



Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson

Keith Ablow, Catherine Crier (Foreword by)

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The highly publicized Scott Peterson murder case captivated a public hungry for the answer to one question: Why would a man with no known history of violent crime or mental illness and with a pretty wife about to give birth brutally murder her and his unborn son? Forensic psychiatrist Keith Ablow's national media appearances, including a groundbreaking interview on Oprah, resulted in enormous public response, saying that his theories about the spawning of a killer inside Peterson were the first that made sense to them. Members of Scott's and Laci's families have also stated that his comments were the first that helped them understand what might have happened inside Scott's mind. *Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson* takes readers into the psyche of a killer, exploring:

How Scott Peterson's empathy for others was shattered by a three-generation "bloodline" of childhood loss and abandonment
Why an addiction to sex took root in Peterson's psyche
Why Peterson's meeting Amber Frey while his wife was pregnant triggered the "perfect" psychological storm
Clues to Peterson's guilt in his interviews with Gloria Gomez and Diane Sawyer
What Peterson was probably thinking as he listened to testimony in court and received his death sentence
Why Peterson could kill again, if released
Using contacts at the FBI, and hiring private investigators and researchers, Keith Ablow delves deeply into Scott Peterson's life story to answer the question: How did an all-American boy turn into a ruthless killer?

Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson Details

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Natalie says

I was sick of the media oversaturation of the Peterson case, but a co-worker gave me this book and I finished it in about two work shifts. Keith Ablow, a forensic psychologist, makes a pretty good case for *why* Scott Peterson killed his wife Laci, which is something the media never really touched upon - too busy playing up the "pretty dead pregnant wife" and "slightly trashy mistress" angles, I suppose. Keith Ablow is a bit of a media whore himself, though, and I'm not sure if that casts suspicion or doubt on his credentials or ideas, but I was fairly convinced by his arguments.

Tara says

Some interesting insights were made but the writing was a little redundant at times. Dr. Ablow must have said that Scott Peterson was "a person impersonating a person" and that he was "already dead" at least a dozen times each, throughout the book. It was a quick read, though, and held my interest enough to finish it. I'd recommend it for things like airplane rides or over-night stays in hotels, etc.

Lauren says

Interesting stuff!

Lori says

"Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson" is an interesting, if possibly flawed, look at the psychological makeup of Scott Peterson. Dr. Keith Ablow, while never having interviewed or worked with Peterson himself, does make some fascinating points and conclusions. Background on the Peterson family, which I previously did not know, sheds some light on the dynamics of this dysfunctional family. Could the murder of Peterson's grandfather have led to Peterson himself becoming a murderer? There are some similarities and parallels but truth is, we will never know.

What is known is that Peterson is a killer, and he is definitely a cold, unfeeling sociopath. This book would have been much more insightful had Dr. Ablow actually spoken with Peterson, but he did speak to Peterson's family members and ex-girlfriends. Part of Peterson's personality is revealed through Dr. Ablow's interviews, but (as with all sociopaths) not all. Probably, Peterson himself doesn't truly know his own personality. The only part of the book I did not care for was Dr. Ablow's opinion of Laci's personality, as being someone who wanted to make things "pretty" and cared about outside appearances. Some of his writing, intentional or not, seemed to suggest that Laci's own ignorance over her husband and desire to keep things respectful and appearances up may have contributed to her own murder. Regardless of how little Laci may have known about her own husband, she was the victim in this story and definitely did not deserve what happened to her. All in all, an interesting and sometimes mind boggling journey into the deep, dark and empty heart of a sociopath.

Amanda says

I loved this book. It was a perfect account of the crime and everything leading up to it. It was interesting to get into Scott Peterson's head, to understand what kind of person he was and still is that led up to the murder of his wife and son.

I have read a few books on this case, written by his sister, his mother-in-law, and finally Amber Frey, but they were all personal standpoints and opinions. It was nice having an unbiased forensic psychologist take me through his life, step-by-step.

I truly feel like I really got to know him. So much so that I actually feel pity for Scott Peterson. He is a pathetic, sad person, yet fascinating.

Dennis Littrell says

Ablow, Keith. Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson (2005) ***
Not the best interpretation

Forensic psychiatrist Keith Ablow's thesis here is that "Laci and Conner lost their lives to a psychological 'perfect storm' that began gathering over the Peterson family over five decades ago and reached hurricane strength in the psyche of Scott Peterson." (p. 8)

In concrete prose (which is not Dr. Ablow's strength) the beginning of the storm was Scott Peterson's maternal grandfather being murdered by a disgruntled ex-employee. Following this his maternal grandmother gave her children to an orphanage run by catholic nuns. Jackie Peterson, Scott's mother, was then two years old. She endured a childhood filled with abuse. When she had her first child the father left her. She then gave up that child for adoption. Another man, another child. He left her too, and she gave that child up for adoption. A third man, a third child. He too abandoned her, and she would have given up that third child, but was persuaded not to by her pediatrician. And then along came Lee Peterson who stayed, and they had Scott. Shortly after his birth he contracted pneumonia and had to be placed in an oxygen chamber.

At this point Dr. Ablow remarks that researchers believe "that the roots of a sociopath's twisted personality...can sometimes be traced to early, sudden separation between an infant and his or her mother." (p. 39) He adds on the next page that "with the cold reality of masked nurses and doctors peering at you, their eyes filled with worry that you will die, your body pierced unpredictably and uncontrollably by needles, it should come as no surprise that you may wish to 'disappear' psychologically from the earth, to crawl back inside a womb..." This is the infant Scott that he is talking about, but one wonders what a newborn infant's eyes can see. They focus on faces as they learn to see, but (as Ablow should know) that takes months. It's hard to imagine that a newborn can read the faces of "masked nurses and doctors."

Ablow's argument is that Scott Peterson is a sociopath more made than born. This is crucial. At another point Ablow speculates that Jackie Peterson might have wondered (referring to Scott Peterson's half brother Don who was put up for adoption) if her "baby would be better off dead rather than abandoned by its father." He asks, "Did Jackie Peterson ever think that before she sent her baby boy away forever?" And then he asks the

clincher: "Did Scott Peterson think that before he sent his baby boy to the bottom of the sea?" (p. 33)

The lurid prose aside, here I think Ablow is beginning to make the right connection. On page 89 he quotes Scott's half-sister Anne Bird as saying, "Scott and Jackie seem very similar to me...She was able to dispose of her children without much thought or emotion, and he followed suit. He disposed of his child."

At another point, Ablow quotes a "family source" as telling him, "Jackie lies about anything and everything." (p. 47)

This is the key: a genetic predisposition toward sociopathology inherited from the mother. Scott Peterson's sociopathic personality had nothing to do with his grandfather being murdered or with his being in an oxygen chamber after birth. It had everything to do with inheriting his mother's sociopathic genes and being raised by a mother who is a sociopath herself. That's nature and nurture working together: like mother, like son.

How did the other children escape being sociopaths? They did not inherit the same combination of genes, and their childhoods were not under the direction of a sociopath. It takes both a genetic predisposition and an enabling environment for the sociopathic personality to be expressed.

This is the weakest of the books on the Peterson case that I have read, although there is some interesting material about Scott Peterson growing up. Both Catherine Crier's and Amber Frey's are better, particular Crier's. The problem here is (1) Ablow's failure to understand sociopathology in evolutionary biological terms; his reliance on outdated psychologies that put too much blame on the environment and not enough on biology; and his overly rhetorical and speculative prose. As a final example of the latter he writes on page 150 imagining Scott Peterson moments after he had killed his wife and unborn son: "Then he stepped into the bathroom, looked at his face in the mirror, and smiled a defiant, unrepentant smile...He felt utterly and intensely alive."

Perhaps, but he might also have felt terribly afraid for himself since he had now done something that could not be undone, something he could not talk his way out of; and therefore there was the very real chance that he would have to suffer the consequences. I imagine that after he had murdered Laci, Scott Peterson felt sorry for himself.

Ablow's idea that Scott Peterson was unmoved by his plight when arrested and then when sentenced to death is almost silly. Scott put on a stoic face, but Scott Peterson cares deeply about Scott Peterson. All sociopaths care only about themselves, first, foremost and exclusively.

Since they don't know how normal people feel (not having those feelings themselves) they are always acting in public, and Scott was acting when the sentence was announced. He was telling himself as he later told Anne Bird that he would get out on appeal and that she shouldn't worry.

Ablow's explanation for his unworried demeanor goes like this: "Scott Peterson had already been spiritually dead a very long time. He had walked among us as an emotional vampire feasting day-to-day on the life force of others, particularly women." (p. 17) Yes, Scott used women, but he did so with a great sense of entitlement and lust. And yes he can be said to be spiritually dead because he was never spiritually alive, but he doesn't care about that. He is a pure sociopath.

--Dennis Littrell, author of "Dennis Littrell's True Crime Companion"

Tree says

My daughter was born within days of Laci's and Connor's deaths, so I've been captivated by the terrible story from the start. This book does present some background on Scott that is sad and disturbing, though the author does seem overly confident in his psychological background. I got very tired of reading his hypothesis of Scott being "a dead man" over and over.

Deborah Mitton says

I read this book when I was preparing to write my first novel. The knowledge that Keith Ablow shares on a psychopath's method on handling day to day situations was just what I was looking for.

This study was certainly a great help to me.

Beth says

Three generations of the Peterson family and how within this family system, Scott became who he is. Dr. Ablow treats the subject with truth and universal compassion.

CrabbyPatty says

Okay, I've sorta gone down the rabbit hole re: Scott Peterson and this is the third book I've read about the case. Ablow, a forensic psychologist, believes that family tragedy and drama causes situations even generations after the fact, and in the Peterson family, Jackie's father was killed when she was 2 and her mother put Jackie in an orphanage, which later was revealed as a place of sexual abuse. Jackie had two children and gave them up for adoption, almost gave up her third son (without much remorse), and after marrying Lee Peterson, Scott was born - their perfect golden son. But, Lee never wanted to be a father, and with Jackie unable or unwilling to love her children ... between the two of them, they raised a sociopath.

Ablow's theory is an interesting one, but I felt it could have been related in a long article rather than the book, which seemed to reiterate the theory over and over, and over and over, again. 3.5 stars.

Charlene says

This book is not about the murder of Scott's wife, Lacey, but a look into his mind which I found very interesting.

andie says

Horrible book. Keith Ablow begins by passively insinuating that Scott Peterson's paternal grandfather was murdered by his parents.

In the same chapters that he calls Scott a manipulative, calculating, empty shell of a person, Ablow makes the assumption that if Scott's first child had been born, perhaps Scott wouldn't have gone on to kill. Ablow also claims that Scott's relationship with Amber was genuine, the one thing in Scott's life he truly cared about, and he wouldn't have gone on to kill if that relationship had lasted either.

Overall, this reads like a cheap arm chair psychology novel. I'm half way through the book and I'm trying to save my eyes from rolling over to the back of my skull.

I've got Catherine Crier's book on Peterson to read next, why do I do this to myself.

Edited: Catherine Crier's book is a much better account of Scott Peterson and the trial. Ablow spends too much time sensationalizing his own opinions of Peterson by omitting certain facts. For example, Ablow significantly downplays how much Peterson lied to Amber Frey, all to propagate the idea that Scott's relationship with Amber was the one "real" thing in Scott's life.

Complete waste of time, thankfully this book was a quick read.

Bella says

I have been following this case since I first heard about it. I've read countless books about the case also from many perspectives and without a doubt my firm belief is that Scott Peterson indeed did kill his wife and unborn child. I enjoyed every detail about this book and the analysis that experts give on Scott Peterson's motives of doing what he did.

Dayna says

This author really tried his best to get into Scott's head - what was he thinking? What were his motives?

Ultimately, I don't think he succeeded; I think he over-simplified Scott's motives and got a few of them flat-out wrong. (For example, the author contends that Scott was madly in love with Amber, but based on his actions during their "affair" I tend to think that she was just another one of his many marital affairs).

This book is worth its weight in gold, however, not for the author's assumptions into Scott's mind, but from all of the background research on Scott and his family. The author dug deep into the history of Scott's grandparents and mother, which was not widely reported in the media.

This book is well-written, and a good "true crime" book for anyone.

Dara S. says

Very readable, not full of terms you can't understand even though it is written by a psychiatrist.
