



## Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

### Markoff's suicide -- No surprise

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The news that Philip Markoff, better known as the alleged "Craigslist Killer," has taken his own life is hardly a surprise. If indeed he was the sociopathic narcissist that he appeared, at least based on his behavior, to have been, then he would do anything not to face the public scorn and embarrassment that would come from a standing trial for the April 2009 murder of 25-year-old Julissa Brisman, a high-price call girl working out of the Copley Marriott Hotel.

Sociopaths are skillful at playing a role and maintaining a veneer of respectability. A trustworthy appearance may have done more than just fool those closest to Markoff, especially his former fiancé. It also allowed him to victimize young women selling in-call "massage" services out of prestigious Boston hotel rooms. If he looked more like the crazed monster that we might otherwise expect of such a predator, Markoff would not have been able to survive the peep-hole test.

It is more than just the drastic change in lifestyle, from one of a high-living conman to one of a lowly convict, that would have encouraged Markoff to take the easy and quick way out of the Nashua Street Jail "in a pine box." To an otherwise successful sociopath and narcissist, image and impression management is everything. Such individuals assess their own worth through the eyes of others. Without the constant attention and praise that serves as their life's blood, life (in prison or out) is not worth living.

Some might argue that Markoff's decision to commit suicide is evidence of a remorseful man, not a genuine sociopath who can fake the tears, but has limited capacity for empathy. We saw the same personality type in the likes of Charles Stuart who jumped from the Tobin Bridge months after he had killed his pregnant wife rather than face the music, as well as court and prison.

The trial of Phillip Markoff would undoubtedly have been a major spectacle with national attention focused on his bizarre behavior and idiosyncrasies. For someone like Markoff, being disgraced and humiliated on a national stage would have been a fate far worse than death.