

## Vigilante justice: So, is it murder?

### Jonathon Edington allegedly kills neighbor to avenge harm to daughter

Legal Analysis, Susan Filan, Senior legal analyst, MSNBC, Updated: 3:52 p.m. PT Oct 20, 2006

Jonathon Edington, a 29-year-old patent attorney, allegedly snapped after his wife told him their next door neighbor had molested their 2-year-old daughter.

Edington's wife and daughter were out of town when she broke the news to him over the telephone. After Edington hung up the phone, he allegedly went next door, climbed through a bedroom window, and stabbed 59-year-old Barry James to death while his elderly parents were in the house.

Police reportedly found Mr. Edington back in his home, talking on a phone, standing at the kitchen sink, washing blood off his hands, a bloody knife on the counter nearby.

Summary	Rhetorical Strategies	Rhetorical Devices
In the above paragraphs, the reader learns how Jon Edington killed his neighbor because he thought the neighbor molested his daughter.	<i>Ethos:</i> Facts <i>Pathos:</i> murder of a family member and molestation evoke strong emotions.	The author <b>narrates</b> what supposedly happened, provides <b>facts</b> about the people involved, and uses <b>imagery</b> in the last paragraph.

When the story first broke a few months ago, the media seemed to have labeled this a case of "vigilante justice," almost endorsing the defendant's actions by seeming to cheer and applaud and say, "If someone did this to your kid, wouldn't you kill him too?"

But from the very beginning, when this story broke, I **countered** this approach saying the taking of a life is homicide, no matter what the reason, except for legally justified homicides such as self-defense or defense of another.

Summary	Rhetorical Strategies	Rhetorical Devices
In the above paragraphs we learn that the author does not agree with vigilante justice. Only in cases of defense is it "legally justified," or acceptable.	<i>Ethos:</i> Aware of the media <i>Pathos:</i> The Question <i>Logos:</i> Addresses counter argument	The author uses a <b>rhetorical question</b> to <b>explain</b> the media's attitude towards the killing. Her use of the word "countered" is <b>strong diction</b> , showing she disagrees with the popular media view.

### Murder is not an option

It is never okay to kill, no matter what you think someone did to "deserve" it. But the law in Connecticut does recognize that sometimes a homicide is a manslaughter rather than a murder if the person acted under the influence of extreme emotional disturbance. This is also known as the "heat of passion" defense. It is most typical in cases where a spouse catches a spouse in the act of adultery, flies into a rage, and kills. In some instances, this would be manslaughter rather than murder.

In Edington's case, a prosecutor could offer a plea to manslaughter rather than murder, or a jury could find Edington guilty of the lesser included offense: manslaughter rather than murder. While murder is punishable by life in prison without parole, manslaughter is a 20-year felony. But make no mistake: even if convicted of manslaughter under extreme emotional disturbance, Edington still faces 20 years in prison for taking Mr. James' life.

Summary	Rhetorical Strategies	Rhetorical Devices

The key to understanding the extreme emotional disturbance defense is in the statute itself. In order to say someone acted under extreme emotional disturbance, first you have to find a reasonable explanation or excuse for those actions. Second, those actions have to be reasonable from the viewpoint of a person in the defendant's situation under circumstances as the defendant believed them to be.

If the jury thinks that killing a child molester is a reasonable excuse, then they also have to find that it was reasonable for Edington to believe James molested his daughter, whether he had or not. The question isn't whether it happened, but rather was it reasonable for Edington to think that it did.

And this is where the going will get tough for Edington. Once the jurors learn that yes, Edington really thought James molested his daughter, but no, James never touched his daughter, jurors could stop siding with Edington. And here, Edington's justification, or provocation, could morph into cold-blooded murder for no reason at all.

Summary	Rhetorical Strategies	Rhetorical Devices

### Rage destroys two families

What was going on in the Edington family that a remark from a 2-year-old to her mother sparked a phone call to her husband, that ignited a homicidal rage in Edington such that he allegedly snuffed out the life of an innocent man?

Two families have been destroyed. The elderly James family has lost their beloved son. Attorney Edington will likely end up with a lengthy prison sentence, Mrs. Edington has lost her husband and their daughter has lost her family, which is forever shattered.

Summary	Rhetorical Strategies	Rhetorical Devices

The moral of the tale is that no matter what you think someone has done, do not take the law into your own hands. Call the police. Lodge a complaint. Let the justice system do its work to punish and protect.

And if you hear of someone avenging a loved one whom they think has been harmed, do not clap and cheer for the vigilante. Whether the vigilante turns out to be right or wrong, vigilante justice is always wrong. And in this case, there is a gentle victim who did not deserve the death sentence Edington allegedly bestowed on him.

Edington, a lawyer himself, was judge, juror and executioner. And an innocent man has allegedly died as a result.

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