From Ted Bundy to Charles Manson: Why women fall in love with serial killers

Ted Bundy had his share of groupies and married one of his admirers even though he had slaughtered dozens of women

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By **Chris Kitching**
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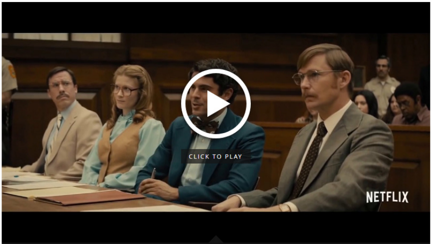

ZAC EFRON PLAYS NOTORIOUS AMERICAN SERIAL KILLER TED BUNDY

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Ted Bundy raped and murdered more than 30 women and girls across the US - but that didn't bother the besotted admirers who sent him marriage proposals and photos of their naked bodies.

The serial killer had his share of groupies who showed up at his trial dressed like his victims, bombarded him with fan mail and gathered outside a Florida prison the day he died in an electric chair.

Evil Bundy even married one of his admirers in a bizarre twist noted as the most famous case of a woman falling in love with a killer - but it is far from the only one.

The rise in true crime films and podcasts has put a spotlight on the relationships again with viewers and listeners left asking why women fall in love with serial killers, including those who preyed on women.

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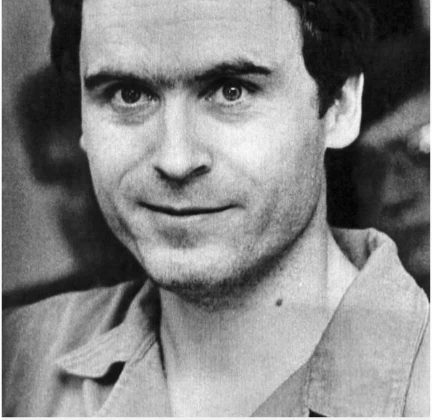

Ted Bundy raped and murdered more than 30 women and girls in the 1970s (Image: Bettmann Archive)

High-profile murderers including **Charles Manson,** Jeffrey Dahmer and "Night Stalker" Richard Ramirez were sent letters and gifts from women all over the world despite their appalling crimes.

In a recent case, family killer **Chris Watts** - who strangled his pregnant wife Shanann and smothered his daughters Bella, four, and Celeste, three - has received love letters and photos from female admirers as he sits in a Wisconsin prison for life.

One sent a photo of herself in a bikini, and another wrote that she didn't care that he had wiped out his family and urged him to put her on his list of visitors, adding: "Trust me, you will not be sorry."

Mirror Online has spoken to a number of experts about women who fall in love with killers to find out what makes them tick.

There is no blanket explanation, but the experts cited cases where women felt that their relationship with a jailed killer was "safe" or they felt like they could "save" or transform the prisoner.

Chris Watts murdered his family, but that hasn't stopped women from sending love letters (Image: Instagram)

Some cases involved women with a mental illness or a history of trauma, including being abused by a

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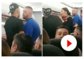

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partner or parent.

Some involved the search for attention or fame.

In extreme cases it's a phenomenon called hybristophilia, or Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome, a sexual disorder in which someone is aroused by wrongdoing.

There are examples of educated women with careers, including lawyers, falling for and marrying killers who will either never be released or get out when they are older men.

Sheila Isenberg, the author of Women Who Love Men Who Kill, told Mirror Online that many of the women she interviewed for her book had been abused physically, sexually and/or emotionally by a partner or parent.

Charles Manson (pictured in March 1971) had his share of female admirers after he was jailed (Image: AFP/Getty Images)

She said: "For them these were safe relationships (with killers) because they guys were behind bars.

"The women I interviewed ranged from one with a PhD who was a college professor all the way down to high school dropouts.

"To me the main thread was the abuse.

"These were women who were finding a way to meet their own psychological needs.

"When we get into a relationship we all have needs and we all have ways to meet those needs.

"What she sees in him is a relationship where she is safe and in control, and maybe for the first time has some power - she is on the outside and he is on the inside."

Sheila Isenberg is the author of Women Who Love Men Who Kill (Image: Linda Nova)

Ms Isenberg, from New York state's Hudson Valley, added: "I don't ever think these women are crazy.

"I think the whole serial killer thing, with Chris Watts or Ted Bundy or any notorious killers, it's about their celebrity.

"What is in our culture that is growing this kind of thing?

"I think it has to do with the intersection of how we treat women, celebrity worship and violence against women - and all of these things coming together create this passion for these relationships with killers.

"The women's pursuit of these unhealthy relationships is a symptom of a culture or society that has a lot of problems."

Ms Isenberg, who is writing a new book called Mad, Bad and Dangerous: Women's Fascination with Crime and Outlaws, said the latest trend in true crime is feeding into the obsession.

She said: "Women are the main consumers of this stuff, not men."

A woman sent a photo of herself in a bikini to jailed family killer Chris Watts (Image: WELD COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY)

Katherine Ramsland, an American professor of forensic psychology and the author of a number of books about serial killers, has written about the different reasons women marry them.

She wrote for **Psychology Today:** "Some believe they can change a man as cruel and powerful as a serial killer. Others 'see' the little boy that the killer once was and seek to nurture him."

A few of the women have been lawyers, psychologists, or judges, she wrote.

She added: "Most people think such relationships defy common sense, but some theorists have hypothesised a biological impetus that operates apart from logic.

"Primate research finds that females prefer the larger, louder, more aggressive males who show clear markers of their maleness.

"In humans, then, certain women might sense in an aggressive male a larger-than-life companion who can deliver more than an ordinary man could."

Carole Ann Boone famously married Bundy during his trial in Florida (Image: Netflix)

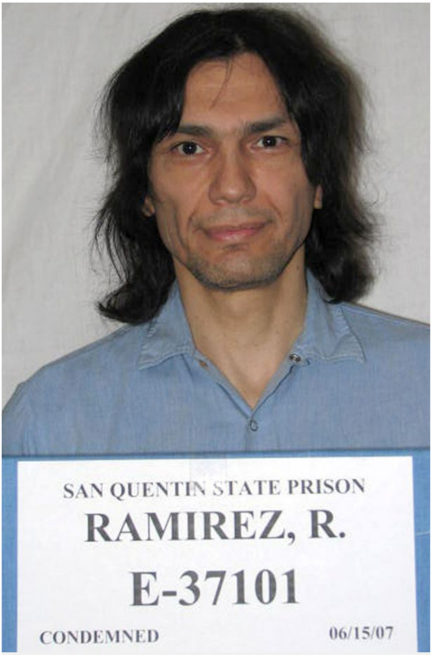
Carol Ann Boone started her relationship with her former colleague Bundy while he was on trial for murdering two university students, even testifying as a character witness for him.

Bundy, who represented himself, proposed while questioning her and their marriage was later made legal. Boone gave birth to Bundy's daughter, Rose, in 1982.

Doreen Lioy married Ramirez, the California serial killer and rapist known as the "Night Stalker", in 1996 after she saw him on TV and started visiting him in prison.

She saw him as "kind, funny and charming" - and believed he was innocent.

Doreen Ramirez, who was disowned by her family, rejected suggestions that she was crazy or naive, telling CNN: "I just believe in him completely. In my opinion, there was far more evidence to convict OJ Simpson."



Richard Ramirez, the "Night Stalker", married a woman while on death row (Image: Rex Features)

Michelle Lyons, a former spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, said death row prisoners in the US state have their share of admirers they have never met.

So many, in fact, that staff joked that the inmates have more active dating lives than people "on the outside".

Ms Lyons witnessed almost 300 executions as part of her job between 2000 and 2012, and recently wrote a book called Death Row: The Final Minutes, describing what she saw.

Some women start out as pen pals with jailed killers and eventually become girlfriends or wives.

Ms Lyons said some travelled from as far as Europe to watch their death row boyfriend or husbands be put to death for murder.

She added: "One woman from Germany who came to witness the execution of her death row husband.

"She kept yelling and then took off her shoes and refused to put them back on to walk into the witness room - I think she honestly thought this might delay the execution.

"When security officers informed her that she would not be allowed to enter and that the execution would proceed without her, she put them on rather quickly.

Michelle Lyons has written a book about her time working at prisons in Texas (Image: Daily Mirror)

"If I'm being honest, I had encountered her a number of times and never felt she was particularly sincere and rather, really liked publicity and the notoriety that came with being a death row wife."

She added: "Some of those men on death row had more active dating lives than some of us on the outside.

"One of the [prison] officers who I was particularly good friends with told me about a scene witnessed the week before, when the two women a death row inmate was secretly 'dating' showed up at the unit at the same time and a confrontation ensued.

"So it was possible for an inmate to 'cheat' and some certainly did as there was no shortage of interested women from which they could choose."

London-based relationship expert Kate Mansfield said women who fall in solve with killers may have issues such as depression or low self-esteem or are vulnerable in some way.

The violent men are often narcissists, and there are cases where the women had a parent who was similar in some way, she added.

Relationship expert Kate Mansfield says violent men are often narcissists (Image: Handout)

Ms Mansfield said: "Psychopaths and narcissists often attract women as they have an extreme ability to be very charismatic, and to charm vulnerable women who are susceptible to this kind of manipulation.

"In our relationship choices, we tend to unconsciously choose what is familiar, over what is safe."

She said the women are putting themselves in danger, "but the denial and delusion will often prevent them from getting help".

Ms Mansfield recently appeared on ITV's Good Morning Britain to argue many true crime programmes or films "glamorise" offenders without any consideration for the victim and their families.

She said: "Crime, violence and men like this have a certain appeal on a primal level in terms of masculinity and a kind of brutal strength, this would only appeal to women who are very insecure though.

"I had a session with a woman who was in love with a man in prison. He was not in trouble when they met but in fact it turned out that she is a law student and was trying to help him, even though she didn't actually know what crime he had committed.

"After one session we uncovered that, in a similar way to most women who end up in these kind of relationships, she herself has a deep fear of intimacy and abandonment due to the attempted suicide of her mother as a child.

"Her mother was also violent and abusive, but the suicide attempt in front of her had left the woman with a trauma that she was trying to resolve by recreating this in her adult life with a man.

"She has a tendency towards rescuing men, and abandoning herself, because it is easier and feels less of a risk to be the one on the outside who is seemingly in control of the relationship."