Richard says he got very angry at this point and deliberately went back to his house to get his gun. He says that he can remember most of what happened but that at times he "blanked out." He remembers that he got to Dan R.'s door, that he knocked on the door, and that when Mr. R. showed himself he shot him, at least four times. After shooting him he returned home via a roundabout route, hid the gun, and went to bed, where he was arrested several hours later.

He says that, although Dan R. did not make any open homosexual overtures, the way he "looked" reminded him of his past experience. I asked him why he did not just leave, and he said that he felt that he had to shoot Dan R. because he would never be able to face him again. He said he was frightened of "those people" and that he got "scared when a man like that comes around." There was no question in his mind that he knew what he was doing in the sense that he committed a deliberate action. He says he had to do it because "that man" (Dan R.) would see him again and he would "know."

## Discussion

Tanay<sup>11</sup> has classified homicidal behavior into three types: ego-syntonic homicide, ego-dystonic (dissociative) homicide, and psychotic homicide. He describes ego-dystonic homicide as "resulting from a process occurring between two individuals whose personalities and life situation determine the deadly outcome. The homicide in these cases represents a resolution of a conflict extending over a long period of time and maintained primarily on an unconscious level. The killing takes place during a disruption of the ego and may be precipitated by a seemingly insignificant provocation." He describes psychotic homicide as rare and associated with psychotic states, and ego-syntonic homicide as a goal-directed action "committed for the purpose of fulfilling a consciously acceptable wish."

All three cases described have clear elements of ego-dystonic homicide, with the case of town violence (Richard A.), however, merging into the psychotic category. The town case is more typical of the violent events which are growing in intensity in rural Alaska. The characteristics of the growing violence are that they are affecting the young, seem always associated with alcohol, and many times seem aimless and representative of a general cultural disorganization which is affecting segments of Eskimo Alaska.

The changes in the violence expression pattern in rural Alaska are striking and are summarized in Table I.

It is apparent from the table that major changes began in the mid-sixties, and that from that time to the present there has been an acceleration in both suicide and homicide. Accurate statistics by ethnic groups are missing for the homicide category. Kraus,<sup>13,14</sup> in a series of papers on Alaskan native suicide, has found that the increase in the suicide rates is a reflection of an increase in suicide among late adolescents and young

TABLE I<sup>2</sup>

## Alaskan Native Suicides and Homicides: 1950-1971

<i>Year</i>	<i>Suicide</i>	<i>Homicide</i>
1950	7	3
1951	3	7
1952	8	1
1953	3	2
1954	4	4
1955	3	4
1956	6	8
1957	7	5
1958	5	6
1959	3	3
1960	4	2
1961	7	6
1962	7	4
1963	4	6
1964	9	7
1965	5	12
1966	13	16
1967	14	8
1968	14	14
1969	4	13
1970	15	14
1971	20	12
Total	130	131

adults. Work is proceeding to define the homicide statistics along the lines done for suicides. Suffice it for this report to note the alarming trend in the general statistics and to note the changes since the year 1966. In 1970 the homicide rate for Alaskan natives was 27.6, while it was 6.8 for the United States as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

The three cases presented give substantial clues to some of the dynamic factors in the rising rates of violence. Although the cases can be classified in the general categories presented above, the question remains: is there anything particularly "Eskimo" about these cases that would necessitate a separate study of Eskimo homicide? Any culturally distinct group of people exhibit discernible characteristics which define them as a separate group. Aside from the obvious geographic environmental situation by which Eskimos are defined, they manifest basic personality styles. One of these basic styles involves the Eskimo aggression management system. This has been examined in detail in the recent literature by Briggs,<sup>16</sup> who discusses the elaborate cultivation and shaping of aggressive instincts in Eskimo society. Briggs worked in central Canada, and there certainly are questions as to whether the Alaskan Eskimo shares in the same degree of control over aggression management. There are, however, indications that some very strict rules regarding anger, aggression, and violence cut across all Eskimo society. Lubart<sup>17</sup> takes traditional aggression management systems one step further by defining an area of "impounding of hostile and competitive impulses" as one point of tension in Eskimo personality which seriously threatens adaptation in a changing society. Both cases of village violence described above illustrate this problem. Each man was exposed to the violence-producing situation because of the extension of western society into village life. Both store manager and policeman are certainly non-Eskimo jobs. The job places each man in a psychologically dangerous position. Inherent in the job is the inevitable role conflict and reference group alteration, with its concomitant psychological tension. Further, each job placed the man in a position which is traditionally difficult for an Eskimo to assume, the position of "boss," or authority figure—that is, any position which mandates that one man stand out over others in his community. The leveling

forces in Eskimo society, pulling people back to the group, are strong and unrelenting. The people will assert the need for men in such positions, but at the same time they will also test, tease, or ridicule those in the positions.

In the case of the store manager, the major testing issue is credit. The manager is placed in the almost impossible position of having his job success defined by opposite dicta. Success, defined by his western bosses, is his ability to deny credit; but his popularity and psychological comfort with his own people rest upon his acceptance of the group norms of sharing and avoidance of confrontation. His relationship with the man he shot and with the village was ambivalent at best. The man who was murdered was, in actuality, more of a boss than the store manager himself; he had a "mysterious" relationship with the manager's own agency and he seemed to have the best of the situation, including more credit than any of the other people in town. His murder was traditional in the sense that he went too far. There is a theme in Eskimo society of the "bully" who dominates others by force of terror, rumor of previous violence, or threatened violence. The bully survives until he goes too far, and then he is destroyed. This theme fits the events of this situation: A store manager from another village, exposed to the marginality of being an outsider, compounded by the stress precipitated by role conflict, finally acts violently against the man who most represents the mastery and prestige that he cannot achieve.

The village policeman story represents again the outcome of role conflict and impounded hostile impulses. The precipitating events revolve around ridicule experienced by the policeman in the pursuit of his job—ridicule focused on the marital conflict which had been quietly operative for some time. After an abortive confrontation with his wife, the man retreated into drinking behavior and confused and violent intervention in a marital fight involving his friends.

Other threads in Eskimo research come together in the study of these violent events. The classification of dissociative homicide is critical for Eskimo violence. I have never seen an episode of violent behavior of *any* kind not involving the use of alcohol, and have never seen a serious violent event without some degree of dissociative episode present.

Dissociative episodes seem to lie at the core of the periodic excitement. Pibloktoq<sup>18</sup> and hysterical mechanism have repeatedly been postulated as operative in basic Eskimo personality dynamics.<sup>19</sup> In another report<sup>20</sup> I have pointed to the range of hysterical-dissociative events surrounding sleep phenomena. It seems clear that the dissociation associated with violence is in the service of ego-denial of the dread hostile wishes. The denial associated with alcohol and dissociation is profound and stubborn. "It is not me, it was someone else" or "It was the drinks" are common statements made after a violent event. The extensive denial, the long training involved in the inhibition of hostility, and the consequent reluctance to make anger conscious and verbal all lead to great difficulties in psychotherapy.

The third case, the only example of town violence cited, needs some additional comment. Rural towns such as Bethel or Nome are centers of communication, education, and medical treatment, and also serve as contact points between traditional and western values. Although a thorough description of these towns is beyond the scope of this report, suffice it to say that cultural disorganization, violence, and identity confusion, especially among the young, are prominent features of town life. More complete descriptions of town life have been provided by Lubart,<sup>21</sup> Hippler,<sup>22</sup> Ervin,<sup>23</sup> and Bloom.<sup>24</sup> It is in the towns where the young are most profoundly affected with a pervasive sense of alienation and identity diffusion. The case described was chosen to illustrate the depth of these corrosive processes at work. The violence was random in the sense that the aggressor and victim had no extensive past history of intertwined behavior. The aggressor acted out of a frame of reference of chaotic and disorganized past experience coupled with an aimless present situation. It is here, in this young man, that the

dissociative approaches the psychotic. It is in this age group, in these towns, that the whole society takes its closest turn toward unraveling. The point here is not to be overly pessimistic but still to avoid denying the evidence of a whole generation of extremely troubled young people. Evidence is accumulating from various sources of a pattern of rampant drinking, serious psychopathology emerging in the high school population,<sup>25</sup> and a pattern of endemic town violence.

## Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to begin a focus on current Eskimo homicide, from the point of view of traditional personality dynamics. Solutions will be found only if these factors are taken into account. Time and time again I have seen unsophisticated people urge Eskimos toward methods of problem-solving which are entirely counter to Eskimo problem-solving styles. Since 1966 we have seen a plethora of confrontation-oriented groups urge Eskimos to stand up and confront, encounter one another, express themselves, etc. Whether these devices fit the traditional Eskimo style of problem solving was of little interest to such groups, and it may very well be that these tactics are partially involved in the loosening of cultural restraints to the expression of violence.

On the other hand, creative ventures in community power and expression like the Skyriver project,<sup>26</sup> a culturally syntonetic community development project in the Village of Emmonak, show that *methods of change can be integrated into traditional communal values*. Hippler and Conn<sup>27</sup> have begun an exploration of traditional Eskimo law ways and the relationship of these concepts to current efforts in criminal justice administration in rural Alaska. Violence reduction on a social-cultural level will come from projects such as these and ultimately will depend in the next decade upon the shaping and force of the newly organized regional Native Corporations. On an individual level, violence reduction steps must be explored immediately and can take many forms, from the removal of high school students from disorganized rural towns to the introduction and diversification of rural mental health treatment programs, which at the present time are meagre.

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