

FEMALE SERIAL KILLERS THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this project to my parents, Bonnie and Nassrullah Keya. They have been my support system throughout my entire academic career. My father encouraged me to never settle for less than A's and that all of the hard work would pay off in the end. My mother has been my biggest fan and cheered me on when I did not think I could write one more paper or take one more exam. I could not have done this without them and I hope that I have made them proud.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FEMALE SERIAL KILLERS THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS**

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It has been estimated that 12 to 15 percent of serial killers are female. Documented cases of serial murder committed by women date back thousands of years and have continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The majority of studies conducted on and about serial killers have focused primarily on their male counterparts, due to the fact that men make up 85 to 88 percent of documented cases of serial murder. Many of the studies conducted have focused predominately on the mental, psychological, and physiological factors that may have caused or contributed to why they killed. This study examines ten of history's most notorious female serial killers using the theories of sociologists Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. The principles of Durkheim's Anomie Theory and Merton's Strain Theory have been selected as tools of analysis in helping to understand how a set of thirteen specific sociological factors may have contributed to causing these particular women to become serial killers.

## INTRODUCTION

Ted Bundy. Dorothea Puente. Son of Sam. Andre Chikatilo. John Wayne Gacy. Hannibal Lecter. BTK. Aileen Wuornos. Dexter Morgan. What do these individuals have in common? They are just a few of the hundreds of names of infamous and famous serial killers. Some are real people and others are merely figments of someone's imagination. What exactly is it about serial killers that we find so fascinating? Is it the sheer brutality of their crimes that shock us? Is it the unfathomable nature of their behavior that intrigues us, or is it admiration for vigilante killers like Dexter Morgan who are, "taking out the trash" of society?" (Dexter 2006). Whatever the reasons, serial killers and mass murderers have become cultural phenomena. Books, documentaries, television shows, movies, and even computer and video games have focused on them. Some of the media portrayals have demonized, while others have glorified. Psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, law enforcement officials, and politicians have tried to explain how and why people become serial killers. Indeed, many in-depth studies have been conducted on these different individuals, some completed while they were living, and others written long after their death. These studies have also focused predominately on the mental, psychological, and physiological factors that may have caused or contributed to why they killed. However, the vast majority of studies have focused primarily on male serial killers and mass murderers. What about the women who commit multiple murder?

Who are they, and what prompted them to become serial killers and mass murderers?

This inquiry will seek to answer such questions about ten of history's most notorious and ill-famed female serial killers: Velma Barfield, Carol Bundy, Mary Ann Cotton, Nannie Doss, Karla Homolka, Genene Jones, Dorothea Puente, Jane Toppan, Rose West and Aileen Wuornos.

What is a "serial killer?" "A serial killer is defined as a person who murders at least three or more persons in at least three separate events, with a "cooling off period" between kills" (Mitchell & Aamodt 2005). Sociologists study human behavior and try to pinpoint what causes a person to act violently. What happens to them that drive them to kill? Are there certain socio-economic factors that can be attributed to these women that could help explain why they became deviants? Can certain sociologists and their theories help to explain why these particular women become serial killers? Or is it possible that there is really no concrete explanation for why these women kill?

The central question of this particular inquiry is: Whether the theories of Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton can assist in explaining why women become serial killers? In the end, the findings may disprove the hypothesis that the theories of these two sociologists can help provide an explanation as to why these women became multiple murderers and serial killers.

## METHODOLOGY

Due to the subject of this thesis, the data obtained is primarily qualitative rather than quantitative. Therefore that eliminates using more conventional research methods and tools such as surveys, random interviews, and polling. Also, conventional qualitative research methods using interviews and observations are not possible. The women used as the sample group are either incarcerated in maximum security prisons, mental health institutions, or deceased. Due to these limitations, the biographical and theoretical data used in this study is collected and compiled by examining different sources both current and historical. The analysis of the data collected will be done by using a version of Grounded Theory.

While some theorists say that grounded theory can be categorized as a qualitative research method, others do not. Many view it as being a general research methodology: “It is a set of rigorous procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. These concepts/categories are related to each other as a theoretical explanation of the actions(s) that continually resolves the main concern of the participants in a substantive area” (Glaser 2008). Simply stated, grounded theory is an inductive methodology, and using a “bottom-up” approach to the research for this particular project is appropriate.

The primary sources for the data used in this thesis are taken from biographical

accounts of the lives of the selected female serial killers, the journal articles reviewed on delinquency and acts of deviance, writings by sociological theorists and their theories, and selected data from government and social agencies. For this study, a small sample group of history's most studied female serial killers have been chosen to be examined through the sociological lens. Knowing each woman's history, allows us to understand the social and personal indicators that may have contributed to her future crimes. Their economic background, family history, education, sexual and relationship experiences, mental and physical health, and any history of prior deviance are some of the indicators. Once an outline of each woman's life has been created, her life events will then be looked at through the framework of Durkheim's and Merton's theories. However, the events of her life may or may not fit into that framework. There may be factors and social indicators in the lives of some of these women that may not fit into one theorist's framework, but may fit in the other's. In addition, the two theories may not have any significance. These are all factors that are going to be taken into consideration and will be an essential part of the research.

The central research method used in this study is an extensive literature review along with content and secondary analysis. Historical research methodology will also be used. Historical method entails the process of establishing general facts and principles through attention to chronology and to the evolution or historical course of what is being studied. While this is a broad definition and can be applied to many academic fields of research, it has been an important method within sociology. The SAGE Database of Qualitative Research Methods states the following about historical

research:

Whether studying a contemporary social issue, such as drug abuse or terrorism, or the history of an individual person or of a concept, such as freedom, historical research provides the critical contextual link of the past to the present. Using a historical research design is of particular relevance to research about contemporary social and cultural issues, as it enhances an understanding of the present. Any contemporary issue is bound intrinsically with the social and historical milieu of the past. Most historical research involves some type of conceptual idea, theme, or person in history (Given 2008).

An article in the *Annual Review of Sociology* focused on the subject of historical social science. The author Elisabeth S. Clemens states that, “The historical sociologist strives to appreciate all [this] complexity and yet find patterns by looking across cases, down branching paths, or within complex sequences to discern how ‘complex events are codetermined by constellations of causal mechanism’” (Clemens 2007).

The article also includes Arthur Stinchcombe’s explanation of how historical methods are significant. He stated that:

[Historical methods] study sequences of conditions, actions, and effects that have happened in natural settings, in sufficient detail to get signs of sequences that are casually connected. In particular, such studies sometimes concentrate on contexts that change meanings of actions or the conditions under which actions are carried out, so that similar actions have different effects in different times and places (2007).

Other significant sociological theorists could be thought to share this ideology. For example, Herbert Blumer, the famous sociologist credited for the development of the concept of symbolic interaction, used various types of methods when conducting his research. His research agenda was considered to be “methodologically pluralistic” in nature (Wellman 1988). Some academics criticized Blumer for his ideas which earned

him the label of “anti-scientific” from those who saw sociology as a science fashioned after the natural sciences (Morrione 1988). He was more inclined to using qualitative research methods, like historical research, than the more traditional number-based, quantitative methods. Blumer viewed social reality as an ongoing process of people individually and collectively meeting and handling situations. The realities of race relations, industrial development, collective behavior, and social movements, for example, are all ongoing and emergent processes of adjustment (1988). The concepts of ongoing and emergent processes are significant to this study because they show that the issues and situations faced by the selected women spanned across time.

While the majority of the research in this inquiry is qualitative, there is a small amount of quantitative research with regards to how many women in the selected sample group experienced X number of contributing factors (how many of the women came from broken homes, what percentage of the women were raped, did any of them have drug and/or alcohol addictions, etc). Using solely quantitative methods would not be as effective for this particular study because the main research question is whether or not specific sociological theories can help explain why women became serial killers, not how many women became serial killers.

## **EMILE DURKHEIM'S ANOMIE THEORY**

It is important to summarize Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie because it became one of the fundamental building blocks of future sociological theories, such as strain theory. While the theories do differ, one of the basic principles used in such theories is Durkheim's anomie. Born in 1858, Durkheim is viewed as one of the founding fathers of sociological theory. His research and studies focused on the division of labor and its effects upon members of society, the concept of moral norms, collective consciousness within society, how religion plays a role in social interaction, and effects of acts of deviance among members of society. "Durkheim was especially interested, then, in acts of deviance, because it was here that society's norms could be seen most clearly in operation. Crimes and their punishments, he felt, were among the central features of a society" (Collins 1998).

The concept of anomie is a perspective which attempts to explain deviance in a way that is related to principles of social disorganization (Clinard & Meier, 1998). It is used by sociologists to offer an explanation of the various forms of deviance, such as violent and nonviolent crime, drug addiction, mental disorders, suicide and alcoholism. According to Durkheim, anomie essentially means a "state of normlessness" within society. This state of normlessness arises when members of society cannot reach their

goals by using traditional, legitimate means. “Anomie is a result of the disruption of the collective order [which] allows man’s aspirations to rise beyond all possibility of their fulfillment” (Clinard, 1964). To put it in simpler terms, anomie results when the traditional means are not efficient or effective enough to reach an individual’s goals, that individual may turn to alternative, illegitimate means in order to fulfill his or her needs. These alternative means can violate society’s structured set of norms, thus creating anomie. According to anomie theory, the largest number of deviant acts are committed by members of the poorer, lower classes. These groups also include certain racial and ethnic groups. According to Durkheim, this is because these individuals are more likely to encounter the greatest pressure for deviation and only have limited opportunities to acquire material good and higher education (Clinard & Meier 1998).

Durkheim used this term in his first work, *The Division of Labor in Society*, in 1893. This book focuses on the problem of how societies, especially those with a high degree of social differentiation, were able to maintain some type of cohesion. Durkheim felt that the division of labor within the society significantly contributed to social differentiation, in that it created lines and boundaries between the different segments and classes within the society. He also believed that the divisions of labor would make social relationships unstable. Durkheim made a distinction between two types of unity within a society, “mechanical solidarity” and “organic solidarity” (Clinard 1964). Mechanical solidarity is to be found within the simpler, less modern societies and organic solidarity is found within the more complex societies, like that of Western Europe and the United States. Organic solidarity was seen by Durkheim as a natural consequence of the

complementary nature of people's relationships in a society having an extensive division of labor, based on specialization of function and resulting in differences among individuals (1964). In those societies which he categorized as having mechanical solidarity, there exists a "collective consciousness." This collective consciousness is based on the common interests and feelings of the group. Durkheim felt that in more differentiated societies where the division of labor and organic solidarity prevail, the collective conscious diminishes and individual differences are encouraged (1964). Thus in turn, anomie is created. This state of normlessness arises because the division of labor fails to produce sufficiently effective contacts between its members and adequate regulations of social relationships (1964). Individuals begin to feel disconnected from society, the organizations and social groups they are connected to, and from their friends and family members. They then begin to turn to alternate ways of dealing with their shortcomings, failures, and disappointments in their lives. These alternatives may be conventional at times, such as looking for new employment, moving to another city, or seeking professional guidance for their specific issues. However, many cannot get by or succeed by using conventional methods so they turn to other means which are considered deviant by society's standards, those means being illegal or immoral.

However, one of the major resulting negative behavioral results of anomie and social differentiation is suicide. Durkheim felt that suicide was not just an individual phenomenon, but that it was instead related to the different features of social organization, or lack thereof. The features of society that contribute to acts of suicide are the strengths of ties that bind persons together, the amount of group unity, and the degree

of control or regulation within that society (Clinard, 1964). Durkheim made a distinction between two types of suicide: egoistic and altruistic.

Egoistic suicide is defined as being a product of extreme independence of the individual in society; the other, of his extreme social integration (Clinard 1964).

Altruistic suicides are more likely to occur in simpler societies because of the pressures placed on individuals by the other group members. When a person commits an altruistic suicide, he or she may feel that the act of taking their own life will benefit others in some manner. For some, this type of suicide is not considered a deviant act, but instead it would be considered a disobedience to the fellow group members if the individual were to refrain from such a selfless act, if in the end it were to be a true benefit to the others.

Egoistic suicide is due to the disintegration of the social order, in which individuals are freed from group ties and commit suicide for personal reasons, as a solution to personal problems (1964). This type of suicide is committed by individuals who believe they lack identity, or lack the ability to integrate into a particular group, or into society as a whole. This type is considered deviant because the individual, for whatever reason, is unable to form the appropriate social bonds, and the act of taking their own life is considered a selfish and cowardly act.

A number of history's most notorious serial killers, such as Fred West and Israel Keyes, have turned to suicide, but only after committing other forms of deviant behaviors. In *Suicide*, Durkheim states that women are less likely to commit acts of deviance, especially the act of suicide, than men (Lehmann 1995). Instead of choosing

suicide as the sole method of dealing with societal pressures and demands, many turn to alternative forms of deviant behavior. Theft, forgery, fraud, prostitution, gambling, drug addiction, alcoholism, rape, assault, and murder are examples of such behaviors. It is possible that the selected women may have considered suicide or may have attempted to commit suicide as a possible solution for their particular problems, but instead they chose to use these alternative practices of deviance to obtain the means to fulfill their particular goals. Women who committed any act of deviance, according to Durkheim, was an “asocial” occurrence (1995). This viewpoint adds to the complexity of how and why these women became serial murderers.

## ROBERT K. MERTON'S STRAIN THEORY

Robert Merton's theory is known as "strain theory." In his article *Social Structure and Anomie*, Merton lays out his primary research objective by stating that the primary aim is to discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconforming rather than conforming conduct (Traub & Little 1999). By examining how the social structure operates and places pressures upon individuals, they may adapt to those pressures differently. Some adapt to such pressures by committing crimes. Merton's theory argues that crime stems from the inability to achieve the goals of monetary success, middle-class status, or both (Broidy & Agnew 1997).

Sigmund Freud, suggested that an individual would commit acts of deviance solely due to biological impulses and as a way of releasing biological tensions. He believed that:

In the beginning, there are man's biological impulses which seek full expression. And then, there is the social order, essentially an apparatus for the management of impulses, for the social processing of tensions, for the "renunciation of instinctual gratifications," in the words of Freud. Nonconformity to the demands of a social structure is thus assumed to be anchored in original nature. It is the biologically rooted impulses from which time to time break through social control (Traub

1999).

Robert K. Merton, who elaborated upon the theory of anomie, wanted to take the focus away from the idea that acts of deviance were a result of man's biological impulses or expressions of natural instincts, and instead place the focus on how the tensions of living up to societal demands could lead one to commit deviant acts (1999). When individuals are unable to live up to the expectations and demands of society because of a lack of opportunity, financial hardships, and dysfunctional upbringings, they can be viewed as being failures in the eyes of others. These individuals may feel a great sense of tension and strain because they have failed to fulfill societal expectations such as obtaining an education, finding a stable job, and building a loving home and family. This strain could lead a person to commit acts of deviance as a way to obtain such goals, simply survive within society, or even use as a coping mechanism to deal with the feelings of failure. Durkheim's principles of "normlessness" and "anomie" were crucial to Merton's development of his strain theory. Merton felt that this strain could lead individuals to create their own set of "norms" in order to acquire the means to fulfill their goals in life. These norms could include deviant acts such as lying, cheating, stealing, abusing others as well as themselves, and even more severe acts of violence such as murder.

Merton also felt that the role of family was significant in understanding how a person reacts to tension and strain. He states that, "It is the family, of course, which is a major transmission belt for the diffusion of cultural standards to the oncoming generation" (Traub 1999). Merton explained further how a child will duplicate the actions of its family members, especially acts of deviance. If a parent reacts to tension

and strain with acts of defiance, deviance, or violence, the child can grow up to think those are normal reactions to difficult circumstances. Parents and family members may take their frustrations out on the children with violent actions, therefore creating a possible cycle of violence that the child may later repeat. If the acts are not violent against the children, they may manifest in the form of strict discipline, lofty expectations with regards to academic achievement and social behaviors, and unreal expectations of perfection and accomplishment. Parents may expect their children to live up to the expectations and demands that they could not. Merton states that, “The projection of parental ambitions onto the child is also centrally relevant to the subject in hand. As is well known, many parents confronted with personal “failure” or limited “success” may mute their original goal-emphasis and may defer further efforts to reach the goal, attempting to reach it vicariously through their children” (1999).

## **FEMALE SERIAL KILLERS**

Whereas males make up the vast majority of those who commit multiple murders, there are a number of documented cases of female serial killers and mass murderers. It has been estimated that women commit 12% to 15% of serial murders (Cluff et al. 1997). Some cases of female serial killers date back to ancient and medieval times, such as the Countess of Bathory and Locusta the Poisoner. Erzsebet Bathory, or better known as the “The Bloody Countess of Bathory,” was the daughter of an aristocratic soldier and the sister Poland’s king in the mid-1500s in Hungary. She was thought to have been from an incestuous bloodline and it has been theorized that it may have contributed to the savage torture and murder of hundreds of Polish and Hungarian women over a thirty year period. She was considered to be bisexual and chose to kidnap, torture, sodomize, mutilate, and kill women to satisfy her sexual urges and sadistic need for control and dominance (Newton 2006). She, along with the help of a number of her faithful servants, was able to commit these heinous acts for years because of noble status which protected her from the fear of prosecution. Bathory’s luck would run out when she decided to widen her victim base from peasants to the daughters of Hungary’s lesser nobility. After murdering twenty-five of these women, her immunity was stripped and she and a half-dozen of her accomplices were arrested and tried for murder. She was not present at her own trial, but

was kept under heavy guard at Csejthe Castle. A number of her servant-accomplishes were found guilty of murder and were eventually executed. Bathory was ultimately found guilty of torture and murder. The actual number of her victims is unknown, but it is thought to have been between 300 and 650. She was not executed, but instead sentenced to live the remainder of her life isolated in a brick-sealed room of the castle and was found dead on August 21, 1614 (2006).

Dating back even further to 54 A.D. with the case of Locusta of Gaul, also known as Locusta the Poisoner. Little is known about this woman in comparison to other female serial killers. She was born in one of Rome's outer provinces, Gaul, which is known today as France. Growing up in the countryside, she learned about plants and herbal lore and would later use this knowledge to her advantage when she lived in Rome. She assisted greedy and ruthless Roman citizens who wanted to rid themselves of a wealthy relative for their inheritance or sought revenge on known enemies by becoming employed as a professional poisoner. She would make the deaths look like they resulted from natural causes with her lethal herbal concoctions. Though she was arrested from time to time on suspicion of being involved in a number of deaths, some of her more influential clients were able to help get her released from jail, and she was never charged with any crime.

Her infamous reputation attracted the attention of the Empress of Agrippina, the fourth wife of the Emperor Claudius. The empress wanted her son from a previous marriage to become emperor of Rome and hired Locusta to poison her 64-year-old

husband (Wamack 1998). Locusta poisoned one of the Emperor's favorite foods, mushrooms, and he died shortly after eating the lethal delicacy. Agrippina was very pleased with Locusta's work when her 16-year-old son Nero became emperor of Rome. However, Locusta's involvement in the former Emperor's death was found out and she was arrested and sentenced to death, but she would not remain in jail for long. Nero would have her released from prison because he wanted to employ her for her services to help him rid himself of unwanted family members, servants, associates, and rivals. After coming to work for Nero, Locusta became quite wealthy and gained an even bigger client base thanks to Nero's glowing recommendation of her services to Rome's elite. She even opened a school in Rome where she taught others her vast knowledge of herbs and natural toxins (1998). However, her success would come to an end in 68 A.D. when the Roman Senate condemned Nero to death, leading him to kill himself with his own dagger. Without Nero's protection, Locusta was arrested shortly after Nero's suicide and executed that year.

Some of the more recent cases, such as that of Aileen Wuornos and Karla Homolka, have brought women who kill into the mainstream limelight. Actresses like Charlize Theron, who played Wuornos in the movie *Monster*, earned a Best Actress Academy Award for her performance. The movie gave a graphic account of this Wuornos's life, crimes, incarceration, and ultimate execution. However, it may be possible that many who saw the movie did not focus their attention on some specific details and events of this woman's life and how they in turn contributed to her future acts of murder.

Many serial killers, both male and female, have been documented as having been victims of abuse as children, adolescents, or teenagers. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, an estimated 754,000 children were victims of maltreatment in 2010 (ACF 2011). It is also estimated by the ACF that 10 out of every 1,000 children are victims of maltreatment. The majority, 70.3 % of the children, were victims of neglect. The remainder of the victims suffered physical abuse (15.5%), sexual abuse (7.1%), and psychological and emotional abuse (1.6%). The remainder of the victims suffered from abuses such as medical neglect and "other" unnamed assaults (1.9%). The distribution among the sexes of those who were abused showed that females had a slightly higher percentage of abuse with 51.2 % and males with 48.5 %. The vast majority of the victims, 87.3%, suffered the abuse at the hands of their parents or other relatives, and of the 754,000 children abused in 2010, 1,560 died as a result (2011). Seven out of the ten women of the sample selected for this thesis were victims of childhood abuse.

It is true that millions of women have been victims of such social problems and yet manage go on to live happy, normal, productive, and law-abiding lives. Although the majority of women who are victims of such negative circumstances do not go on to become serial killers, they also do not live happy and productive lives. Many suffer for the rest of their lives and are emotionally, socially, or physically broken. Suicide, broken marriages, poor relationships with children, unemployment, hospitalization, drug and alcohol abuse, and imprisonment are all real consequences of being victims of such negative social problems growing up. When one looks closely at the backgrounds of

these different infamous female murderers, their pasts are littered with such tragic circumstances and events: being abused as a child, being raped, becoming pregnant too young, being poor, being abandoned and neglected, being addicted to drugs or alcohol, and being mentally ill. By examining the negative social, emotional, and physical events of these women's lives, society may be able to obtain a better understanding of why and how these women were led down such violent and deviant paths.

For this study, ten women have been chosen as research subjects: Mary Ann Cotton, Aileen Wuornos, Velma Barfield, Karla Homolka, Nannie Doss, Dorothea Puente, Rose West, Carol Bundy, Genene Jones, and Jane Toppan. These women were selected as the sample group because there are more available sources of information regarding their lives and crimes. In order to understand why they became some of history's most notorious killers, a brief summary of each woman's crimes, arrest, trial, and sentencing is needed. The results section will provide examples of how these women suffered from occurrences of the selected contributing sociological factors listed and described in detail in the next section of this paper. The following summaries of the women are in alphabetical order by their last name.

### **Velma Barfield**

Margie Velma Bullard Burke Barfield was charged with the murder of her fiancé of two years, Stewart Taylor. She was fifty-five at the time of her arrest. Taylor had a life-long history of alcohol abuse, but he died from a sudden onset of severe gastrointestinal symptoms. Nothing was thought of Velma's fiancé's death until the

routine autopsy found arsenic in Taylor's system (Jones 1996). This finding sparked the interests of the investigating detectives in the case. They decided to check into Velma's personal life to see if anyone else she had been close to had died under similar circumstances. The detectives found that four other people in Velma's life had died and three of them from severe gastrointestinal symptoms and that traces of arsenic had been found in their bodies at the time of their deaths.

Velma was born in South Carolina in 1932. She was the eldest daughter of nine children. Her family lived in a wooden house without electricity or running water. She and her brothers and sisters never owned new clothes or shoes. Her father, Murphy Bullard, worked in a textile mill during the Great Depression and then later ran a farm, and her mother Lillie, was a submissive housewife. Murphy was strict and ran his household in a traditional patriarchal manner. He was abusive towards his wife and children when they did not follow his rules, especially when he would drink heavily. He also had a reputation for being a lady's man and was continually unfaithful to his wife. As Velma got older, she was given more responsibility around the house and farm and was assigned more and more tasks after the births of her younger siblings. When recounting her childhood, she stated that, "I really never felt like my Mama or Daddy ever wanted me except for the work I did" and "I always felt that they really wanted me to be a slave" (Noe 2013). Velma resented the fact that her mother was so submissive to her father, but never dared defy him herself because of the fear that she would be punished. Velma claimed that her father would fondle her when she was young, but did not know that it was something wrong. However, she did realize that her father's

affections were not appropriate when she claimed that he came into her room one night and raped her when she was in her early teens (2013). She became more afraid of her father. She lived at home until the age of seventeen, when she would marry her first boyfriend, Thomas Burke.

Velma and Thomas would have two children together during their sixteen-year marriage. They lived a fairly happy life together until Thomas developed a serious drinking problem. His addiction led him to get arrested on numerous occasions for drunk driving and ultimately lose his driver's license and his job working as a delivery driver for the Pepsi-Cola Company. He eventually found work at a local mill and had to carpool with his coworkers. Thomas's drinking created friction between him and Velma and they would have constant arguments. Thomas never became physically violent towards his wife, which is what kept them from divorcing. However, Velma dealt with the stresses of her life by developing an addiction of her own. She became addicted to prescription tranquilizers and later prescription pain killers after suffering injuries in a car accident. Her addiction would increase further after Thomas's death in 1967, when their house caught fire and burned to the ground (Noe 2013). Thomas was alone at home at the time and it was believed that he passed out from drinking and the fire started from a lit cigarette. Velma would remarry three years later to Jennings Barfield. Their marriage was rocky due to Velma's addiction to prescription medications. However, the marriage would end after only a year when Jennings would die from a lifelong heart condition. Velma and her children moved in with her mother, Lillie, until she died from a sudden onset of gastrointestinal problems in 1974 (2013). She would not have another serious

relationship until she met Stuart Taylor in 1977. Taylor would also suffer from similar gastrointestinal problems while living with Velma. One episode was so severe that he had to be rushed to the hospital and he would die three days later. Velma would be charged with his murder in 1978 after Taylor's children demanded an autopsy which revealed that he had been poisoned with arsenic (2013).

On the day she was arrested for the murder of her fiancé, Velma admitted to putting ant poison in his beer and tea, but that she had not intended to kill him, but instead to make him ill so that she could "nurse him back to health" (1996). She said she did so because she did not want him to be upset with her when he found out that she had forged checks that belonged to him and to his mother, Dollie Taylor Edwards, for whom she had worked as a live-in nurse. She admitted to poisoning Mrs. Edwards as well. Velma had a history of forging checks in order to finance her long-time addiction to prescription pain killers and tranquilizers.

She also admitted to forging checks that belonged to another of her elderly patients, John Henry Lee. In order to keep Lee and his wife from going to the police after they discovered that she had forged one of Lee's checks for \$50, she decided to poison him. Velma also confessed to poisoning her own mother, Lillie Bullard. Velma poisoned Lillie because she had taken out a loan in her mother's name without her knowledge or permission, and knew that she would not be able to repay it before she would have found out. She claimed that her drug addiction had "made her mind real fuzzy" and had clouded her judgment at the time of the poisonings (1996).

Velma's trial began on November 27, 1978. The trial only lasted six days before the jury returned a guilty verdict and she was sentenced to death. Over the next six years, Velma exhausted all of her appeals, which went all the way to the Supreme Court. The appeals cited numerous legal issues pertaining to her trial, including ineffective assistance by her trial attorney and the extent to which her drug addiction had contributed to her actions. In North Carolina, severe drug addiction was a factor that could protect a convicted felon from capital punishment. After all of her petitions were denied, Velma petitioned Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. to have her death sentence commuted to life in prison. After meeting with some of the victims' family members and weighing the negative effects commuting a death sentence could have on his own career since he was trying to unseat the current Republican Senator Jesse Helms, Hunt denied the request to commute her sentence. On November 2, 1984, Velma Barfield was executed by lethal injection at the Central Prison of Raleigh, North Carolina. She was the first female to be executed in the United States in twenty-two years (Jones 1996).

### **Carol Bundy**

Carol Bundy was charged with the murder of her one-time married lover John Murray and an "unidentified Jane Doe" in August of 1980. Carol had murdered her married lover in his van one night after he had been performing country-western music in a district of California called "Little Nashville" (Newton 2006). His van was discovered a few days later containing his headless body. Murray had been stabbed nine times, his buttocks slashed, decapitated, and his head missing from the scene. It was only two days

after Murray's body was discovered that Carol Bundy could no longer live with her horrific secret. She confessed to her nursing co-workers how she had brutally killed her one-time lover and how she had been involved in and witness to other murders committed by her current lover, Douglas Clark. She broke down and sobbed, "I can't take it anymore. I'm supposed to save lives, not take them" (2006).

Carol Mary Bundy was born Carol Mary Peters in 1942. She was the second child of Charles and Gladys Peters. As an adult, Carol would make up fairy-tale like stories about her mother and father when asked about her childhood years. She would describe her mother as being glamorous and magical and her father as being a loving and devoted family man who tried to spoil his children the best he could, despite the fact that they lacked financially (Steel 2013). In reality, her childhood was far from being a fairy-tale. Her father was an alcoholic who constantly moved his family around the county in search of employment, and her mother was an abusive, average-looking hairdresser. Gladys would go into fits of rage and beat her children with belts and make the other children watch as a way to instill fear into them. When Carol was eight years old, her mother decided to sever her relationship with her daughter claiming that she had not lived up to her expectations and that she was not her "little girl" anymore (2013). Gladys locked her daughter out of the house and would not allow her to reenter their home. This feud continued until Carol's father was able to convince Gladys to allow their daughter to return home, but the relationship was never repaired and the two remained distant until Gladys's death.

On the night of their mother's death, Carol and her sister were told that they were to take their mother's place in their father's bed. He made the two young girls, Carol who was eight and Vicky who was eleven, play a game to decide who would be first. Carol's sister, Vicky, lost the game and was the first to be molested. A short time later, Carol became the victim. It was stated that shortly after the abuse began, Carol was seen running around her neighborhood naked late at night (Steel 2013). The abuse ended after Charles remarried eight months later. He continued to verbally abuse his children, constantly telling Carol that she was "fat and stupid." Shortly after her father remarried, Carol returned home from school one day to find her cat dead on the floor next to her father's shotgun case. When he returned home, he stated that he wanted to kill his entire family, including his new wife. After a struggle, Carol was able to wrestle the shotgun away from him. Vicky and Carol were soon sent to live in foster homes, but eventually ended up in Michigan with their grandmother and uncle. They only remained there for a short time because their father was able to regain custody of them. He packed up the family and moved to California.

When Carol began physically developing during puberty, she saw it as a way to attract attention from the local boys. She became promiscuous and used sex as a means of satisfying her need for attention. At the age of seventeen, she married a fifty-six-year-old man as way to escape from having to live with her father, but the marriage did not last because the man was an alcoholic like Carol's father. In 1962, Carol's father committed suicide by hanging himself. Carol took responsibility for her father's death and claimed that she was to blame for his decision to sexually abuse her (Steel 2013).

During this time, Carol began having relationships with both men and women until she met a man named Richard Geis. Geis cared for Carol and offered to pay for her to go to school to pursue her interest in nursing. She and Richard Geis did not form a committed romantic relationship because he was aware of her sexual promiscuity, but the two would remain lifelong friends. She graduated as valedictorian from nursing school in 1968 and soon began working as a nurse at a local Santa Monica hospital.

It was shortly after taking the nursing job that Carole met Grant Bundy, who was also a nurse. The two married and had two sons, but the marriage was far from happy. Carol claimed that Grant would “shove her around” frequently (Steel 2013). This led to Carol to leave for a short period of time and have a lesbian affair, but she would return to her husband after spending all of the money she had on her lover. The marriage continued to deteriorate and the couple filed for divorce in 1979, after fleeing with her children to a shelter for battered women (2013). She would eventually move to an apartment complex in Van Nuys where she met and became infatuated with the manager of the complex, John “Jack” Murray. He lived with his wife at the complex and showed no romantic interest in Carol, but she began calling him constantly to come fix things in her apartment, began following him around, and after learning that he performed locally as a musician, she would attend every one of his shows. It was while attending one of Jack’s performances in a bar in the “Little Nashville” neighborhood, that Carol would meet Douglas Clark.

Carol’s relationship with Douglas Clark began in January 1980. She was

immediately swept away by Clark's good looks and charm and within three months, she had moved him into her apartment. She and Clark connected on a sexual level despite her homely, unattractive appearance, because she shared his appetite for dark, kinky, and violent sex. Carol became accustomed to Clark bringing younger women to their apartment, usually prostitutes, for them to take photographs of and have sex with. She even participated in his pedophilic conquest of an 11-year-old girl who lived in the neighborhood. Clark would soon add murder and necrophilia to their list of deviant, sexual escapades.

In June of 1980, Clark abducted two young girls, ages 15 and 16, who were half-sisters from Huntington Beach. Their bodies were discovered the next day beside a freeway near Griffith Park. They had both been killed by a single gunshot to the head (Newton 2006). Clark excitedly told Carol about the murders and how he had forced the two girls to perform oral sex on him before shooting them in the head. Two weeks later, Clark again confessed to murdering two more young women, this time prostitutes, which he had picked up in Burbank. Only this time, he brought home a souvenir. He surprised Carol by taking out a severed head from their refrigerator and placing it on their kitchen table. Carol reacted by going and getting her make-up case and starting to give the dead woman's head a makeover. She would later tell the police that, "We had a lot fun with her. I was making her up like a Barbie with make-up" (2006). After Clark performed an act of necrophilia with the head, the two scrubbed it clean, placed it in a decorative wooden box, and dropped it in a Hollywood alley. The head of veteran streetwalker, Exxie Wilson, was discovered a few days later. Over the next few weeks, two more bodies

were found in surrounding California neighborhoods. They had also been killed by a single gunshot to the head. One was identified as a missing 17-year-old prostitute and the other body was never identified. This was the “Jane Doe” Carol would later confess to helping Clark murder.

After Carol’s confession to her hospital co-workers and their calling the police, she and Douglas Clark were arrested and formally charged with multiple murders. The two were tried separately. At Clark’s trial, he briefly served as his own defense attorney and attempted to place the blame on Carol and her one-time lover John Murray. He claimed that, “They patterned their crimes after the case of Theodore Bundy” (Newton 2006). The jury did not buy into this far-fetched defense and on January 28, 1983, found Clark guilty on six counts of first-degree murder, along with a slew of additional charges such as mutilating human remains and attempted murder. He was ultimately sentenced to death and currently sits on San Quentin’s Death Row.

At her own murder trial, Carol first pled not guilty due to insanity, but later changed her plea and admitted to the murders of John Murray and the unidentified female. The jury found her guilty on both counts, but because she had confessed to the murders, she was spared the death penalty. Instead, she was given two consecutive sentences of 27 years to life and 25 years to life. Carol would not serve out her sentence. She died of heart failure in a California prison in December of 2003 (Newton 2006).

### Mary Ann Cotton

Mary Ann Cotton, nicknamed the “Lucrezia Borgia of the North,” was accused of murdering up to twenty-one people, including four of her husbands and twelve of her own children and step-children (Klein 2003). She murdered her victims by poisoning them with arsenic. The central motive behind the killings was to collect monies from life insurance policies. She was ultimately arrested, tried and executed for the death of her eight-year-old son, Charles Cotton. Mary Ann’s heinous crimes made her one of England’s, and the world’s, most notorious killers of the 1800’s.

Mary Ann grew up in a small English village of Low Moorsley to a working-class family and led a very difficult life after the accidental death of her father. She had to help support the family, keeping them from falling into poverty by becoming employed in one of the local workhouses before she had reached her teens (Klein 2003). After her mother remarried and her financial support was no longer needed, Mary Ann left home at age 16. She worked as a servant for a few years and then went on to train as a seamstress when she was twenty. This is when she met her first husband, William Mowbray.

At the time of their marriage, Mowbray worked as a miner, which provided a fairly stable income for them. But a short time later, he quit his job and started doing odd-jobs and railroad construction projects which yielded less money and stability. This displeased Mary Ann, but did not keep her from having five children in succession. Four of the five children died shortly after birth from various ailments, predominately severe gastric illnesses. It is thought that these were the first of Mary Ann’s murders, but the

deaths did not arouse suspicion due to the high infant mortality rate in England at the time. In 1865 after a serious foot injury, Mowbray developed a mysterious gastrointestinal illness and died after only a few days of severe and agonizing pain. After collecting Mowbray's life insurance money, Mary Ann moved with her only surviving daughter, to the seaside village of Sunderland.

After a brief and unsuccessful pursuit of an engaged man named Joseph Nattress, Mary Ann met her second husband, George Ward. She found a job as a nurse at an infirmary for people suffering from contagious fever, and Ward was one of her patients. They quickly fell in love and that was when Mary Ann sent her daughter to live with her mother in Low Moorsley. After Ward was released from the hospital, they were married, but the marriage would not last long because Ward would also die from intestinal problems in 1866 (Klein 2003). Before his death, Ward bequeathed all of his assets to Mary Ann. She took a short holiday after her second husband's death, but shortly after her return to Sunderland, she would meet her third husband, James Robinson.

Robinson was a widowed shipbuilding foreman with four children. Mary Ann applied and was hired to work as a housekeeper for Robinson. Shortly after she began working for the family, the youngest of the children, only ten months old, died from "gastric fever" (Klein 2003). After the death of his child, Robinson turned to Mary Ann for comfort and support and they soon became engaged. It was also during the time of the first child's death that Mary Ann went to visit her mother, Margaret, who was recovering from an illness. Shortly after her arrival, Margaret started to complain of

stomach cramps and died a few days later. After the death of her mother, Mary Ann returned to Sunderland and she and Robinson were married in June 1867. Tragedy would strike three more times after the wedding. Each of Robinson's remaining children fell ill and died from gastric fever (2003). Mary Ann was able to assuage public suspicion by having different doctors attend each of the children while they were ill and moving to a different house after each death, but she was unable to do the same with her husband. He grew suspicious of his wife when she began insisting that he take out life insurance policies on his children after each death. The children had no health problems until their father's marriage. He also found out that she had been pawning some of his more valuable belongings. Robinson's life was probably spared because he threw Mary Ann out after learning of the theft.

Mary Ann was homeless for a short time until she began working at the Sunderland Penitentiary. It was during this time that she met and dated a naval officer and while he was away, she stole everything she could from his house and then left the area. She then found another job working with a doctor named Hefferman. She had her eye on marrying the doctor, but was fired before they became seriously involved for having been caught stealing money from his home. She relocated once again, this time to the town of Walbottle, where she became friends with a woman named Margaret Cotton. Margaret introduced her to her widowed brother, Frederick. Frederick had also lost two of his four children after the death of his wife. It was shortly after the introduction that Margaret died from an unknown stomach ailment (Klein 2003). Grieving the loss of his sister, who had also been the primary caretaker to his two children, Frederick turned to

Mary Ann for help. They quickly began a romantic relationship and Mary Ann soon became pregnant. They were married in 1870. Shortly after the wedding, Mary Ann convinced her new husband to take out life insurance policies not only on himself, but on his two children from his first marriage. After the birth of their son in 1871, the family moved to West Auckland after Mary Ann had constant disputes with neighbors over the deaths of some of their livestock. It was also suspected that the move was prompted by Mary Ann rekindling the friendship with her old flame, Joseph Nattress.

Shortly after the move, Frederick fell ill with severe stomach pains and vomiting. He died in 1871. Mary Ann once again collected the life insurance money, which did not last long, so she decided to have Joseph Nattress move into the home as a lodger. It was not long after this that Frederick's remaining two children from his first marriage also died from gastric illnesses. Mary Ann then took a job working as a nurse for a man named John Quick-Manning, and soon became pregnant by him and they planned to marry. During this time, Nattress died from gastric fever shortly after Mary Ann had talked him into making a new will which named her sole beneficiary. She would collect thirty British pounds in life insurance money from his death (Klein 2003). After Nattress's death, Mary Ann instructed her only surviving child with Frederick Cotton, Charles, to go to the local chemist to purchase a small amount of arsenic. When the chemist refused to sell it to the boy without his parent present, Mary Ann had a neighbor purchase the arsenic for her. A short time later, young Charles died from gastric fever. She was then free to marry Quick-Manning and have his child without the burden of her children and stepchildren from her previous marriages.

Unknown to her, people had begun to become suspicious of her after the deaths of her two step-children, son, and lodger. Charles Cotton's doctor was one of the suspicious and requested that his death certificate not be signed until an inquest into his death could be completed. The inquest showed no initial signs of foul play, but the story had already reached the local newspapers and Mary Ann was dubbed "Lady Rotten" (Klein 2003). After hearing the accusations and reading the reports, Quick-Manning broke off his engagement to Mary Ann despite the pregnancy. She quickly began planning her next relocation, but before she could leave the area, one of the investigating doctors decided to have Charles Cotton's stomach samples tested for poison. The samples tested positive for traces of arsenic. Several of Mary Ann's victims' bodies were exhumed, tested, and traces of poison were also discovered.

In the spring of 1873, Mary Ann Cotton was charged with the murder of her eight-year-old son Charles Edward Cotton. Her trial was postponed until she gave birth to a baby girl who was later adopted. Her defense claimed that Mary Ann and her family had slept in a room that had green wallpaper that contained elements of arsenic and that the children and her husband had inhaled the poison. Her defense also claimed that the soap Mary Ann used to clean the floors contained traces of arsenic as well. While it was a cunning defense, the jury did not buy it. Mary Ann was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Throughout the trial and after sentencing, Mary Ann insisted that she was innocent and even wrote to her still legal husband James Robinson trying to convince him to help her prove her innocence. Amazingly enough, James asked his brother-in-law to go visit Mary Ann in prison, but he refused. On March 24, 1873, Mary Ann Cotton

was executed by hanging.

### *Nannie Doss*

A number of serial killers have killed for sexual gratification, but there has only been one that claimed her search for the perfect romance was the motivating force behind her crimes. In 1953, Nancy 'Nannie' Doss confessed to murdering not one, but four of her five husbands. When Nannie was asked why she had murdered them, she simply said, "I was looking for the perfect mate, the real romance of life" (Greig 2006). The seemingly innocent looking grandmother's unusual motive for murder made her one of America's infamous deadly women. After being convicted of murder in 1955, subsequent investigations found that Nannie had also murdered her mother, two of her own children, one of her grandchildren, a nephew, and two of her sisters by poisoning them with arsenic (2006).

Nannie was born in 1905 in the rural Alabama town of Blue Mountain. She had a difficult childhood living under the strict rule of her father. It was said that, "Her father was an authoritarian farmer who worked his children as if they were hired farmhands" (Greig 2006). Despite his stringency, Nannie was a defiant teenager and at age sixteen she married her co-worker, Charles Braggs. She and her husband had four children during the next six years. Nannie thought that by leaving home and becoming a wife and mother, she would find the peace and happiness she longed for as a child. But those hopes were quickly dashed after she, her husband, and their children had to live with his overbearing and domineering mother. This caused Charles to drink heavily and he soon

began having affairs with other women. In 1927, the estranged couple's two middle children died in two separate incidents. Both causes of death were listed as severe food poisoning, but foul play was not suspected by the authorities in either case. Her husband felt otherwise and soon after the deaths, Charles left with their eldest daughter. He would later claim that he left because he was afraid of his wife and suspected that she was putting poison in their food (2006).

Nannie quickly moved out of Alabama and settled with her remaining daughter, Florine, in Georgia. Soon after finding a job in a local cotton mill, she met Frank Harrelson. They would quickly marry, but their marriage was not a happy one. Frank developed a serious drinking problem and Nannie once again found herself in an unsuccessful marriage. Despite her disappointment, Nannie stayed with Frank. In 1945, Nannie's infant grandson, Florine's youngest child, suddenly died while staying with Nannie while Florine had gone to visit her father. The baby's death was listed as asphyxia and Nannie claimed that might have been caused by the baby accidentally ingesting rat poison (Greig 2006). Three months after the death of her grandson, Nannie became a widow. After coming home drunk one night after one of his binges, Nannie decided that she had had enough of Frank. The next day she put rat poison in his liquor bottle, and he became violently ill. A few days later, he was dead. His death was thought to have been caused as a result of his years of heavy drinking.

Shortly before his death, Nannie had taken out a life insurance policy on her husband and used the insurance money to move and buy herself a house in Jackson,

Mississippi. While living in Mississippi, Nannie answered a lonely-hearts ad she found in one of her favorite romance magazines placed by a man named Arlie Lanning from North Carolina. Only two days after they met, Arlie and Nannie were married. Once again, Nannie found herself married to yet another alcoholic. After three years of marriage, Nannie decided she could no longer deal with Arlie. In 1950, Arlie became violently ill after eating stewed prunes and coffee laced with rat poison that Nannie had prepared for him (Greig 2006). Two days later, he was dead. Amazingly, doctors and police did not suspect that he had been murdered, even after the home they shared suddenly burned down leaving Nannie with an insurance settlement.

After receiving the insurance money, Nannie left town and went to visit her sister. A short time later, her sister also died. Nannie was not suspected by police to have had anything to do with her death. Finding herself alone once again, Nannie signed up with a dating agency and met a man named Richard Morton from Kansas. They were married in 1952 and shortly after they were married, Nannie found herself unhappy once again because Richard turned out to be a womanizer and a fraud (Greig 2006). In January 1953, Nannie's mother, Louise, came to stay with them. Louise soon became ill with unexplained, chronic stomach pains and died. Three months later, Nannie would become a widow once again after Richard died from similar stomach ailments. Again, doctors did not suspect that Nannie had any involvement in the deaths and no autopsies were performed.

While married to Richard, Nannie had continued to correspond with men through

lonely heart ads and right after Richard's funeral, she moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma to meet Samuel Doss. By June of 1953, they were married. Nannie found herself once again disappointed with yet another husband, not because of drinking, lying or adultery, but because he was a strict Christian and a cheapskate. In September 1954, Samuel was taken to the emergency room and admitted to the hospital for severe stomach pains (Greig 2006). He was released from the hospital three weeks later and the night he returned home, Nannie prepared him dinner and coffee laced with a large amount of arsenic. He was dead within hours and this time, an autopsy was ordered. It was found that Samuel had ingested enough arsenic to kill twenty men (2006). Nannie unnerved the police by continuing to read one of her romance magazines and giggling in response to their questions regarding the death of her husband. It was only when they took away her magazine that she became so upset that she confessed to killing Samuel as well as her previous three husbands (2006). Nannie was arrested, charged with murder, and quickly nicknamed 'The Giggling Granny' by the press. She was tried, found guilty of murder, and sentenced to life in prison. Nannie would only serve ten years of her sentence before dying in 1965 at the age of sixty.

### **Karla Holmoka**

Karla Holmoka and Paul Bernardo were dubbed the 'Ken and Barbie of serial killers' by the media after they drugged, molested, tortured, raped, and murdered three young girls in Scarborough, Canada (Schechter 2003). One of their victims was Karla's own fifteen-year-old sister. While the two looked like the picture-perfect young couple

on the outside, the pair hid a perverse and sadistic appetite for kinky sex. Their attraction to one another was unhealthy and dangerous from the start. One writer stated that their affinity was based upon the fact that his sexual tastes veered towards sadism, and hers towards masochism (Wilson 2006). A newspaper reporter described them by saying, “Beneath their wholesome exterior, however, lurked two of the most depraved personalities imaginable” (2003). Karla was not only Paul’s partner in crime, but one of his victims. He would viciously sodomize and beat her if she did not do what he wanted. The cycle of violence between the two fueled Paul’s obsession with sexual depravity and domination of women and kept Karla constantly trying to please the man who she loved to the point of obsession. After the couple’s arrest in 1992, the police asked Karla why she had participated in the deplorable acts with her husband and why she submitted to his abuse. She stated simply, “I wanted him to love me” (Stunell 2007).

Karla grew up in Port Credit, Ontario. Her father was a Czechoslovakian immigrant who worked various jobs after to provide for his family marrying Karla’s mother, Dorothy, a Canadian native. The couple had two more daughters after Karla, Tammy and Lori. They appeared to be a tightknit and loving family, but Karla always felt that she would only truly be happy when she met the ‘perfect’ man and became his wife. Karla was very attractive, popular, and sought after by many boys at her high school, but she was very particular about what she wanted in a boyfriend. She prided herself on her blond hair and her “Barbie-like” appearance. When she met Paul Ken Bernardo in 1987, he was exactly what she was searching for, her ‘living doll’ (Stunell 2007). He was tall, muscular, and tanned with blond hair and blue eyes. The fact that he

was older and enrolled in college appealed to Karla. She was seventeen and he was twenty-three. The night Karla and Paul met, her friend Renya remarked, “I think Barbie just met Ken” (Stunell 2007). Karla immediately knew Paul was the man she had been waiting for, but Paul was not as enthusiastic. When he found out that Karla was not a virgin, he all but dismissed her until she promised to fulfill all of his sexual needs, no matter how extreme. This was the beginning of the new couple’s descent into an extremely abusive, masochistic, and ultimately deadly relationship.

The two began seeing each other on the weekends because Paul had to drive two hours to see Karla from his hometown of Scarborough. During the weekly visits, Paul’s sexual requests became more and more sadistic, but Karla never objected. He even went as far as to ask her what she would think if he was a rapist and she responded by simply saying, “Cool” (Stunell 2007). This was more of an admittance rather than a hypothetical question because during previous months, Paul had begun raping women in Scarborough. The police dubbed the perpetrator as “The Scarborough Rapist,” but Paul was not a suspect in the eleven open cases of rape (2007). The thought of Paul being a rapist actually turned Karla on and she actually became encouraging of his secret perversion. However, Paul did not seem satisfied by his girlfriend’s obedience and support. He wanted more. Paul saw females as, “Something to be used, dominated, manipulated, abused and controlled” (2007). When Karla no longer satisfied his appetite for this sense of power, Paul set his sights on Tammy, Karla’s fourteen-year-old sister. She was a virgin, and that is what Paul craved the most, so in order to keep the man she loved from leaving her, Karla decided to help fulfill his ultimate desire.

Shortly before Christmas in 1990, Karla gave Paul an early present. One night after a family Christmas party, Karla drugged her sister Tammy with sedatives that she had stolen from her former job at a veterinary clinic. While her family slept upstairs, “Paul videotaped himself taking Tammy’s virginity” (Stunell 2007). When Tammy started to come to, Karla applied animal anesthetic to a cloth and held it over Tammy’s face so she would not wake up. Paul continued to rape and sodomize her while encouraging Karla to participate, but she refused. Despite being in a comatose state, Tammy began to vomit and choke until she was no longer breathing. When the couple failed to resuscitate her, they called the police. They told the police and the family that they had been watching television when Tammy just stopped breathing. The autopsy report would confirm that she had choked on her own vomit while sleeping, but no blood testing was conducted by the pathologist. Paul blamed Karla for Tammy’s death because he felt that she had given her too much sedative. Instead of turning in her murderous boyfriend and admitting her involvement, Karla instead stood by him and continued to plan their wedding scheduled for the following spring. She told Paul after Tammy’s funeral that because she was not able to give him her virginity, she gave him her sister’s because, “She loved him enough to do that” (2007).

Raping and ultimately killing Tammy only added fuel to Paul’s demented and sexual behavior. When Karla was not satisfying his sexual and behavioral demands, he would scour the streets looking for young girls that reminded him of Tammy. One night in June 1991, Paul pulled a knife on a fourteen-year-old girl, shoved her in his car and took her back to the house he shared with Karla. Once there, Paul woke Karla up and

demanded she participate in a three-way encounter while he videotaped it. She agreed and over the next two days, the couple would rape, sodomize, and sexually torture their teenage prisoner, Leslie Mahaffy. Leslie would eventually die while being held captive, but the exact story surrounding her death is uncertain. After their arrest and during the trials, Karla and Paul would give conflicting stories and placed blame on each other for the death. But what the couple did agree on was how they disposed of her body. After storing the body in the basement while the couple entertained her family for a Father's Day celebration, Paul dismembered Leslie's body and encased it in cement mix. The couple then drove to a nearby lake to drop the hardened cement blocks. Thirteen days later, Paul and Karla were married in a lavish, fairy-tale style wedding. Despite the fact that Paul told his bride that he was only marrying her because a wife could not testify against her husband, Karla was over the moon because she had fulfilled her childhood dream of marrying her "living doll" and vowed to continue to do whatever her new husband wanted from that day forward (2007).

While away on their honeymoon, an investigation into the death of Leslie Mahaffy was underway after a father and son, fishing at Lake Gibson, discovered the cement blocks sticking out of the water. Paul was infuriated with his new wife because she should have known that the lake's water levels were going to fluctuate and she was to blame for the body being discovered. Afraid that her marriage would end so shortly after it started, Karla decided that she had to find a way to make her husband forgive her. That August, Karla befriended a fifteen-year-old pet store co-worker who had developed a crush on her. After a few weeks of hanging out with Karla and Paul, Paul decided that it

was time to use her as a replacement for his beloved Tammy. When the young girl did not satisfy Paul, he had Karla drug her so he could rape her while Karla videotaped it. Once again, Karla administered too much sedative, but the girl survived the almost fatal overdose. For reasons unknown, Paul and Karla let the girl go and she was never seen again. Paul was furious at Karla for disappointing him, but she was determined to do whatever it took to make her husband happy. The following April, Karla accompanied Paul while he searched the streets for his next sex slave. She pointed out fifteen-year-old Kristen French who was walking alone, had Paul pull up next to her pretending to ask for directions, and at knife-point he abducted her. The couple took Kristen back to their house began and videotaping while they violently sodomized, raped, and tortured her. Two days later, Kristen was dead. Once again, the details of her death are unclear because the couple had differing stories and placed blame on each other for the death. But once again, the couple did admit to disposing of the body together. After shaving Kristen's head to prevent any carpet or bedding fibers from being found in her hair, the couple drove to a secluded area of highway and dumped the hairless body in a ditch by a garbage dump (Stunell 2007). Two weeks later, Kristen's body was found by a scrap metal picker. It appeared that the couple had once again gotten away with murder.

After months of escalating arguments about Paul's dissatisfaction with his wife's behaviors both inside and outside of the bedroom, Paul became extremely violent. He would constantly beat Karla until she had bruises all over her body. Karla eventually broke down and admitted to her family that she could no longer stay with Paul because of the abuse. The couple separated in 1993. It was during this time that the Ontario police

were closing in on a suspect in the Scarborough rape cases. After a sketch was composed of the suspect, Paul Bernardo was identified and he and Karla were brought in for questioning. Karla felt that the police would eventually link the Scarborough Rapist to murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, so she decided to confess to a family member that she knew her husband was a rapist and a murderer. In 1993, Paul Bernardo was arrested for the rapes and murders. He was tried and found guilty and ultimately sentenced to life in prison. Karla was able to, “Successfully paint herself as just another victim of the dominating Bernardo” and plead guilty to her involvement in the murders in exchange for a light prison sentence. After serving twelve years, Karla was released from prison in 2005. She would later marry her lawyer’s brother and move away from Canada to escape the public scrutiny. The couple currently reside in Guadeloupe with their three children (Ha 2012).

### **Genene Jones**

Genene Jones can be placed into the category of serial killers known as “Angels of Death” (Schechter 2003). These are individuals who predominately prey on babies, children, and the elderly. They focus on these groups because of their vulnerability, both mentally and physically. They are most often mothers themselves or work as doctors, nurses and caregivers. Those like Genene Jones, are motivated by the feeling of power they have while holding another person’s life and death in their hands. This motivation came from the “depraved narcissism characteristic” that is often seen in cases of psychopathic behavior (2003). During the early 1980’s, Genene was suspected of having

been responsible for the deaths of as many as forty-six babies and young children while working as a nurse in Texas (2003). She was tried and convicted for the first-degree murder of a fifteen-month-old and for the deliberate injury of a one-month-old who miraculously survived. Genee would inject her victims with drugs like succinylcholine that would induce paralysis of the respiratory system which could cause seizures, cardiac arrest, asphyxiation, and death. At times, she would attempt to resuscitate them, sometimes even successfully, because it would give her a euphoric feeling of heroism. Her distorted need to feel powerful is what led to the injuries and deaths of many innocent and vulnerable young victims.

Genee was born in 1950 in San Antonio, Texas. She was immediately given up for adoption and was taken in by a family with three other adopted children (Vronsky 2007). Her adoptive father was a wealthy businessman, and her family lived a privileged and tranquil life (2007). Genee was a very bright, but sensitive child who craved constant attention and recognition from others, and she developed the habit of creating elaborate stories and lies to gain the attention of classmates and friends. This need intensified after the loss of her father to cancer in 1968. Shortly after his death, she married the first boy who paid any attention to her, a high school dropout named Jimmy. The young couple would eventually have a child, but the marriage was not satisfying. She felt that her husband spent too much of his time working on cars, racing, drinking and partying. She also felt abandoned when Jimmy enlisted in the Navy, and she then began having affairs with other men in order to obtain the attention she craved. The couple divorced in 1974, and Genee became a twenty-three-year-old single mother. She

would soon become pregnant with a second child, but was never forthcoming about the father's identity. Having to support her growing family, Genevieve took a job as a beautician, but was unsatisfied with her occupation. After her younger brother died of testicular cancer in 1976, Genevieve became obsessed with the fear of developing cancer herself, and after developing a rash at work that she claimed was caused by the cosmetic products, she convinced her mother to pay for her to go to nursing school (2007).

After graduating from nursing school with exceptionally good grades, Genevieve worked at a number of hospitals until she accepted a permanent position at the Bexar County Medical Center in the pediatric ward in 1981 (Schechter 2003). Soon after she began working at Bexar, the administrators began to notice a startling increase in pediatric deaths. Genevieve became a person of interest with connections to the deaths and an investigation was launched, but she resigned before she was charged with anything. She then began working at the private practice of Dr. Kathleen Holland in Kerrville, who had also previously worked at Bexar in the pediatric intensive care unit. Dr. Holland was impressed with Genevieve's nursing abilities, but tragedies began to strike the doctor's practice shortly after her arrival. During August and September of 1982, seven infants developed unexplained respiratory distresses at the clinic and they were rushed to nearby hospitals in the ambulance with Genevieve being the only person to provide treatment on route (Innes 2006). One of the children, fifteen-month-old Chelsea McClellan, died on the way to the hospital. The day after Chelsea's funeral, another infant suffered from a similar case of respiratory distress and was rushed to the hospital. The child survived and was recovering when one of the attending emergency doctors became suspicious of the

child's symptoms. They resembled symptoms that would be induced by a drug called succinylcholine. A short time later, Dr. Holland found a bottle of this drug with its cap missing and needle marks in the rubber sealing in the clinic's refrigerator (2006).

Because she had been informed by the emergency doctor's suspicions about the drug, she immediately made the connection back to Genene. Dr. Holland fired Genene that day and then contacted the Texas Rangers.

After two lengthy grand jury hearings, Dr. Holland was cleared of any involvement, but Genene Jones was indicted in 1983 on two counts of murder in Kerr County, Texas. She was charged with, "Injecting lethal doses of a muscle relaxer and another known drug to deliberately cause Chelsea McClellan's death" (Newton 2006). She was also brought up on charges in San Antonio for the deliberate injuring of four-week-old Rolando Santos by injecting him with the anticoagulant drug Heparin which caused spontaneous hemorrhaging. Emergency physicians were able to save Santos's life. Additional investigations linked Genene to ten other infant deaths at Bexar County Hospital. Genene's trial began in January of 1984 and lasted one month. After deliberating for only three hours, the jury found her guilty of murder and she was sentenced to the maximum sentence of ninety-nine years in prison. Eight months later, she was tried and found guilty of injuring Rolando Santos in San Antonio, and she was sentenced to sixty years in prison for that crime. She was ordered to serve both sentences consecutively for a total of one hundred and fifty-nine years imprisonment (2006). While she was suspected in dozens of other cases at Bexar, no evidence could be collected because of a massive records disposal by shredding in March of 1984. Genene Jones is

currently serving her sentence in San Antonio and is eligible for parole on the basis of good behavior in 2017 (Schwartz 2011).

### **Dorothea Puente**

During the summer and fall of 1988, residents living on the 1400 block of F Street in Sacramento, California were complaining of a constant, foul odor coming from one of their neighbor's property. The property belonged to a petite, fifty-nine-year old boarding house owner named Dorothea Puente. When questioned about the odor Dorothea would have an array of explanations such as the sewer had backed up or that she had been using fish emulsion as fertilizer on her garden or that rats had died under the house (Marlowe 2009). However, it was not the odor that brought police to the boarding house door in November of 1988, but instead one of her elderly boarders seemed to have vanished into thin air. Alvaro Montoya was a mentally disabled schizophrenic who had come to live in the boarding house a few months earlier and his social worker had become concerned when she had not heard from him. The police did not find any clues in his room or the house, but one officer noticed that a corner of the backyard had recently been disturbed. The officers began to dig and quickly found what they believed to be human remains. When Dorothea was told about the body, she was in utter shock. While the excavation of the backyard continued, a distraught Dorothea asked if she could be escorted to a nearby hotel bar to get a drink to calm her nerves and be questioned afterwards, and the police obliged. By the time the excavation was completed, seven bodies, three men and four women, had been exhumed that were in various stages of decomposition, (2009). The

police were eager to speak with Dorothea about their discoveries, but she had failed to return from the hotel bar. She became their number one suspect after finding a list of names in her bedroom with numbers written besides each one and a list of disability and Social Security benefits. It appeared that the boarding house owner had been murdering her residents in order to collect their benefit checks, amounting to around \$5,000 each month (2009). The next day, Dorothea was found in Los Angeles, after being turned into the police by a man she had tried to cozy up to at a local tavern. She was arrested and charged with nine counts of murder, including two murders that were believed to have been committed years earlier. After her disappearance, police began to piece together a picture of who the deadly boarding house owner really was.

Dorothea Puente was born Dorothea Helen Grey in Redlands, California in 1929. Both of her parents died before she turned nine, and she grew up living in various different homes. During her teenaged years, she used her good looks to her advantage and began working as a prostitute. After the end of World War II, she met and married a twenty-two-year old soldier and would have two daughters during the course of their marriage. She was displeased with her life as a wife and mother and longed for a more glamorous one, so she left her family and moved to Los Angeles in 1948. It was not long after her move that she was arrested and served four years for forging checks (Marlowe 2009). Soon after her release from prison, she met and married another man, a merchant seaman, and that marriage lasted fourteen years. She was again unhappy, but it is thought that the marriage lasted because her husband was constantly away from home and for the fact that she had begun prostituting herself once again during both of her marriages. In

1960, she was arrested for living in a brothel and after her release, she married again for the third time in 1968 to Robert Jose Puente, who was half again her senior. The marriage only lasted one year and shortly after the divorce, Dorothea began running the boarding house. A few years later, she married one of her boarders, but was soon arrested, again for check forgery, but avoided prison by receiving five years of probation (2009).

She continued to run the boarding house and started a second business running a lunch room with a woman named Ruth Munroe. Shortly after becoming Dorothea's partner, Munroe died from an apparent overdose of pain killers, which was listed as a suicide by the coroner. This was thought to have been her first murder. A month after Munroe's death, Dorothea was arrested and charged with drugging her boarders to steal their possessions and was sentenced to three years in the California Institution for Women (2009). Upon her release, she was ordered not to handle any government checks and to keep away from senior citizens, but she did not listen and went right back to running her boarding house. It was during this time that a seventy-seven-year-old man Dorothea had been pen pals with for many years decided to come live at the boarding house. Everson Gillmouth and Dorothea soon became engaged and he made her a signer on his bank account. Shortly after writing home to his sister telling her of his engagement, Everson disappeared. His body was not discovered until it was found in a make-shift coffin in the Sacramento River. Dorothea sent a card addressed to Everson to his sister's house in an attempt to cover her tracks after he mysteriously disappeared. Dorothea continued to rent rooms to boarders, some who were referred to her by local

social workers and others she recruited herself. She would frequent the local bars and strike up conversations with single, lonely men and encourage them to move into her boarding house. She continued renting out rooms until her arrest in November 1988.

After her arrest, Dorothea spent four years in prison awaiting her trial. She plead not guilty to all counts of murder. Her defense lawyers did a poor job in defending her stating that while, “Puente had a touch of larceny in her heart, but it doesn’t make her a killer. It doesn’t make her an evil, serial killer” (Scheeres 2013). The jury did not buy into the defenses pleas, especially after eyewitnesses and former boarders testified to the fact that Dorothea was consistently making her boarders take medications that were not theirs. Alvaro Montoya had once complained to an employee of a local detox center where he had lived before moving into the boarding house that Dorothea was, "Giving him a medicine he didn't like to take” (2013). A local handy man also testified against her after he admitted that he had built the make-shift coffin Everson Gillmouth’s body had been discovered in and that he had been paid to dig large holes in the backyard. He was not charged with any crime because the statute of limitations had run out. On December 10, 1993, Dorothea Puente was found guilty on three counts of murder. She was sentenced to life in prison without parole in Central California Women's Facility near Chowchilla, which is the largest women's prison in the United States (2013). The sixty-four-year-old boarding house owner would spend the rest of her life in prison because she had drugged and killed her elderly boarders in order to finance her need for the finer and fancier things in life.

### *Jane Toppan*

Honora Kelley, or later known as Jane Toppan, is another deadly female who falls into the category of “Angels of Death.” She was a nurse and caretaker who derived “sick feelings of satisfaction,” both mentally and sexually, from poisoning her victims, then watching them slowly suffer and die. She would even go as far as to get into bed with some of her victims and hold them until they took their last breaths (It is thought that she killed over one hundred people during the late 1800’s in Massachusetts, but she admitted to actually killing thirty-one (Schechter 2003). From all outward appearances, Jane did not look like the diabolical and sadistic killer that she really was. Many viewed her as being a lively and outgoing person and she was given the nickname “Jolly Jane” (2003). This mild-mannered monster was thought to have been created at a very early age due to being a, “Product of a severely unstable upbringing” (2003).

Born to a poor Irish couple in 1857 in Boston, Massachusetts, Honora never knew what it felt like to be part of a loving and stable family. Her mother died when she was only a baby and she and her older sister were left to be raised by an habitually drunken father. He was known in the neighborhood for his eccentric outbursts, violent outbursts and drunken stupors which gave him the nickname of ‘Kelley the Crack’ or ‘Kelley the Crackpot’ (2003). In 1863, no longer wanting the responsibility of being a father, Kelley left his two daughters at Boston Female Asylum, never to see them again. A few years later, at the age of eight, Honora was sent to work as a full-time, live-in servant for a

middle-aged widow named Mrs. Abner in Lowell, Massachusetts. Mrs. Abner never formally adopted Honora, but changed her name to Jane Toppan. On the one hand, Mrs. Abner treated Jane like a member of the family, but on the other, she was not allowed the same freedoms and privileges. She was constantly reminded of her lowly origins and was constantly looked down upon for her dark, Irish appearance (2003). Jane kept her head down, did her work, and knew her place, but inside she developed great feelings of animosity, resentment, and hatred. She took great pleasure in being a gossip and would fabricate vicious tales about people in the community she detested. She was also a secret pyromaniac who, “Derived intense erotic pleasure from starting fires” (2003). Jane would soon find another way to satisfy her twisted, deranged needs.

Jane enrolled in Cambridge Hospital’s nursing training school and excelled both academically as well as socially. The doctors and nurses were impressed by her aptitude and enjoyed working with her because she had such a sweet personality. What they did not know was that she had secretly begun to conduct experiments on her patients using combinations of different drugs to find the perfect lethal combination. She would poison her patients when she was alone with them at night and observe how they would respond to the different concoctions. Jane soon found that combining the drugs atropine and morphine was the perfect way to kill her victims (Schechter 2003). The deaths would appear to have resulted from whatever ailment the patient was suffering from or from natural causes. The exact number of people she murdered while working at Cambridge Hospital is unknown, but it was enough for Jane to develop her own effective method to murder.

After completing her training at the hospital, Jane found work as a private nurse. She was well-known throughout Cambridge for her professionalism and pleasant demeanor. She worked for a number of different patients over the next ten years, but would usually select those who were elderly and had no surviving relatives or at least, “None who were likely to enquire as to the circumstances of their deaths” (Roland 2007). In addition to poisoning her patients, she was also known to steal sizeable sums of money and valuable possessions while employed. It is also believed that during this ten-year period that Jane also murdered her foster-sister Elizabeth and her best friend Myra Connors. The motives behind their murders are unknown, but it has been thought that she simply had become addicted to killing. This infatuation with killing would soon spiral out of control.

In 1901, Jane went on a vacation to Cape Cod and stayed at the home of an old friend named Alden Davis. His wife, two married daughters and a number of grandchildren were also vacationing at the cottage. Over the next six weeks, Jane murdered each grown member of the Davis family. She murdered her last two victims over a short four day period. While her last victim lay dying, Jane took the woman’s ten-year-old son into the next room and made him get into her bed with her (Schechter 2003). The consecutive deaths of an almost an entire family over such a short period of time caused shock and aroused suspicions leading to Jane’s arrest.

While in custody, she was examined by some of Boston’s leading psychiatrists and soon admitted to them the motivation behind her many killings. She shocked them

by saying that she had “an irresistible sexual impulse” to kill and that she got an intense feeling of euphoria from poisoning her victims and holding them in her arms while they convulsed to death (Schechter 2003). She also admitted that she felt that she had grown more powerful over the last year and that she had, “Let herself go” during the Cape Cod vacation. While her confessions stunned the doctors, their final diagnosis was that she was “morally sane,” which at the time was the Victorian term for a criminal psychopath (2003). Jane was tried and found guilty of murder and was sentenced to live the remainder of her life in the state mental hospital. It is believed that Jane was spared the death penalty because the jury of ‘Victorian gentlemen,’ could not, “Bring themselves to sentence a ‘respectable’ woman to the gallows” (2003). Shortly after her trial had ended, Jane admitted that she had killed thirty-one people, though the number is believed to be closer to one hundred.

She seemed to take great pride in herself and was known to tease the nurses at the asylum by smiling at them and saying: “Get the morphine, dearie, and we’ll go out into the ward. You and I will have a lot of fun seeing them die” (2003). Jane Toppan spent thirty-six years at the hospital until her death in 1938. She was eight-four-years-old.

### **Rosemary West**

In 1994, after British police were called to the couple’s house on 25 Cromwell Street in Gloucester, the couple’s dark and deadly secrets would be revealed to the world. The police arrived at the residence to arrest the couple for raping a minor. Their five young children were taken into protective care, and that is when the tales of terror began

to emerge. The children had been so frightened of their parents because Fred and Rose had threatened that if they misbehaved, they would be “buried under the patio” like their sister Heather (Innes 2006). Heather Ann was the couple’s oldest child together, and had disappeared seven years earlier at the age of seventeen. After learning about this from the younger children, the police immediately returned to the house and began digging and removing the concrete slabs of the back patio. They soon found the remains of what they believed to be a young female. When the house was searched inside, a large collection of pornographic videotapes and photographs, which included naked pictures of the Wests’ young daughters. One of the bedrooms was been used as a make-shift brothel for Rose, who worked as a prostitute at the request of her husband, and it contained a large collection of whips and bondage paraphernalia. The investigating officers described the scene as being, “So disgusting and so vile and so difficult” to process (2006). Little did they know that this was only the tip of the iceberg of the couple’s depraved and deadly secret world.

Rosemary Letts was born in 1953 in Devon, England. Her mother suffered from a deep-state of depression and even received electroshock therapy while pregnant with Rosemary (Biography.com 2013). It is unknown if the shock therapy had any detrimental physical or psychological effects on Rosemary. Her father was abusive to her mother as well as to the children, and it was rumored that he also sexually molested and may have raped Rosemary as a child (2013). His violent temper and abuse led to Rosemary’s mother moving out of the home and leaving Rosemary to be raised by her abusive father. Rosemary was a rebellious adolescent and developed a strong sexual

attraction to much older men. This attraction would lead her into the arms of an already dangerous and deadly older man, Fred West.

When Rosemary Letts met Frederick Walter West in 1969, he had already committed two murders and countless sexual assaults. Fifteen-year-old Rosemary, who was already known in her town as a “nymphomaniac,” was easy prey for twenty-eight-year-old Fred (Wilson 2006). Despite the fact that Fred was already married and had a child from a previous relationship, Rose left home at sixteen to move in with him. That was the beginning of their twenty-five year twisted and violent relationship. The two were attracted to each other right away because they were both described as being “sex maniacs” (Colin 2006). Fred West persuaded Rose to have sex with other men as he watched. She would later pose for nude photographs that Fred would put in advertisements in sex magazines. It is believed that Fred was seduced by his mother at the age of twelve and that Rose had had a sexual relationship with her own father and had attempted to seduce her younger brother when he was twelve (2006). The bond between the two would intensify after they would learn that they were both killers.

While in prison for fraud in 1971, the daughter of Fred’s wife Rena, who also lived with them, disappeared. Rena’s daughter, Charmaine, and Fred’s daughter, Anne Marie, disliked their stepmother Rose intensely because she would beat them for no reason. After Fred was released from prison, Charmaine could not be found and there was no doubt in Fred’s mind that his young lover had killed her. It was then that he admitted to Rose that he had killed two women before they met, including his pregnant

mistress and a fifteen-year-old waitress. This did not drive Rose away, but instead intensified their bond. After moving out of the trailer that Rose, Fred, his wife Rena, and his daughter Anne Marie had lived in and into a house in Gloucester, Rena disappeared. Her body would be found years later, buried not far from the body of Fred's pregnant mistress whom he had murdered in 1967. After Rena's disappearance the family would move to 25 Cromwell Street, where their life became a "non-stop sexual orgy" (Wilson 2006).

The couple began renting out rooms of the house to teenagers and Rose would have sex with the male lodgers, which Fred had no objection to. He encouraged the behavior and suggested that she start prostituting herself and have the clients come to the house. Rose excitedly agreed and Fred turned one of the bedrooms into the make-shift brothel. It was also during this time that the couple would become friends with young women, invite them into the house and drug them so Fred could rape them as Rose watched. One of these young women, Caroline Raine, was asked to move in as an au pair to the couple's children, which they soon had five of, but decided to leave after a few weeks because of Rose's and Fred's sexual advances. Two weeks after leaving, in January 1973, Fred saw Caroline walking and offered her a ride. Caroline agreed not knowing Rose was in the backseat. Once in the car, Rose attempted to kiss Caroline, but when Caroline became uncooperative, Fred punched her and knocked her out. Once back at the house, the couple dragged the unconscious Caroline inside, drugged her, bound her, and the couple began to sexually assault her. The next day, Rose and Fred told Caroline that the only way they would let her live was if she agreed to return as their au pair.

She reluctantly agreed and said she needed to return home to collect her belongings. The Wests agreed to let her go back to her house if she came right back. As soon as Caroline got home, she told her mother about what had happened, and the Wests were arrested. The couple would only be charged with indecent assault, and because Caroline was too traumatized to testify at the hearing, the Wests were only given a twenty-five pound fine and were released (Wilson 2006). It was then that they decided that it would be easier for them to just kill their victims in the future.

Over the next twenty-one years, Fred and Rose continued to rent out rooms of their house on Cromwell Street and Rose continued to seduce the male lodgers, some of whom became Rose's regular brothel clients even after moving out. Fred would continue to make advances towards the female lodgers, and when they did not reciprocate, he and Rose would drug them and sexually assault them. Some of them would never leave the house on Cromwell Street. Rose and Fred would invite the young girls they had befriended over the years to the house, and then ask them to join their "sex games." Some agreed, mostly out of sheer fear, but not all of them did, but would face the same fate as the au pair Caroline.

It is believed that during the next two decades, Fred and Rose sexually assaulted and murdered nine women and buried some of them in and around their home. One of the victims was Shirley Robinson, who was an eighteen-year-old lodger and lover who had become pregnant with Fred's baby. Heather, their sixteen-year-old daughter was also another of their victims. Fred had raped Heather when she fourteen, taking her virginity

(Wilson 2006). Heather became extremely depressed and withdrawn, which caused Fred and Rose to worry that she might tell someone about the incest. In June of 1987, Fred took the day off from one of his odd jobs working on a building construction site, and he and Rose murdered Heather and buried her in the back garden. They later constructed a concrete patio over where they had buried her. They told everyone that Heather had suddenly left home and had made no contact with her parents since. After Heather's death, the killings are believed to have stopped. The couple, however, continued to molest and rape some of their other children, but kept them from ever telling anyone by threatening to do to them what they had done to Heather. The family continued to live in the house on Cromwell Street until the arrest in 1994.

After the discovery of what was believed to be Heather's dismembered body under the patio, Fred West was charged with murder. He insisted that Rose had no knowledge of the murder. The police may have believed his story had they not discovered more body parts under the patio. They knew that Rose was not the innocent, unknowing wife that Fred claimed she was. Confronted with the evidence, Fred admitted to raping and killing two other young girls during the 1970's but did not mention the other victims that were buried in the cellar and underneath the bathroom. It is believed that he did not tell the police about the other bodies because he did not want his precious home to be damaged by them digging up the interior (Wilson 2008). But the police continued to pressure Fred until he admitted that there were six more bodies buried at the house and that he had murdered three other women whom he had buried in the Gloucestershire countryside. After the discovery of a total of eleven bodies at 25

Cromwell Street, Rose West was charged with being involved in ten of the murders. While awaiting trial, Fred West committed suicide by hanging himself in his prison cell on New Year's Eve 1995 (2006). Shockingly, Fred's daughter Anne Marie attempted to commit suicide after learning of her father's death. It is believed that Fred and his brother had had an incestuous affair with Anne Marie while she was growing up. Rose, on the other hand, did not seem saddened by the death of her husband. She declared that, "He got what he deserved" (2006).

During her trial in October 1995, Rose plead not guilty and claimed that she knew nothing about the murders because she was out of the house working as a prostitute (Colin 2006). Her defense placed their hopes of an acquittal based on the fact that there was no forensic evidence linking Rose to the bodies, but there was sufficient evidence that Rose was capable of taking part in the crimes. This evidence was provided by the Wests' surviving children and by other victims of Fred and Rose's sexual assaults who came forward after they had been arrested. On November 21, 1995, Rose West was found guilty on all ten charges of murder. She was sentenced to life imprisonment. At her sentencing, the judge, Sir Charles Mantell, stated, "If attention is paid to what I think, you will never be released" (Wilson, 2006).

### **Aileen Wuornos**

Falsely dubbed the 'first female serial killer' and the 'lesbian murderer' by the media, Aileen Wuornos attracted enormous attention during the early 1990's (Marlowe 2009). The thirty-one-year-old prostitute was arrested after her fingerprints were found

on items that had been stolen and sold at a Florida pawn shop. The items belonged to a number of Florida men who had disappeared and been found murdered in 1989. After being arrested at a biker bar in 1991, Aileen Wuornos admitted to killing seven men that she had met while hitchhiking and prostituting (2009). She claimed that the murders had been committed in self-defense because the men had become violent and either attempted to rape or actually rape her. Her confession was prompted by a phone call that she was allowed to make to her lesbian girlfriend, Tyria 'Ty' Moore, while she was in custody. Ty was afraid that she would be implicated in the murders and cooperated with police by agreeing to have their conversation recorded. Aileen's love for Ty and her desire to prove to her that she had never cheated on her with another woman was the motivation behind the confession. During the recorded conversation, Aileen told Ty that, "The reason why I'm confessing is there's not another girl. I did it. There is no other girl" (2009). This confession to Ty was not only Aileen surrendering herself to the police, but surrendering herself to the inevitable fate of hardship and defeat that she had been running from all of her life.

Aileen was born to a fifteen-year-old newlywed mother in 1956. Aileen's mother, Diane, had married her husband, Leo, after accidentally becoming pregnant with Aileen's older brother Keith. During the young couple's marriage, Leo was repeatedly arrested for a number of petty crimes, but he avoided going to jail by joining the army. Diane, who was pregnant with Aileen at the time, saw her husband's leaving as her opportunity to escape her unwanted marriage. After Aileen was born, Diane and her two young children moved into her parents' home in Troy, Michigan. When Keith was five and

Aileen four, Diane walked out of the door and never came back. The two children were left to be raised by their grandparents alongside Diane's two younger siblings. Aileen would never meet her father. In 1966, Leo was arrested and convicted for raping a seven-year-old girl and was later diagnosed as being paranoid schizophrenic (Marlowe 2009). He had served time in a number of mental hospitals prior to committing the rape, and he was sentenced to serve his time in a Kansas prison. He, however, committed suicide by hanging himself in his cell in 1969. Aileen grew up believing that her grandparents were her real parents after they legally adopted Aileen and Keith in 1969. Her childhood, already damaged by her parents' abandonment, continued to be plagued by problems as she grew up.

Aileen's grandfather was an alcoholic who consistently beat his wife, Keith, and Aileen. He was tyrannically strict by not allowing Aileen or Keith to ever bring friends to their house and refusing to let them open any of the curtains in the house (Smith 2003). The children were also malnourished because Aileen and Keith's grandmother was also an alcoholic and neglected to buy food and feed them. Aileen and Keith did not do well in school and spent most of their time setting fires for entertainment. When she was six, Aileen's face was severely burned and left her scarred for the rest of her life. By the time she reached puberty, Aileen had already begun sleeping with neighborhood boys for money, food and cigarettes. It was rumored that she had begun having sex with her brother Keith when she was ten, but that was never proven to be true. She soon began using the money to buy drugs and alcohol. At the age of fourteen, she became pregnant and claimed that she was raped by an older man who lived in the neighborhood and was

one of her grandfather's friends. Her grandparents were furious with her and sent her to live in a home for unwed mothers where she gave birth to a baby boy in 1971 (Marlowe 2009). The baby was immediately taken away and put up for adoption. Aileen was not allowed to see the baby before he was taken away. Brokenhearted, Aileen returned to her grandparents' home.

A few months after giving birth to her baby, Aileen's grandmother died from liver failure. Her grandfather told her and her brother Keith that they were no longer welcome there, and that they had to leave immediately and never come back. Keith went to live with friends and developed a drug addiction and began robbing stores to support his habit. Aileen dropped out of school and was out on the street (Smith 2003). This is when she turned to prostitution. Aileen ended up hitchhiking her way to Daytona Beach, Florida, but along the way, she was arrested a couple of times for crimes that were not related to her prostituting, such as disorderly conduct, drunk driving and failing to appear in court.

Around the time of her twentieth birthday, she learned that her grandfather had committed suicide by inhaling gas, and that her brother had died of throat cancer (Marlowe 2009). She was the beneficiary of Keith's life insurance policy and received a ten thousand dollar settlement. The money only lasted a few months. She used the money to buy a car which she soon wrecked while driving drunk. She attempted to find a job, but was unsuccessful and returned to prostituting. That is when she met a wealthy retiree whom she quickly married. Her husband, Lewis Fell, was forty-nine years older

than she and was very generous to her. He bought her a fancy new car and expensive jewelry and clothing. He was her chance to have a normal life, but it was not meant to be. Nine weeks after they married, Lewis filed for divorce because Aileen could not control her drinking and was constantly starting fights at bars. Alone once again, Aileen returned to prostitution and her mental health began to decline.

In 1978, Aileen shot herself in the stomach and was taken to the hospital. Once she recovered, she was released from the hospital, but was not given any further psychiatric care. Because she was getting older and her drinking and drug abuse had begun to take its toll, Aileen was not making enough money from prostitution, so in 1981 Aileen decided to hold up a small supermarket in Edgewater, Florida. She was quickly apprehended and charged with armed robbery and spent the next few years in prison. While incarcerated, Aileen began reading the Bible and became a devote Christian, but this change was short-lived. After being released from prison, Aileen continued to get into trouble with the law by being charged with check forgery, grand theft auto, and attempting to rob a boyfriend at gunpoint (Marlowe 2009). At the age of twenty-eight, Aileen decided that she would find try and find love with women. This is when she met a twenty-four-year-old hotel maid named Tyria Moore. The two became lovers the same night they met and soon moved in together. Aileen told Ty to quit her job at the hotel and that she would support them by going back to prostitution. They couple embraced the lifestyle as transients and moved around constantly. Concerned for Aileen's safety, Ty convinced her to take a gun with her while she was working the streets. She continued to work the streets, but was making less and less money. Ty returned to working at hotels

as a maid, and this made Aileen paranoid that she would eventually leave her. Her fear of losing Ty and stress of not being able to support herself caused Aileen to quickly spin out of control.

One night in November 1989, Aileen met fifty-one-year-old Richard Mallory and they decided to party together. He drove them out into the woods where they drank and talked until dawn. It was then that Aileen claims that Richard wanted to have sex, but refused to pay her. When Aileen refused, Mallory allegedly attacked and brutally raped Aileen repeatedly. While he was taking a break to smoke a cigarette, Aileen took out her handgun and shot him four times. She took the contents of his wallet, covered his body with some carpet she found in the trunk, and fled in his car. When she returned home to Ty, she was badly bruised and bleeding. She told Ty what had happened, but Ty refused to believe that she had actually murdered Mallory, until she saw the news report about the murder. She did not leave after Aileen's confession, but instead stood by her. She would later tell the police that she did not leave because, "I thought at the time: that, okay, she has all the frustration out of her system – for whatever reason she hated society – that she'll be okay. But obviously she wasn't. Obviously, it was just the turning point, and she figured she got away with it once – she would keep doing it" (Marlowe 2009). It was six months later when Aileen would kill again.

She would later shoot and kill a forty-three-year-old man who had picked her up and had also become violent with her. She took his gun, money, jewelry, and car. Afraid of being seen driving the car, Aileen quickly abandoned it, and she was hitchhiking when

she met Peter Siems, who was a retiree who was a devote Christian who worked for an outreach center. It is not clear what exactly happened with Siems, but Aileen claims that after talking with him for a while about his outreach work and him offering to help Aileen, Siems demanded sex. Aileen then shot him, took his belongings, and drove off in his car. This is when she would make one of the mistakes that would lead to her arrest. On July 4, 1987, Ty was driving Siems' car, unaware that it was stolen, and was driving too fast when she took a corner too quickly, and rolled the car. The couple panicked and asked witnesses not to call the police and fled the scene. After the police arrived, they realized that the car belonged to Siems, who had been reported missing. The witnesses were able to provide the police with a very detailed description of Ty and Aileen. Over the next five months, Aileen would kill five more men, claiming that they were all committed in self-defense. The two were on the run and lived in hiding for the next three years. Over time, flyers with sketches of the two had begun to circulate throughout Florida. One night while Aileen was buying alcohol, Ty left and traveled to Pennsylvania to stay with her sister. It was shortly after Ty abandoned Aileen that the police connected her fingerprints to the stolen items and she was arrested in 1990.

Aileen spent a year in prison before her trial would begin. At her trial, Ty was called as a witness by the prosecution. It was only then that she realized that Ty had not only abandoned her, but betrayed her. Ty avoided all eye contact with Aileen as she sat stunned and broken hearted. Aileen was the only witness for her defense, but her behavior on the stand was very strange. She would make strange statements about being part of a government conspiracy, that electronic monitoring devices had been planted in

her body, and that she was being watched by hidden cameras. Some thought that she had inherited the predisposition towards schizophrenia from her father while others thought she was just pretending to be insane. Her defense claimed that she was permanently damaged from all the abused she had suffered over the years and had developed a borderline personality disorder, but the jury did not agree. It only took the jury two hours to reach a verdict. They found Aileen guilty of the murder of Richard Mallory. As Aileen was led out of the courtroom, she yelled at the jury saying, "I'm innocent. I was raped. I hope you get raped. Scumbags of America!" (Marlowe 2009). She would have numerous other outbursts during the penalty phase of her trial, but was ultimately sentenced to death. Over the next two years, Aileen pled guilty to two more counts of murder and pled no contest on three counts. She was never charged with Siems' death because the body was never found. Shortly after her conviction, a number of women's rights groups started petitioning that her death sentence be overturned. In July 2001, Aileen asked the court to end the mandated appeals of her death sentence and she also recounted her testimony that the murders had been committed in self-defense. Some believe she made these requests and claims because her mental health had deteriorated so severely that she was not in control of her thinking. She did however, begin to write a confession two months before her execution in which she wrote: "Dear Lord Jesus, I know I have done some wicked things in my life, and Lord God, I know I deserve every bit of the rot in Hell" (2009). On October 9, 2002, Aileen was the tenth woman to be executed in the United States since the death penalty had been reintroduced in 1976 (2009).

## **CONTRIBUTING SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS**

In order to begin theorizing why these particular women were driven to kill, creating a set of possible contributing factors is essential. These factors can be social, personal, biological, and demographical in nature. With this particular topic, that being acts of violence where a woman is the perpetrator, it seems of great importance to see if there were any similarities between the different women. Using basic factors such as race, age, place of birth, and level of education can provide some insight into why these women were driven to commit such heinous acts, but in this study, using more specific and detailed factors are required. This study uses a list of thirteen factors. They include both situations and experiences that occurred during childhood, as well as those that occurred during adulthood. Thirteen specific factors have been chosen that will be identified in the review of each woman's life and background. The factors are:

1. Poverty
2. Broken/dysfunctional home life (including adoption)
3. Abusive parents/guardians
4. Physical abuse (by someone other than a parent/guardian)
5. Sexual abuse (by someone other than a parent/guardian)
6. Abandoned or Neglected (by someone other than a parent/guardian)
7. Rape
8. Abusive husband/spouse
9. Employment issues/problems
10. Drug habit/addiction

11. Alcohol dependency
12. Unwanted/unplanned pregnancies
13. Mental illness (resulting from life events, not born with)

While these factors are broad, and can also be viewed as psychological problems, they have been chosen because in the majority of cases, more than one factor is present and each one of them can be seen as a significant social problem. They defy the “norms” of society, thus supporting and representing Durkheim’s idea of “normlessness

The first of factor is coming from a poor family or household. This is significant because individuals who come from poor economic backgrounds comprise a large portion of those who go on to commit criminal acts. Having little or no money can cause emotional, social, and physical hardships for individuals, especially for children who come from poor homes.

The second factor is whether or not the women came from a broken home. The term “broken home” is used in the broad sense. It can include situations such as having been raised by a single mother or father, becoming orphaned because of the death of a parent or parents, being sent to live with other relatives such as grandparents, being raised in foster care, or being raised by brothers and sisters who were young themselves. It can also include cases of adoption.

The next factor is closely related to the second and is growing up in an abusive and/or unstable household. The terms “abusive” and “unstable” are also used in the broad sense. This can include instances where one or both of the parents or guardians

were physically, emotionally, mentally, or sexual abusive towards their children. This can also include situations where there was someone in the home who suffered from an addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, etc. For this particular study, unstable and abusive can include a home-life where the child felt or was presented with any kind of physical or emotional trauma.

The next two factors are being physically abused and/or sexually abused as a child by someone other than the child's parents or primary guardians or someone not within the child's home. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, physical abuse is defined as, "Any nonaccidental physical injury to the child and can include striking, kicking, burning, biting the child, or any action that results in physical impairment of the child" (ACF 2011). The ACF defines sexual abuse as being, "Any sexual activity, practice or instruction which either meets the criminal definition or is unhealthy for a child considering his/her age and level or development" (2011). For this particular study, rape is not included in this category, but will instead be considered a separate contributing factor. It is common that a child can grow up in a home free from any type of abuse, but can be victimized at the hands of persons known to them or by complete strangers. Examples of this could be an incident where the female child was sexually molested by a family friend or by a neighbor, smacked, pushed or kicked by a babysitter, or inappropriately touched by a member of their community such as a teacher, clergyman, or sports instructor. These incidents may occur a single time or could occur numerous times over long periods of time. Also, these incidents are considered significant whether

they are reported to parents or authorities or kept secret by the child victim. A number of the women included in the sample did not openly admit to being victims of childhood abuse until after they were arrested and sentenced for the murders that they had committed.

The sixth factor is that of abandonment and/or neglect. These two terms are also used in the broad sense. The ACF defines neglect as, “The failure of a parent or other person with responsibility to the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm” (ACF 2011). Abandonment is defined as, “When the parent’s identity or whereabouts are unknown, the child has been left by the parent in circumstances in which the child suffers serious harm, or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or to provide reasonable support for a specified period of time” (2011). Not having proper adult supervision can enable a child to have the opportunities to engage in acts of deviance at an early age, thus creating a pattern of behavior which can continue into adulthood. It also can make the child feel that they are not cared for and that it does not matter how they act because no one will care either way if they are good or bad.

The next factor can have a significant impact on the life of an individual, and that is rape. As mentioned before, rape is considered a form of sexual abuse, but in this particular study it is considered an independent factor because a number of women in the sample were raped as children, but had not been sexually molested prior to the rape. A

number of the women were raped during their teenage years and as adults, but were not sexually molested as children. Some of the women were raped by their fathers and other close relatives, while others were assaulted by boyfriends, male acquaintances, and strangers.

The next factor is being abused by a significant other. This can include people who the women dated on a casual basis but were not in a significant relationship with, boyfriends, husbands, and lesbian lovers. The term “abuse” is also used in the broad sense. This can include physical, emotional, mental, and sexual forms of abuse. Examples of this would be being beaten during a drunken rage, verbally berated, personally humiliated by a spouse, and forced to perform sexual acts that are degrading or demeaning. This category does not include acts of rape by a significant other.

The ninth factor is employment and career problems. A number of the women in the sample group had difficulty obtaining and/or keeping a steady job. This created financial issues for a number of the women which led them to find alternative and primarily illegal means to earn money. Examples of this would be engaging in acts of prostitution, forging checks, insurance policy fraud, and petty forms of theft. This category also includes instances where the women were not allowed to obtain a job outside of the home and were therefore completely dependent upon their spouse, thus limiting their ability to be at all financially independent.

Drug abuse or having a drug habit is the next factor. A number of the women chosen had a history of drug use, some starting at a very early age and becoming

progressively worse over the years. Some of the women were addicted to prescription drugs while others were addicted to hard narcotics. If any of the women used drugs during any point in their lives, they are placed into this particular factor category. It should be mentioned that the women who did use drugs were likely to have come from a home where someone was also using or abusing drugs.

The eleventh factor is if the woman had a history of abusing alcohol. This factor can be connected to the drug habit factor in some instances. Women who abuse drugs are also likely to have a problem with alcohol consumption. The two habits sometimes coexist or one may lead to the starting of the other. Some of the women who committed multiple murders used the excuse of being high at the time and therefore were not responsible for their actions. While their addictions could have altered their judgment and may have contributed to their violent behaviors, prosecutors and jury members many times did not feel that it absolved them of their actions.

The next selected factor is having unwanted or unplanned pregnancies and births of children. While some of the women wanted children, loved them deeply, and were otherwise good mothers despite their crimes, others did not want that responsibility at all. A number of women had unwanted pregnancies which ended in either miscarriages or abortions while others were carried to term but were abandoned or neglected. Those women who reluctantly had children were often resentful of them and saw them as contributing factors to their addictions, feelings of unhappiness and despair, and growing feelings of homicidal rage. A number of the children eventually became murder victims

themselves at the hands of their own mothers.

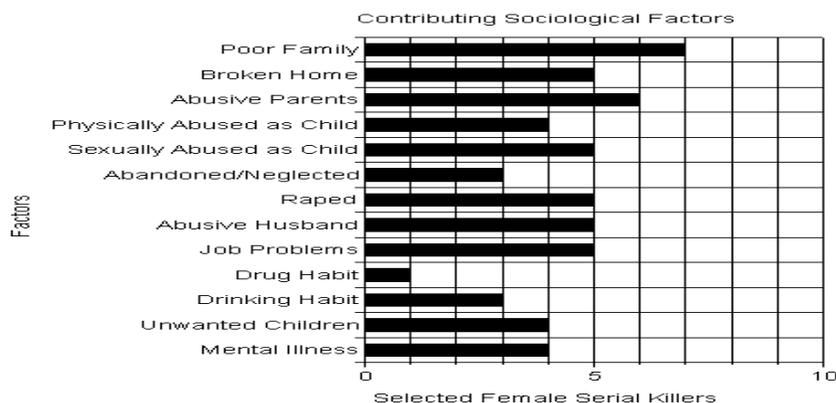
The last factor is mental illness. This term is also used in the broad sense. Some of the selected women suffered from serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression. Others had self-esteem issues, thoughts of suicide, actual suicide attempts, and feelings of being disconnected from real life. Any documented event of emotional or mental illness or condition is considered significant to this study.

Previous studies on serial killers have been done that primarily focus on biological and emotional factors, this study does not view them as being any more significant than the numerous other factors. While mental illness can and has contributed significantly in serial murder cases, it is not being viewed as having more weight or significance in this particular study.

## RESULTS

After examining the backgrounds and life histories of the ten selected female serial killers, a simple bar chart was created containing the results. The vertical column contained the thirteen selected sociological factors and the horizontal column represents the number of women who experienced each one. This method was simple but effective in creating an understandable visual matrix. Percentages were then calculated for each of the factors. Some of the women experienced numerous traumatic and stressful events in their lives, while a small number of the women experienced very few of the negative factors. This may provide some insight into why each woman committed the particular crimes they did and why certain victims were targeted.

**Table 1.0 Contributing Sociological Factors Experienced**



The factor that was experienced the most by the women was coming from a poor family. Seven out of the ten women came from families who lived on or below the poverty level. A number of the women lived in homes without the basic amenities of indoor plumbing, electricity, or heat. Velma Barfield, better known as the “Death Row Granny,” was tried and convicted for the murder of her husband Stuart Taylor and was suspected of being involved in four other deaths including her own mother, was the second oldest of nine children (Montaldo 2004). She was born into the Great Depression and her family struggled to make ends meet. Her family lived in North Carolina’s cotton and tobacco belt where luxuries such as running water and electricity were not commonplace. She and her family barely had enough food to eat, had to draw water from a well dug beside their house, and go out into the woods to use the restroom because they did not even have an outhouse (Vronsky 2007). Jane Toppan, who confessed to killing 31 people, came from a poor family in Massachusetts whose father turned her and her sister over to an orphanage in Boston where they were eventually given to other families to work as indentured servants (Schechter 2003). Due to the lack of financial stability, these women were not given the same opportunities as other children who came from more economically stable homes. A number of them were not able to obtain a proper education because they were forced to work to help support themselves as well as their families at an early age. A number of the women turned to petty crimes such as theft and forging checks and others were left homeless for periods of time during their lives.

The second most experienced factor is having abusive parents and/or family members. As mentioned before, the term abusive is used in the broad sense and includes

verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Rape is not included in this category. Sixty percent of the sample women experienced some type of abuse at the hands of one or both of their parents or other family members. The infamous “Damsel of Death,” Aileen Wuornos, who was convicted of killing six men who picked her up while prostituting, was a victim of abuse from a very early age. She claimed that her maternal grandfather touched her sexually and kissed her passionately when she was two years old (Vronsky 2007). Carol Bundy was half of the murderous couple alongside her husband Douglas Clark and was convicted of murder for the part she played in a murder her husband committed, along with another charge of murder and use of an illegal firearm, and was sentenced to twenty-seven-years to life in prison (Ramsland 2009). It was suspected that she was involved in the other numerous abductions, rapes, and murders committed by her husband. Carole was a victim of abuse at the hands of her mentally ill mother from an early age. Her mother would repeatedly lock her out of the house, forcing her to walk two miles to her father’s home at the age of nine. Her mother was not allowed to dole out any type of physical punishments because once she began beating them, she would not stop (Vronsky 2007). Another victim of childhood abuse was Rose West, the wife and killing partner of Fred West. Together the Gloucester couple killed a number of young girls, including their own daughter, and buried their bodies in and around their row house on Cromwell Street. She claimed that her schizophrenic father, Bill Letts, abused her sexually while her mother was suffering from severe depression (Greig 2006). Killer Carole Bundy began her life with loving and caring parents, but at the age of eight, her mother began hating her. She would lock Carole outside of the

house forcing her to walk to her father's workplace in order to get back into the house. Her mother also began savagely beating her with a belt. The abuse at the hands of her mother would not end until she was 14, when her mother died suddenly of a heart attack (Vronsky 2007).

Five of the thirteen factors were experienced by half of the women sampled. The first of the five is coming from a broken or unstable home. The terms broken and unstable are also used in the broad sense and include different and unconventional living conditions. These include situations where the parents were divorced, one or both parents died, parents remarried, being raised in an orphanage, adopted, or being raised by a single parent. Genene Jones was a pediatric nurse suspected of killing over fifty babies and children during her nursing career. She was convicted of the murder of one of the children along with the injury to seven other children by injecting them with muscle-relaxing drugs and sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison (Ramsland 2009). After her birth in 1950, she was immediately given up for adoption. Mary Ann Cotton, the English serial killer suspected of killing over twenty people by poisoning them with arsenic, including a number of her own husbands and children, lost her father in a work accident at a very early age (Klein 2003). She was deeply affected by her father's death and was even more devastated when her mother remarried a younger man. Her relationship with her stepfather was "cold and distant" and prompted her to want to leave her home as soon as she was able to marry (Manners 1995). The infamous killer Aileen Wuornos and her brother Keith were abandoned by their mother while still toddlers and were raised by their strict and abusive grandparents. Aileen never knew her father because he was sent

to prison when she was a baby after being charged and convicted of abducting of 6-year-old girl. He committed suicide in prison by hanging himself before Aileen ever got a chance to meet him (Manners 1995).

The second of the four factors experienced by half of the women selected is being sexually abused as a child, adolescent, or teen by someone outside of the home. This means that the abuser could be a family friend, church member, sports coach, or stranger. Nannie Doss, dubbed the “Lonely Hearts Killer” and the “Jolly Black Widow,” was responsible for eleven murders by poisoning including four husbands, two children, her two sisters, her mother, her grandson and her nephew (Greig 2006). In her biography it states that, “Nannie was molested by a string of local men of all ages in fields, barns, and cars before she reached her middle teens” (Manner 1995).

The third factor is having an abusive husband, boyfriend, or significant other. Karla Homolka and her husband Paul Bernardo, were dubbed the “Ken and Barbie Killers” because they made such an attractive couple. Paul, with the help of Karla, molested, kidnapped, raped, and murdered two teenage girls in Toronto during the late 1990’s. One of the victims was Karla’s own 15-year-old sister Tammy. Karla drugged, videotaped, and even performed sexual acts on the girls while Paul watched. Unlike the other women in the sample group, Karla had a normal, even privileged, upbringing with no evidence of any type of abuse. “Overall, nothing has been uncovered in Karla Homolka’s adolescent history that is particularly different from the lives of millions of typical teenagers” (Vronsky 2007). This all changed after she married Paul Bernardo.

He had a sadistic sexual appetite that he forced Karla to satisfy and if she refused, he would physically force her to comply. She claimed in her defense that it was the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that drove her to agree to help Paul find young girls to satisfy his demented sexual cravings. At age seventeen, Carol Bundy, no relation to Ted Bundy, married a 56-year-old man hoping to escape the sexual, physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of her father. This was a tragic mistake. Her husband, who remained nameless, was a raging drunk. He was physically and emotionally abusive towards Carol and even attempted to force her into becoming a prostitute in order to earn money for him. She claimed that it was because of these threats that she left him very soon after getting married, but also admits that she did accept small amounts of money in exchange for sexual acts during this time in her life (Vronsky 2007). Later, Carol turned to lesbian relationships and would claim that they too had been abusive towards her and that, "Hurt and rejection came as easily from her female lovers as from her male ones" (2007). By the time she met Douglas Clark in 1980, she had given birth to two sons with her third abusive husband (Greig 2006).

Five out of the ten sample women claim that they were raped at some point in their lives. Some claim that they were raped by their fathers, others say they were raped by their significant others, and others claimed that they were raped by a stranger. When she was fourteen, Carol Bundy's mother died suddenly of a heart attack. That very night was when she claims that her father raped her and her sister for the first time (Vronsky 2007). The physical abuse at the hands of her father escalated in the months following her mother's death, and Carole stated that she was raped a second time by her father

before he remarried a short time later. When Rose West was sixteen, she was walking home from a party and a man pulled up and offered her a ride home. Being naïve and starved for male attention, she accepted. Instead of giving her a ride home, the man took her to a golf-course and raped her. She never reported the incident to the police. She claims that she was raped for the second time in 1969, about five months after the first rape. That time she was standing at a bus stop when a man approached her and tried to start a conversation. Rose ignored the man's advances, became frightened, and ran into a nearby park. The man followed her, then attacked and raped her (Klein 2003). Like the first incident, Rose did not report the second rape to the police.

Another of the five factors experienced by half of the women is having employment issues. These women had a difficult time finding, obtaining, and keeping a stable job for a number of different reasons. Before Genene Jones became the infamous baby-and-child-killing nurse, she struggled to find a way to earn her own money. She married a high-school dropout named Jimmy DeLany right after graduating high school with a C-average. Soon after marrying Jimmy, she became pregnant with the first of her two children. She was hoping that Jimmy would step up and support his new bride and newborn baby, but instead all he cared about was drinking, cars, and partying. Genene decided that she wanted to become a beautician and enrolled in cosmetology classes. She got a job at a hospital hair salon, but quickly tired of the job and claimed that the products she was using at the salon caused her to develop a skin rash. She then decided that she wanted a career in medicine and convinced her widowed mother to pay for her to go to nursing school. She did well in nursing school by earning A's and B's, but the other

nursing students would recall that she was not taking being a nursing student seriously. They stated that, “She did not study during her breaks, she made jokes with the instructors during lectures, and in anatomy class she drew caricatures of male genitalia” (Vronsky 2007). After graduating from nursing school, Genene went from hospital to hospital because she was unable to get along with the other doctors and nurses.

Four out of the ten women reported that they experienced being physically abused as children, adolescents, or teenagers. This was abuse at the hands of someone outside of the family or home. Carole Bundy was physically, sexually, verbally, and emotionally abused by her mother and father for many of her adolescent and teenage years. There was a time after her father remarried that Carol and her sister Vicky were sent to live in foster care (Vronsky 2007). Though never formally documented, Carol claimed that the abuse continued at the hand of her foster parents. She and her sister would not be in foster care for very long because their father reclaimed them and moved the family to Los Angeles. Her father would return to his violent and abusive ways until Carol left home at age seventeen.

Of the ten women studied, forty percent of them had unwanted pregnancies and/or children. In some cases the pregnancies were a result of a rape, while others were during relationships and marriages. A number of the women genuinely did not want children, but still had them because they were doing what their husbands wanted, or to fulfill the feminine roles that they felt were being imposed upon them by society. When Aileen Wuornos was between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, she became pregnant. She

claimed that a friend of her grandfather's was the assailant. She alleged that he drove her into the woods late one night and raped her. Her mother did not believe that she was raped and felt that the pregnancy was a result of her daughter being a "harlot" (Davis 2001). Aileen was sent to a home for unwed mothers and gave birth to a baby boy in 1971, who was immediately put up for adoption. No one ever came forward and claimed to be the father of the baby. Aileen felt that she would never be a good mother and wanted her child to have a better upbringing than her own.

However, Mary Anne Cotton became pregnant and willingly gave birth to five children during the course of her three marriages. She also became a stepmother to seven of her husbands' children. Cotton did not have a great love for children or being a mother, but instead liked having numerous potential victims at her disposal. She would take out insurance policies on the children, as well as on her husbands and mother, poison them with arsenic, and then collect the policy monies once they died. It was easy for Mary Ann to poison the children with arsenic and claim that they died of gastric fever because the child mortality rates were extremely high in Victorian England (Klein 2003). For these women, children were not seen as blessings, privileges, or gifts, but instead were burdens, hardships, or simply just objects to take out their violent behaviors upon.

Suffering from mental illness is another factor experienced by five of the ten women. A number of the women came from families with histories of mental illness, but only four of them have been documented as to have suffered from it themselves. The term mental illness is also used in the broad sense for this particular study. This can

include such ailments as depression, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and paranoia. The presence of mental illness, many times left untreated, may have contributed to their violent behaviors. Karla Homolka had what some would consider being a privileged upbringing and lived in a wealthy suburb of Ontario, Canada, but she still had frequent thoughts of suicide. Karla acted and was treated like a princess. People compared her image to that of a Barbie doll. That all changed when Karla became obsessed with witchcraft, death, curses, and demons during her teenage years. She became less outgoing and friendly and more aggressive and hostile. Her friends would notice scratch marks on her arms and one time she told one of them that she tried to kill herself and made the statements like, "Sometimes I just don't want to live" (Stunell 2007). Jane Toppan, the killer nurse who was accused of murdering over thirty people, was raised by her mentally-ill father until he was sent to a mental institution for the remainder of his life. Jane was sent to live with her grandmother, but was soon turned over to the Boston Female Asylum for Destitute Girls (Vronsky 2007). She was eventually adopted and this was when she began to exhibit some odd behaviors. Jane lived in a fantasy world and began to tell people elaborate lies about herself and her life. She once claimed that she had been offered a nursing position with the family of the Czar of Russia. It is possible that with time, Jane began to believe her own lies which gave her a sense of superiority, power, and invincibility that empowered her to commit the murders of her patients. Aileen Wuronos's father was diagnosed as being schizophrenic and it was believed by some psychiatrics that she may have inherited a predisposition for the illness and may have contributed to her violent crimes.

Three of the ten women were victims of abandonment and/or neglect. As previously mentioned, Jane Toppan was sent to live with her grandmother after her mother died and her father was sent to live in a mental hospital. Her grandmother attempted to raise her and her three sisters, but soon found herself unable to support them along with herself. She had to turn them over to an orphanage where the sisters would eventually be separated from one another because they were each adopted by different families. Aileen Wuornos was also abandoned as a child. Her mother, Diane Pitman, was seventeen when she gave birth to her in addition to already having a year-old son named Keith. Diane was a single teenaged mother of two children because her husband was incarcerated for sodomizing young children. It was a difficult task for the young woman to manage on her own. “The young mother found it increasingly hard to cope so when the children were still infants she ran off, leaving them with her emotionally-distant parents, Lauri and Britta” (Davis 2001). Aileen’s maternal grandparents did not tell the two children that they were their grandparents, but instead legally adopted them, gave them their last name of Wuornos, and raised them to believe that they were their parents. The adoption would eventually end up being as tragic an event as the abandonment by their mother because Aileen and Keith would become victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of their grandfather.

Thirty percent of the women studied suffered from a serious drinking habit. Their abuse of alcohol affected all aspects of their lives and could be seen as a contributing factor in their destructive and violent behavior. Dorothea Puente, the “Elizabeth Taylor-like classy lady” who murdered nine elderly residents of her self-run nursing home and

buried them in her backyard garden, had been an alcoholic for most of her life. Her parents were both alcoholics who spent the majority of their days being drunk when they were not out picking cotton for slave wages in San Bernardino, California. They were such alcoholics that, “When money was scarce, what little the family had went mostly on cheap alcohol” (Manners 1995). It seems that this family tradition was passed on down to Dorothea despite the fact that she went to live with relatives after her parents died before she was six-years-old. Dorothea went through a string of bad marriages and a number of miscarriages and all the while finding her solace in the bottle. The alcoholism would prove to be beneficial to Dorothea because she would meet a number of her future male residents at the many bars she would frequent. The liquor gave her a sense of confidence and a feeling of personal security that enabled Dorothea to be aggressive and persuasive enough to recruit her future victims. She would drink so heavily at times that she would verbally and occasionally physically attack some of her elderly boarders for refusing to take their medication (Vronsky 2007).

Only one of the women studied had a documented history of drug abuse. While it has been mentioned in a number of the biographies of the different women that they had at one time or another experimented in recreational drug use, but none of them were seriously addicted to drugs or had used them for a significant amount of time during their lives. The only exception was that of Velma Barfield, better known as the “Death Row Granny.” Velma claimed that her drug addiction was the major reason why she committed murder multiple times. After suffering from a number of physical ailments and emotional traumas over the years, Velma had become addicted to a number of

prescription drugs. She was first prescribed the drug Valium to help calm the anger and rage she felt was tearing her up inside during one of her abusive marriages, however, the number of drugs she used began to grow and, “Eventually Velma would become addicted to a combination of painkillers and tranquilizers, which included Elavil, Sinequan, Tranxene, Tylenol III, and Valium” (Vronsky 2007). Velma was juggling a number of different doctors in order to keep her drug supply constantly flowing. During her murder trial in 1974, Velma’s defense attorney would claim that it was this lengthy and severe drug addiction that clouded her judgment and therefore she should not be held responsible for her heinous actions. She claimed that she was “not herself” at the time of the murders and that her judgment was severely impaired because of her addiction (Manners 1995). The jury did not accept this argument and found her guilty of first-degree murder. She, however, continued to claim that she would never have acted the way she did if it were not for her addiction to numerous prescription drugs.

## ANALYSIS

The research shows which factors each of the selected women experienced during their lives. Each of the factors alone could have explained why the women became serial killers, or they could have had no real bearing on their deadly actions. In order to determine if the factors could have contributed, Durkheim's Anomie Theory and Merton's Strain Theory were examined. It has been acknowledged that the factors selected are very broad for this particular inquiry. It is also acknowledged that the experiences presented in this study have been and are components of life for many individuals, most of whom do not become serial killers. Many women, and men, who experience abuse, neglect, abandonment, and rape deal with such difficult events and circumstances in socially normal and acceptable manners. Sometimes such events may have positive effects and contribute to an individual becoming stronger and more motivated. It can also lead them to help others who have suffered from the same experiences and thus help to prevent it from happening to others. This determination of correlation between the chosen factors and the selected serial killers is in no way meant to be applied to every person in society who experienced similar circumstances and events. The purpose of this inquiry is not to say that, "If a person was raped, neglected, abandoned, abused, etc. that they will become a serial killer" or that "If someone

commits acts of violence, such as serial murder, and have experienced such factors in their lives that it is an acceptable excuse to have committed such acts.” Instead, this inquiry is looking at the factors as being parts of a bigger puzzle in helping to understand what might have contributed, motivated, and driven these women to commit their particular crimes. In some cases, the factors experienced may be determined to have no significant bearing on why each of the women committed multiple murders. Each of the ten women selected and the factors they experienced will be briefly analyzed in relation to the theories of Durkheim and Merton in order to make an empirical determination as to whether or not the factors could be viewed as contributing significantly.

### **Velma Barfield**

During her life, Velma Barfield experienced ten out of the thirteen selected factors: Poor Family, Abusive Parents, Physically Abused as a Child, Sexually Abused as a Child, Raped, Abusive Husband, Job Problems, Drug Habit, Drinking Habit, and Mental Illness. Velma had a history of forging stolen checks in order to support her addiction to prescription pain killers (Jones 1996). She admitted that her prescription pain killer addiction had started after suffering injuries in a car accident, and that the cost of maintaining her supply of medication became costly. This created a strain on her financially and may have contributed to her motive to commit theft and forgery. This is an example of Merton’s Strain Theory. Despite the fact that Velma was employed at certain points of her adult life, she was unable to make what was necessary to support her addiction. She turned to “nonconforming” acts within society to obtain the means to

achieve her goal (Traub & Little 1999). When she was faced with the possibility of having her crimes discovered, she committed murder to protect her secret. This is an example of Durkehim's Anomie Theory. She created her own reality of "normlessness," or illegitimate actions, in order to obtain what she needed, whether it be the money for the drugs or to silence potential witnesses to her crimes (Clinard 1964).

It can also be suggested, not definitely determined however, that the other factors she experienced in her life, such as having an abusive upbringing and later abusive marriage, may have also contributed to her addiction to drugs and alcohol which in turn could have affected her mental state which then led her to commit forgery and then murder to keep her secret hidden. If these events had not happened to Velma earlier in life, would she still have committed such acts of normlessness and deviance? There is no concrete way of determining that except for asking her those questions directly, but for the purpose of this particular inquiry, it can be concluded that they certainly could have contributed to her specific acts of deviance.

### **Carol Bundy**

Carol Bundy experienced six out of the thirteen factors during her life: Abusive Parents, Physically Abused as a Child, Sexually Abused as a Child, Raped, Abusive Husband, and Job Problems. Carol admitted that her motivation behind the murders she committed was because she wanted to please her lover, Douglas Clark, and to help fulfill his deviant sexual appetite (Newton 2006). She also admitted that she committed murder as a result of an obsessive relationship she had with a married man whom she could not

have for herself. The fact that Carol had been a victim of physical and sexual abuse as a child could have contributed to her unhealthy choices in male partners, but that can be viewed more as a psychological issue rather than a social issue following the principal guidelines of Durkheim and Merton. The fact that she came from an abusive background can be seen as her living in a perpetual state of anomie, or “normlessness,” but it cannot be concretely determined that her acts of violence and murder would have been committed if she had not become partners with an already violent and deviant man (Clinard 1964). She may not have been motivated to commit such acts if she had remained single or had become involved in healthy and stable romantic relationships.

### **Mary Ann Cotton**

Mary Ann Cotton experienced three of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Broken Home, and Unwanted Children. The central motive behind Mary Ann’s murders of her husbands, relatives, children and step-children was financial gain (Klein 2003). After the death of her father, Mary Ann was required to help support her family financially until her mother remarried. She resented having to go and work at an early age and decided that the best way to avoid having to do that again was to find a man who could support her (2003). That is what she later did, but when her husbands were unable to support her efficiently or not up to her particular standards, she would dispose of them and move on. Instead of simply divorcing them, she found that they were more useful dead, but only after she was able to convince them to leave her their assets and/or was able to take out a life insurance policy on them. She later found that she could do the same with the

children, both her own and those of her husbands. The children were unwanted burdens and were simply viewed as disposable commodities.

Mary Ann did create her own reality in that she found an alternative means to obtain her goals in life. Instead of working herself and/or making do with what her husband(s) were able to provide, she used murder as a means of income. During the 1880's in England, a woman's choices were limited in society when it came to supporting herself, either working as a servant, menial labor jobs or being a homemaker supported by her husband, but Mary Ann rejected them and created her own way of supporting herself financially. However, she was not driven to commit multiple acts of murder as a last resort to survive, which Merton views as being a contributing factor to acts of deviance, but instead committing serial homicide was as a personal decision (Brody & Agnew 1997). The choice to continue to murder over multiple decades appeared to be her preference. It can be concluded that her life of anomie was not only chosen willingly, but in some sense, enjoyed and prided upon.

### *Nannie Doss*

Nannie Doss experienced six of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Abusive Parents, Physically Abused as a Child, Raped, Abusive Husband, and Mental Illness. Nannie suffered abuse at the hands of her rigidly strict father who treated his children as if they were his employed farmhands (Greig 2006). This led Nannie to rebel as a teenager and marry at a young age with the hopes of finding a happier life. When her marriages did not live up to her expectations or when she found herself at the hands of

another abusive man, she decided to find her own way of escaping the situations. Instead of taking the usual paths of separation or divorce, Nannie turned to poisoning to solve her problems. In addition to ridding herself of a bad situation, she was also able to punish those who treated her badly. This may have been something she would have liked to do to her abusive father if she had had the opportunity. Nannie also used murder as a means of financial support because she did take out insurance policies on a number of her husbands and their property (2006).

Again, it is impossible to know if Nannie would have chosen a different path in life if her circumstances had been different. However, based on what is known about Nannie and her particular background, it appeared that her anger and resentment towards men who did not live up to expectations or were abusive may have stemmed from her troubled childhood and relationship with her father. Nannie did create her own reality by using acts of deviance such as poisoning and murder (Clinard 1964).

### **Karla Homolka**

Karla Homolka experienced three out of the thirteen factors: Rape, Abusive Husband, and Mental Illness. Of the ten women selected for this inquiry, it can be concluded that despite having experienced three of the factors, Karla's motivation behind her acts of violence did not stem from those events in her life. Karla admitted that she participated in the acts of rape, torture, kidnapping, and murder because she wanted to please her husband Paul Bernardo's sadistic sexual appetite. She stated that she did whatever it took to make him happy because, "She just wanted him to love her as much

as she loved him” (Stunell 2007).

Karla led what many would call a privileged life up until she met Paul Bernardo. She came from a stable and loving family, was attractive and popular, did well in school, and had a fairly stable financial background. She learned early on in her relationship with Paul that he had violent tendencies and a demeaning attitude towards women, but chose to continue the relationship. She later accepted, and even supported, Paul’s hidden life of being a serial rapist. When Paul did become physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive of Karla, she viewed it as being justifiable punishment for her not living up to his standards (Stunell 2007). She even encouraged him to punish her if it would make him able to forgive her for whatever it was that she had done to disappoint him. Karla did create her own sense of normlessness in order to obtain what she wanted, which was Paul’s love, but in this particular inquiry, that is not viewed as a goal justified by the means. She helped Paul torture and kill young girls, including her own sister, because it satisfied him, and in turn, made her feel as though she was being the loving and supportive wife she so desperately wanted to be.

### **Genevieve Jones**

Genevieve Jones experienced three of the thirteen factors: Broken Home, Abusive Husband and Job Problems. Immediately after being born, Genevieve was given up for adoption. She was quickly adopted and raised by a wealthy family that had three other children. By all accounts, Genevieve grew up in a loving and privileged household. Despite having more than most children, Genevieve craved constant attention and praise from her

family, friends, and teachers. She would create elaborate stories and lies in order to attract more attention (Vronsky 2007). After marrying and having children, Genee found that her married life was also unfulfilling due to the lack of attention she received from her husband. After divorcing and becoming a single mother in her early twenties, Genee decided that she wanted to begin studying to become a nurse. She felt that she would then gain the attention and praise that she so longed for. She excelled in her studies and gained praise from her hospital coworkers, but that was not enough. Eventually, Genee found that she could fulfill her need for gratification in a different manner, a deadly one. She gained an enormous sense of power and feelings of euphoria knowing that she could control life and death of another human being, especially the lives of infants and children. This obsessive need led her to begin poisoning her young patients with different drug concoctions, letting them reach the brink of death, and then attempting to revive them. Sometimes she was successful, but in the majority of the cases, her victims would die. Genee created her own set of means to obtain her goal of feeling powerful and important. She created her own reality of 'normlessness.'

However, there is no significant evidence to support the assumption that Genee created this reality as a result of anything that happened to her growing up. She admitted that she became addicted to feelings of power and euphoria she gained by poisoning and killing over four dozen babies and children (Innes 2006). The foundation of this addiction cannot be justified or explained away by having experienced the three factors listed. Genee did create her own reality of anomie and normlessness, but that reality stemmed from a place of selfishness and egoism, not strain or event-driven anomie.

### *Dorothea Puente*

Dorothea Puente experienced five of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Broken Home, Abandoned/Neglected, Drug Habit, and Drinking Habit. After losing both of her parents at a young age, Dorothea was shuffled around and never regained a sense of stability. When she was old enough to be on her own, she turned to prostitution and forgery in order to support herself. These are examples of Merton's Strain Theory in that Dorothea had to turn to illegitimate means to obtain what she needed to survive. She engaged in nonconforming conduct (Traub & Little 1999). The pressure of not having a proper education and supportive upbringing were factors that may help explain why Dorothea turned to a life of crime in order to survive. Her criminal actions would continue throughout her adulthood and eventually become more serious and dangerous.

Dorothea began to extort from and poison the elderly and disabled residents of her boarding house. She had already created a reality of anomie and normlessness and murder became the next logical step, at least in her mind. Her progression was fueled by her inability to ever learn to live in a socially acceptable reality because she had become too immersed in her own. The fact that she also developed a serious drinking habit may have resulted from her inability to cope with the circumstances of her life growing up. This is another example of Merton's Strain Theory. It is also an example of Durkheim's state of normlessness. Alcoholism was viewed by Durkheim as being one of the ways in which individuals defied societal norms (Clinard & Meier (1998). While her choices and actions defied societal norms, they were the most effective means by which Dorothea

could obtain what she needed in life.

### *Jane Toppan*

Jane Toppan experienced five of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Broken Home, Abusive Parents, Abandoned/Neglected, and Mental Illness. Jane was born into an already established state of anomie. Her mother had died when Jane was a young child and her father was an alcoholic who did not know or want to properly care for his children (Schechter 2003). This state of normlessness would continue when her father placed Jane and her sisters into the care of a state run asylum for women, where Jane would spend her formative years. Being forced to live in an environment where anomie, normlessness, and strain were constants most likely had an enormous effect on Jane's perception of reality. Living in a isolated and prison-like environment of an asylum would have been like living in a constant state of chaos, which in turn created more acts of normlessness such as violence, suicide, mental illnesses, and perhaps even murder (Clinard 1964). Jane most likely took aspects of this reality with her once she was released into the real world.

When Jane began to work as a live-in nurse and caregiver, she developed her own way of dealing with her reality, and that was to experiment with, drug, and eventually kill her patients. She also developed a habit of setting fires. These actions were examples of normlessness. They gave her a sense of purpose and fulfillment, both emotionally and sexually. It does not appear that these actions were motivated by the principals of Merton's Strain Theory, but they can be linked to those of Durkheim's Anomie Theory.

While Jane was found to be legally sane at her trial, her perception of reality could be based on what she learned from an early age, a reality of a constant state of normlessness (Schechter 2003).

### **Rosemary West**

Rosemary West experienced six of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Abusive Parents, Physically Abused as a Child, Sexually Abused as a Child, Raped, and Unwanted Children. Even before her birth, Rosemary was living in an environment of normlessness and strain. Her mother, who had suffered from severe depression, was treated with electroshock therapy while pregnant (Biography.com 2013). In the early 1950's, little was known about how such treatments would affect a fetus and was allowed to be performed on pregnant women. This may or may not have had any physiological effect on Rosemary, but being born to a clinically depressed mother set the stage for her introduction into a life of chaos and anomie. Durkheim viewed mental illnesses like clinical depression as being a form of normlessness that can result from living in an environment filled with anomie (Clinard 1964). The fact that her father was an abusive and violent man only added to this state of normlessness. It is possible that Rosemary felt feelings of strain, as described by Merton, from having lived in such an unhealthy home and that it may have led her to rebel as a teenager (Traub 1999). While Rosemary may not have been feeling the strain from not being able to achieve financial security as Merton describes in many cases, she may have felt the strain from not being able to achieve having a stable male influence in her life. And when she met Fred West, her

attraction to him may have been based on sexual attraction at first, but because of the age difference, Rosemary may have felt that he could provide her with the male role model and support she lacked growing up.

Rosemary's relationship with Fred West was not an escape from her previous state of anomie and normlessness, but instead was an entrance into a more complex and dangerous one. Fred West introduced Rosemary to a world of sexual deviance which would eventually lead into one of moral and social deviations. The evolution from solely sexual deviant behavior into those of abuse, torture, and murder does not appear to be justified by the principals of anomie and normlessness explained in this inquiry.

Rosemary and Fred West's sexual appetites may have been deviant manifestations in themselves resulting from previous events in their lives, but the progression into violence does not appear to have been caused by an other forces of anomie or strain besides their own twisted carnal urges. These actions connect more Freud's idea that humans commit acts of deviance as a result of biological impulses, which is what Merton wanted to take the focus away from (Traub 1999). He felt that acts of deviance were committed by individuals as a result of societal pressures, and in the case of Rosemary West, her actions cannot be justified as a result of any societal pressures she may have faced. Abducting, torturing, drugging, raping, and murdering young women, including her own daughter, is not seen as being a result of any societal pressures, but instead could be viewed as a result of a dysfunctional and sexually-driven sadistic relationship with Fred West.

### *Aileen Wuornos*

Aileen Wuornos experienced eleven of the thirteen factors: Poor Family, Broken Home, Abusive Parents, Physically Abused as a Child, Sexually Abused as a Child, Abandoned/Neglected, Raped, Job Problems, Drinking Habit, Unwanted Children, and Mental Illness. Of the ten women studied in this inquiry, Aileen Wuornos is the best example of how both living in a constant state of anomie and the strains of societal demands could lead to violent crimes. From a very young age, Aileen lived in a state of normlessness after she and her brother were abandoned by both of their parents and were raised by dysfunctional grandparents. The fact that her grandfather was verbally and physically abusive to his wife, children, and grandchildren provided Aileen with an unhealthy example of what family life was like (Marlowe 2009). Due to the lack of proper parental support and supervision, she and her brother did poorly in school which in turn led them to drop out before graduating. This would affect Aileen's ability to read and write and hindered her from ever being able to obtain a stable job. She turned to prostitution and petty crime as a result. The strain of not being able to achieve the basic goals of society such as obtaining an education and gaining a stable form of employment in order to support herself, led Aileen to create her own set of norms as defined by Merton, in order to survive (Traub 1999).

After she was allegedly raped by one of her clients, Aileen developed a fear that it could happen again. She stated that she murdered her rapist in self-defense, and when she felt threatened again, she committed murder once again to protect herself. In her

mind, the acts of normlessness committed against her had to be righted by committing further acts of normlessness. Realistically, Aileen may not have been in any real danger of being raped or violently attacked each time she committed murder, but in her mind, she may have felt that the danger was real. This paranoia may have been caused by the fact that she had a genetic predisposition towards mental illness because of her father's diagnosis of schizophrenia. This theory, however, was never medically proven or disproved.

When looking at all of the events Aileen experienced in her life, it is not unreasonable to determine that some of her crimes were caused as a direct result. Aileen Wuornos may have been driven to commit murder because she had been living in a situation of both anomie and strain. Her perceptions of reality had been distorted from an early age and continued to be molded as she continued to experience life in a state of dysfunction, despair, and hardship.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this inquiry was to determine if the theories of renowned Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton could help in explaining why a selected group of women became serial killers. The interpretation and analysis of the research results found can be viewed as debatable. Determining right and wrong or true and false was not the purpose of this inquiry, but instead the objective was to examine the lives and crimes of the selected serial killers through a sociological lens. Serial killers have been studied and dissected by experts in many fields of study such as psychology, criminology, forensics, gender studies, biology, and sociologists have examined and theorized about why people become serial killers, but the majority of the studies have focused on male serial killers. While it is true that males do comprise the majority of serial killers, women do commit 12 to 15 percent of serial murders (Cluff et al. 1997). This may be a small percentage, but it is still large enough to deserve attention.

The women selected as the sample group for this inquiry lived in different historical periods and in different countries around the world. This fact is significant in that by examining different women from different historical backgrounds, the research in this inquiry could provide a broad spectrum of examination. Each of these women may

have lived very different lives in different places and times, but similarities were discovered. It was found that a number of these women lived in highly dysfunctional and abusive environments while others lived in relatively comfortable situations. Some of the women were victims of abuse while others were not. A number of the women committed murder as a means to gain financial stability while others killed to please their partners. While each of the women's stories may have differed in the details, one theme did emerge. The majority of the crimes committed by the ten selected female serial killers stemmed from living in a state of anomie, or normlessness, in one form or another. There were aspects of each of these women's lives that can be viewed as straying from the norms of daily life in a given society, and these aspects can be viewed as contributing factors resulting in deviant behaviors perpetrated by each of these women. Opinions may differ as to whether the specific actions of each woman could or should be justified as a result of the factors they experienced, but again, the purpose of this inquiry was not to determine rights or wrongs. It was to determine if the Anomie Theory of Durkheim and the Strain Theory of Merton could be used to help explain why these women killed.

There are a number of ways in which this study could be expanded on for future research. Because the topics of crime, murder, gender issues, and childhood traumas are fluid and are continuously changing, there will always be new data available for like studies. However, there have been very few studies added to the subject of female serial killers, or serial killers in general. There may be in the future, but it is doubtful due to the advancements of police investigations, forensics, and the legal system in comparison to the times when the majority of serial killers committed their crimes in previous decades.

Those who commit crimes, both men and women, are being apprehended more quickly because of the scientific and technological advancements. This prevents murderers from having the chance to commit their crimes multiple times, or at least enough to be categorized as being a serial killer.

Therefore, because of such limitations, this particular study could be expanded on by examining a number of the other infamous female serial killers, comparing them to other categories of murderers, such as spree killers, mass murderers, and killer couples/teams, focusing on different factors they may have experienced in their lives, or using different academic theories as tools of analysis. The topic of female serial killers could be examined sociologically along with other academic fields of study such as gender studies, psychology, biology, physiology, geography, religious studies, and criminology. Incorporation of different theories could provide a new set of results strengthening the argument of this particular study or challenge its findings.

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