

Female Psychopathic Serial Killers

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*Having a fun night out in London
stabbin' hookers.*

Objectives:

- 1. Clarify misperceptions of female criminality*
- 2. Define and explain psychopathy.*
- 3. Explain Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy*
- 4. Review a few female serial killer cases.*

First, some quick facts.

- 1. Female serial killers are much better at it than men are. They elude apprehension on average twice as long as men.*
- 2. The frequency of female serial killers is doubling every 20 years.*
- 3. Female serial killers are no longer “rare.” One in six serial killers in the United States is a woman.*

Vronsky, P. (2007) Female Serial Killers: How and Why Women Become Monsters. New York: Berkley Books

What is a psychopath?

- *Psychopaths use charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others.*
- *Psychopaths lack any conscience and in feeling for others.*
- *Violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.”*

Hare, R. (1993) Without conscience; The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us. New York: The Guildford Press, Inc.

What is a psychopath?

- *Psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality.*
- *They do not experience the delusions, hallucinations or distress that characterizes most other mental disorders.*
- *They are rational and aware of what they are doing and why. Their behavior is a result of choice freely exercised.*

Perri, F.S., Lichtenwald, T.G. & MacKensie, P. (2008c), The lull before the storm: Adult children who kill their parents. *The Forensic Examiner*, 17(3), 40-54

Reactive Homicide

(Not associated with psychopathy)

- *High level of spontaneity or impulsivity.*
- *Lack of planning.*
- *Occurs mostly among relatives and acquaintances.*
- *No apparent goal other than to harm the victim soon after a conflict/provocation. Harm to the victim is the goal.*

Instrumental Homicide (Associated with Psychopathy)

- *Lack of spontaneity or impulsivity.*
- *Long-term planning.*
- *Murder is only a means to achieving a larger goal.*
- *Victim is usually a stranger. At most a superficial relationship exists only to facilitate the pursuit of the larger goal, such as financially plundering the victim.*

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP): Psychopathic mothers and caregivers

- *A severe form of child abuse in which a parent or caregiver fabricates symptoms on behalf of another causing that person to be regarded as ill.*
- *Persistent and repetitive inducement of illness or injury.*
- *Mothers or the most common perpetrators.*
- *Injuries and illnesses are caused in such a manner that they are masked as accidental or natural, e.g. poisoning.*
- *The goal of the perpetrator is to gain attention, notoriety and treatment as a hero because “she is such a trooper for raising a sickly child.”*

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP): The Journal of Pediatrics Experiment

- *Physicians at several British hospitals covertly videotaped 39 parents, mostly mothers, whom medical personnel had begun to suspect were deliberately bringing their young children to death.*
- *30 of the parents were filmed intentionally suffocating their children.*
- *Two were seen attempting to poison their children.*
- *One mother deliberately broke her 3-year-old daughter's arm.*

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP): The Journal of Pediatrics Experiment

- *Abuse was inflicted with no provocation, but with premeditation.*
- *In some instances, elaborate lies were constructed to explain the consequences. For example, a mother claimed that she had suffocated her son because he kept her up all night. But in the film, he was in a deep sleep.*
- *The 39 patients together had a total of 41 siblings, 12 of whom had died suddenly and unexpectedly*

Aileen Carol Wuornos:

Erroneously hyped as the “First female serial killer.”



*Aileen Carol Wuornos
(February 29, 1956 –
October 9, 2002)*

- American serial killer who murdered seven men in Florida between 1989 and 1990, claiming they raped or attempted to rape her while she was working as a prostitute. She was convicted and sentenced to death for six of the murders, and executed via lethal injection on October 9, 2002. She was the 2nd woman to be executed by Florida.*

Aileen Carol Wuornos:

Erroneously hyped as the “First female serial killer.”

- *Wuornos was a prostitute who admitted to killing 7 men truck drivers between 1989 and 1990.*
- *Scored 32 out of 40 on Hare Psychopathic Checklist Revised (Moderate to Severe)*
- *Atypical in that she killed strangers in public rather than in accepted social or professional settings like a hospital where women can operate with less scrutiny.*
- *Later said that she planned to kill at least 12 men.*
- *Wuornos' final 8 October 2002 interview with NBC's Nick Broomfield the day before her execution.*

Diane Downs: Appeared in court pregnant



- Elizabeth Diane Frederickson Downs shot her three children, killing one, and then told police a stranger had attempted to carjack her and shot the children. After her conviction in 1984, she was sentenced to life in prison.

Diane Downs: Her Children Got in the Way

*Elizabeth Diane Frederickson Downs
(born August 7, 1955)*

Diane Downs:

Shot her 3 children, killing 1

- *Downs claimed she was carjacked on a rural road near Springfield, Oregon, by a strange man who shot her and her three children. Investigators, however, became suspicious when they noticed her manner was too calm to have experienced such a traumatic event.*
- *Their suspicions heightened when Downs went to see her daughter Christie in the hospital; Christie panicked and her heart rate jumped.*
- *The forensic evidence did not match Downs' story; there was no blood on the driver's side of the car, nor was there any gunpowder residue on the driver's panel.*
- *Witnesses saw Downs' car being driven very slowly toward the hospital—Downs had claimed that she drove there at high speed after the shooting.*

Helen Golay and Olga Rutterschmidt: “Little Old Ladies” or “Black Widows”



Helen Golay



*Olga
Rutterschmidt*

- *Golay and Rutterschmidt took in homeless men and then spent thousands of dollars on life insurance policies and then would kill the men after certain provisions of the \$2.8 million worth of insurance policies kicked in. They would drug and run over their victim to make it look like a hit and run accident.*

The Black Widow murder: Episode 26 American Greed

Helen Golay and Olga Rutterschmidt: “Little Old Ladies” or “Black Widows”

- *“The prosecution has to be worried that one or more of the jurors will feel sorry for these two old women.”*

--Jean Rosenbluth, law professor

- *“When we see women generally, we either view them as nurturers or as needing protections; age is a proxy for non-threateningness.”*

—Jonathon Simon

Criminal justice researcher

Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez

“The Lonely Hearts Killers”



Raymond Fernandez
17 Dec. 1914 – 8 Mar. 1951
and Martha Beck
6 May 1920 – 8 Mar. 1951

Raymond Fernandez and his common-law wife Martha Beck killed as many as 20 women between 1947 to 1949 after they would plunder them of life insurance, cash and other assets. They were convicted of three murders in New York and executed on 8 March 1951.

Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez

“The Lonely Hearts Killers”

- *During and after World War II, Raymond Fernandez swindled lonely women, some widows of soldiers he found through obituaries and others he would find through “lonely hearts” clubs advertized widely in true crime magazines.*
- *Martha Beck, a nurse in Pensacola, Florida, subscribed to Mother Dinene's Family Club for Lonely Hearts in 1947. Raymond wrote her a letter and went to visit her. Intending to swindle her, he left with \$2,000 she had “lent” him.*
- *She told friends, family and co-workers that she had married him. When she was abruptly fired, she showed up on his doorstep in New York.*
- *Fernandez revealed his real motives. Unfazed, Beck eagerly joined him as an accomplice, leaving her ailing mother, putting her children in an orphanage and posing as Fernandez' sister to the women.*

Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez

"The Lonely Hearts Killers"

- Advertisements like these ran mostly in true crime magazines. You might think of them as the craigslist personals through the mail.

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INC.
Greystone, IL. Box 207-FA

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Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez

“The Lonely Hearts Killers”

- Beck escalated their scheme to include murder when she sent Myrtle Young away on a bus overdosed on sleeping pills to Little Rock, Arkansas after she had willingly paid Fernandez \$4,000 to marry her so that her unborn child would have a legitimate father on record.*
- Next Fernandez, using the alias Charles Martin, married 66-year-old Janet Fay of Albany, New York and convinced her to give them \$4,000 in cash, jewelry and investments to help her open a hat shop in New York City. She got suspicious, and Beck killed her with a hammer. They packed her and belongings in a trunk she had brought with her. They buried her in the basement and poured new concrete over her.*
- Again using an alias, Fernandez planned to marry Delphine Downing of Grand Rapids, Michigan, a 41 year-old widow with a two-year-old daughter. Downing got suspicious before the wedding when she saw him without the toupee that Myrtle Young had given him. Fernandez shot Downing and Beck drowned her daughter in a bathtub. They buried the bodies in her basement.*

Dorothea Montalvo Puente:

“The Midtown Murderess”



Dorothea Puente
9 Jan 1929 to
27 Mar 2011



1426 ½ F Street
Sacramento, CA

Dorothea Puente rented rooms in her Sacramento, CA boarding home to mentally ill elderly men on Social Security, poisoned them, and then buried them in her yard. She was charged with nine murders in 1988, after neighbors complained of the smell and a social worker reported one of her tenants missing. She was convicted of three murders in 1993.

Dorothea Montalvo Puente: “The Midtown Murderess”

- She was popular with social workers and known for accepting difficult tenants and making fabulous home-cooked meals.
- By the time she was arrested, she was taking in more than \$5,000 per month of her victims Social Security pensions.
- In prison, she co-wrote Cooking with a Serial Killer with journalist Shane Bugbee. The book included 50 of her recipes, prison art she produced and an extensive multi-year, episodic interview with Bugbee.

