

Diagnostic Case Study #1: The Case of Pete from Grosse Point

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The case vignette for Pete starts out by explaining that one day before his 16th birthday, he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital because he slashed his wrists with a butcher knife causing severe damage to nerves and tendons. Pete's story gets even more dark. As a child of a Vietnamese mother and American servicemen he lived in Saigon during the earlier parts of his life, until he was adopted by his first American parents at the age of 2. This set of set of adoptive parents abused him by burning and beating him. At age 2 ½, Pete was placed with his current adoptive parents. Pete remained reserved and still does not communicate much with his parents, even though he always got along with other children. When Pete entered Junior High School, he began spending time with friends who smoked marijuana, accepted nihilism as a way of life, stole, and dismissed the values taught by their parents and teachers. Soon enough, Pete's parents separated, and he then was involved in stealing a neighbor's car, stopped attending school regularly, used drugs, and began to accept the nihilistic perspective. The previous variables mentioned lead to Pete's Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5 (DSM-5) diagnosis - he is suffering from moderate conduct disorder.

Conduct Disorder is defined as "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated" (American Psychiatric Association, p. 469, 2013). The disorder is manifested by at least 3 of 15 criteria in the past 12 months from any of 4 categories. One criterion should also appear, at least, within the past 6 months. The 4 categories include, aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules. The significant symptoms of the disorder typically began to appear in middle childhood to middle adolescence, but they can start to appear as early as preschool (American Psychiatric Association, p. 473, 2013). Pete has

shown symptoms from every one of the 4 categories mentioned, from middle childhood to middle adolescence.

Pete exhibits the first of the 4 categories of criteria, aggression to people and animals. Pete has gotten into trouble for shooting at squirrels with his BB gun and for fighting with the “jocks” from his school. He exhibits the second of the 4 categories of criteria, destruction of property – as he has gotten in trouble for blowing up mailboxes with firecrackers. Next, Pete meets the criteria for the third of the 4 categories, deceitfulness or theft. He and his friends were picked up by the police for stealing the car of one his vacationing neighbors to go for a joy ride. And lastly, Pete meets the criteria for the fourth category, serious violations of rules. By the age of 15, Pete was truant more days than he was in school and ended up getting expelled from the military school his parents sent him away to, because he never attended class. The symptoms of conduct disorder in Pete may stem from the abuse he endured as a child and his experience with more than one set of parents. Pete’s delving into drugs can be seen as a serious violation of rules, due to his young age. His experience with self-harm, may be an effect from using hallucinogenic drugs or may be an indicator of other comorbidities.

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) explains that conduct disorder can appear simultaneously with other mental disorders including, anxiety, depressive/bipolar, or substance abuse disorders. Pete may very well be experiencing more than one set of symptoms for more than one DSM-5 mental disorder. However, his symptoms match the majority of the criterion presented for conduct disorder.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th Edition). Washington, DC: Author, ISBN:978-0-89042-555-8