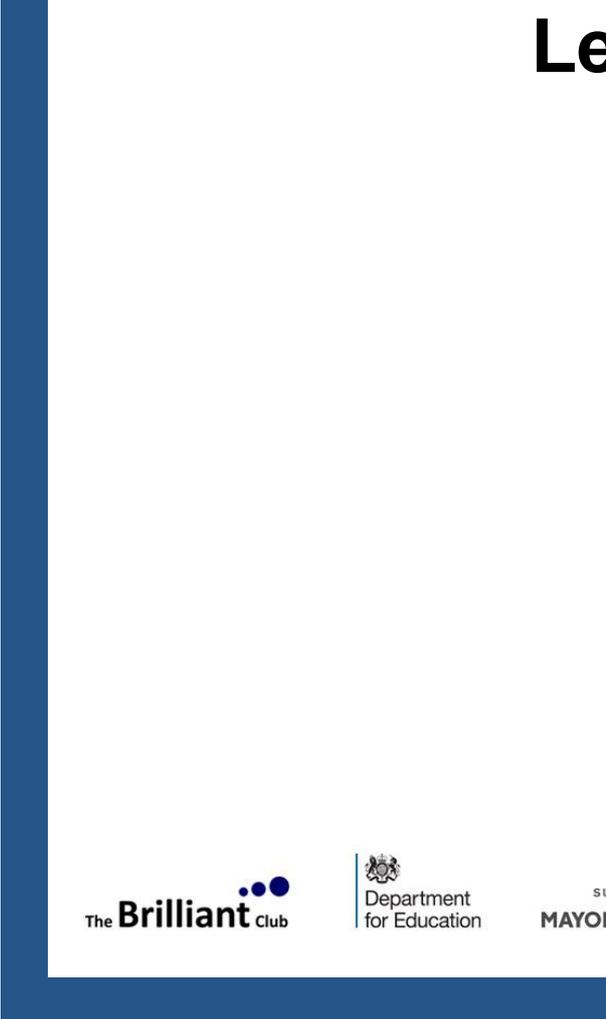


**University Learning in Schools**

# **Psychology**

**Myth-busting the Brain: Case Studies**

## **Lesson 4**



Forensic Case study: Charles Whitman



## Charles Whitman Biography

Murderer (1941–1966)

Charles Whitman was a former Marine and sniper who killed 16 people at the University of Texas in 1966.

### Synopsis

Born on June 24, 1941, in Lake Worth, Florida, Charles Whitman served as a Marine before enrolling in the University of Texas. Suffering from mental illness and acute fits of anger, Whitman killed his mother and wife and on August 1, 1966, went atop a 300-foot tower, targeting people in the vicinity. He would kill 16 and injure many others before he was killed by police, who stormed the tower.

### Early Life

Mass murderer Charles Joseph Whitman was born on June 24, 1941, in Lake Worth, Florida. Taught at an early age to handle guns, Whitman was a model student and Eagle Scout who left home early to escape a violent father. He joined the Marine Corps to be a sharpshooter and then entered the University of Texas, where he met his future wife, Kathryn Leissner. (They married in 1962.)

Whitman returned to the Marine Corps in 1963. In December 1964, he was discharged. Whitman went back to the University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 1965.

By 1966, he was suffering from severe headaches and consulted a therapist at the university to discuss concerns he had over his mental health. The doctor recommended Whitman attend another session the following week, but he never returned.

### Mass Murder

Also in 1966, his mother finally left his father after suffering years of abuse. She got an apartment in Austin, not far from her son. This move would prove fatal for her. Sometime on the evening of July 31, Whitman went to his mother's home and stabbed and shot her. In a note left with her body, Whitman explained that he was "truly sorry that this was the only way I could see to relieve her sufferings but I think it was best."

After killing his mother, Whitman went home. Sometime after his wife went to sleep, he stabbed her to death. He typed a note before her death, stating that he was going to kill her. He said that "I love her dearly. . . . I cannot rationally pinpoint any specific reason for doing this." He thought it might have been his own selfishness or his desire to spare her from facing embarrassment over his actions.

### QUICK FACTS

NAME  
Charles Whitman

OCCUPATION  
Murderer

BIRTH DATE  
June 24, 1941

DEATH DATE  
August 1, 1966

EDUCATION  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, Texas

SYNOPSIS  
EARLY LIFE  
CONCERNS ABOUT HEALTH  
DEATH  
CITE THIS PAGE

IN THESE GROUPS  
FAMOUS CANCERIANS  
FAMOUS PEOPLE BORN IN LAKE WORTH  
FAMOUS PEOPLE BORN IN UNITED STATES  
FAMOUS PEOPLE BORN ON JUNE 24

Show All Groups

On August 1, 1966, Whitman, along with an assortment of weapons and supplies stored in a trunk, entered the University of Texas tower, wearing overalls. He headed up to the observation deck, killing a receptionist and two others along the way. Once he reached the deck, he began shooting at the people below. The rampage lasted less than two hours with most of the deaths and injuries occurring in the first 15 to 20 minutes.

### **Death**

A trained sniper, Whitman shot most of his victims near or in the heart. In total, he killed 14 people and wounded 30 more on the campus before being shot and killed by two police officers, with a wide range of civilians assisting authorities during the crisis.

In one of his writings, Whitman stated that he wanted his brain examined after his death to check for signs of physical cause of mental illness. His request was granted in the form of a police autopsy, which showed that he had a brain tumor. But medical experts disagreed over whether it had any effect on Whitman's actions.

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## Schizophrenia Case study: Maria



Maria is a 21 year-old business student at a large university. Over the past few weeks her family and friends have noticed increasingly bizarre behaviours. On many occasions they've overheard her whispering in an agitated voice, even though there is no one nearby. Lately, she has refused to answer or make calls on her cell phone, claiming that if she does it will activate a deadly chip that was implanted in her brain by evil aliens.

Her parents have tried to get her to go with them to a psychiatrist for an evaluation, but she refuses. She has accused them on several occasions of conspiring with the aliens to have her killed so they can remove her brain and put it inside one of their own. She has stopped attending classes altogether. She is now so far behind in her coursework that she will fail if something doesn't change very soon.

Although Maria occasionally has a few beers with her friends, she's never been known to abuse alcohol or use drugs. She does, however, have an estranged aunt who has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals over the years due to erratic and bizarre behaviour.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Case Study: Josh

Josh is a 27 year-old male who recently moved back in with his parents after his fiancée was killed by a drunk driver 3 months ago. His fiancée, a beautiful young woman he'd been dating for the past 4 years, was walking across a busy intersection to meet him for lunch one day. He still vividly remembers the horrific scene as the drunk driver ran the red light, ploughing down his fiancée right before his eyes. He raced to her side, embracing her crumpled, bloody body as she died in his arms in the middle of the crosswalk. No matter how hard he tries to forget, he frequently finds himself reliving the entire incident as if it was happening all over again.

Since the accident, Josh has been plagued with nightmares about the accident almost every night. He had to quit his job because his office was located in the building right next to the little café where he was meeting his fiancée for lunch the day she died. The few times he attempted to return to work were unbearable for him. He has since avoided that entire area of town.

Normally an outgoing, fun-loving guy, Josh has become increasingly withdrawn, "jumpy", and irritable since his fiancée's death. He's stopped working out, playing his guitar, or playing basketball with his friends – all activities he once really enjoyed. His parents worry about how detached and emotionally flat he's become.



### Case study: MMR vaccine and autism

No public health issue of recent years has attracted such heated debate as the question of whether the MMR vaccine can cause autism. The MMR jab combines three childhood vaccines, against measles, mumps and rubella, into one injection, which is first given to children at around 12-18 months. It has virtually eradicated these diseases from the UK, and throughout the world it has saved hundreds of lives.

Rosemary Kessick's 16-year-old son, William, is severely autistic. Shortly after William had his MMR shot, Rosemary noticed a change in his behaviour. He showed repetitive movements, delayed speech and shunned social interaction. He also started suffering from recurring bowel problems. Convinced the three things were connected, she took William to the Royal Free Hospital in north London to see Dr Andrew Wakefield, a specialist in bowel diseases.

Wakefield became convinced that William and a number of other children he had examined were suffering from a new kind of bowel disease that could be linked to their autism. What's more, he started to wonder whether this condition was being caused by the MMR vaccine. At the press conference to coincide with the publication of this research he suggested that the combined MMR jab should not be used. The result was a media storm.

