

**A NARRATIVE EXPOSITION OF SERIAL MURDER IN SOUTH  
AFRICA**

**BY**

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**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**

**IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**SEPTEMBER 2009**

# **A NARRATIVE EXPOSITION OF SERIAL MURDER IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the phenomenon of serial murder from the perspective of narrative psychology. Using a case study approach and a grounded theory analytical process this qualitative study utilised the narrative concept of the imago to explore the motivation and development of those who commit serial murder in South Africa. The aim is increase our theoretical understanding of serial murder in directions that support offender profiling.

Semi-structured interviews with two South African men who committed serial murder were undertaken and analysed alongside archival data. Their imagoes formed the focus of the analysis. This analysis included a consideration of how the individual's motivations and developmental patterns were reflected in their crime scenes. This study demonstrated that imagoes play a significant role in the motives for offending, and development of offence behaviours, in men who commit serial murder. The imagoes help create motives; then embody these motives by encouraging and justifying certain types of behaviour in the individual. Interactions between imagoes were particularly significant in this regard. The dominant imago associated with the individual's self was also associated with the development of a behavioural template for offending, and was thus especially significant in embodying motive. The development of offending was further encouraged by the separation between imagoes involved in offending and those that are not. However differences between the case studies were also observed, such as the extent to which imagoes develop in interaction

with others and the roles played by their imagoes in the developmental narrative of their offending.

These findings shed novel theoretical light on the study of serial murder in South Africa. It suggests directions for research into the role of narrative and culture in offending, and for the study of the imago as an embodied mode of interpersonal interaction. It also offers opportunities for research aiming to support offender profiling, and proposes a possible synthesis of competing conceptions of serial murder.

**10 KEY PHRASES:** serial murder; narrative psychology; imago; offender profiling; development of offending; motivation for offending; behavioural template; culture and crime; interpersonal interaction; violent crime.

## OPSOMMING

### **‘n Narratiewe uiteensetting van reeksmoorde in Suid-Afrika**

Die fenomeen van reeksmoorde word vanuit die teoretiese perspektief van die narratiewe sielkunde ondersoek. ‘n Gevallestudie benadering tesame met die analitiese proses van begrondingsteorie is gebruik om die narratiewe konsep imago te benut om motivering ten opsigte van reeksmoorde asook die ontwikkeling van diegene wat hul skuldig maak aan reeksmoorde in Suid-Afrika, te ondersoek. Die doel was om die teoretiese begrip van reeksmoorde uit te brei en om die proses van profilering van oortreders te ondersteun.

Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is met twee Suid-Afrikaanse mans wat reeksmoorde gepleeg het, gevoer. Analises van die onderhoude is uitgevoer waarby inligting uit argiewe ingesluit is. In die analises is oorweeg hoe die individu se motiverings en sy ontwikkelingspatrone in die misdaadtonele gereflekteer is. Die studie het aangetoon dat die imago ‘n betekenisvolle rol speel in die motiewe vir oortreding, en in die ontwikkeling van oortredingsgedrag. Die imago het bygedra om motief te skep wat dan beliggaam word in die gedrag van die individu deur die versterking van sekere tipes gedrag. Die interaksies tussen imagoes is ook betekenisvol in hierdie verband. Die dominante imago wat met die individu se self geassosieer was, hou ook verband met die ontwikkelingsproses van die gedragstemplaat van die oortredings, en was dus spesifiek betekenisvol vir motief.

Die ontwikkeling van die oortredingsgedrag is verder bevorder deur ‘n skeiding wat tussen imagoes was wat betrokke is in die oortreding en die wat nie betrokke is nie. Verskille tussen die gevallestudies is waargeneem, soos die mate waartoe imagoes ontwikkel in interaksie met van die ander en die rolle wat deur die imagoes gespeel word in die ontwikkelingsnarratief van hul oortredings.

Hierdie bevindinge werp nuwe teoretiese lig op die bestudering van reeksmoorde in Suid-Afrika. Navorsing ten opsigte van die rol van narratief en kultuur in oortredings word deur die studie gesuggereer, asook vir die bestudering van die imago soos dit beliggaam word in interpersoonlike interaksie. Die studie bied ook geleentheid vir navorsing ten opsigte van die profilering van oortreders, en stel ‘n moontlike sintese



van vergelykende konseptualiserings voor ten opsigte van die fenomeen van reeksmoorde.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, my thanks go to my supervisors, Prof. Dave Beyers and Prof. Gerard Labuschagne. Your insight, patience and humour were invaluable. You asked all the right questions, reigned me in when I headed off on tangents, and guided me through. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service, without whom I would never have been introduced to this field, and who made this study possible. I hope the results help you in your work.

The staff at the Department of Correctional Services also deserve my thanks for their friendliness and advice throughout the process of data collection.

Next, I would like to express my appreciation to my employers at the Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire Constabularies for granting me the time I needed to complete this study.

I thank my parents, Dave and Dot, for teaching me the value of enthusiasm and the willingness to *vasbyt*. Without you I would never have started. Thanks also to my parents-in-law, Gordan and Diane, without whom I would never have finished.

Finally, to my wife, Claire. Thank you. You never doubted me; giving me the time, support, and advice I needed to get this study done. I cannot express my gratitude enough, and am so looking forward to more time with you and Adam.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 SERIAL MURDER AS A PHENOMENON .....	2
1.2. MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH .....	3
1.2.1 The particular applicability of narrative psychology to serial murder.....	3
1.2.2 The need for research on offending that uses the narratives of the offenders themselves .....	3
1.2.3 The need for research on serial murder and offender profiling in South Africa .....	4
1.2.4 The competing narratives of serial murder and offender profiling.....	5
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .....	7
1.4 NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND DESIGN .....	7
1.4.1 Research design .....	7
1.5 NOTE ON THE NARRATIVES PRESENTED .....	8
1.6 RESEARCH OUTLINE .....	8
1.7 CONCLUSION.....	9
CHAPTER 2 THE NARRATIVES OF OFFENDER PROFILING AND SERIAL MURDER .....	10
2.1 THE ENTWINED NARRATIVES OF SERIAL MURDER AND OFFENDER PROFILING.....	12
2.1.1 Defining offender profiling and its uses .....	13
2.1.2 The competing narratives of offender profiling and their commonalities ..	15
2.2 INTRODUCING AND DEFINING SERIAL MURDER .....	16
2.3 CAUSES OF SERIAL MURDER .....	34
2.3.1 Medical and psychiatric narratives of cause .....	36
2.3.2 Environmental narratives of cause.....	42
2.4 MOTIVATIONAL MODELS OF SERIAL MURDER .....	48
2.4.1 Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas, and McCormack’s motivational model of serial sexual homicide .....	49
2.4.2 Hickey’s trauma-control model .....	55
2.4.3 Summary and critique of motivational models of serial murder .....	59
2.5 TYPOLOGIES OF SERIAL MURDER.....	61
2.5.1 Ressler, Burgess and Douglas’s organised – disorganised typology .....	63
2.5.2 Holmes and DeBurger’s four category typology .....	70
2.5.3 Summary and critique of typologies .....	76
2.6 THEMATIC MODELS OF SERIAL MURDER .....	78
2.6.1 Interpersonal thematic models of serial murder.....	79
2.7 RESEARCH ON SERIAL MURDER IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	81
2.7.1 Introduction to South African research into serial murder .....	82
2.7.2 Offender profiling in South African serial murder investigations .....	83
2.7.3 Historical context of serial murder in South Africa.....	84
2.7.4 Comparisons between South African and foreign serial murderers .....	84
2.7.5 Summary and current situation of South African research into serial murder .....	86
2.8 CONCLUSION.....	87

CHAPTER 3 EXPLORING NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY'S APPLICATION TO RESEARCH INTO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR.....	88
3.1 INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY?.....	88
3.1.1 Approaches to the study of self.....	89
3.1.2 The narrative approach to the study of the self.....	91
3.1.3 Research from the perspective of narrative psychology .....	95
3.2 NARRATIVE AND CRIME .....	102
3.2.1 Advantages of narrative in the study of crime .....	102
3.2.2 The use of narrative in the study of crime .....	104
3.2.3 Narrative and offender profiling .....	106
3.3 IMAGOS .....	108
3.3.1 Defining the narrative concept of the imago.....	108
3.3.2 Negative and dysfunctional imagos .....	110
3.3.3 Imagos and crime .....	111
3.4 CONCLUSION.....	119
 CHAPTER 4 A NARRATIVE INQUIRY .....	 121
4.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH .....	121
4.1.1 Narrative inquiry .....	121
4.2 METHODOLOGY .....	122
4.2.1 Evaluation and validation in qualitative research .....	122
4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	129
4.4 SAMPLING .....	130
4.4.1 Criteria for selection .....	130
4.5 DATA COLLECTION .....	132
4.5.1 Clinical observations.....	133
4.5.3 Archival and other sources.....	135
4.6 PROCEDURE.....	137
4.6.1 Administration .....	137
4.7 DATA ANALYSIS.....	140
4.7.1 Discussion of case study method .....	140
4.7.3 The analytical process.....	143
4.8 DATA PRESENTATION.....	152
4.8.1 Presentation of transcriptions.....	152
4.8.2 Presentation of case studies .....	153
4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	157
4.10 CONCLUSION.....	159
 CHAPTER 5 IMAGO ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES.....	 160
5.1 CASE STUDY ONE: SIMON MANDLENKOSI .....	161
5.1.1 Bibliographical detail.....	161
5.1.2 Prologue to Simon Mandlenkosi's story.....	161
5.1.3 Simon Mandlenkosi's story .....	164
5.1.4 Epilogue to Simon Mandlenkosi's story.....	236
5.2 CASE STUDY TWO: JACQUES EKSTEEN .....	256
5.2.1 Bibliographical detail.....	256
5.2.2 Prologue to Jacques Eksteen's story .....	256
5.2.3 Jacques Eksteen's story.....	262
5.2.4 Epilogue to Jacques Eksteen's story .....	368



CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	388
6.1. COMPARISON IN ROLES OF SIMON AND JACQUES' IMAGOS.....	389
6.1.1 What role do imagos play in the motivation of a person who commits serial murder?.....	389
6.1.2 What role do imagos play in the development of the offending behaviour? .....	391
6.2 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE STRUCTURES OF JACQUES' AND SIMON'S NARRATIVES.....	396
6.2.1 Sequencing of events in the narratives.....	396
6.2.2. Coherence and cohesiveness of the narratives.....	397
6.2.3 Progression of the narratives over time .....	399
6.2.4 Summary of narrative structures.....	400
6.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FEATURES OF SIMON AND JACQUES' IMAGOS AND THE LITERATURE .....	401
6.3.1 Number of imagos.....	401
6.3.2 Imagos' development, associations and interactions .....	402
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS, CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	405
7.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE.....	405
7.1.1 Narrative theory and the concept of the imago.....	406
7.1.2 The theory of serial murder.....	410
7.1.3 The theory and methods of offender profiling .....	415
7.2 METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION.....	417
7.2.1 Implications for narrative research methodology .....	417
7.2.2 Evaluation of the research.....	418
7.3 CRITIQUE.....	422
7.3.1 Critique of definitions used.....	422
7.3.2 Critiques of the construction of the narratives.....	424
7.3.3 Critiques on the basis of culture.....	425
7.3.4 Critique of evaluation criteria .....	426
7.3.5 Critique of applicability to offender profiling .....	427
7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	428
7.4.1 Improvements in research methodology .....	428
7.4.2 Research into the role of narratives in offending.....	429
7.4.3 Research into the concept and role of the imago .....	430
7.4.4 Research into the role of culture in narratives and offending.....	431
7.4.5 The future of the study of serial murder .....	432
REFERENCES .....	434
APPENDIX A INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS.....	449
Transcription of interview with Simon Mandlenkosi .....	449
Transcription of interview with Jacques Eksteen .....	507
APPENDIX B INTERVIEW AND AUDIO TAPE CONSENT FORMS .....	598
APPENDIX C TRANSCRIPTION MATRIX.....	602
APPENDIX D IMAGO IDENTIFICATION FORM.....	603
APPENDIX E THEORETICAL MEMO .....	605
APPENDIX F IMAGO AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE.....	607
APPENDIX G LETTER OF PERMISSION TO VIEW CASE FILES .....	629



## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Classification of multiple murderers.....	19
TABLE 2: Comparison of personality characteristics between organised and disorganised serial murderers.....	68
TABLE 3: Comparison of crime scenes between organised and disorganised serial murderers.....	69
TABLE 4: Four category typology of serial murderers.....	72
TABLE 5: Characteristics of the research sample.....	132
TABLE 6: Data sources used for each case study.....	133
TABLE 7: Summary of Simon’s offences and victims.....	244
TABLE 8: Summary of Simon’s motives and their relationships to his imagoes....	253
TABLE 9: Summary of Jacques’ ‘incidents’ and victims.....	378
TABLE 10: Summary of Jacques’ motives and their relationships to his imagoes..	385
TABLE 11: Similarities and differences between the role of imagoes in the development of offending behaviours in Jacques and Simon .....	395

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Motivational model of sexual homicide.....	50
FIGURE 2: Trauma-control model of serial murder.....	56