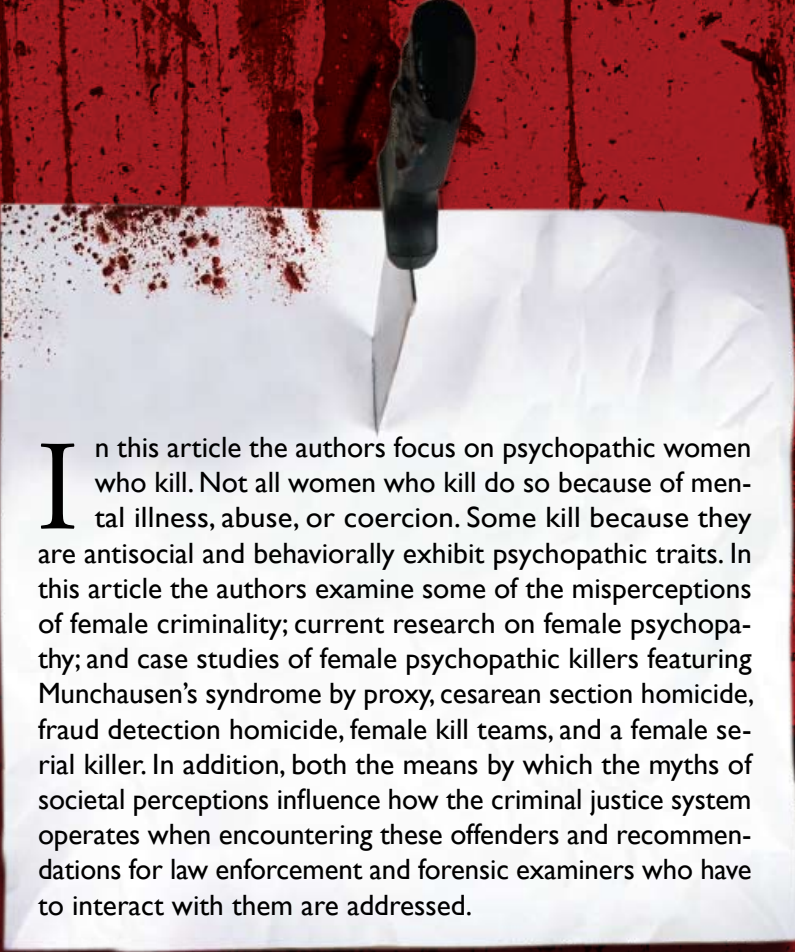


# THE LAST FRONTIER:

## Myths & the Female Psychopathic Killer

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In this article the authors focus on psychopathic women who kill. Not all women who kill do so because of mental illness, abuse, or coercion. Some kill because they are antisocial and behaviorally exhibit psychopathic traits. In this article the authors examine some of the misperceptions of female criminality; current research on female psychopathy; and case studies of female psychopathic killers featuring Munchausen's syndrome by proxy, cesarean section homicide, fraud detection homicide, female kill teams, and a female serial killer. In addition, both the means by which the myths of societal perceptions influence how the criminal justice system operates when encountering these offenders and recommendations for law enforcement and forensic examiners who have to interact with them are addressed.



## Introduction

Within the past 50 years, industrialized countries have witnessed the rise of women filling positions traditionally held by men. At one time, women were not thought of as capable of fulfilling such positions because of beliefs surrounding gender that were based on socio-cultural norms. Women were deemed less intelligent than men; thus, the thought of a well-educated woman appeared foreign. Moreover, women were thought of as the weaker sex and the thought of women participating in the military or in law enforcement was not tolerated. Yet as we have observed throughout the decades, myths surrounding what women are and are not capable of have dissipated over time.

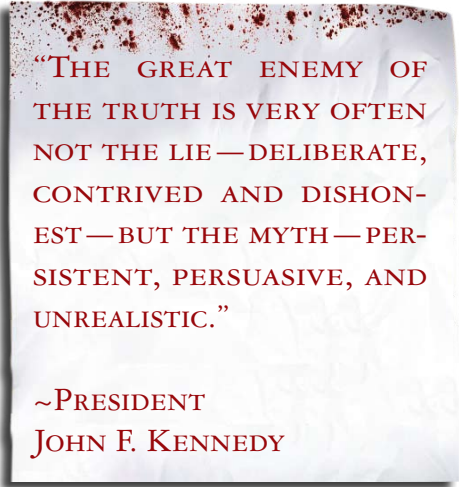
The authors believe the area of female criminality adheres to myths still accepted by the majority of society but has slowly been changing. While many areas of female progress are attributed to the empowerment of women historically, the study of female criminality (as opposed to the study of male criminality) has only recently been linked to antisocial behaviors instead of relying on socio-cultural explanations. Common and legitimate explanations used to rationalize homicides committed by females include killing because of a mental illness, coercion, or because they were abused (Follingstad et al., 1989). Such explanations, however, ignore the possibility that motives for both genders may be steeped in antisocial behaviors where violence is not necessarily reactive, such as claiming self-defense to a physically abusive situation, but planned in a cold-blooded manner facilitated by those who harbor psychopathic traits to satisfy diverse motives.

The purpose of this article is not to address whether there has been an increase in female violence and its potential causes, or to revisit already well documented statistics that show males tend to engage in more violent crimes than women. The goal of this article is to analyze homicides committed by women, the diverse motives for the kill, and the offender's psychopathic traits that may facilitate the use of murder to satisfy a motive. The article reveals that the underlying behavioral traits are gender neutral even though the methods and motives to kill may at times be gender specific and societal misconceptions still attribute gender specific explanations to crimes such as homicide.

Some of the issues the authors tackle to support the position that motives to kill are diverse and that some female killers exhibit

psychopathic traits include case studies on Munchausen's syndrome by proxy, fraud detection homicide, kill teams, female serial killers, and cesarean section homicide. The authors further examine how the criminal justice system displays the myth in terms of how it influences homicide trials. The authors conclude by cautioning forensic examiners and those in law enforcement to not succumb to misconceptions of gender-based violence when interacting with female psychopaths.

## Societal Perceptions or Misconceptions



**"THE GREAT ENEMY OF THE TRUTH IS VERY OFTEN NOT THE LIE—DELIBERATE, CONTRIVED AND DISHONEST—BUT THE MYTH—PERSISTENT, PERSUASIVE, AND UNREALISTIC."**

**~PRESIDENT  
JOHN F. KENNEDY**

The myth that females are not aggressive is being challenged in the literature as well as by the statistical evidence that influences society's view relative to the existence of the problem of female aggression (Denfeld, 1997). However, violent aggression is still considered the province of men, one of the most pervasive myths of our time (Pearson, 1997). Male dominance, as expressed through aggression, has been historically supported by a patriarchal society that viewed female aggression as a threat and, as an extension, unnatural and atypical (Jack, 1999). Dating back to at least 2500 BC, women were considered subservient to men and were punished for indiscretions according to written Greek and Roman law (Steinmetz, 1980). However, times have changed and women now participate in combat, work in law enforcement, and compete in the corporate world (Beckner, 2005). As for their criminal inclinations, Jack (1999) wrote, "And women hurt others. They abuse, kill, inflict harm on the human spirit, and dominate others through pain and intimidation ... Violence is not limited to men."

When the authors speak of myths, what we are referring to is not necessarily the mythological stories of antiquity. Although these stories may be relevant, our reference to myths is the more colloquial basis of some beliefs—which may or may not be accurate—that are extrapolated from fact or fiction and used to explain human behaviors, practices, societal ideals of a society, an individual(s), or a segment of society. For example, some beliefs may be based on a fictional story that conveys a truism about human behavior, such as the Greek story of Narcissus and the self-destructive behaviors of excessive pride. Conversely, some beliefs may be based on an interpretation of truthful facts that should not be used to provide an explanation for similar but different scenarios, though they may apply for a limited purpose. For example, some women kill because they were abused; however, this limited explanation should not be used as a general explanation of all motives for female homicide.

The authors understand the utility of myths because myths may serve a useful purpose in explaining life lessons—the problem that the authors observe is that the use of myths lacks completeness when applied to criminological elements. In essence, culturally we have forgotten how the ancients may have used myths to explain human behaviors in more complete terms that were gender neutral, such as the capability of depravity by both men and women. For example, we have cultural archetypes such as Mother Earth, which evokes a nurturing image of the female gender. Conversely, the image of Mother Nature also evokes images of wrath in which innocents are not spared; it is this aspect of the myth that tends to be ignored or denied when examining female aggression. Moreover, Freud and psychoanalytic theory were influential in the evolution of theories related to aggression; the influence of World War I on Freud's views increased his perception that aggression was mostly male and instinctual (Jack, 1999). Women functioned as a calming effect on the aggressive and/or sexual drives that moved men to violent behavior (Beckner, 2005). Those women who did not repress their anger were considered masculine, thus perpetuating the belief that aggressiveness in women was an anomaly. From a societal perspective, this assumption that aggression is an inherent characteristic to males, as passivity is to females, perpetuated a patriarchal structure

that was dominant until the feminist movement of the 1970s and still influences certain aspects of society today. Women who were aggressive were labeled irrational and in need of psychotherapy (Beckner, 2005).

Even from an evolutionary perspective, Darwin's views influenced societal perceptions of his belief that the success of human evolution was due, in large part, to the differences between males and females (Jack 1999). A female who exhibited perceived masculine characteristics (e.g. aggression) or a male who had feminine characteristics was considered to be reminiscent of less developed species (Beckner, 2005). Considering the opinions of Freud and Darwin alone, then coupled with religious and cultural views of how females are perceived, it is not surprising that myths of female aggression have persisted and have been perpetrated for as long as they have—the aggressive female is still considered to have an abnormal, unnatural quality even in the face of evidence illustrating criminal behavior that contradicts the myth of female passivity. As a result, the aggressive female was essentially considered an anomaly throughout the first half of the 20th century, and research pertaining to female aggression (let alone research on female psychopathy) is lacking, which suggests that a “male perspective” has biased research related to female aggression. A more complete study of aggression in females should consider various forms of aggression, both direct and indirect. Jack (1999) commented on the issue: Almost all of what psychologists have thought and felt about aggression has been shaped by a predominantly male perspective. This position is supported by the facts that much of the research conducted on female aggression has been associated with domestic violence or violence perpetrated on a significant other and that many in the social and behavioral sciences communities were unwilling to accept that women could be violent—and men the victims—when researchers examined the evidence of female on male aggression (Beckner, 2005).

When women commit violence, the only explanations offered have been that it is either involuntary, self-defense, the result of mental illness, or hormonal imbalances inherent with female physiology (Vronsky, 2007). Women have been perceived to be capable of committing only reactive or “expressive” violence—an uncontrollable release of pent-up rage or fear—and that they murder unwillingly and without premeditation.

As author and editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, Samuel Tanenhaus, stated, “female violence is stuck in a ‘time warp’ bound by themes of sexual and domestic trauma” (Wachter, 2010). Our belief in the intrinsic, non-threatening nature of the feminine is deceiving to both genders and actually exposes both to homicidal risks that are ignored because of long-internalized myths about female criminality. As we shall see in the next section on female psychopathy, some of the societal perceptions of female aggression may have influenced the lack of research on female psychopathy because it has not been seriously explored until recently. We will also look at how the myths that still surround female aggression are used by female psychopaths in what Dr. Robert Hare refers to as “impression management.”

## Female Psychopathy

“MOST OF THE PEOPLE I KILLED WERE OLD ENOUGH TO DIE, ANYWAY, OR ELSE HAD SOME DISEASE THAT MIGHT CAUSE DEATH. I NEVER KILLED CHILDREN. I LOVE THEM.”

~FEMALE SERIAL KILLER JANE TOPPAN (VRONSKY, 2007).

## Overview of the Disorder

According to Hare, international psychopathy expert from the University of British Columbia, the term or concept of “psychopathy” has had a long and sometimes confusing history. Dr. Hare states part of the conceptual confusion stems from the use of multiple terms to describe similar personality traits and behavioral patterns (e.g. moral insanity, psychopathic personality, sociopathy, antisocial personality) (Hare, 1991). The concept of psychopathy is no longer an actual clinical diagnosis but rather refers to a specific cluster of traits and behaviors used to describe an individual in terms of pervasive dominating personality traits and behaviors (Hare, 1993). Currently there is no diagnostic criterion in the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) (Semple, 2005). Psychopathy is most strongly correlated to the DSM-IV's antisocial personality

disorder (ASPD) and is considered a subset of ASPD because the behavioral traits of a psychopath are more severe in terms of lack of consciousness, callousness, and remorselessness. While psychopathy has similarities to ASPD, which is characterized by a disregard for societal rules including criminal behavior, psychopathy is not synonymous with or to be confused with criminality or violence in general. However, those who have psychopathic traits are more at risk for committing crime and acting out violently (Herve & Yuille, 2007).

The concept of psychopathy, however, has been studied for several hundred years before Dr. Hare refined the concept, beginning with French practitioner Philippe Pinel. Pinel observed patients whose behavior was outside of society's cultural expectations—but who were not clinically insane. The interest in psychopathy continued throughout the centuries until Dr. Hervey Cleckley delineated recurring behavioral traits of psychopathy in his book *The Mask of Sanity* (1941). Dr. Hare then took the traits delineated by Dr. Cleckley and devised an instrument referred to as the Psychopathic Checklist Revised (PCL-R), which measures whether or not psychopathy is present and the severity of the disorder. One should understand that psychopathy is not a mental illness but a personality disorder. Personality disorders can be characterized by a class of personality types which deviate from societal expectations of acceptable behavior. Although there is a subjective quality to diagnosing personality disorders, research has proven that those who have personality disorders display a rigidity or inflexibility in their thinking, feeling, and behaviors that impairs them from functioning with others in a larger societal context. In contrast to personality disorders, mental illness is characterized by a probability of a biochemical imbalance that may act as a catalyst for the individual to behave in an inexplicable, erratic manner that has no connection to such logic as cause and effect. For example, a person who is delusional and experiencing sensory hallucinations, like feeling as if he is on fire, would consequently have his thought processes disrupted. It is possible that a mentally ill person can premeditate a murder like a psychopath, but the question lies in the thought processes that led to the kill—and how erratic and illogical is their reasoning?

Keep in mind that understanding this aspect of psychopathy is important. One



## Notoriety follows Myra Hindley to the grave

Between 1963 and 1965, Myra Hindley helped her lover select his victims, waited as he raped and murdered them, then helped him dispose of their bodies in Manchester, England. The brutal killings of five children left an emotional scar on Britain that lingers to this day, almost a decade after Hindley's death from a chest infection in November 2002.

One reason for the enduring fascination with the case may be that the body of one of the victims, 12-year-old Keith Bennett, has never been found. In March 2010, after a public appeal for funds, a new search for the boy's remains began on Saddleworth Moor, where Hindley and her partner in crime, Ian Brady, disposed of three other victims (Smith, 2010). So far, the search has proved fruitless.

Hindley and Brady were convicted in 1966 in the murders of Lesley Ann Downey, age 10, and Edward Evans, age 17, and sentenced to life in prison. The death penalty for murder had

been abolished the previous year. Brady was also found guilty of the murder of 12-year-old John Kilbride, and Hindley was convicted of being an accessory. The two waited more than two decades to admit killing the other two victims, confessing in 1987 to the murders of Keith Bennett and Pauline Reade, age 16.

Dubbed "the most evil woman in Britain" and "the most hated woman in Britain" for her role in what came to be known as the Moors Murders, Hindley nevertheless gained prominent supporters during her 30-plus years in prison, including Lord Frank Longford and David Astor, former editor of *The Observer*. She also fought tirelessly—and unsuccessfully—for her own release.



Saddleworth Moor ▲

could simply claim to have some type of mental illness diagnosis attempt to explain away behavior that somehow was out of their control. Psychopathy is not a mental illness, although many psychopaths want others to believe that their antisocial ways are a result of a mental deficiency in order to gain favor, especially in criminal legal settings where a judge is required to impose a punishment. It is a common but mistaken belief among law enforcement and forensic professionals that people who commit violent, incomprehensible crimes must be crazy, psychotic, or they "just snapped." This perception is reinforced in the media (Herve & Yuille, 2007). Moreover, the fact that an individual may have a mental illness does not mean that she cannot also be psychopathic; the two characteristics are not mutually exclusive and co-occur (Murphy & Vess, 2003). Unfortunately, many individuals are capable of fooling professionals who observe "abnormal behavior." The professionals equate

the behavior to a mental illness and ignore the calculating, manipulating, and planning beneath the schemes; these are not the symptoms of someone who is mentally ill.

Dr. Hare described psychopaths as intraspecies predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and in feelings for others, they cold-bloodedly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret (Hare, 1993). The psychopathic theoretical model was first delineated by Cleckley (1941) in *The Mask of Sanity*, named as such to convey to the reader that psychopaths have a core deficit in emotional sensitivity beneath an overtly normal social exterior. The authors use this concept of the "mask" to ask whether or not the myth of the female character is used as the mask to convey normalcy in the face of aggression. The concept refined by Dr. Hare

identifies a number of personality and behavioral characteristics that have become a generally accepted definition of psychopathy.

Some of the major personality and behavioral traits identified by Hare are noted in Figure 1 below (Herve & Yuille, 2006).

Psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality, nor do they experience the delusions, hallucinations, or intense subjective distress that characterizes most other mental disorders. They are rational and aware of what they are doing and why. Their behavior is the result of choice, freely exercised, but coupled with a distorted sense of reality (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). As Edelgard Wulfert, forensic psychologist and professor at the University of New York at Albany, stated, "A psychopath invents reality to conform to his needs" (Grondahl, 2006). Psychopaths also have difficulty projecting into the future; that is, understanding how their actions play themselves out in life, and they also have deficits in reflecting upon their pasts; "[t]hey are prisoners of the present" (Meloy, 2000).

Clinical descriptions of the traits can be misleading. For example, to say that a psychopath is unable to learn from his or her experience is misleading because there is no mental incapacity; psychopaths *do* learn from the past, but learn only what interests them, not what society wants them to learn (Samenow, 1984). **To call them impulsive**

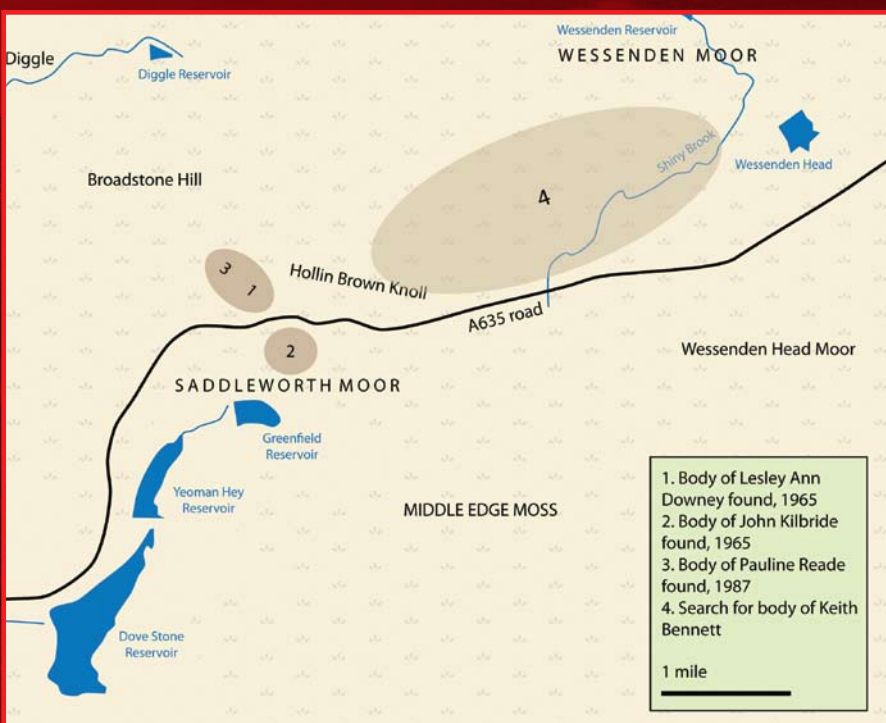
Figure 1: Major Personality Types

| Interpersonal          | Affective                        | Lifestyle               | Anti-Social               |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Superficial charm      | Remorselessness                  | Impulsivity             | Poor Behavioral controls  |
| Grandiosity            | Shallow affect                   | Stimulation seeking     | Delinquency               |
| Lying                  | Callousness                      | Irresponsible           | Criminal versatility      |
| Conning & manipulative | Failure to accept responsibility | Parasitic lifestyle     | Early behavioral problems |
|                        |                                  | Lack of realistic goals |                           |

Hindley and her defenders contend that her love for Brady led her to get caught up in his crimes. Hindley was 18 when she met Brady, an aloof stock clerk at the small chemical company where the two both worked. He had a minor criminal record and a fascination with Hitler and the writings of the Marquis de Sade.

According to a new biography of Hindley by Carol Ann Lee, titled *One of Your Own: The Life and Death of Myra Hindley*, her diary suggests she quickly became infatuated with Brady. By early 1962, Hindley wrote: "I hope Ian and I love each other all our lives and get married and are happy ever after" (Smith, 2010). In one of 150 letters to the producer of a 2000 BBC documentary on her case, Hindley wrote that Brady had "such a powerful personality, such an overwhelming charisma. If he'd told me the moon was made of green cheese or that

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is to assert a lack of self-control; in reality, psychopaths can rationalize. They have calculating minds that are very much in control. We observe predatory behaviors that are analogous to the animal kingdom—they stalk their prey and do not act impulsively, very analogous to instrumental violence of planning to kill, a trait of psychopathic killers that is more pronounced than in non-psychopathic killers who may kill reactively, such as a crime of passion (Herve & Yuille, 2006). However, some social and behavioral sciences experts are willing to accept that women may engage in reactive violence, such as engaging in self-defense, but refuse to accept the notion that females would be willing to take their time to plan a violent act (Pearson, 1997).

Moreover, do not confuse the lack of a normal range of emotions in these killers as synonymous with being antisocial; they can be very gregarious and charming, but their charming demeanor should not be mistaken for affection or sincerity. In fact, psychopaths want to be able to blend in with others to give the appearance that they too have values and traits that are probably diametrically the opposite of that of the psychopath; thus, the external mask of normalcy they portray to the world is used to shield the true mask of exploitation (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008a). Blame externalization is a hallmark trait of psychopaths,

as exemplified by female serial killer Jane Toppan, who admitted to killing over 30 individuals after nursing school. Toppan stated, "Don't blame me, blame my nature. I can't change what was meant to be, can I" (Vronsky, 2007). Toppan is partially correct that it was her "nature" that provided the catalyst to become a cold-blooded killer. She did not suffer from a mental illness that robbed her of her ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the ability to plan her murders, or experience sexual gratification from the deaths.

Although all of the traits are important, certain traits stand out more than others in terms of identifying psychopaths, and those will be presented in this article. Lack of remorse or guilt is the hallmark of psychopathy—in other words, a lack of conscience. Psychopaths do not feel bad for their actions because they are not capable of internalizing how their behavior had an impact on another person. Usually when we feel bad about what we did to hurt someone, an unsettling physical behavior accompanies the remorse. This quality does not apply to psychopaths; they are capable of fooling people with outward signs of emotions because they learned to mimic behaviors that dovetail a given set of circumstances while they themselves feel either nothing or entirely opposite emotions (Meloy, 2000).

## Gender Differences

Although men are more likely to show characteristics of psychopathy than women, Cleckley (1976) included female subjects among the prototype cases in the *Mask of Sanity*, suggesting that the full syndrome of psychopathy occurs in both genders. According to psychopathy expert Hare, there are many clinical accounts of female psychopaths but relatively little empirical research (Carozza, 2008). Reasons for the neglect of research on female psychopathy include the persistence of rigid sex role stereotypes in society and the diagnosis of personality disorders is, to a large extent, influenced by sex role expectations (Widom, 1978). This adherence to sex role stereotypes may explain the reluctance of some diagnosticians to label women with personality disorders that have an antisocial complexion (Brown, 1996). For example, when diagnosing men and women with similar clinical features, mental health professionals tended to label the men as exhibiting antisocial personality disorder and women as exhibiting histrionic personality disorder (Brown, 1996).

What is interesting about this observation is that the authors examined available, but different, editions of Cleckley's *Mask of Sanity* and the first mention of female psychopathy that the authors could locate appeared in the fifth edition, published in 1976. The authors consider whether Cleckley may have been unconsciously influenced by

the sun rose in the west I would have believed him" ("Hindley: I wish," 2000).

The crimes themselves were horrendous, the victims lured into a van or car by Brady while Hindley drove him through working-class areas of Manchester. Some the victims were photographed in pornographic poses before being raped and killed (Smith, 2010). Some were strangled; the last, Edward, was strangled and attacked with a hatchet. A tape recording played at trial of Lesley Ann pleading with her captors made it clear that Hindley was present at the time (Morris, 2002) and helped seal Hindley's fate.

Brady's desire to involve others in his crimes helped bring the killings to an end. He befriended David Smith, Hindley's brother-in-law, at first attempting to involve him in an armed robbery. While Smith was considering the robbery plan, he was summoned by Hindley to her house in Hattersley, where the two walked in to find Brady attacking Edward with an ax. Terrified, Smith played along with the "initiation," even helping Brady hide the body. The couple was so confident in his loyalty that he was allowed to go home, where he promptly called the police to report what he had witnessed (Smith, 2010).

During the trial, Hindley's defense argued that she had been subjected to threats, intimidation and violence from Brady

("Obituary: Myra Hindley," 2002). The tactic didn't work.

Incredibly, Hindley was apparently shocked at being sent to prison at the end of her trial, swaying as her sentence was announced. She reportedly asked her grandmother, "Do you remember how we both thought I'd be out on probation in no time?" (Smith, 2010).

Hindley and Brady wrote each other love letters during their first five years of incarceration, although he later called her a manipulative liar who was as committed to the murders as he had been ("Obituary: Myra Hindley," 2002). Brady claimed that Hindley had savored the murders, writing him letters in which she recalled them "lyrically," and even regarded them as "a substitute marriage ritual" (Smith, 2010). The two never saw each other again after the trial.

Hindley's argument that she had been corrupted by Brady appeared to have won her some sympathy. The judge who sentenced Hindley said, just two days after the trial, "Though I believe Brady is wicked beyond belief without hope of redemption, I cannot feel that the same is necessarily true of Hindley once she is removed from his influence" ("Obituary: Myra Hindley," 2002). A similar statement was made by the detective to whom she made her 1987 confession, Inspector Geoff Knupfer: "Had she not met Ian Brady and fallen in love with him, she would

sex role stereotypes referred to by Brown (1996) and Widom (1984) and reflected in his diagnosis of Anna, one of the two female psychopaths in the book. Cleckley described Anna as an individual with high intelligence, contagious enthusiasm, who worked out plans for a career with good judgment, and had a taste for living for healthy experiences. Yet the mask she wore for Cleckley did not match her true mask as reflected by her actions outside of Cleckley's presence. For example, Cleckley revealed Anna's pathological lying to her parents and others, manipulation of peers and authority figures, physical fights, forgery, document fraud, promiscuous sexual behaviors to rob others, expulsion from school for failing and misconduct, transmitting sexual diseases, urinating on peer clothing, thievery, and a lack of proper remorse for her acts still indicated that "Anna never really seems to have meant much harm to others or to herself." In Cleckley's words, she never meant to harm others, but the authors suspect Cleckley may have unconsciously harbored gender stereotyping by dismissing her criminal acts because they were not reflective of male aggression.

Ironically, the very behaviors behind the mask—not the mask of normalcy Anna displayed to Cleckley—were the reason Anna's parents brought her to Cleckley in the first place but that Cleckley minimizes. It is here that the authors part company with

Cleckley's analysis of Anna when he appears to relieve her of malice, perhaps not grasping that the end result of aggression does not have to mirror male aggression to be harmful. The authors' position is that the mask can seduce the diagnostician and in the analysis of Anna, Cleckley had difficulty attributing malice to the behaviors behind the mask—the very behaviors he had been trained to look for and acknowledge. For example, although Anna was charged with multiple counts of grand theft auto, he suggested that Anna's intent was not to keep the vehicles. During Anna's analysis, Cleckley does not pursue the behavior of Anna arranging specific times and places that she could meet with men under the pretext of a sexual encounter while she robbed them.

When Anna was expelled from one school, her parents were financially able to send Anna to a private school in another part of the country where she could start over. While at the new school, Anna wrote letters to her parents. Cleckley reports:

"In these letters she sometimes mentioned her conviction that she knew of no way to express her gratitude except to show by her own conduct that she did deserve the trust her mother and father had shown in her and the support of their love and understanding. No happiness could mean more than that she would find in making them feel they could be proud of her again."

This excerpt displays the "double talk" with which psychopaths are well endowed—saying one thing and doing another, telling people what they want to hear to buy themselves time to engage in the next scheme. What is in line with psychopathic reality is that Anna would continue to profess her innocence, claim to behave like a lady, and assert that she is trustworthy while showing no regard for the consequences of her behavior. **Anna's mask of innocence is rooted in her failed ability to form attachments or empathize with others, a hallmark trait of psychopathy.** In the final analysis, Cleckley leaves the reader with the consideration of "the possibility that such a person as Anna might be born with a subtle and specific biological defect" since he cannot find any environmental explanations (such as family dynamics, history of abuse, compulsive disorders, etc.) for the development of her behavior. The authors' question of the mask of innocence is more likely to be attributed to a female criminal than to a male. Cleckley further supports the assertion that Anna's criminal behavior falls within the lower range of antisocial when he states the following: "It is interesting to note that Anna, unlike so many whose conduct closely resembles hers in other respects, seems never to have committed a major felony or tried to do serious physical injury to another." It appears as if Cleckley is indicating that because

have fallen in love and got married and had a family and been like any other member of the public" (Smith, 2010). But Hindley herself wrote in 1994 that she was "wicked and evil" and that "without me, those crimes could probably not have been committed." ("Obituary: Myra Hindley," 2002).

In the 2000 BBC documentary, Hindley claimed she wished she had been hanged for her crimes. "It would have solved so many problems. The family of the victims would have derived some peace of mind and the tabloids would not have been able to manipulate them as they do to this day. I would have made a total confession to the priest before I hanged and would not still be half crippled by the burden of guilt that will not go away. But I didn't hang" ("Hindley: I wish," 2000).

The families of the victims were outraged by the documentary. Alan West, the father of Lesley Ann, asked: "Why can't the families be spared the constant indignity of Hindley's continuous publicity seeking?" ("Hindley, I wish," 2000). But the BBC defended its coverage, which coincided with a national debate over the length of life sentences.

Hindley caused no trouble during her years in prison, pursuing studies with the Open University, embracing religion, and claiming to be reformed. But she remained so reviled in Britain that when she died in 2002, the prison service couldn't find a

local undertaker willing to handle her remains and had to use one 200 miles away, and even the linens from her hospital room were destroyed to eliminate all trace of her (Smith, 2010).

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Anna's aggression does not dovetail male-like physical aggression, she is considered more harmless or less culpable. If Cleckley were predisposed to the myth of female criminality, then Anna's seduction of Cleckley would not be surprising.

Given the negative connotation of some of the traits inherent in psychopathy (such as being manipulative, remorseless, callous, parasitic, irresponsible, etc.), the reluctance to place the label of "psychopathic" on females is not surprising. This reluctance is due in part to the historical position that women are passive, emotional, nurturing, and self-sacrificing, and is coupled with the belief that female criminals are viewed as psychiatrically unstable (Brown, 1996). By labeling women as psychiatrically unstable, this removes accountability from their actions, which contradicts the diagnosis of psychopathy that clearly indicates that they are not suffering from some type of delusional thinking (Brown, 1996). Not only does the pervasiveness of the myth of the female character percolate into forensic studies of personality disorders that is in direct contradiction to the behavior displayed by female offenders but, as we shall see, the myth is also perpetuated in the legal setting with the assistance of forensic psychology and psychiatry. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that male and female psychopaths share similar interpersonal and

affective features, including egocentricity, deceptiveness, shallow emotions, and lack of empathy (Carozza, 2008). All will make maximum use of their physical attributes to deceive and manipulate others, but female psychopaths may be less prone than males to use overt, direct physical aggression to attain their needs (Carozza, 2008). **Researchers have found evidence of at least two broad categories of female psychopaths;** one category appears to be characterized by interpersonal deception, sensation seeking, proneness to boredom, and a lack of empathy, and the second category appears to be characterized by early behavioral problems, promiscuous sexual behavior, and adult, nonviolent antisocial behavior (Salekin et al., 1997).

However, as we shall see in this article, female psychopaths are willing to resort to brutal violence to attain their needs; violence is simply a solution that is available to them as other forms to control someone (such as deceit, manipulation, charming someone, etc.). While most of us have strong inhibitions to injure others, violence is a solution psychopaths use when they are angered, defied, frustrated that their narcissistic sense of entitlement is threatened, and give little thought to the pain and humiliation experienced by their victims. Their violence is callous and can be planned in order to satisfy a want, and psychopaths' reaction to their actions are likely to be indifferent, possibly

coupled with a sense of power, pleasure, and a smug satisfaction instead of remorse (Hare, 1991). Many of the personality and behavioral features associated with psychopathy in men are also found in women, and the more severe psychopathy in women has been linked to greater instances of violent and nonviolent offenses. However, researchers have only begun to investigate female psychopathy within the last 15 years since research has focused almost exclusively on the characteristics of male offenders. For example, do the traits that tend to predict male psychopathy apply in equal strength to women? Is female psychopathy expressed differently than male psychopathy?

Gender differences are clearly observed in the prevalence, severity, behavioral expression, and factor structure of psychopathy (Warren et al., 2003). However, the question is raised whether the differences found in psychopathy research to this point reflect actual gender-based differences or are the result of potential biases in sampling, diagnostic criteria, and/or assessment instruments. Moreover, disagreement remains in the most suitable factor solution for measuring psychopathy in females. What is certain is that although there may be differences of opinion on how psychopathy is expressed across gender or how it should be measured, the core traits of psychopathy (such as exploiting others or institutions for self-serving

reasons, lack of empathy, lack of remorse, blame externalization, etc.) hold true for both genders. At their core, especially male and female psychopathic killers, they harbor a depravity that stands outside our moral universe.

Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD) is characterized by traits reflecting pervasive attention-seeking behaviors that include inappropriate sexual seductiveness and exaggerated or shallow emotions—and appears to have the strongest relationship to psychopathy in female samples (Salekin et al., 1997). Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is characterized by a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy and appears to have a stronger relationship to male psychopaths than female psychopaths (Blackburn & Coid, 1998). Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is characterized by traits reflecting “black-and-white” thinking and instability in relationships, self-image, and behavior—appears to have a modest relationship with psychopathy, regardless of gender (Salekin et al., 1997). Given the overlap of personality traits with each other, there appears to be momentum to categorize subtypes of psychopathy into four types that can be empirically verified, namely psychopathy that may be categorized as narcissistic, antisocial, borderline, and histrionic personality disorders (Murphy & Vess, 2003).

**Female psychopaths were comparable to psychopathic males in terms of irresponsible lifestyles** (Rogers et al., 2007). Female psychopaths typically have higher unemployment rates, relationship instability, and dependency on social assistance programs, while male psychopaths tend to have higher rates of unlawful behavior and violent crimes (Salekin et al., 1998). Analysis of adolescent populations found gender differences in psychopathy related to violence. Specifically, nonviolent antisocial behavior appeared to be key to understanding psychopathy in females, whereas violent antisocial behavior was more important in males (Cruise et al., 2003). Sexual conduct has emerged in several studies differentiating between male and female psychopathy; specifically, female psychopaths appear to engage in more promiscuous sexual behavior than males (Grann, 2000).

These findings are likely due to gender specific socialization in which assumption of strong, dominant roles is expected and accepted more so for men than it is for women.

As a result, psychopathic female offenders appear to demonstrate significant concern regarding impression management, a propensity to portray themselves in the most favorable light to others, which has not been reported in male psychopathic offenders (O'Connor, 2002). This characteristic may play an instrumental role, as we shall observe, in whether they have more options for impression management by the myths that are available for them to exploit for their benefit, especially in a legal setting. Yet what is certain is that both male and female psychopaths are not affectionate, they do not value traditional social norms or close relationships, can be vengeful or physically violent, and victimize others for personal gain (O'Connor, 2002). Ratings of female psychopathy in youth reflected much less aggression than those of males (Salekin et al., 1997). Furthermore, Cruise et al. (2003) reported that (a) physical cruelty to people and/or animals and (b) bullying/threatening were prototypical of psychopathy in male but not female youth. Females with psychopathic traits might rely on different tactics than psychopathic males to achieve the same goals; for example, brute force in general is less likely to achieve the same results as men, thus women may resort to manipulation and flirtation as methods to achieve similar results (Nicholls & Petrila, 2005). In the next section, different motives to kill are examined.

### **Fraud Detection Homicide**

Fraud detection homicide refers to white-collar criminals, regardless of gender, who resort to murder to silence those that may have detected or are in a position to detect fraud that a white-collar criminal perpetrates (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). These white-collar killers silence their victims in order to prevent them from divulging what they have discovered or could discover to law enforcement. These killers exhibit significant psychopathic traits that apply to both genders who exhibit extreme remorseless brutality (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). Fraud detection homicide cases overwhelmingly illustrate instrumental (planned) violence.

### **The Nancy Siegel Case**

Jack Watkins, a widower, supported himself comfortably in his retirement years until he met Nancy Siegel. Watkins, 30 years senior to Siegel, met her in the fall of 1994, when she sold him a burial vault; soon thereafter

the relationship became romantic. Within months after meeting him, Siegel began using Watkins' personal information to open new accounts and had persuaded him to buy her thousands of dollars of luxury items and real estate. Siegel exerted as much control over Watkins' financial affairs as she needed to have the ability to commit financial fraud to support her lifestyle; she isolated him from his family to inoculate herself from being discovered by them. On May 14, 1996, Watkins' emaciated body was found near an access point to the Appalachian Trail in Loudoun, Virginia. The body was stuffed inside two duffel bags and then stuffed into a footlocker. The cause of death was cervical compression, and there were bruises and other marks on the body consistent with manual strangulation. A toxicology analysis revealed that Watkins' blood and liver contained toxic levels of an over-the-counter medication with sedative effects, which suggested that Watkins had been ingesting extremely high levels of the medication for a period of weeks or months.

In January 2003, nearly seven years after Watkins was murdered, Virginia law enforcement officials identified his body through military fingerprint records and determined that Siegel had been receiving his Social Security checks. After a few months of investigating and watching Siegel, postal inspectors and an FBI agent approached Siegel after she had retrieved Watkins' Social Security check from her post office box. She agreed to be interviewed and initially claimed that Watkins was alive and well, living in Pennsylvania with a woman named Ruth; but when the investigators told Siegel they knew what she was doing, she never provided them with any details about Watkins' death, except to say that “[i]t didn't happen the way you think.” The prosecution argued that Siegel murdered Watkins to prevent him from discovering and reporting her fraudulent crimes, a classic case of fraud detection homicide. Siegel was found guilty of murder.

### **The Sante Kimes Case**

After the victim, David Kazdin, detected that his colleagues, Sante and Kenny Kimes, had committed mortgage fraud in which they obtained a \$280,000 loan in his name, he began receiving threatening telephone calls from Sante demanding that he cooperate with the fraud scheme. Kenny indicated that it was his mother who made the decision to kill Kazdin after she stated to Kenny, “He

knows too much and we got to do something about him, we're going to have to kill him." As Kenny left Sante to kill David, Sante said to Kenny, "Good luck. Do a good job." According to the statement given by Kenny Kimes, when he went to Kazdin's home, he followed Kazdin into the kitchen and shot him in the back of the head in his own home. After the killing, Kenny stated that he felt high from the killing and stopped by a florist shop to buy his mother flowers. Kenny stated, "In my mindset, I thought that I had completed a great duty for my mom. I felt that it was a significant completion and I wanted to celebrate." In an attempt to control the impression others would form of her, during the trial, Sante told the jury that she loved Kazdin and "God bless him wherever he is. I need his help. I wish he was here today."

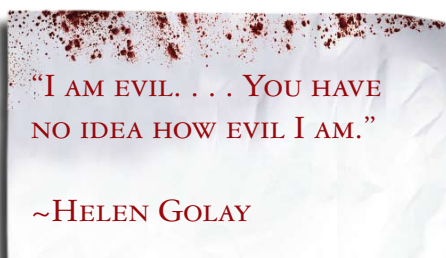
As an interesting side note, in order to avoid the death penalty, Kenny testified against his mother. He disclosed that he and his mother had drugged a 55-year-old banker by the name of Syed Ahmed. As Ahmed struggled against the sedative effects of the drugs, Sante and Kenny would take turns holding his head under water in a bathtub. In another case in which Sante and Kenny murdered 80-year-old Irene Silverman with the motive of fraudulently obtaining her residence in Manhattan, the sentencing judge stated, "It is clear that Ms. Kimes has spent virtually all her life plotting and scheming, exploiting, manipulating and preying upon the vulnerable and the gullible at every opportunity" (King, 2002). Forensic psychologist Dr. Arthur Weider stated that Sante demonstrated psychopathic personality features with "no guilt, conscience, remorse or empathy," adding that Sante was "socially charming, arrogant, full of herself [and] ego-centric coupled with a superiority complex" (King, 2002).

### Kill Teams

About 68 percent of female serial killers operate alone, while the other 32 percent kill with either a male or female partner. Sometimes the male partner is dominant and at other times it is the female who is dominant. **It is in the male-female serial killer partnerships that women participate in sexual homicides.** Female-female serial killer partnerships are a unique complex phenomena and what is interesting about the Golay and Rutterschmidt case is not only is there a female-female kill team, but that they are

in their 70s, debunking the myth that age slows down the psychopathic killer. Often, regardless of gender, two meet and establish an intimate familiarity that allows them to share fantasies that may be violent; when eroticized, this approval encourages acting out (Ramsland, 2007). However in the kill teams represented here, it was all business with no indication that their motive was to act out a fantasy.

### The Case of Helen Golay and Olga Rutterschmidt



In April 2008, jurors found Olga Rutterschmidt, 75, and Helen Golay, 77, guilty of first-degree murder for the deaths of homeless men Kenneth McDavid, 50, and Paul Vados, 73 (Deutsch, 2008). Prosecutors said the women recruited their prey from among the homeless of Hollywood and invested thousands of dollars in insurance policies on them by providing food and lodging (Keith, 2008). According to the prosecution, they took care of the men to the extent they needed them to stay alive for two years, the period in which insurers could not contest the policies for possible fraud. Golay collected more than \$348,000 in life insurance proceeds from more than half-dozen insurance companies, while Rutterschmidt collected more than \$246,000 from Vados's death. Golay collected more than \$1.5 million and Rutterschmidt more than \$674,000 after McDavid's death.

After the two-year waiting period, Golay and Rutterschmidt would drug the men and then drive them to a secluded alley and run them over until they were dead. According to appellate court documents, while in custody, they discussed the circumstances of their arrests without knowledge that they were being videotaped. Rutterschmidt said: "That is very serious, everything dragged into Paul [Vados]." Rutterschmidt again blamed Golay for "mak[ing] all these extra insurances ... You were greedy. That's the problem. That's why I get angry. We had no problem with the relationship. You pay me and be nice and don't make extra things. I

was doing everything for you." During the trial the jury saw the recorded videotape of the two; Rutterschmidt berated Golay, saying her actions in taking out 23 insurance policies raised a red flag when the men died. Rutterschmidt told Golay: "You cannot make that many insurances. It's on your name, only." Golay responded that she did not want to talk to Rutterschmidt, but the latter told her, "[Y]ou have to because you did all the insurances extra. That's what raised the suspicion. You can't do that. Stupidity." Golay answered: "All they're after is mail fraud. It is no mail fraud involved." As the discussion continued, Golay reasserted that the insurance companies were complaining against them for "mail fraud"—"They have nothing else." They discussed suing the insurance companies to get the benefits that had been denied.

Interestingly, the defense for Golay said, "This case is about the insurance industry retaliating against Helen Golay and Olga Rutterschmidt. ... They don't like the fact that two little old ladies are involved in an insurance scam. ... They are going to teach them a lesson. ... This is a nightmare for her. ... It's unfortunate that two men are dead." The defendant's attorneys characterized the women as grandmotherly types, two "little old ladies" not physically capable of this (Pringle, 2008). Interestingly, Golay stated to her hairdresser, "I am evil... You have no idea how evil I am" (Huck, 2008). She laid out a scenario where a woman marries an older man, insures his life, and then uses Viagra to engineer a heart attack. Homeless people, Golay stated, were parasitic. As for the people left homeless by Hurricane Katrina: "she said those people were nothing. . . . They were just on welfare . . . they were useless to society" (Huck, 2008). Yet Golay, in attempting to control the impression others would form of her, said that McDavid "loved them and that he wanted to be part of our family" (Pringle & Kim, 2008).

Neither of the women trusted each other, and Golay tried to get Rutterschmidt's name removed from one of the policies. What is truly bizarre is that when Golay tried to change the fraudulently obtained insurance policies, Rutterschmidt called the insurance company and stated, "I want to report a fraud. ... I'm the fiancée, she [Golay] is not the fiancée" (Kim, 2008). Speaking in a heavy accent, Rutterschmidt began ranting and raving like a lunatic that Golay had committed fraud by listing herself as the



beneficiary on the policies (Kim, 2008). Interestingly, Golay described Rutterschmidt as “crazy, very explosive, very loud . . . hard to deal with in public” (Pringle & So, 2008b). Yet Golay’s daughter Kecia described her mother exhibiting “thirty years of psychopathic behavior” (Pringle & So, 2006a).

### **Instrumental Homicide Versus Reactive Homicide**

One of the interesting aspects of the cases presented so far and those to follow is that they represent murders that are planned consistent with research on the link between instrumental murder and psychopathy. Psychopathy appears to be one of the strongest predictors of aggression and violence, and the distinct psychopathic traits of lack of empathy and lack of remorse are the best indicators of aggression, especially in unprovoked aggression that is observed in the cases in this article (Reidy, et al., 2008a). Psychopaths tend to engage in violence, especially homicide, in a more predatory, instrumental manner and are willing to take their time to plan the kill as contrasted to non-psychopathic killers (Herve & Yuille, 2007). The behavior of the psychopath often is motivated by a clear goal, void of emotional reactivity, rather than a powerful emotion of rage or despair associated with crimes of passion (Woodworth & Porter, 2002).

For a homicide to be instrumental, the offense had to have been clearly goal oriented in nature with no evidence of an immediate emotional or situational provocation; the catalyst for the homicide has to be attributed to something other than spontaneous anger (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). In contrast, for reactive violence to be present there must be strong evidence for a high level of spontaneity/impulsivity and a lack of planning surrounding the commission of the offense; thus a rapid and powerful affective reaction prior to the act with no apparent goal other than to harm the victim immediately following a provocation/conflict (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Reactive violence is more illustrative between family members and acquaintances, while instrumental violence is more illustrative of violence between strangers (Woodworth & Porter, 2002).

In fact, the mistake many in law enforcement make when they learn of a homicide that is between acquaintances is that the killer must have been angry; yet if the individual was psychopathic, then emotion had nothing to do with the kill—murder was a solution to

achieve a goal (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008b). Because their violence is often instrumental and committed without intense emotion, psychopaths would be less distraught and immobilized with fear or confusion in post-offense behavior (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). This post-offense attribute is especially evident in the Munchausen syndrome by proxy offenders, fraud detection homicides, and the cesarean section homicide offenders, which should serve as a clue to investigators as to whom they should consider potential suspects.

**The absence of emotion actually assists them in planning the kill and not killing reactively because a time requirement to predation is not necessarily present** (Meloy, 2000). If there is an absence of emotions, empathy, and the ability to form attachments to others, what replaces these human qualities? According to Dr. Liane Leedom, the inability to have emotions is replaced by the motivation for dominance, control or power; to them, having power over another is the pleasure (Leedom, 2006). For those psychopaths who view homicide as an acceptable and ultimate solution to controlling others, Dr. Leedom’s views are accurate. Another way to think about what replaces these human qualities is to consider Dr. Martha Stout’s assessment when she states that life, in essence, is reduced to a contest and human beings are nothing more than game pieces to be moved about, used as shields or destroyed—it’s about winning to satisfy an intrapsychic need (Stout, 2005).

Research also has shed light on the fact that the narcissistic subdimension of psychopathy is linked to the probability that a psychopath will resort to violence (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2006). The authors caution that narcissism is not the cause of violent aggression but should be understood as a risk factor, like psychopathy, that has been empirically linked to violent aggression, especially when someone has threatened their highly favorable views of themselves by not agreeing with them or through a perceived insult that to others are viewed as harmless (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Moreover, recent scholarship has identified that narcissists who displayed traits of extreme entitlement and exploitation of others to achieve their goals were more likely to resort to extreme forms of aggression and deleterious violence against innocent people even in the absence of provocation (Reidy, et al., 2008b). Some researchers have posited that the pathological

form of narcissism is actually psychopathy in that when egocentricity, lack of empathy, and sense of superiority of the narcissist blends with the impulsivity, deceitfulness, and criminal tendencies of the antisocial, the result is a psychopathic individual who seeks gratification of selfish impulses through any means without remorse or empathy (Millon & Davis, 2000).

Psychopaths committing instrumental violence did not display a state of heightened emotional arousal at the time of the murder as contrasted to non-psychopaths whose reactive murders exhibited an emotional discharge such as “jealousy, rage, or a heated argument during the offense” (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Thus the rage displayed by a psychopath should not be confused with the emotion-based rage that Woodworth and Porter refer to and that law enforcement erroneously concludes when they do not have any insights into the behavioral profile of a suspect. Quite the opposite holds true; psychopaths’ display of rage in the context of instrumental violence represents a dispassionate expression of their devaluation of others where murder is a viable option to satisfy their motives. Because they lack empathy, do not have the ability to anticipate remorse, and devalue others, instrumental violence is possible, especially given that their diverse motives to kill are not emotionally driven as they might be for a non-psychopath who engages in reactive murder.

### **Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy: Psychopathic Mothers and Caregivers**

**Interviewer:** So when you were, you know, ready to do this thing, what was going through your head.

**Female Killer:** All I knew was that I was gonna do this thing, and there wasn’t anybody gonna stop me. I thought about it a lot, how I was gonna do it. The first one, the one I was charged with, I watched her sleeping before I . . . her mouth was open, and I put my hand over like this (displays putting hand over the girl’s nose and mouth). It was warm, you know, her breath on my hand. She kicked a couple of times, but I held her down because she was so little. I can’t remember nothing after that.

**Interviewer:** Was there anything on her, like marks or anything someone could see?

**Female Killer:** No. I was good at not leaving no marks. It wasn't hard because they were so little. It was like they was sleeping, and all I had to do was...that's all I remember.

— Statement of female serialist (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000).

Munchausen syndrome by proxy (MSBP) is a severe form of child abuse in which a parent or caretaker fabricates symptoms on behalf of another causing that person to be regarded as ill; the diagnosis has been widely accepted by clinicians in medically related fields (McKee, 2006). The persistent and repetitive inducement of serious injury or illness is a commonly reported characteristic of MSBP (Gross, 2008). Because MSBP entails deliberate injury to a victim through life-threatening methods such as poison or suffocation, the disorder has been considered to have an extremely high mortality rate. Within MSBP research, mothers are the most common perpetrators, but men have also engaged in MSBP, as well as caretaker daughters of elderly parents (Ben-Cherit & Melmed, 1998).

Syndromes are usually characterized by evidence that a particular person shares a particular behavior that is characteristic of a larger class of people. Syndromes are often used at trial as a justification of why someone may have killed, such as battered child syndrome. The authors caution, however, that the use of syndromes is fraught with abuse, particularly a psychological syndrome that can almost never successfully diagnose the causes of criminal conduct (Mosteller, 1996). When these pathological behaviors are labeled syndromes, professionals often fail to see people with MSBP to be in complete control of their behavior in that they have not lost touch with reality.

Dr. Geoffrey McKee, forensic psychologist and clinical professor at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, had the opportunity to evaluate hundreds of murder defendants, including women such as Susan Smith who strapped her children in her car and then allowed the car to run into a body of water, drowning them. In his book, *Why Mothers Kill* (2006), Dr. McKee outlines multiple behavioral reasons why mothers kill their children ranging from the psychotic/depressed mother, the abusive/neglectful mother to the psychopathic mother who exhibits MSBP. Dr. McKee indicates that mothers who demonstrate narcissistic

and psychopathic traits are found in persons with MSBP, further stating “few of us can imagine someone who could deliberately and repeatedly injure a child and then deceptively thwart the well-intentioned efforts of medical personnel to successfully treat the highly vulnerable victim.” **Abandonment or neglect of biological children is more diagnostic of psychopathic women**, and this observation makes sense given psychopathic inability to bond with others in emotional/humanistic manner (Strachan, 1993). Hundreds of infants and young children die at the hands of their mothers, and newborns are abandoned in public or are discarded and left uncovered to die. Although many may be mentally ill and be housed in forensic hospitals, women convicted of killing their children will display a wider array of characteristics, including those of psychopathic mothers (McKee, 2006).

In a deceitful way, the mother destroys the child that supports the myth of motherhood in order to satiate her narcissism. During the pregnancy, the mother is the center of attention and the need for narcissistic attention is fed; but once the child is born the attention shifts to the well-being of the child, and the perceived benefits of motherhood, the attention, are replaced by the realities of parenthood. Thus the mother attempts to project the myth of the nurturing and caregiving female by placing herself in the role of the heroic mother who saves her child. Placing herself in the role of the mother-hero garners the narcissistic approbation she craves by usurping the myth to her benefit at the expense of the child who was simply a means to an end. For these women, children, like a commodity, are objects to be used for self-gratification. The value of the child is dependent on what they get out of them; if they are more valuable alive, then they are kept alive, but if they happen to die, they can always have another without remorse. It was never about upholding the myth of motherhood; the myth was a guise for their narcissism because these mothers never formed any real attachments/bonding to their children in the first place, symptomatic of psychopathy.

Part of the problem in the detection of MSBP and caregiver abuse is that the deaths can be staged, victims might be too young or too old to not rule out a medical explanation, there are no outward signs of foul play, no marks, no weapons, no struggle, natural death is plausible, and no outward

signs of caretaker stress that might be an indication of wrongdoing to law enforcement, because psychopaths are capable of holding themselves up under a perceived stressful situation without showing emotion because there were no emotions to manage in the first place. Yet it is this lack of emotion that should be a sign that law enforcement should not ignore when investigating a potential suspect. The mother of a dead child gets a lot of attention from the ambulance crew, the emergency-room folk, the doctors, the nurses, the social workers, and then she gets attention from family, friends, neighbors, the funeral home, and clergy (Brown, n.d). Then when the excitement dies down, she starts the process all over again.

Marybeth Tinning, over the course of 14 years, kept taking her kids to the hospital and collecting flowers at their funerals until she was eventually found to have killed nine of them. She was a “predator” and a woman who “located her well-spring of power in maternity” (Pearson, 1997). The mystery of how these women eluded suspicion is really no mystery at all; they were accomplished liars, and it helped that medical science had settled on sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) as an explanation. Above all, argues Pearson (1997), these women got away with their crimes for years because so few of us are willing to acknowledge that women are as capable of cool and calculating brutality as men are, again relying on the myth that females are incapable of such monstrosities.

In November 1997, the *Journal of Pediatrics* published the results of a terrifying experiment; doctors at several hospitals in Great Britain had decided to covertly videotape 39 parents—most of them mothers—whom medical personnel had begun to suspect were deliberately bringing their young children to the brink of death (Southall et al., 1997). In 30 of the 39 cases, the parents were observed intentionally suffocating their children; in two they were seen attempting to poison a child; in a third, the mother under surveillance deliberately broke her 3-month-old daughter's arm. Many of the parents seemed as methodical and as brazen, as scoured of fear or conscience, as any serial killer. “Abuse was inflicted without provocation and with premeditation, and in some instances, involved elaborate and plausible lies to explain consequences” (Southall et al., 1997). For example, one mother claimed that she had suffocated her son because of



stress related to his crying and continually waking her from sleep. However, under surveillance, the mother was seen, with premeditated planning, to suffocate her infant when he was deeply asleep.

The majority of other cases showed attempted suffocation when the child was asleep or lying passively on the bed. The disturbing feature was that these were women (and a few men) who masqueraded as good parents, the sort who rushed their children to the emergency room when they had trouble breathing, and stood by them with fortitude and devotion while the doctors puzzled out what was wrong. They were conning; they could give the appearance of the concerned mom the minute a doctor or nurse walked in the room, enjoy the social prestige of a mysterious disease, the proximity to powerful medical professionals, they liked the attention and the drama—the wail of the sirens, the adrenalin rush of the emergency room (Brown, n.d.). With further investigation, it turned out that the 39 patients under surveillance, ages 1 month to nearly 3 years old, had 41 siblings, and that 12 of those siblings had died suddenly and unexpectedly.

### Cesarean Section Homicide

Cesarean section homicide is based on the motive to obtain a baby by murdering the natural mother and removing the baby from the womb through cesarean section. The behavioral profile of these women suggests that the abductors use a confidence style approach to the victim mother whom they have befriended, deceived, conned, or recently met (Burgess et al., 2002). The offenders faked their pregnancies by gaining weight, wearing baggy clothes, setting up nurseries, showing friends fake sonograms, and stalking their victims (Geberth, 2006). Cutting instruments such as knives are used, but a tool as simple as a pair of car keys was used to cut the mother open, and methods of killing the mother include strangulation and gunshot (Burgess et al., 2002). The abductors carefully planned the murder attempting to effectively cover up their crime and avoid detection; this behavior is more consistent with psychopathy than psychosis (Geberth, 2006). **Some of the women kill for their own purposes, while others do so to please a male partner** (Burgess et al., 2002).

Narcissistic traits of extreme entitlement and exploitation coupled with psychopathic traits of remorselessness and lack of empathy are risk factors to consider, given that the desire of the mother is not to bond with the child, but to garner more attention that accompanies motherhood via remorseless and brutal violence (Brown, 2009). The narcissistic blow over not being able to have a baby because of fertility problems may play a role

in the motive, but this is not always the case where women abducted the child to sell it for profit (Burgess et al., 2002). In addition, the alleged motive of their overwhelming desire to have a child is muted by cases in which the woman kills to take the child but also voluntarily had tubal ligation to prevent pregnancy. Interestingly,

MSBP and cesarean section homicide are the flip sides of the same mythical coin in that the women destroyed objects

that gave rise to the myth they exploited to support their narcissistic sense of entitlement.

The murder of Bobby Jo Stinnett by Lisa Montgomery is one such cesarean section homicide. Although Montgomery knew Stinnett through their mutual dog-breeding interests and a related Web site, Montgomery signed on the Web site with a different username in order to make an appointment with Stinnett about buying a dog. The day before the murder, Montgomery drove her car from her Malvern, Kansas, home to Stinnett's home in Skidmore, Missouri, in what police said was a practice run, and Montgomery ordered a birthing kit online and studied how to perform a cesarean section. After being arrested for the crime, Montgomery was recorded in a telephone call with her husband saying that she was "messing with" the psychiatrists by saying she heard voices. Interestingly, the defense attempted to explain her behavior by showing the jury brain scans, arguing that she could not stop herself from committing the crime because of an abnormality in the region of the brain that controlled aggression. Consider that neurobiological impairments may be considered risk factors for antisocial behavior, but this method of assessment should not be over-interpreted as representing a causal one-to-one relationship with behavior (Glenn & Raine, 2009). An abnormality in a particular brain region does not imply that the abnormality was the cause of a specific crime (Glenn & Raine, 2009).

The medical examiner, Dr. Mary Case, told the jury that the large amount of blood on the bottom of Stinnett's feet showed she had her feet flat on the floor—either standing or sitting with her knees raised—when she was cut. "The evidence to me (Dr. Case) shows that she regained consciousness while the incision was being made, a struggle ensued and she was strangled again" (Stafford, 2007). Meanwhile, several witnesses from Montgomery's hometown testified about her actions and demeanor after she said she had given birth. Five women who knew Montgomery said she and her husband were ecstatic about their new baby girl and she showed no signs of being upset; she answered all of their questions about giving birth to the child.



## Serial Killer: The Psychopathy of Aileen Wuornos

"EVERYBODY HAS A RIGHT TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THAT'S WHAT I DID. THESE WERE VIOLENT, VIOLENT RAPES, AND THE OTHER ONES I HAD TO BEG FOR MY LIFE."

~AILEEN WUORNOS  
(VRONSKY, 2007).

It is estimated that serial murder accounts for about 0.5-1.0% of all murders or about 70-140 victims per year (McNamarra & Morton, 2004). Only small percentages, about 5-10%, of the perpetrators are believed to be female (Hickey, 2002). Unfortunately, there are no reliable national or international data to accurately determine the prevalence of female serial killers. Many of these women are labeled psychopathic (Brown, n.d.). Unlike their male counterparts who usually kill for sexual reasons, most female serial murderers kill either for money, excitement, and power, often in institutional settings such as hospitals and nursing homes (Wilson & Hilton, 1998). Of a total of about 400 serial killers identified between 1800 and 1995 in the United States, nearly 16%—a total of about 62 killers—collectively killed between 400 and 600 victims (Hickey, 2002). **More than a third of the female serial killers made their appearance since 1970**, and the numbers keep increasing (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Regrettably, the huge increase in the number of female serial killers has been ignored by the media, and not surprisingly law enforcement agencies and society as a whole fail to realize that women are capable of such brutality (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). The authors believe that such figures are conservative given that many female serialists kill at home or at work in the capacity of caretakers such as nurses, babysitters, etc. where a child's mysterious death could be explained away as a medical anomaly or to old age.

Attacks occur in accepted social and professional relationships, while the means to kill are often surreptitious like poison, drug overdose, or sudden suffocation; the murder in essence becomes hidden because of the belief that someone who established a

bonding relationship with the child would not kill (such as a nurturing nurse, mother, caretaker, etc.). Many female serialists tend to use poison and trap their victims on territory that is familiar to them and is shared with the victim (Vronsky, 2007). Female serial killers tend to have longer killing careers than men, presumably because their crimes are more carefully planned, methodical, precise and "hidden" on the whole (Hickey, 2002). As for other serial crimes committed by women, some aid their boyfriends and husbands in abducting, torturing, and killing women; such was the kind of assistance Karla Homolka gave her husband, Paul Bernardo, when they killed Karla's sister and two other school girls.

"I KILLED THOSE 7 MEN 1ST DEGREE MURDER AND ROBBERY...NOT SO MUCH FOR THRILL KILL; I WAS INTO THE ROBBERY BIZ. I WAS INTO THE ROBBERY AND TO ELIMINATE WITNESSES...I PRETTY MUCH HAD 'EM SELECTED THAT THEY WERE GONNA DIE...THERE WAS NO SELF-DEFENSE."

~AILEEN WUORNOS (MYERS, 2005).

Aileen Wuornos, 34 years old at the time of the murders, admitted to killing seven men in a one-year period between 1989 and 1991. It should be noted that Wuornos' upbringing can be described as nothing short of horrendous, and her borderline personality disorder could be partially caused by her traumatic upbringing and the physical and sexual abuse inflicted upon her (Myers, 2005). In this case Wuornos scored a 32 out of a possible 40 on the Hare Psychopathic Checklist Revised, placing her in the moderate to severe range of the disorder (Myers, 2005). She also met the criteria for borderline personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder. In Wuornos' case, it is impossible to separate her abusive upbringing from biological predispositions toward violent criminality inherited from her absent father (Arrigo & Griffen, 2004). As an interesting side note, Wuornos is atypical of

other female killers in that she appears to have killed strangers in public as opposed to family and acquaintances in private settings where women can operate with less scrutiny. Prior to her execution by lethal injection, Wuornos admitted that if she was ever released from prison or if she had not been arrested, she had planned to kill a minimum of 12 men (Myers et al., 2005). One can observe the psychopathic traits of blame externalization, egocentricity and lack of remorse in her television interview with *Dateline* where Wuornos stated to the victim's family, "You husband raped me violently, Mallory and Carskaddon [the victims' husbands]. And the other five tried, and I went through a heck of a fight. You owe me, not me owe you" (Vronsky, 2007).

## Criminal Trials: The Ultimate Display of the Myth

"REMEMBER, I LOOK INNOCENT. IMPRESSION IS WORTH AS MUCH AS FACTS."

~CAROL BUNDY (PEARSON, 1997).

Female serialist Carol Bundy's statement to Doug Clark, the co-defendant, could have easily replaced the word "impression" with the word "myth"; the "myth" is worth as much as facts. Our legal system functions, especially criminal trials, as a funnel that captures our societal myths, which empty and reveal themselves onto the legal stage to persuade others to accept their message as fact. One would naturally think that from a criminal perspective, those who have to defend female killers would be the ones who would most rely on myths to persuade others, most notably a jury, that because she is female she does not have the capability, either because she was coerced, abused, exhibited mental illness traits, or purely for gender stereotypical reasons, to engage in heinous acts that men do. Yet the reality is that prosecutors and the courts rely on the myth if they must in making decisions either for trial strategy or for punishment.

Information is relatively sparse on how offenders manage the image they present to the criminal justice system. It is difficult to determine the extent to which people's in-

teraction involves impression management or self-presentation, which is the process by which a person tries to control the impressions that other people have of him or her; one can clearly observe from Carol Bundy's quote that she understood the power of impression management. Impression management is relevant to the investigation and prosecution of crime, interviews and court proceedings, yet it has remained a relatively unexplored concept in forensic psychology. Psychopaths in the legal system use impression management to control the players in the system such as detectives and prosecutors, and this should not be surprising when the need to control and win is so very important to these individuals (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009).

Impression management should be taken seriously, considering how the myth is used in court to convey messages to the jury. For example, Diane Downs, the woman who killed her two children by shooting them, came to her jury trial pregnant, projecting the image that a mother could not commit such an act. Golay and Rutterschmidt projected a disposition of two elderly, grandmotherly-like women, and Karla Homolka projected the image that she was under the control over her husband when she helped kill three young women. The power of impression management being used to gain favor by decision makers, such as judges or jurors, should not be taken lightly, especially when dealing with psychopathic killers facing trial (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). For example, after serving her sentence for killing three young women, Homolka appealed common restrictions that are placed on homicide parolees (such as reporting new addresses, abstaining from using narcotics, provide DNA samples to authorities, entering therapy, etc). Superior Court Justice James Brunton granted her appeal to have these restrictions lifted because she had no record of violence in prison.

In the Golay and Rutterschmidt case, the defense used the myth of age and gender to try to convince the jury that they are innocent. University of Southern California law professor Jean Rosenbluth stated that "The prosecution has to be worried that one or more jurors will feel sorry for these two old women" (Pringle, 2008). Jonathon Simon from the University of California at Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice said the presence of two older women could evoke favorable responses from the jurors; "When we see women generally, we either view them

as nurturers or as needing protection, age is a proxy for non-threateningness" (Pringle, 2008). In other words, donning the feminine mask, they can manipulate the biases of the community by maintaining the idealized image of the feminine (Pearson, 1997).

**We can observe how impression management impacts the type of punishment that women who kill can receive from the court.** In 1999, Marie Noe, who admitted to killing her eight children, received probation. It had been suggested that her 72-year-old appearance, mannerisms and her gender affected the decision and because society is reluctant to believe that women kill serially, law and prosecutions lacked the motivation to investigate and vigorously prosecute these women (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Another female serialist received only 10 years in prison after admitting to killing her five children, but the jury felt sorry for her because she had lost all the children in her life (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Prosecutor and defense counsel believe that part of packaging impression management for court proceeding involves the use of packaging the myth for persuasive purposes. Accepting or rejecting of the myth for impression management depends on which position one is advocating. Thus, for Homolka, it was law enforcement and the prosecution who bought her impression of being a victim then packaged the impression to the jury, even though the prosecution indicated that it was scripted (Pearson, 1997). As one police investigator would tell her, "You're innocent, you're the victim" (Davis, 2001).

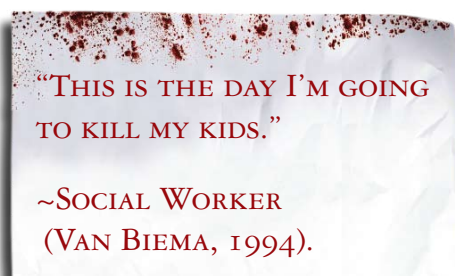
The myth of who is likely to be in control in a male-female kill team is still widely used in the courts for strategy purposes. In cases where there are male-female homicide teams, it is not unusual for both the defense, if representing the female, or law enforcement and the prosecution using the female to get to the male co-defendant, to use impression management to project the myth to a jury that the female was not in control of the kill, but was somehow coerced into performing the act by the male defendant and thus less culpable. The question remains whether their submissive trait is actually a guise of the puppet master to control the kill, such as whether Homolka used her husband as a proxy to kill her sister because she did not like the fact that her husband was attracted to her.

In order to prepare for her testimony against her husband, Homolka read *Perfect*

*Victim* while in prison, which documents the case of a California teenager who was kidnapped and kept in a box for three years: "What made the victim convincing in court? Someone asked in the book. The juror replied: Her deadness. Her stillness" (Pearson, 1997). Homolka read up on battered women's syndrome and post-traumatic stress disorder, mastering the jargon and its symptoms. In describing her relationship with Bernardo, Homolka frequently used the terms "cycles of abuse" and "learned helplessness." When Homolka appeared in court to blame the sexual assault and slaughter of three young girls on Bernardo, her face was described as blank. During the trial she showed little emotion, only dabbing theatrically at her eyes with a handkerchief when the mothers of the dead girls made statements, and during the trial, Homolka was softly spoken and in full victim mode (Davis, 2001).

### Lessons for Forensic Professionals and Law Enforcement

"I don't think most parents who murder children wake up in the morning and say,



"THIS IS THE DAY I'M GOING  
TO KILL MY KIDS."

~SOCIAL WORKER  
(VAN BIEMA, 1994).

Is this social worker's statement correct? Does this individual understand that parents who kill may not be mentally ill but possess psychopathy traits that, in fact, make them more prone to planning their child's death? Does this person have training on how to spot psychopathic traits or are does he harbor the view that a mother is incapable of intentionally killing her child because of her gender? If the parent did plan the murder, could this professional participate in the evaluation of such a case without resorting to myths to resolve the "shock" he or she experiences? These questions are not to be posed simply to those in the social, behavioral and forensic fields, but also to law enforcement.

**From a law enforcement perspective, the psychopath can be described as one of their greatest challenges because they are more likely to encounter this group than any other professional.** Unfortunately,

courses designed to study psychopathy are not a traditional part of basic law enforcement curriculum or for social, behavioral and forensic professionals. Often the study of violent offenders is lumped together under the same umbrella that somehow criminals are from the same mold (Herve & Yuille, 2007). It can be particularly unnerving for professionals to realize that a female is capable of brutal violence, especially homicide, and project normalcy to those she encounters. Unfortunately, many in the law enforcement and behavioral field resort to the myth in order to resolve an uncomfortable inconsistency between what they observe and what they want to believe.

Dr. Myriam Denov's research on the myths surrounding sexual abuse by females and the impact of harboring such myths can be generalized to myths surrounding females who kill because they both rely on the same stereotypes of female aggression to come to conclusions about culpability regardless of the type of crime. **Professionals' beliefs about female aggression influence their approach to inquiry, interviews, investigation, and their reactions to female disclosures about their criminal acts have an enormous impact on who is labeled a victim or an offender** (Denov, 2003). Criminal justice professionals may be more comfortable in prosecuting, convicting, and punishing those who fit the traditional stereotype, and in many cases that is men. Studies have shown, for example, that denial by police and psychiatric professionals of female aggression assisted professionals in understanding the act by realigning it with more culturally acceptable notions of female

behavior (Denov, 2003). Consequently by denying female acts of aggression, the complexities that are intrinsic to cases remain unexplored by law enforcement who are employed to solve brutal crimes. Thus, to not consider female psychopathy or its risk factors for violence because one does not want to accept the fact that females can kill in a premeditated manner is considered professional negligence and exposes others to potential harm (Nicholls & Petrila, 2005).

**The question is, how does a criminal investigator who may have to interview a female psychopath or forensic examiner who may have to evaluate a female defendant for court purposes avoid Cleckley's error of minimizing criminal intent and marginalizing the damage done by the female psychopath** evident in his case analysis of Anna? First, acknowledge the myths associated with the mask of innocence and the power that the myths can have over us (Denov, 2003). To inoculate ourselves against Cleckley's error one must have a self-awareness of one's own version as well as society's version of gender stereotypes. Specifically, regardless of the relationships we may have had with significant women in our own lives that may have been positive, one must be able to emotionally and intellectually consider that a range of different female experiences exist beyond our own. Moreover, regardless of our own experience, the professional must be able to manage the cognitive dissonance of the dissimilar experiences of the female as care taker and female as abuser, female as peace maker and female as perpetrator. Finally, if the investigator or examiner cannot resolve the cognitive dissonance and locks into only

one version of the myth prior to beginning the evaluation, he should seriously consider excusing himself from further involvement in the case.

The bias of the examiner can lead to a flawed initial approach to a case, which leads to a series of flawed decisions and ultimately a miscarriage of justice (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2009). Next, the examiner must approach the evaluation with a solid collection of data with the intent to test for the different myths regardless of the gender of the individual being evaluated. The steadfast view of an examiner regardless of the information gathered which contradicts an examiner's views can lead to a variety of conflicts with the ethical guidelines defined by the American College of Forensic Examiners International (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2009). It is not unreasonable to enter the evaluation process with the understanding that the examinee has much to gain and little to lose by manipulating (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). For example, in the analysis of Anna, Cleckley outlines that each of Anna's criminal acts was followed with Anna participating in a "restorative justice" episode in which she displayed the emotional expectation of the mask she wore. It is at this point that Cleckley's fatal flaw in Anna's behavioral study is evident, because as the accumulation of the data increasingly supported the rejection of Anna's external mask to Cleckley, Cleckley increasingly minimizes the criminal acts behind the mask.

To achieve an impartial collection of data, the examiner must be willing to examine his emotions for countertransference, such as the feeling of disappointment that the in-

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dividual is not what she first seemed. In the event that the forensic examiner is not able to move past this countertransference to the examinee and the mask she wears, then the examiner must recuse him/herself from further involvement in the case. If the forensic examiner cannot "know thyself," especially when the dichotomy between the mask and behavior is evident, then all of the forensic interview techniques, psychological tests, behavior rating scales, document reviews, and research regarding the female psychopath will be contaminated by the examiner's own defense mechanisms, and thus, a distorted analysis is offered to the court, complete with a mix of the examiner's biases (e.g., caring mother, wounded female in distress, unwilling participant unable to overcome the abusive partner in crime, etc.)—all of which hide the female psychopath from her crimes and will lead to a miscarriage of justice that is nothing short of professional negligence. Lastly, the examiner who is able to follow procedure will evaluate not only the deception of the mask, but evaluate the quality of the deception. How did the examinee respond when the deception was exposed? For example, did the examinee advance another deception? Did the manipulation incorporate the examinee incorporating the wants and needs of the examiner? Specifically, did the examinee offer ego-enhancing statements designed to bolster the examiner's self-esteem?

## Conclusion

**Violence, especially murder, is a human issue and not a gender-specific phenomenon.** Failing to recognize that psychopaths can exact brutal violence on others exposes any gender or age group to be preyed upon. Moreover, we observe how technology can be used to debunk myths surrounding female aggression as depicted in criminal trials. For example, we observe mothers being videotaped killing or attempting to kill their children while in a hospital, Karla Homolka being videotaped by her husband Paul as she too enjoyed the thrill of killing her sister and two other girls, Lisa Montgomery being audiotaped as she tells her husband that she is fooling the forensic professional into believing that she is mentally ill, and Rutterschmidt and Golay videotaped discussing their crimes.

It has become increasingly difficult to rely on the myth, whether prosecution or defense, when technology displays images that contradict the myth, revealing criminal be-

haviors that are gender-neutral. Furthermore, social, behavioral, law enforcement, legal personnel, and forensic professionals must be willing to consider whether they harbor any gender stereotypes that may inhibit them from accurately performing their duties.

Although myths of gender specific aggression persist, slowly, false perceptions are being exposed and hopefully corrected by the media, academic research, field work, and technology.

## Methods and Sources

Sources of information consist of published case law, news media, scholarly articles and articles retrieved from the Web.

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#### After studying this article, participants should be better able to do the following:

1. Describe misconceptions about female killers.
2. Explain the link between psychopathy, aggression, and its application to female killers.
3. Demonstrate to law enforcement the different motives to commit murder.
4. Prepare forensic psychologists and legal professionals to assess female killers.
5. Illustrate the difference between instrumental violence and reactive violence and its connection to psychopathy.
6. Prepare the legal community on the use of impression management in judicial settings.

**KEY WORDS:** Psychopathy, Munchausen syndrome by proxy, fraud detection homicide, kill teams, cesarean section homicide, narcissism, impression management, trials

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Forensic psychologists, forensic psychiatrists, legal professionals, law enforcement professionals

**PROGRAM LEVEL:** Basic

**DISCLOSURE:** The authors have nothing to disclose.

**PREREQUISITES:** None