

# Dangerously in Love: The convict confession

With Oscar Pistorius being the latest criminal to gain a large female following and the social media explosion of ‘convict crushes,’ Deborah Williams asks, why are so many women infatuated with prisoners?

EARLIER this year, US prisoner Jeremy Meeks’ mug shot went viral, setting Facebook ablaze, establishing the Twitter and Instagram trends, #SexyMugShot and #FelonCrushFriday. But Meeks’ reign may be over, as Sean Kory, of Santa Cruz, is the most recent offender to receive praise for his green-eyed mug shot. Most recently, the controversial case of Oscar Pistorius produced an army of women called the ‘Pistorians.’ Infiltrating our newsfeeds with the devoted hash tag, #InOscarWeTrust, they also created the website Support for Oscar and condemned his victim, Reeva Steenkamp. “These women are attracted to the status or talent of the individual, not the actual crime,” explains Dr Aleksandr Kogan, Psychologist and Lecturer at Cambridge University.

Hybristophilia, also known as ‘Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome,’ is a form of paraphilia that causes sexual arousal or attraction towards someone who has committed heinous crimes, like murder or rape. Throughout history, the most threatening criminals have drawn the biggest female audiences. As well as receiving mail from fanatical women, US serial killer Ted Bundy married and conceived a baby with his ex-wife, Carole Anne Boone, while jailed. The Kray twins - kings of the London criminal underground but weren’t short of partners to satisfy their murderous nature. Reggie was linked to a string of women, including former Eastenders actress, Barbara Windsor. He even married his widow, Roberta, during his 29th year of incarceration, aged 63. Ronnie also had numerous male lovers in and outside of prison. Their life of love and war will be depicted in

forthcoming film, *Legend*. “The biggest but most unexpected attribute most psychopaths have is a charismatic personality. They are very charming, often handsome and exceptionally good speakers,” adds Kogan. BBC documentary, *Life and Death Row*, told the stories of US inmates sentenced to the death penalty. Facing his inevitable end was 29-year-old Richard Cobb. Jailed for kidnap and murder, his unnerving gaze wasn’t the only thing that caught attention. It was his eloquent speech: “I’m an unregenerable speck of cancer that needs to be excised from humanity, before I grow and develop into something darker. I spent a lot of time just retreating into myself, trying to divorce myself from this form, from this mortal coil. Trying to renounce it. Trying to get ready for whatever type of transcendence might come. Trying to detach myself from all the attachments, the desires, the anger, the remorse.”



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change from fascination to encouragement. As a Chaplain, my main goal is to promote the word of God. So in that sense, it can just be about telling someone, that no matter what, God still loves them.” Williams continues, “Power comes with guys in prison. They have unlimited street credibility. There’s a huge problem with young women looking for men with a street reputation. They show them what it’s like to live on the edge, similar to the ‘ride or die’ concept.” Davis shares more: “A man in prison is dangerous. Generally, he still has criminal connections on the outside. This allows the woman to create a new identity as someone who is strong and a risk taker. As well as this, both individuals can use each other to gain emotional stability. Whoever is on the outside, mainly the woman, will be used by the person on the inside because they are, most of the time, the only connection they have to the outside. In that same way, an element of dependency is formed, as the outside person knows they are the prisoner’s only point of contact.” “Unfortunately,” concludes Reverend Williams, “this often ends with the guys getting the girl into trouble.”

meaning he is unable to harbour feelings he cannot feel or express. In psychology, this is called, projective identification. Davis explains how this can work positively. “Prisoners often try and right their wrongs by doing the opposite. They may think it’s safer to project their emotions onto the woman, fearing that if they themselves let them out, it would be explosive. However, this can be interpreted negatively and their genuine nature can be called into question.” These men would be branded emotionless for their actions, so can we be surprised that they cannot inhabit or control them? One side affect of this type of emotional control is denial. Sheila Isenberg, Author of *Women Who Love Men Who Kill*, says, “When a woman gets involved with someone on death row, they often deny the crime, in order that they can go ahead with the relationship.”

domesticated by proxy; he’s not there. It’s an artificial relationship which is made artificial by the prison walls.” Davis shares an insiders view. “Prisoners only receive one letter a week and both parties only share positive things. Normal relationships have highs and lows but with these, there has to be a constant high. Inevitably, this wouldn’t be a real relationship.” Prisoner can often seek redemption. So Davis explains how prisoners can see saviour-like qualities in these women. “Lots of criminals love their mother. It’s the only woman they depend on. They may see mothering qualities or want someone who replicates the role. Instinctively, this provides comfort, trust and someone to protect and love upon release.” Alternately, he shares how this homey nostalgia can help explain more. “There is an element of loyalty entwined within this as both may have a family history of crime. If they’ve had a relationship with the prisoner before or another criminal on the outside, it would be a continuation of the norm.”

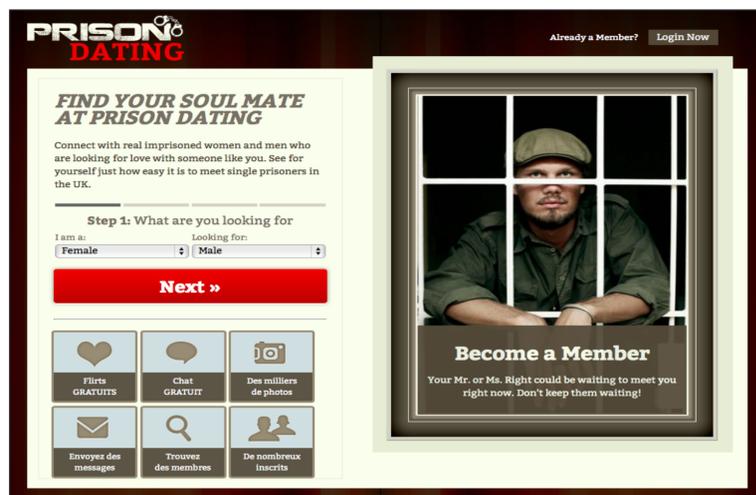
So how can this initial addiction occur? Davis, of HMP Oakwood says, “When you are happy endorphins are released. People want that consistency of happiness. As we are biologically addicted to addiction, we are capable of becoming addicted to something. It’s tied into everything. It’s not just physical, it’s the whole person, the whole being – body, mind, soul and spirit.”

Whether real love or unhinged fantasy, these relationships can be seen as constructed romantic notions. Isenberg adds, “It’s

With nearly 250,000 Facebook likes and 40 parodist twitter accounts between them, Meeks and Kory prove that a prisoner may be locked away from the world but is not locked away from love. Even the Kray’s and Bundy receive social media affection and they’re six feet under. *British crime thriller, Legend will be released in 2015.*



“Inmate to inmate pen palling is more common and can turn into a relationship.”



Clockwise from bottom left: prisondating.com website. Reggie and Roberta Kray, on their wedding day in 1997. Jeremy Meeks’ mug shot. Sean Kory’s mug shot. Oscar Pistorius on trial in October: and actor Tom Hardy, as Ronnie and Reggie Kray, in Legend (2015).