CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The study of crime and criminal behaviour is not new, spanning more than two centuries (Stephenson, 1992). The nature of crime and those who commit it has been researched across fields as diverse as medicine, philosophy, penology, sociology, psychiatry, criminology and psychology. This research often sought to identify and classify the most salient aspects of the phenomenon to increase our understanding and to develop theory (Canter, 2004). More recently, psychological research aiming to directly assist criminal investigations has become increasingly popular (Canter & Heritage, 1990; Salfati & Canter, 1999). This is particularly true of serial murder, which has received an inordinate amount of interest from academics, investigators, and the media (Hickey, 2002; Hodge, 2000; Holmes & Holmes, 1998). For this reason the study of serial murder, perhaps more than any other field of research into crime, is characterised by competing narratives. Research into serial murder is also unique in the degree to which it is influenced by and entwined with the investigation of serial murder, particularly the practice of offender profiling (Labuschagne, 2003). The narratives of serial murder and offender profiling are thus inextricably linked. This study takes this understanding as one of its starting points, and using the theory of narrative psychology, will identify new insights into serial murder in South Africa.

Narrative psychology is part of the movement in social science research towards postmodern perspectives on human experience. Being a social constructivist theory, it adopts the stance that language is central in the formation and structuring of the self (Crossley, 2000). This is an expansion of the traditional modernist perspectives on research. As shall be shown, narrative psychology's emphasis on meaning and the creation thereof is particularly applicable to the study of serial murder. By exploring the role narratives play in the motivation and development of a person who commits serial murder this study has thus chosen to acknowledge the social construction of meaning and the entwined narratives of serial murder. The main sources of these narratives will be interviews with the person who committed serial murder. The narrative concept of the imago (McAdams, 1988, 1993; Parkinson, 1999) will be focused on, which should also assist in creating theory applicable to offender profiling.

1.1 SERIAL MURDER AS A PHENOMENON

Serial murder is a site of competing narratives, and each narrative brings competing definitions of the phenomenon and so defining serial murder remains difficult (Del Fabbro, 2006). Mostly simply, serial murder can be defined as a form of multiple murder (Holmes & Holmes, 1998, 2001) where a person acting alone or with another commits two or more separate acts of murder (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Geberth, 1996; Egger, 1990). This definition avoids much of the confusion of categorisation and description noted in the study of serial murder, along with some of the conceptual, practical, and moral shortcomings of the label 'serial murderer' (Ferguson, White, Cherry, Lorenz & Bhimani, 2003). These will be explored in the chapters to come.

Serial murder appears to have become increasingly prevalent in the latter half of the twentieth century (Hickey, 2002). This trend is mirrored in the developing world, including South Africa (Gorby, 2000; Hodgskiss, 2004; Labuschagne, 2001). Serial murder is thus a popular topic for research enquiry, and authors in this field have proposed a number of competing narratives of cause, motivation, and classification. Amidst the competing narratives some consensus appears to have emerged. This consensus finds that serial murder is characterised by structured variations in behaviour; is dynamic; and is underpinned by cognitions and meaning structures (Arndt, Hietpas & Kim, 2004; Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas & McCormack, 1986 ; Canter, 1994; Canter, Alison, Alison, & Wentink, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Hickey, 2002; Hodge, 2000; Hodgskiss, 2001; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2001; Pakhomou, 2004; Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman & D'Agostino, 1986; Wright, Pratt & DeLisi, 2008). Despite this apparent consensus, some of the basic questions that research into serial murder sets out to answer remain unanswered, particularly those that ask what the nature of the links between motivation and development are, and how these are expressed in offender behaviours. As will be explored in more depth in the following chapters, answering some of these basic questions will help not only the investigation of serial murder, but will highlight directions that research in this field could productively follow.

1.2. MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

1.2.1 The particular applicability of narrative psychology to serial murder

Narrative psychology can accommodate the consensus that has emerged in the study of serial murder, and is thus particularly suited to the study of the motivation and development of serial murder. Narrative, as pointed out by Canter (1994) and Maruna (2001), can account for dynamic behaviours. Similarly, narrative is primarily concerned with meaning and the cognitive structures of the individual (Crossley, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 1993) and can so maintain the focus on meaning structures desirable for an adequate understanding of serial murder. Narratives can thus be considered a credulous approach to understanding how someone who has committed extreme violence comes to do so (Winter, Feixas, Dalton, Laso, Mallindine & Patient, 2007). These narrative understandings could be applicable in both the investigative (Canter, 1994) and therapeutic (Winter *et al*., 2007) settings. Despite the benefits of a narrative understanding being highlighted, no research on serial murder has made explicit use of both the epistemology and methodology of narrative psychology.

1.2.2 The need for research on offending that uses the narratives of the offenders themselves

Research studying serial murder by interviewing those who commit serial murder is rare. A large proportion of previous studies into serial murder have either not conducted interviews with those who commit serial murder (relying on media reports instead), or it is not clear whether the interview material they use was collected by themselves or a third party (e.g. Arndt, *et al.*, 2004; Canter *et al.*, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Gorby, 2000; Hodge, 2000; Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Hickey, 2002; Leyton, 1989; Wentink, 2001; Winter *et al*., 2007; Wright, Pratt & DeLisi, 2008). Furthermore, previous research into crime drawing on narrative psychology has either not used interviews with offenders (e.g. Canter, 1994; Hodge, 2000; Winter *et al*., 2007) or when interviews have been conducted, these have not been with serial murderers (e.g. Athens, 1997; Parkinson, 1999; Schultz, 2005). This study aims to fill

this gap by conducting interview based research, from the perspective of narrative psychology, with people who have committed serial murder.

1.2.3 The need for research on serial murder and offender profiling in South Africa

Research into serial murder in South Africa has become more popular over the last two decades and an increasingly large body of research is being accrued (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2005; De Wet, 2005; Del Fabbro, 2006; Du Plessis, 1998; Hook, 2003; Hodgskiss, 2001, 2004; Labuschagne, 2001; Pistorius, 1996). South African research suggests that local serial murderers' behaviours may be different from those found in the United States or United Kingdom (Hodgskiss, 2001, 2004; Labuschagne, 2001). These findings echo those from elsewhere calling attention to the possible variations in serial murder across cultures (Gorby, 2000; Hickey, 2002). This suggests that international research on serial murder may be less relevant in the different social, demographic and perceptual landscape of South Africa. Narrative psychology proceeds from a social constructivist paradigm, and so presumes that behaviour is socially and environmentally mediated. Thus narrative can help account for the ways serial murderers' behaviours may change in response to social and environmental factors. Research drawing on this understanding would also not be dependant on research findings from elsewhere, and could help future comparisons with similar offenders from overseas.

There is also little research in South Africa that attempts to directly assist in the offender profiling of serial murder. While this is in part of reflection of the international research situation (Canter, 2004), the need for this research is even more pressing in South Africa, where not only is there an extremely high number of serial murders compared with other countries (Hodgskiss, 2004; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009) but offender profiling has proven particularly useful in serial murder investigations (Labuschagne, 2003) and the typologies of serial murder used to support offender profiling in other countries may be less relevant in the social and cultural context of South Africa (Hodgskiss, 2004). Although not the main aim of the study, by acknowledging the needs of offender profiling and how

these influence our understanding of serial murder, this study aims to help fill this gap.

1.2.4 The competing narratives of serial murder and offender profiling

Both serial murder and offender profiling are characterised by competing narratives. This study will focus more on those in serial murder, but it is worth highlighting how these narratives affect both fields. Serial murder and offender profiling both receive inordinate amount of media attention. To illustrate this Hickey (2002) lists 69 North American films with serial murder themes produced in a five year period. The narrative propagated by the media appears to influence and compete with academic perceptions of serial murder (Hickey, 2002) and offender profiling (Canter, 2004). This media narrative can distract the researcher from the most relevant aspects of a phenomenon (Canter, 2004), fictionalise the role of the 'profiler' in the mind of the public, and limit their credibility with colleagues in law enforcement (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 2002). Media-propagated images of serial murder can also affect investigations, and court cases, by influencing peoples' perceptions of what it constitutes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009). The media narrative can also exacerbate the competing narratives seen in the academic literature by making knowledge claims with little or no basis in evidence. The heterogeneity of academic narratives for serial murder will be explored further depth in Chapter 2.

Being situated in a narrative perspective this study should be better placed to acknowledge and delineate these narratives. This study will also meet the requirement for research able to challenge media-propagated misconceptions and lend support to those academic narratives which could yield the most theoretical insight and practical benefit.

1.2.5 Applications to investigations and offender profiling

Offender profiling first came to attention in the context of serial murder investigations and the growth of theory around offender profiling has tended to be linked to serial murder (e.g. Burgess *et al*. 1986; Douglas, Ressler, Burgess & Hartman, 1986; Ressler *et al.*, 1986). Serial murder investigations have continued to make use of offender profiling (Labuschagne, 2003; Pistorius, 2002). This study acknowledges this relationship and aims to produce insights into serial murder that could be applicable to offender profiling.

There is a lack of systematic research exploring empirically the relationships between an offender's crime scene actions and their overt characteristics and so being capable of adequately supporting offender profiling (Canter, 2004). Interpersonal narrative models have been shown as potentially valuable in establishing linkage between offence and offender characteristics because narrative can articulate the interpersonal, thematic concerns advantageous to offender profiling (Canter, 1994; Hodge, 2000; Salfati and Canter 1999; Wentink, 2001; Youngs, 2004). By drawing on these findings and using the perspective of narrative psychology to illuminate the links between an offender's motivation, development and offence behaviours; this study could yield results that are applicable to investigations.

The narrative concept that best meets the interpersonal requirement highlighted in this previous research is that of the 'imago' (McAdams, 1988, 1993). Drawing on McAdams' (1993) understanding, the epistemology of narrative psychology (Crossley, 2000), and origins of the concept in psychological literature; this study defines the imago as the characterisation of a mode of interpersonal interaction. These imagoes function as characters in an individual's narrative (McAdams, 1993) and have been used previously in research into crime (e.g. Athens, 1997; Parkinson, 1999; Schultz, 2005). This study will be the first to focus explicitly on the content, interactions and development of the imagoes of people who commit serial murder.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will explore the phenomenon of serial murder in South Africa from the perspective of narrative psychology. It will collect the narratives of those who have committed serial murder and analyse these using the narrative concept of the imago. This will help determine the role played by narratives in the motivation and development of those who commit serial murder.

1.4 NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND DESIGN

To meet the above aims, two narrative inquiries need to be made:

1. What role do imagoes play in the motivation of a person who commits serial murder?
2. What role do imagoes play in the development of the offending behaviour?

These inquiries will be answered with reference to the narratives of those who commit serial murder. This exploration will include a consideration of how the individual's motivations and developmental patterns are reflected in their crime scenes. Although not the main objective of the study, answering these inquiries may also assist in demonstrating the extent to which the concept of imago can be applied to offender profiling.

1.4.1 Research design

The design of this study is qualitative, adopting a descriptive-dialogic case study method (Edwards, 1993) to describe the phenomenon of serial murder in terms of the theory of narrative psychology. Given the novelty of this approach in South Africa, the design aims to be exploratory. A grounded theory method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be used to analyse the data collected. In line with grounded theory, the analysis of the data and validation of the findings are not limited to a single stage of the research process, rather being concerns that pervade the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Kvale, 1996). The primary data source to be analysed in terms of the concept of the imago will be semi-structured interviews with people who have committed serial murder. These interviews will be the main source of the narratives presented. These data will then be combined with the narratives offered by

archival sources and my own experience of the participants and the research process, to meet the narrative inquiries. By doing this I also meet the requirements of narrative psychology, and grounded theory, that the researcher acknowledges their role in the creation of meaning and validity in the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach & Zilber, 1998). I will thus refer to myself in the first person throughout this study.

1.5 NOTE ON THE NARRATIVES PRESENTED

A wide range of theories, models, and causal explanations for serial murder have been proposed, as have a number of methods for offender profiling. Similarly, there is a wide range of methods and studies that could conceivably be called 'narrative psychology'. By not discussing all of these in detail, this study may appear to overlook portions of the literature. There were three reasons for not presenting all of these. Firstly, the study did not aim to test the applicability of all the possible theories, explanations and models in this field of enquiry. Thus only the most frequently referenced were presented. Secondly, given this study's focus on narrative I aimed to identify narratives in the literature, with each narrative representing a particular perspective on the phenomenon. This allowed for a more consistent appreciation of the fundamental themes and tensions in the literature this study is situated in. Thirdly, the social constructivist position of narrative psychology encouraged this study to illuminate previous research that is consistent with social constructivism in more detail. Thus less space was given to previous research which considers serial murder as the result of individual pathology only (such as organic brain damage or hormonal imbalance), with this study asserting that serial murder is the result of interpersonal constructions of meaning and the relationship these have with external events.

1.6 RESEARCH OUTLINE

This introductory chapter of this thesis will be followed by, in Chapter 2, a discussion of the literature, delineating the narratives of serial murder and offender profiling. Chapter 3 will explore the ways in which narrative psychology has been applied to research into crime, included how the narrative concept of imago has been defined and used. Chapter 4 will describe the method used in the narrative inquiry. The

validation, sampling, data collection, and analytical processes will all be described. The presentation of the data and the ethical implications of undertaking this study will also be considered. Chapter 5 presents the results of the imago analyses, and Chapter 6 is a discussion of the results. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of this study, an evaluation of its validity, and possible critiques of it. Chapter 7 will include recommendations for future research.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly outlined the topic of this study: serial murder in South Africa. It has given the study's motivation, what it aims to achieve, and the methodology of the narrative inquiries that will be carried out to achieve these aims. The layout of the thesis has also been given alongside a brief note on what narratives were prioritised for presentation in this thesis. This exploration will draw on interviews with those who commit serial murder. This exploration will hopefully lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon, and assist in the construction of more valid and reliable offender profiles.

CHAPTER 2

THE NARRATIVES OF OFFENDER PROFILING AND SERIAL MURDER

Serial murder and offender profiling have attracted much attention in psychological theory and research, with psychology in turn largely being accepted as valuable to these fields. As the psychological literature into serial murder and offender profiling has grown it has become characterised by competing narratives. Each narrative is championed by the investigator, academic, or psychologist who first articulated it, so there is no dominant explanation for serial murder or most valid methodology for offender profiling.   This literature review is thus faced with the challenge of presenting a heterogeneous selection of narratives, in a field where the areas of expertise between serial murder, psychology, and offender profiling are not clearly demarcated.

This study takes a narrative approach to navigating a way through the literature. Firstly, it acknowledges how the systematic study of serial murder developed: the first large scale attempts to study serial murder were conducted as part of research to support offender profiling, with offender profiling consequently coming to widespread attention with reference to serial murder (Burgess *et al.* 1986; Douglas *et al.*, 1986; Ressler *et al.*, 1986). This acknowledgement is used to focus the study's inquiry. Secondly, as stated in the previous chapter, the literature review looked to appreciate the fundamental themes and tensions in the literature by identifying narratives within it, with each narrative articulating a particular perspective on the phenomenon. This allowed the third measure implemented to negotiate the literature: focusing on the most established and oft-cited narratives in the respective fields. This literature review is thus not exhaustive, preferring brevity and relevance. Fourthly, also as mentioned in the opening chapter, the social constructivist position of this study meant that the previous research that was more consistent with this epistemology was delineated in more detail. Finally, by adopting a social constructivist stance this study requires that the researcher's role in the creation of meaning is acknowledged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lieblich *et al.* 1998). Thus the perceptions, concerns, and narratives I bring to the study contributed to its focus. In the main, my concerns pertain to offender profiling and the application of research to

criminal investigations. This review thus represents my narrative as I lead the reader through the literature

This review will primarily address the contributions made by psychological theory and psychological research to serial murder and offender profiling, outlining challenges for research that aims to support serial murder investigations and the practice of offender profiling. It will start by briefly discussing the entwined narratives of serial murder and offender profiling which inform this study's focus, offender profiling, the competing methodological narratives within offender profiling, and the commonalities between them. This chapter will then discuss serial murder, how it is defined, and the various narratives of cause, development, and classification. It will focus particularly on the research into serial murder of most use to, or most often used in, offender profiling. This will demonstrate how narrative psychology can be productive in advancing our understanding of serial murder in a way that can be applied to offender profiling. Given this study's focus on offender profiling, an exhaustive review of the literature is not relevant (for a more detailed review see Del Fabbro, 2006).

As the previous section illustrates, research into serial murder has often been subject to conceptual confusion (Canter, 1994; Del Fabbro, 2006; Ferguson *et al.*, 2003). In an effort to avoid this, in this chapter I will explicitly divide the discussion by cause (section, 2.3); development of offending (section 2.4, discussing motivational models of serial murder); and the relationship between offence and offender characteristics (section 2.5, discussing typologies of serial murder). While each of these sections present different narratives around serial murder, it should be remembered that this separation does not reflect a division within the literature, and has only been used to avoid conceptual confusion.

2.1 THE ENTWINED NARRATIVES OF SERIAL MURDER AND OFFENDER PROFILING

Psychology is often thought of as an obvious aid to understanding the behaviour of a person who has committed serial murder, perhaps due to their actions suggesting a psychological motive. Furthermore, with offender profiling having its origins in psychiatry (Innes, 2003), the processes of compiling an offender profile can frequently be comparable to making a psychological diagnosis in a clinical setting (Blau, 1994). Thus the practical application of psychology is involved with both serial murder and offender profiling. This is a result of the history and development of offender profiling, and contributed to the narratives of serial murder and offender profiling being linked to one another.

The exact origin of offender profiling is vague but it has its earliest precedents in the specialist advice, usually of a psychological nature, given to police by civilian professionals. Canter (2004) suggests that probably the first recorded offender profile was in Dr Thomas Bond's 1888 list of the characteristics of the offender who came to be known as Jack the Ripper, based on a victim's autopsy. Practices that would now likely be termed 'offender profiling' appear regularly in the earlier half of the twentieth century. They come to prominence again in psychiatrist Dr. James Brussel's (1968) advice to police in New York City tracking the 'Mad Bomber' George Metesky, and those investigating the murders of the 'Boston Strangler' (Brussel, 1968; Innes, 2003). These practitioners created the first, psychological and psychiatric, narrative of offender profiling.

Offender profiling came to widespread notice following its use by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the 1970's and 1980's (Innes, 2003); especially in the context of serial murder investigations. The first concerted attempt to formalise the procedures of offender profiling came from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the USA, when Special Agents at Quantico published reports on the procedures they used, and began lecturing to FBI trainees and police departments (e.g. Hazelwood, Ressler, DePue & Douglas, 1987). These attempts gave rise to proposed methods of offender profiling (Douglas *et al.*, 1986), while simultaneously creating one of the most well-known typologies of serial murder (Ressler *et al.,* 1986) and one

of the most frequently cited motivational models of serial murder (Burgess *et al.*, 1986). The narrative proposed by the FBI has had a lasting influence on the study of serial murder and the practice of offender profiling (Canter *et al.*, 2004; Canter & Youngs, 2003; Wentink, 2001). This FBI narrative further strengthened the link between offender profiling and serial murder.

Subsequent discussions and representations of offender profiling and serial murder in academia and the media have increased the intertwining of their narratives. While this has occasionally been the result of the myths these fields attract (Canter, 2004; Hickey, 2002; Innes, 2003; Pistorius, 2005) this has also been result of serial murder investigations continuing to make use of offender profiling (Labuschagne, 2003; Pistorius, 2002). Offender profiling has been one of the tools most commonly used to overcome the investigative challenges of serial murder cases and has been used for a number of years in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2003). Accurate offender profiles have been found to be especially useful in serial murder enquiries, where the success of the case can rest on effective investigative techniques (Hodgskiss, 2004; Labuschagne, 2003). This study acknowledges this inextricable linking of serial murder and offender profiling and uses it to guide the enquiry, so potentially creating research that can be used by investigative practitioners.

2.1.1 Defining offender profiling and its uses

Offender profiling is a relatively new investigative tool. However, there is little unanimity as to what 'offender profiling' is. Various professions, organisations and practitioners have introduced their own definitions, such as criminal personality profiling (Pinizzotto, 1984), crime scene profiling (Hickey, 2002), and behavioural investigative analysis (Richards, 2005); often creating more confusion than clarity for scholars in this field. There is thus no universally accepted definition of profiling (Ainsworth, 2001; McGrath, 2000) and the term 'offender profiling' has itself become problematic (Richards, 2005). Furthermore, the methods and processes employed to construct an offender profile in a country depends on factors such as the legal system, the status of offender profiling, and whether the 'profiler' is employed within the police or is an external consultant (G. N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 15 May 2005).

Notwithstanding this confusion, offender profiling can be defined as any activity undertaken to determine the most likely type of individual to have committed a crime (Labuschagne, 2003). The term 'offender profiling' has been applied to a range of methods used to develop advice for investigators based on inferences drawn from observations and clues at the crime scene (Davies & Dale, 1995). Offender profiling therefore aims to extrapolate the major behavioural and personality characteristics of an individual based upon an analysis of the crimes they have committed (Douglas *et al.*, 1986). It is based on the assumption that offenders differ in their actions during a crime, and these differences reflect characteristics of the offender (Hodge, 2000).

This research accepts Labuschagne's (2003) statement that the primary aim of offender profiling is assisting the investigating officer by indicating the characteristics of a person who could have committed the offence. That is, offender profiling assists by providing them with specialist knowledge (such as inferences around the possible psychological traits and behavioural patterns of an offender) that they would not otherwise have had access to. An offender profile could also help in:

- Establishing whether a crime is part of a series (linkage analysis);
- providing investigative advice to investigators (guidance);
- predicting the future behaviour of an offender (prediction);
- educating investigators about the phenomenon they are investigating (education).

   (Copson, 1995; Davies & Dale, 1995; Labuschagne, 2003; Richards, 2005)

While there are a number of different definitions of offender profiling, which tend to reflect the narrative and methodological assumptions of their authors, the above description distils the aims of offender profiling. For the purposes of this study, offender profiling will therefore be defined as any activity aims to assist an investigating officer by indicating the most likely characteristics of the person who committed the offence. The competing narratives on how this is achieved, and the commonalities between them, will now be discussed.

2.1.2 The competing narratives of offender profiling and their commonalities

Increased research into offender profiling brought with it increased criticism of the FBI's findings from social science researchers (Alison & Canter, 1999; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Muller, 2000) and later practitioners of offender profiling (Turvey, 1999). Most of these criticisms drew attention to the lack of methodological rigour in the early studies, the absence of empirical evidence for these authors' claims, and the dependence of the FBI's offender profiles on detective experience. In addition to criticising the FBI's findings, these researchers and practitioners proposed their own methods of offender profiling (e.g., Canter, 1994; Turvey, 1999). These criticisms voiced two further narratives of offender profiling: the inductive versus deductive narrative, and the empirical and statistical narrative. There thus grew up a number of competing narratives of offender profiling (a conception some practitioners seem to actively encourage), each articulating a different approach.

The various narratives have advantages and disadvantages. This study does not aim to assess the various methods, and will mention them only briefly. The earliest, psychiatric and psychological, narrative tends to emphasise clinical and diagnostic knowledge (Britton, 1997; Brussel, 1968; Innes, 2003), while the FBI narrative favours investigative experience (Douglas *et al*., 1986). Turvey's (1999) narrative of deductive offender profiling (which he proposes in opposition to inductive profiling) relies on interpretive skill, whilst the empirical and statistical narrative uses formal research methodology and statistics (Alison & Canter, 1999; Canter 1994, 1995, 2004). No method or narrative has become dominant, or been proven to yield more accurate and useful results (Richards, 2005).

While often quite different in theory, in practice these approaches tend to overlap (Innes, 2003; Labuschagne, 2003; Petherick, 1999), with practitioners employing helpful constructs or processes from an 'opposing' narrative. There are a number of common 'tasks' that persons compiling offender profiles undertake, and a high degree of consistency in the material requested by practitioners compiling an offender profile (Gudjonsson & Copson, 1997). Offender profilers therefore tend to have similar approaches and generate similar inferences about the offender (Innes, 2003; Richards,

2005) and so these narratives seem to represent differences in conceptual emphasis rather than independent approaches.

All the proposed methods of offender profiling share two fundamental similarities: all are processes of interpretation and meaning generation, and all make use of research. The degree of emphasis on either interpretative skill or research depends on the theoretical background and working environment of the practitioner. A hypothetical continuum can be constructed with interpretatively-oriented profilers such as Britton and Turvey on one end, research-oriented profilers such as Canter on the other, and the FBI roughly in the middle. Ultimately the skill, knowledge and experience of the offender profiler in applying a system effectively, and in combining aspects of the methods, is as important as ever. In an investigative setting those on the 'interpretative' end of the continuum risk a lack of validity and credibility, not aided by the media's influence (Canter, 2004). In turn the 'researchers' are hampered by limitations in their data, risking inaccuracy and irrelevance (Turvey, 1999). Similarly, there is currently a lack of suitable, systematic, research capable of adequately supporting offender profiling (Canter, 1994).

2.2 INTRODUCING AND DEFINING SERIAL MURDER

Serial murder has consistently attracted inordinate amounts of attention from the law enforcement and psychological communities, as well as from society at large (Fisher 1997). This is despite serial murder representing a relatively small proportion of all homicides (Hodge, 2000). This interest seems generated by the unusual features of serial murder: serial murder is repetitive, appears 'motiveless', and often involves a combination of sexual and violent acts. Serial murders also pose investigative problems not traditionally found in other homicide cases (Holmes & DeBurger, 1985). The fascination these factors have engendered in popular culture appears to have combined with academic and investigative enquiries to produce a plethora of theoretical and historical explorations on the subject (Del Fabbro, 2006).

While serial murder is by no means a major contributor to South Africa's crime problem in financial terms or even in terms of the number of lives lost (Hodgskiss, 2004), it is has the potential for great social disruption (Davis, 1998) and can impact

on political agendas. The failure to successfully resolve a high profile case may lead to a lessening of faith in the police services and an increase in the public's fear of crime (Hickey, 2002; Holmes & Holmes, 1998). This is primarily due to the inordinate community and media attention that a murder series (or even a suspected murder series) attracts, which in turn places great pressure on law enforcement to resolve it. Greater investigative efficiency can thus be very beneficial to these potentially media-saturated investigations.

The media is an unavoidable part of the ideological and social context of serial murder but this chapter will not explicitly discuss or contradict the misrepresentations of serial murderers in film, fiction and news reports (as discussed by, for example, Canter, 1994; Hickey, 2002 and Keppel & Birnes, 1998). This chapter will remain focused on published research findings on serial murder. This discussion is however situated within an awareness of the biases that the media have introduced into the study of serial murder.

This section has two aims. Firstly, to outline the main defining features proposed for serial murder. Secondly, to give the definition of serial murder used in this study. Serial murder, like offender profiling, has attracted a number of competing labels and definitions and is characterised by competing narratives. This is likely to be the result of different authors taking different approaches to defining the phenomenon. Serial murder has been defined according to behavioural, temporal and motivational criteria. The resulting conceptual confusion is exacerbated by the heterogeneity of offence behaviours, backgrounds, personal characteristics and motives observed in those who commit serial murder. This will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2.2, but before the concept of serial murder can be defined we need to distinguish it from others acts of multiple murder (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Lane & Gregg, 1992).

2.2.1 Definition of multiple murderers

Not all perpetrators of multiple murder can be termed 'serial murderers' (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). There are a number of frameworks for the categorisation of individuals who commit multiple murders. The primary differentiation that needs be made is between mass, spree, and serial murderers.

Mass murder has been defined as a single person killing a large number of people, in the same approximate location, over a short period of time (Lane & Gregg, 1992). The murders thus appear to occur in "one explosive event" (Leyton, 1986, p.18). A hypothetical example of mass murder would be a person entered his former place of work, and shooting everyone he comes across. Examples of mass murder include the 1999 Columbine High School shootings in the USA, the 1996 Dunblane school massacre in the UK, or the nine murders committed by Sibusiso Madubela on the Tempe military base in Bloemfontein on the 16th September 1999

Spree murders are committed over a longer period of time: "hours or days" (Lane & Gregg, 1992, p.1). Holmes and Holmes (1998, 2001) further differentiate between the categories of spree and mass murderers by asserting that spree murderers commit their murders in at least three locations, in separate events, with other offences also being committed in the course of the 'spree'. A hypothetical example of spree murder would a person going on the run across the country, committing robberies and killing those he comes across. A possible example of spree murder in South Africa would be the four murders committed by Peter Grundling and Charmaine Philips in Durban, Melmoth, Secunda and Bloemfontein over three weeks in 1981. Del Fabbro (2006) notes that the differentiation between mass, spree and serial murders, as given in Table 1, is based primarily on differences in the spatial and temporal dimensions. That is, how many locations murder was committed at and the amount of time passing between offences. On the basis of this, she observes that all three forms of multiple murder could "be seen as lying on a continuum with respect to distance in space and time" (p.15). There is ongoing debate around the nature and function of the time between murders, and on the number of murders required before a person can be deemed a 'multiple murder' (Fox & Levin, 2005; Hodge, 2000). These will be discussed more as we discuss the third form of multiple murder, serial murder.

Table 1*: Classification of multiple murderers*

	Mass Murder	Spree Murder	Serial Murder
Victims	At least three	At least three	At least three
Events	One event	At least three events	At least three events
Location	One location	At least three locations	At least three locations
Cooling-off period	No	No	Yes

Note: Adapted from Holmes and Holmes (1998), *Serial Murder* (2nd Ed.), p. 11-18

2.2.2 Serial murder

As stated, there are a range of suggested definitions for serial murder. Keeney and Heide (1994) find that definitions of serial murder in the research literature lack uniformity and agreement. Without a reliable and valid definition of serial murder, there is a risk that researchers will be "comparing apples and oranges" (Ferguson *et al.*, 2004). A selection of definitions for serial murder will be presented below, alongside a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each. The background of each researcher will be given since, as in offender profiling, their definition often reflects the narrative in which they are situated. International definitions will be presented alongside those from South African research. The commonalities between these, as well as significant differences between them, will then be discussed.

2.2.2.1 Definitions of serial murder

Ressler *et al.* (1986), drawing on their experience within the Behavioural Science Unit of the FBI and around the same time as the FBI began publicising and formalising their use of offender profiling, defined serial murder as:

– Three or more separate murders;

– occurring at different locations;

– with an emotional cooling off period between offences.

The above definition reflects the differentiations made between mass, spree and serial murder. It does not specify the number of suspects, the motives of the offender, or the relationship between victim and offender. It is also notable that no reference is made to gender, with both males and females thus being deemed capable of serial murder.

Holmes and De Burger (1988), coming from an academic background and providing consultant services to the police, proposed a different definition of serial murder. In addition to those aspects included from the Ressler *et al.*'s (1986) definition, they state that serial murders usually occur between slight acquaintances or strangers, the motives originate within the individual murder (that is, the murders are not committed for profit or due to provocation), and they strengthen the notion that the majority of serial murders are a sexual. This definition was updated by Holmes and Holmes (1998), who stated that serial murder is:

– Repetitive homicide that will not stop unless prevented.

– Usually one on one murders.

– Usually stranger murders, seldom occurring between relatives or intimates.

– No extrinsic motive, and seldom victim precipitated

These definitions are notable in that they, by offering alternative definitions, introduce a number of factors that are still debated by debated by practitioners and academics over 20 years later, particularly that the serial murderer commits their offences alone, preferably against strangers, has intrinsic motives (especially sexual) for their crimes, and will keep killing unless they are stopped.

The sexual element of the serial murderer's offences was picked up by Pistorius (1996) in her psychoanalytical study of South African serial murderers, where she defined the serial murderer as:

- A person or persons who murder/s several victims;
- the victims are usually strangers;
- the murders occur at different times, not necessarily in the same location;
- there is usually a cooling-off period between murders; and
- the motive for serial murder is intrinsic and consists of an irresistible compulsion, fuelled by fantasy, that may lead to torture, and/or sexual abuse, necrophilia and mutilation.

Pistorius (1996), former offender profiler for the South African Police Service and now author on crime, appears to have drawn on elements of the previous two definitions, and made the psychodynamic assumptions within them (as will be discussed in section 2.2.2.2) more explicit. While useful in that it allows for more than one perpetrator, as well as temporal and geographical distinctness, its insistence on specific paraphilias and definite characteristics to the motive is limiting. That is, by stating that a serial murderer must be motivated by fantasy / irresistible compulsion and must carry out specific sexual acts, Pistorius (1996) excludes any offenders who do not display these characteristics. Apart from limiting the samples size of serial murderers, this perception potentially reduces our understanding of the person who commits serial murder by conceiving of them as consisting only of their criminal activities (Del Fabbro, 2006), so ignoring their relationships to others and suggesting they are completely isolated.

Hickey (2002), an academic researcher from the USA, offers a less exclusive definition of serial murder. He finds that serial murderers should include:
- Any offenders that murder three or four victims over time;
- they can be male or female;
- they usually display a pattern to their offending; be it victims selected, method of murder, or motive for offending;
- they can display a variety of motives;
- some are known to their victims and others are not;
- they can be geographically mobile, or commit all their offences in the same location.

This definition is less prescriptive, while still acknowledging the factors highlighted in previous definitions. By stating that serial murderers can be male or female, this definition highlights the implicit assumption in research into serial murder that most,

if not all, serial murderers are male. This assumption is increasingly being challenged (Ferguson *et al*, 2003; Hickey, 2002), and will be discussed in section 2.2.2.2. Hickey's (2002) definition also highlights the multiplicity of motives that a person who commits serial murder may have, although Hickey (2002) goes on to state that the desire for control (rather than sexual motivations) is a fundamental motivation in male serial murderers.

Turning once more to South African research into serial murder, Labuschagne (2004) current head of the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service, proposes that in serial murder:

- The person(s) are intrinsically / psychologically motivated to kill.
- They murder two or more victims.
- The murders occur at different time.
- The murders appear unconnected, and tend to be committed against strangers.
- The murders are not motivated primarily by material gain, elimination of witnesses, or revenge.

This definition gives a similar requirement as previous definitions. Once again, the importance of an intrinsic motivation in serial murder is emphasised. Labuschagne (2004) however adopts a less prescriptive stance than Pistorius (1996) by avoiding stating what the motive for serial murder should be, emphasising instead what it is not.

Ferguson *et al.* (2003) explicitly set out to define serial murder in terms of motivation. They state that any definition of serial murder should include the following elements:

- Three or more victims.
- Killed in multiple and discrete events.
- The offender considered the killing of the victim to be pleasurable, stress relieving, or otherwise consistent with their internal set of values. The murders did not serve any functional purpose (e.g. profit, or witness-elimination).
- The murders which did not occur under the direction of any political or criminal organisation.

This definition, like Labuschagne's (2004), does not mention geographical factors, focusing rather on the temporal. Similarly, both definitions emphasise the necessity of an intrinsic motive. However, Ferguson *et al.*'s (2003) requirement that the murders

should bring the offender pleasure, consistent with their internal values, or stress relieving could be difficult to assess in an investigation. For example, if a number of victims have been found beaten to death and abandoned on waste ground; could one say with confidence that this murders were consistent with the offender's values (and thus be committed by a serial murderer)?

The fact that this criticism could affect many definitions of serial murder appears to have been acknowledged by the Federal Bureau of Investigation who, in 2005, hosted a symposium on serial murder, one of the purposes of which was to define serial murder in a manner useful to investigations. The symposium acknowledged the multiplicity of definitions proposed for serial murder and proposed the following definition "serial murder: the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005, p.9). Considerations of motive were excluded, as they would make any definition "overly complex" (p.8). The need in investigations for a simple, flexible definition to assist in resource allocation reveals a tension between academics and investigators in defining serial murder. This, and other definitional issues raised in the symposium, will be discussed in more detail in sections 2.2.2.2 and 2.2.2.3.

2.2.2.2 Similarities and differences in definitions

The previous section shows that all the definitions, despite obvious differences, appear to have areas of overlap. However the areas of overlap are not shared by all definitions, and considerable debate remains (particularly in relation to the motives for serial murder). These similarities and differences will now be discussed.

- **Number of murders**

The debate around the number of murders usually carried out by a person who commits serial murder continues, with estimations of the number of victims for the average serial murderer ranging from three to thirteen (Arndt, Hietpas & Kim, 2004). Turning to defining serial murder, the number of victims is sometimes not specified (Holmes & De Burger, 1998; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996), with the main dichotomy being between those who require three or more victims (Ferguson *et al.*,

2003; Fox and Levin, 2005; Hickey, 2002; Holmes and Holmes, 1998; Ressler *et al.*, 1986) and those requiring two or more (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Labuschagne, 2004)

Although the academic debate around this issue continues, there is growing consensus amongst practitioners that it is acceptable to set the minimum number of murder victims required for an offender to be classified as a serial murderer as two (Egger, 2002; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Geberth, 2003; Geberth & Turco, 1997; G. N. Labuschagne, personal communication, April 2008; Myers, 2004; Rossmo, 2000). This is because the minimum requirement of two or more murders allows for the inclusion of offenders who, although responsible for only two known murders before being caught, exhibit the traits of offenders who have committed murder more than twice (Hodge, 2000; Labuschagne, 2004). This in turn allows for the most appropriate resource allocation to any suspected case of serial murder (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

This study, since it is aiming to be as inclusive as possible, will adopt the 'two murders' minimum as part of its definition serial murder (as given in section 2.2.2.4). This avoids excluding individuals who have been arrested before they could commit further murders. It is acknowledged that this argument could equally be applied to cases were the offender who may have gone on to murder again was apprehended after the first murder (Del Fabbro, 2006).

- **Number of offenders and relationship to victim**

While serial murders normally occur 'one-on-one' (that is, involving only the offender and the victim) it is not unknown for these murders to be committed in tandem, or with an accomplice (Arndt *et al.*, 2004; Hickey, 2002). There are a number of examples of this phenomenon in South Africa (Pistorius, 2002). Thus definitions that specify a specific number of perpetrators (Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Holmes & De Burger, 1998; Pistorius, 1996) risk limiting the applicability of the definition, as well as avoiding conceptual questions such as whether gangs of people who commit murder should be considered 'serial murderers' (Del Fabbro, 2006). Thus, in keeping with the bulk of definitions discussed in the previous section, this study will not

specify whether a person needs to operate alone or with another to be defined as a serial murderer.

A number of the definitions given previously also comment on the relationship between victim and offender, with a number finding that victim and offender are usually strangers (e.g. Holmes and Holmes, 1998; Labuschagne, 2004; Pistorius, 1996). In fact, Hickey (2002) found that offences where the victim was known to the offender were a very small minority. This is in contrast to Gorby's (2000) and Hodgskiss' (2004) findings around non-North American and South African serial murderers respectively. Hodgskiss (2004) found that up to 25% of South African serial murderers, in amongst the strangers that formed the bulk of their victims, target someone with whom they are acquainted. Pakhomou (2004) found that approximately 27% of North American serial murderers' victims were either acquainted with, or in an established relationship with, their murderer. Del Fabbro (2006) thus finds that definitions seeking to describe the relationship between victim and offender too explicitly risk failing to recognise certain cases as serial murder when they actually are. For example, a definition which insists that serial murderers only target strangers may fail to link all the cases attributed to South African serial murderer Stewart Wilken who murdered his own stepdaughter, a child he was acquainted with, as well as prostitutes and street children who were strangers to him (Pistorius, 2002). For these reasons the requirement that serial murder usually be stranger murder has been excluded from this study's definition of serial murder.

- **Gender of offenders**

None of definitions given above explicitly state whether serial murderers can only be male of female. Hickey (2002) found that 17% of North American offenders who commit serial murder were female, while 25% of Gorby's (2000) international sample was female. However, in a review of South African serial murder, Hodgskiss (2004) found no recent female serial murderers in South Africa, and only three historical examples of female offenders that could possibly be termed 'serial murderers'. It is not clear whether this lack of female serial murderers is due to limitations in the definition of serial murder and reluctance to acknowledge females as capable of these offences, or whether social norms mean that females are less likely to commit this sort

of crime (Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004). There is also inconsistency in classifying whether females who commit multiple murderers are classified 'serial murderers' (Del Fabbro, 2006). This assumption of male offenders is perhaps linked to the assumption that serial murderers are sexually motivated, with the implicit assumption that females are not capable of or predisposed towards sexually aggressive violence (Ferguson *et al.*, 2003). Research also suggests that the aetiology and nature of female serial murderers differs markedly from that of their male counterparts (Hickey, 2002). Given these limiting factors, and the possibility of significant differences noted between male and female offenders, only male murderers will be referred to in this thesis, and the masculine form will be used in reference to them.

- **Temporal factors**

The timing of serial murders appears one their defining features, setting them apart from spree / mass murders. Serial murders are committed over a protracted period, and spree/mass murders occur over a far shorter time (Leyton, 1986; Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The latter two categories refer to individuals who kill two or more people in one event, with no emotional 'cooling-off' period in between killings (Ressler *et al.,* 1986). To be defined as a serial murder, therefore, there should be a 'cooling off' period between offences.

The concept of a cooling off period is however problematic for purposes of a definition (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005). How long this cooling off period needs to be is not clearly defined in the literature; with authors stating that it can be days, weeks, months, or even years long (Ferguson *et al*., 2003; Hickey, 2002; Salfati & Bateman, 2005). Del Fabbro (2006) further problematises the concept of the cooling off period, stating that if this period is defined too narrowly, the definition would not be able to account for individual nuances arising from the offenders' emotional and psychological processing of the offences. Allied to this, she observes, is the lack of research into the qualitative aspects of this phenomenon. This means that the influence of demography, personality and context on this 'cooling off' period cannot be accurately measured. Finally, Del Fabbro observes that the term 'cooling off period' implies that the offence was the result of an intense emotional outburst which overwhelmed the individual's self-control. This implication not only ignores

the role played by context in causing the offence; but also has an implicitly Freudian and psychodynamic theoretical perspective. This therefore risks adding to the conceptual confusion around defining serial murder. For these reasons the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2005) have stated that it is sufficient, for investigative purposes, to say that the murders need only to have been committed in separate events at different times for them to be defined as serial.

- **Geographical distribution**

Holmes and Holmes' (1998) insistence that a serial murderer commit their murders in at least three locations immediately excludes those serial murderers who kill all their victims in the same location (e.g. Jeffrey Dahmer in the USA, and Samuel Sidyno in South Africa). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2005) assert that the common perception that serial murderers travel extensively is a "myth" (p. 5). In fact, Leibman (1989) asserts that serial murderers usually murder all their victims in the same area. At the very least, it is clear that a proportion of people who commit serial murder commit a number of their offences in the same location, referred to as a comfort zone (Hickey, 2002). This observation is a cornerstone of geographical profiling (Rossmo, 2000). Therefore, this study will allow either geographical mobility or stasis in the definition of a serial murderer.

- **Motive**

Many of the definitions given in the previous section share the insistence that the motive of a person who commits serial murder should not be immediately apparent, that is, extrinsic. This means these people do not kill for monetary gain, jealousy, or revenge, or with the blessing of any political or criminal organisation. Rather, their motivation is intrinsic (Ferguson *et al.*, 2003; Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2004; Pistorius, 1996).

The requirement that serial murderers be typically intrinsically motivated and are killing for "psychological gain" (Holmes, Hickey & Holmes, 1991, p.61) appears to have been introduced to differentiate between those who commit serial murder and

others, such as contract killers, who murder for payment (Del Fabbro, 2006). However even this requirement is subject to debate, with some stating that paid assassins and hitmen are a variation of serial murderer (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Holmes and Holmes, 2001) and others, rejecting this and proposing that, to be defined as 'serial murder', the offences must not have been carried out under the auspices, or with the blessing, of any political or criminal organisation (Ferguson *et al.,* 2003; Wilson, 2000). This is particularly relevant in the South African context where previously politically motivated murders were common, and now criminal enterprise murders (such as shooting killing a person in the course of a vehicle hijacking) are rife. Thus for the purposes of this research the presence of an obvious external motive for murder (such as politics, payment, or spiritual beliefs of the sort found in *muti* murder), in the absence of a simultaneous psychological motive, will preclude the individual from being classified a serial murderer. Other crimes committed in the course of a serial murderer's offences must therefore be secondary to the murder of the victim, which was the primary intent of the offence. Defining the serial murders as intrinsically, psychologically motivated (Labuschagne, 2003) has implications for how these cases are handled, and makes issues such as predicting future criminal activity problematic (Del Fabbro, 2006).

Beyond this, a number of definitions are more prescriptive and specify what these internal motives are, such as lust (Holmes & De Burger, 1988), compulsion (Pistorius, 1996; Schlesinger, 2004), pleasure or stress relief (Ferguson *et al*., 2003), or aberrant hedonism and the complete sense of power of another person (Holmes, Hickey & Holmes, 1991). While individuals who kill due to hallucinations do exist, these are rare in comparison with most serial murderers, who are found to fit to strand trial (Holmes, 1997; Hickey, 2002; Pakhomou, 2004). Many motives for serial murder have been suggested (Hickey, 2002), but the debate around the exact nature of the intrinsic motive behind serial murder and what psychological function it fulfils (Kurtz & Hunter, 2004; Schlesinger, 2004) goes on.

The problematic relationship between the numerous authors and theories on serial murder mirrors that around offender profiling with a number of competing narratives, each with its proponents. Here, this situation is best demonstrated by the issue of sexual elements in defining serial murder.

Early writings on serial murder stated these offenders were fundamentally sex offenders (Burgess *et al.,* 1986; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1993). Building on this, the serial murderer's sexual fantasies were posited as a pivotal factor in the definition, aetiology, planning, and continuation of their murders (Burgess *et al.,* 1986; Claus & Lidberg, 1999; Geberth, 1996; Myers, Burgess & Nelson, 1998). Johnson and Becker (1997) state that sexually sadistic fantasies are indicators of future homicidal pathology; while interviews with people who have committed serial murder in the USA found that up to 80% report violent sexual fantasies (Warren, Hazelwood & Dietz, 1996). In this perspective serial murder is treated as a subtype of compulsive, sexual offending (Schlesinger, 2004).

While this view still predominates, there is still no consensus around whether all serial murderers are fundamentally sex offenders. This is due to the definition of sexual murder not being clear cut (Schlesinger, 2004). Firstly, it is unclear whether reference is being made to the motive for the crime, or the behaviour on the crime scene. For example, if a serial murderer targets couples and shoots them because his wife cheated on him, but does nothing with the bodies after shooting them, is it an example of a sexual motive? Or is a crime scene where the victim is found naked with a bottle inserted in her vagina an example of sexually-motivated murder? Secondly, it is not made explicit what behaviours, or criminal actions, these definitions regard as 'sexual' or 'fantasy-driven'. Schlesinger (2004) points out that many seemingly sexual murders are not sexually motivated, sexual murders are not always overtly sexual, and the distinction between sexual murder and murder associated with sexual behaviour is blurred. It is thus difficult to assess what these definitions are referring to, and so apply them reliably in investigations or research. Del Fabbro (2006) states that a further problem with defining serial murderers as primarily sexually motivated is that such a definition would risk omitting genuine cases of serial murder were sexual elements appear absent, as well as those series of murders were there is not consistency in the sexual elements displayed across the series. She cites the example of Samuel Sidyno, who raped some of his female victims, yet only strangled his male victims. It thus appears that to define serial murder as sexual murder, that is, a murder during which there is sexual behaviour by the offender (Meloy, 2000) would be reductionistic, and that it would be more appropriate to assert only that some serial murderers are sexually motivated (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

Consequently, for the purposes of this study, no assumptions will be made as to the role played by sexual, or any other, motives for serial murder. The aim of this is to avoid defining serial murder too narrowly and thus excluding cases of serial murder were motives may differ (Del Fabbro, 2006). It also avoids defining the problem in such a way so as merely tautologically confirm the initial elements of the definition (Turvey, 1999).

At this point it is worth addressing a common perception that appears to have arisen from the implication that, by being sexually motivated, a serial murderer will continue murdering until prevented (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). That is, they will not stop murdering until apprehended, institutionalised, or dead (Lane & Gregg, 1992). While this assumption is present in much theory on serial murder, it is irrelevant when defining whether a person can be labelled a 'serial murderer'. That is because it is not possible to prove whether an apprehended serial murderer would have continued offending indefinitely, or whether a series of unsolved murders stopped due to the offender being institutionalised or dying. Furthermore while it may appear that a person who commits serial murder is not likely to desist from offending of their own accord, assuming that it is always so risks excluding the possibility of their behaviours changing as the series progresses. By excluding this possibility, it excludes a deeper understanding of the dynamic phenomenon of serial murder, and excludes a possibility that may have direct benefit to the investigation of these offences. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (2005) symposium appears to support this perspective by citing examples of where serial murderers have stopped committing murder altogether before being caught. They consign the perception that serial murderers will not stop killing to the ranks of myth, along with other common perceptions, such as that serial murderers 'want to be caught' (Pistorius, 2002).

2.2.2.3 Concluding remarks on definitions

As shown, there are however a number of competing and contradictory definitions of serial murderers. In light of this, Ferguson *et al.* (2003) find it unlikely that the established categories in any proposed definition will match all of those to whom the label 'serial murderer' is applied. Wolf and Lavezzi (2007) call attention to the heterogeneity of serial murderers' motives, characteristics, and behaviours that can be shown by serial murderers, thus showing the dangers of basing definitions on assumed generalities about these offenders.

Del Fabbro (2006) calls attention to "an underlying tension with regards to definitions of serial murder, between psychological and investigative perspectives" (p.37). This echoes the tension between various narratives in the practice of offender profiling, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The need to define serial murder as a separate category of offending appears to have sprung from investigative need, that is, the need to ensure resources are allocated appropriately (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005) rather than from the need to create an accurate medical or psychological picture of the individual who commits serial murder, where it would be sufficient to define the person according to the compulsion or addiction that caused them to commit serial murder (Del Fabbro, 2006; Schlesinger, 2004). This interplay between these two fields and their different requirements has created confusion, which is especially counterproductive in investigations, when clarity is needed (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

A solution to this may lie in separating the criteria used to define serial murder, from characteristics noted in serial murderers (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009). For example, a research project may set the criteria for someone to be defined as a serial murderer as they have committed two or murders in separate incidents. Within the resultant sample it was found that the individuals' motives were often sexual, they often committed their offences alone, and usually selected powerless victims. However if these observed characteristics were subsequently adopted as definitional criteria, it could be unnecessarily limiting, particularly in the context of an ongoing investigation (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Wolf &

Lavezzi, 2007). This is exacerbated by some definitions defining the concept (serial murder) and others the person (serial murderer) (Labuschagne, 2006, cited in Del Fabbro, 2006). Thus it may be useful to keep criteria for defining the concept separate from observed characteristics of the person; the former being more useful for investigators, the latter being more helpful for researchers and psychologists (Del Fabbro, 2006; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

For the purposes of psychological research, it may therefore be more helpful to avoid conceptualising of those who commit serial murder as an exclusive category of offenders, and more accurate to treat 'serial murder' as an umbrella term for a group of behaviours on a continuum (Hodgskiss, 2004; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, June 2002). The behaviours falling beneath this umbrella can vary greatly. Theorists such as Hickey (2002) and Holmes and Holmes (2001) implicitly support this perspective in their models of North American serial murderers, which allow for a multiplicity of motives and behaviours. It also avoids the risks of incorrectly creating inaccurate profiles of these individuals, based on generalisations (Wolf & Lavezzi, 2007). In this perspective serial murder is seen as part of the continuum of human behaviour, not a cluster of mutually exclusive legal categories. This perspective draws on Canter's (2000) 'radex' model of criminal behaviour. The radex model proposes that criminal behaviour occurs on a continuum consisting of dominant themes. This model discourages rigid categorisation (of the sort implied in the term 'serial murder') and asserts that criminal behaviour is subject to the same influences as 'normal' human behaviours. It thus avoids defining and studying offenders solely in terms of their offences or pathologies. This perspective also tallies well with the more recent emphasis in criminology on determining the developmental pathways of offenders, and how these affect the offences they specialise in. An increasing body of literature suggests this is a more insightful and useful way of looking at criminal behaviour than traditional approaches, which have focused on classification only (Francis, Soothill & Fligelstone, 2004; Wright, Pratt & DeLisi, 2008). This may allow for a more dynamic understanding of how the prospective serial murderer may develop.

In light of this, this study acknowledges that applying the label 'serial murderer' to someone is problematic. This due to the competing narratives around defining and categorising those people who commit serial murder, the resultant conceptual confusion, and the inevitable limitations of any definition applied. These problems are added to by the pejorative and sensationalistic connotations of the label 'serial murderer', partly due to these terms being overused by the media and entertainment industry (Fisher, 1997; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, April 2008; Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004; R.D. Keppel, personal communication, June 2002). The term 'serial killer' is even more sensationalistic, but is not accurate: as 'killing' refers only to taking a life (for example, during a war, or in an abattoir) while 'murder' makes particular reference to the fact that this was an illegal act (Del Fabbro, 2004). Adopting labels as loaded with meaning as 'serial murderer' and 'serial killer' thus not only risks running counter to this study's phenomenological orientation, but also contradicts psychology's general avoidance of labelling.

This study will not use the term 'serial killer'. However this study is situated in an area of research – at the confluence between criminal investigations, applied psychology, criminology, and the media – where the term 'serial murderer' is used as a matter of course, and is a term shared by all the competing narratives. In fact, this label has proven useful in the context of investigations (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2005). To not use it therefore risks confusing the study's aims and findings. An effort will be made to use a more accurate and less negative label for people who have committed such offences, such phrase such as 'a person who has committed serial murder', but this can be clumsy and so impair understanding. Thus while an effort will be made to avoid unnecessarily labelling of this often disparate group of offenders, occasionally the term 'serial murderer' will be used as a shorthand, and in full cognisance of this label's conceptual, practical, and moral shortcomings. Using this label does not suggest that I feel that serial murderers are necessarily an exclusive category of offenders, as asserted by Ferguson *et al.* (2003).

2.2.2.4 Definition of serial murder for use in this study

Therefore this study, adapting Geberth (1996), Egger (1990), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2005) will define serial murder as:

– Two or more separate acts of murder;
– occurring at different times, in separate events;
– committed by an individual acting alone or with another.

This avoids the confusion of criteria with characteristics that has limited previous definitions, and provides a working definition which can then be elaborated on. It is also able to take the central conceptual issues in defining serial murder into account, and is therefore consistent with the aims of this study.

2.3 CAUSES OF SERIAL MURDER

Research into serial murder usually sets out to answer three questions:

1. What motivates the person who commits serial murder?
2. Why do they continue murdering? That is, how does their offending develop?
3. How do the characteristics of the offender and those of the offence interrelate? That is, how is serial murder best investigated? (Burgess, *et al.*, 1986; Canter, 1994; Douglas *et al.,* 1986; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Hickey, 2002; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Kurtz & Hunter, 2004; Pakhomou, 2004; Ressler *et al.,* 1986; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003; Wolf & Lavezzi, 2007).

As discussed, previous studies have tended to combine their proposed answers to these questions which sometimes lead to these concepts becoming confused (Canter, 1994). 'Cause' and 'motive' tend to be treated together in studies of serial murder, despite the terms referring to slightly different concepts. This reflects the combining of aetiological and investigative concerns that have historically occurred in this field of research. These issues will be considered together here.

We are beginning to learn that serial offenders are influenced by a

multitude of factors that inevitably lead them to kill. It is unlikely that any

one factor is directly responsible for homicidal behaviour…

Unfortunately, in serial murder research everyone wants to be the first to predict causation. Whether the explanation is excessive television viewing, head traumas, biogenics, childhood victimisation, or a host of other 'causes', it has been offered too quickly, without the support of sufficient and valid data (Hickey, 2002, p.106 – 107).

There is consensus that serial murder has multiple, overlapping and combinatorial causes (Burgess *et al.*, 1986; Fox & Levin, 2005; Hickey, 2002; Keppel & Birnes, 1998; Kurtz & Hunter, 2004; Leyton, 1989). In fact, Hickey (2002) warns against drawing aetiological assumptions too hastily in what is still a young field of research. Thus the aetiological factors and models given below should be treated as tentative. This review will also avoid the simplistic explanations given for violent sexual behaviour in the media narratives of serial murder; such as alcohol, drugs or pornography. While these may be contributing factors, to blame them for a serial murderer's behaviour would be fallacious (Hickey, 2002). Accurately describing the aetiology of serial murder is an immensely complex and may even be, according to Holmes and Holmes (1998), an "impossible task" (p.47). Serious research on the aetiology of serial murder is universal in its acknowledgement that the creation of a serial murderer is a *process* (some examples are given in Canter, 1994; Hickey, 2002; Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Kurtz & Hunter, 2004; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993). The major models proposed for this process (Burgess *et al*., 1986; Hickey, 2002), and the narratives they express, will be returned to later.

The narratives around the causes of serial murder will not be discussed extensively in this literature review. This is because causal narratives and explanations are only relevant to offender profiling insofar as they can explain behaviour on a crime scene. This is also the reason why, in reviewing the proposed causes of serial murder, this review will concentrate more on environmental and socio-cultural explanations for serial murder. Unlike other causal explanations, environmental narratives of explanation have been consistently applied to offender profiling and investigations via the motivational models that have grown out of them. Environmental explanations are furthermore the most widely cited, and most developed, narratives of cause in serial

murder. However, an overview of the various proposed causes of serial murder is still necessary for an adequate understanding of this field.

2.3.1 Medical and psychiatric narratives of cause

This narrative's central thesis is that a serial murderer's actions can be explained through medical or psychiatric perspectives and diagnoses but, as Carlisle (1993) observes, psychiatric and medical explanations for serial murder tend to be inadequate and contradictory.

2.3.1.1 Organic and biogenic causes

Biological, neurological, and genetic disorders (as well as head injury) have been cited as possible causes for the behaviour of someone who commits serial murder (Jeffers, 1993; Money, 1990; Norris, 1990) but they cannot be universally applied to all these offenders. Similarly, it is not possible to reliably say whether the propensity for murder is a genetically inherited trait (Hickey, 2002). It has also not been possible to identify the potentially relevant biological markers for serial murder (Silva, Leong & Ferrari, 2004). While organic factors such as epilepsy can explain the repetitive nature of serial murder (Norris, 1990) they fail to explain a number of observed behaviours such as changes in offence behaviours, avoiding capture, and reporting on their offences (Ressler & Shachtman, 1993; Hickey, 2002). They also fail to clarify why all people with genetic or organic vulnerabilities do not commit crime, let alone serial murder.

Thus while some serial murderers and other violent offenders do occasionally display abnormalities in their genetic make-up, and there some promising findings around the biological contributors to violent crime, it is unlikely that biological factors will be established as the primary causal factor in violent behaviour in the near future. Similarly while there is a persistent correlation of head trauma in the life histories of serial murderers, this cannot reliably be given a causative role (Hickey, 2002). Physical explanations for serial murderers are also of limited utility in offender profiling. Holmes and De Burger's (1988) observation that biogenic factors, with rare

exceptions, can never be regarded as the cause of serial homicide thus still holds. The cause, they therefore insist, is psychogenic.

2.3.1.2 Schizophrenia and psychotic disorders

This explanation proposes that a person who commits serial murder is not in touch with reality at the time of his offence, and this psychotic break motivates his killings. This perspective is obviously linked to the 'disorganised', 'visionary', and 'psychotic' categories of murderers proposed by various theorists (Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Leibman, 1989; Ressler *et al*, 1986). There is evidence that a number of serial murderers do suffer from schizophrenia or a psychosis at the time of their offences (Geberth, 1996; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993). However a relatively small number of serial murderers are criminally insane or psychotic at the time of their offence (Carlisle, 1993; Meloy, 2000). In South Africa, only one serial murderer out of at least 73, over the past 70 years, has ever been judged unfit to stand trial due to mental illness (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, September 2006). Furthermore most serial murderers do not exhibit the general lowering in global functioning typical of these types of mental illness. Ultimately it seems likely that the majority of serial murderers do not suffer from psychoses, nor are they sufficiently psychologically disordered to render them unfit for trial (Hickey, 2002; Wilson, 1988).

Godwin's (2000) research suggested that approximately one in five serial murderers had been treated for some mental health problem. He does not however state what these mental health problems were. Pakhomou (2004) found that 52.4% of his sample of serial murderers had some form of psychiatric diagnoses (although all were found fit to stand trial). In South Africa a person accused of serial murder is sent to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation of their competency to stand trial (G. N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009) but given that this process is likely to vary between countries, evidence of the presence or absence of psychotic illness in those who are convicted of serial murder is inconsistent, tending to be limited to either case studies or anecdotal evidence. The explanatory power of 'madness' with reference to serial murder is therefore limited. The fact remains that the average psychotic or schizophrenic patient is more risk to themselves than to others (Hickey, 2002).

2.3.1.3 Anti-social personality disorder and sexual sadism

Anti-social personality disorder and sadism are psychiatric concepts frequently utilised in the narratives around causes of serial murder. They are linked to the categories of 'organised', 'comfort', 'hedonistic', and 'power-oriented' serial murderers (Geberth, 1996; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler *et al*, 1986). There has been some confusion between the labels 'anti-social personality disorder' (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and 'psychopath'. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (*DSM*)-IV-TR (2004) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) states that the term 'psychopath' is a synonym for the term anti-social behaviour. However they appear to have slightly different emphases, with the term psychopath seemingly preferred in some circles (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

Dr. Robert Hare (1993) developed the most widely-cited measure of psychopathy, a checklist which aims to provide the clinician with an assessment of the degree of psychopathy possessed by an individual. This tool assesses factors of personality traits and dysfunctional behaviour. Factor one, called 'aggressive narcissism' refers to personality factors such as

- Glibness/superficial charm;
- grandiose sense of self-worth;
- pathological lying and being manipulative;
- lack of remorse or guilt;
- shallow affect and lack of empathy;
- failure to accept responsibility for own actions.

Factor two refers to 'socially deviant lifestyle', as defined by the offenders' case history, referring to his or her

- Need for stimulation (or being prone to boredom);
- parasitic lifestyle;
- poor behavioural control (including promiscuous sexual behavior);
- lack of realistic, long-term goals;
- impulsivity and irresponsibility;
- early behavior problems and juvenile delinquency;
- revocation of conditional release.

Additional traits, such as having many short-term marital relationships and being criminally versatile, are not associated with either factor (Hare, 1993). These characteristics translate into the pervasive egocentricity, disregard for others, and anti-social behaviour observed in the psychopathic personality (Geberth, 1996). Carlisle (1993) summarises the psychopath in more dramatic terms "a person who has no conscience" (p.87).

In contrast, the criteria diagnoses of anti-social personality disorder (excluding requirements around the age of the offender, and precursor disorders in youth) are that since the age of 15 years the individual must display a pattern of violation of and disregard for the rights of others, as indicated by at least three of the below:

1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest;

2. deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure;

3. impulsivity and failure to plan ahead;

4. irritability or aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults;

5. reckless disregard for the safety of self or others;

6. consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behaviour or honour financial obligations;

7. lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalising having hurt, mistreated or stolen from another (American Psychiatric Association, 2004, p.706)

The anti-social behaviour should also not only occur in the course of a manic episode or schizophrenia (American Psychiatric Association, 2004). Four of Pakhomou's

(2004) sample of 22 serial murderers were diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder. This suggests that anti-social personality disorder, and by implication psychopathy, cannot be proposed as the sole cause of serial murder. This is not least because neither syndrome can explain why an individual murders repeatedly, or why some psychopaths commit murder and others do not (Carlisle, 1993; Pistorius, 1996).

The anti-social, or psychopathic, personality is often linked with the paraphilic diagnosis of 'sexual sadism' in the study of serial homicide offenders (Geberth & Turco, 1997; Schlesinger, 2004), particularly in the causal and psychiatric research linked to the FBI's narrative of offender profiling. Sexual sadism refers in part to:

> recurrent, intense, sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving acts (real, not simulated) in which the psychological or physical suffering of the victim is sexually exciting to the person (American Psychiatric Association, 2004; p.530)

These fantasies, urges and behaviours must intrude on, and interfere with, the psychological and social functioning of the individual. This category, with the element of fantasy it implies, has clear correlations with psychodynamic or psychoanalytical theories (Schlesinger, 2004) and Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) motivational model of serial murder, which will be outlined in Section 2.6. Significantly, as the DSM-IV-TR (2004) notes, when sadism is 'coupled' with anti-social personality disorder the victim may be seriously injured or even killed. Furthermore sadistic murderers display distinct crime scene patterns (Warren, Hazelwood & Dietz, 1996) often with high levels of violence and aggression (Fedora, Reddon, Morrison, Fedora, Pascoe, & Yeudall, 1992). Sadism, and the sexual pleasure gained from aggressive acts, also offers an explanation for the repetitive nature of serial murder.

Diagnostically, 'sexual sadism' only relates to sexually oriented and motivated crimes and, as discussed, not all serial murderers display sexual foci either in their life-styles or in their offences (Pistorius, 1996), and not all sexual murderers are sadists. It is therefore difficult to assess whether a crime is sexually motivated or not, as there

needn't be overtly 'sexual' behaviour at the scene of a sexually motivated offence (Schlesinger, 2004). Schlesinger, departing from the formal diagnostic criteria for sexual sadism, goes on to suggest that sadism is not primarily about inflicting pain but rather about having total control over a person, with pain just an expression of that control. Schlesinger appears to make the assumption that having total control over another person would be sexually arousing to the offender, and thus the label of 'sexually sadistic' could be applied to him. However, as Schlesinger himself states, sexually motivated murders may not display overtly sexual elements at the crime scene. Thus although Schlesinger's observations are interesting on a theoretical level they would be extremely difficult to apply in the practice of offender profiling, where the investigator has to depend on the behavioural traces left at the crime scene.

It is likely that a serial murderer's offences would, by their very nature, warrant him being labelled 'sexually sadistic' and / or 'anti-social'. Despite this, studies on the most common psychiatric features in serial murderers do not find anti-social personality disorder or sadism (Labuschagne, 2001). Rather, studies in North America have found these offenders to be suffering from personality disorders, mood disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, psychotic features not serious enough to warrant a diagnosis of psychotic disorder, paranoid and schizoid traits (Hickey, 2002; Myers, 2000; Pakhomou, 2004; Wolff, 1995) as well as hypothesising links between serial murder and autistic spectrum disorders (Silva, Leong & Ferrari, 2004). A number of these findings have been reflected in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2001). However none of these features have been proposed as likely 'causes' of serial murder.

There are therefore clear limits to the explanatory power of diagnostic categories such as sexual sadism and anti-social personality disorder, as proposed by the proponents of this causal narrative. While a number of deviant sexual behaviours and disorders of personality have been offered as explanations for serial murder (Carlisle, 1993; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Schwartz, 1992), none have proved to be universally applicable or sufficiently explanatory (Carlisle, 1993; Pistorius, 1996). Thus, overall, a majority of serial murderers are neither clinically insane nor do they differ significantly from the norm in terms of their psychological traits (Carlisle, 1993; Wilson, 1988). Given that large-scale descriptive studies of the occurrence of mental disorders in serial murderers are unavailable, it is best to view serial murder not having a single cause

(Pakhomou, 2004) rather being the result of a number of overlapping syndromes (Money, 1990).

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that the application of causal explanations in investigations is limited by the fact that identifying the "fatal personality flaws" (Hickey, 2002, p.73) of the serial murderer remains easier in hindsight, that is, after they are arrested and the facts about their offences discovered. This further implies that the accurate prediction of serial murder continues to elude clinicians and researchers (Hickey, 2002). Therefore, as previously suggested, causal explanations of serial murder are currently of limited use in investigation and so offender profiling.

2.3.2 Environmental narratives of cause

Environmental narratives of cause contend that criminal behaviour is a function of socialisation processes, that is, the interaction between the individual and their environment. Fundamental to this narrative is the proposition that crime is a social learning process (Bandura, 1973; Hickey, 2002). With reference to research into serial murder, the role played by social interaction and environment in creating the serial murderer is universally acknowledged. Social and environmental factors are seen as primary causal factors in the major motivational models of serial murder (Burgess, *et al.,* 1986; Hickey, 2002). These environmental influences may be the reason it is difficult to accurately assess the salient causal features in serial murder, since each person who commits serial murder has been exposed to different influences and responded to them differently (Hickey, 2002).

Research has focused on two major spheres of social and environmental influence in serial murder: the influence of others on the development of the individual serial murderer, and the relationship between serial murder and the society it occurs in. These spheres overlap. Given the focus of this study discussion of the latter sphere, represented in the various criminological and sociological explanations, will be limited. This review will not consider those theories which focus only on the role played by, or the representation of, serial murder in a certain socio-cultural context, without considering how this context may cause serial murder (e.g. Hook, 2003; Jenkins, 1994; Seltzer, 1998).

2.3.2.1 The social environment of the individual serial murderer

Some researchers have described childhood of a person who goes on to commit serial murder as characterised by abuse, rejection, cruelty, violence, and dysfunction (Burgess *et al.,* 1986; Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Hickey, 2002; Kurtz & Hunter, 2004; Leibman, 1989; Ressler *et al,* 1986; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003). Burgess and colleagues' (1986) seminal study of 36 sexual murderers set the tone for subsequent findings in this area. They found a majority of these offenders' families had criminal, psychiatric, substance abuse, and sexual problems in their histories. While the majority of these families were not particularly poverty-stricken, many were unstable, nomadic, or broke up during the offender's childhood. Most offenders reported psychological abuse, while a third reported physical and/or sexual abuse. A violent, abusive home has been reported as a particularly potent form of rejection (Hickey, 2002). Similar dysfunctional upbringings and developmental patterns have been observed by other theorists (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Leibman, 1989; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003; Wright & Hensley, 2003). Ressler and Shachtman (1993) expand on Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) results, stating that relationships with parental figures were cold or distant (in a half of cases due to an absent parent) with parental discipline usually "slack, inconsistent, alien, and abusive" (p.116). They hypothesise that these traumas lead to ineffective, weak, and superficial interpersonal relationships, with defective or absent role models exacerbating this problem. In Ressler and Shachtman's (1993) conceptualisation, the serial murderers thus grew up lonely and isolated, lacking close emotional bonds.

These early findings are strongly supported by subsequent studies which showed that while there is a wide range of trauma, abandonment and rejection being the most common (Hickey, 2002). These findings chime with initial indications from studies of South Africans who have committed serial murder. Del Fabbro's (2006) study of the family systems of two South Africans convicted of serial murder, and their families, found clear similarities in the organisation and functioning of their family systems which could be hypothesised to contribute to their offending. In Hodgskiss' (2001) study, the offenders all expressed profound, chronic loneliness and isolation. Similarly Labuschagne (2001) found South African serial murderers characteristically expressed feelings of interpersonal inadequacy and helplessness.

Much research suggests that social and environmental trauma in the development of people who commit serial murder compromises their ability to form effective interpersonal bounds, which contributes to their eventual offending. The above findings have been incorporated into explanatory models of serial murder (e.g. Burgess, *et al*., 1986; Hickey, 2002). These findings around serial murder reflect studies on the social causes of other types of crime, which found that rejection, emotional neglect and abuse correlated with increased incidents of delinquency and maladjustment (Bandura & Waters, 1963; Brown, 1984). Being abused has also been strongly correlated with future violent behaviour (Inglis, 1978; Lloyd, 1995), and up to 57% of sex offenders report being sexually abused in childhood themselves (Jehu, 1991). This suggests that the correlation between childhood abuse and neglect is not unique to serial murder. All these findings lend support to this causal narrative's hypothesis that the process of social learning is significant in all crime.

Taken in isolation there are however limits to the explanatory power of childhood abuse. Firstly, not all people who suffer abusive childhoods become serial murderers (Pistorius, 1996), or indeed criminals in any form. For example, these explanations cannot explain why siblings of serial murderers, brought up in the same household, do not become serial murderers themselves (Mitchell, 1997). Secondly, the terms used (such as 'emotional abuse' or 'isolation') have been insufficiently defined. This means that they could be used to refer to an individual or situation where they are not applicable, or could be so inclusive as to be rendered meaningless. Del Fabbro (2006) also points out that although these theories can explain how people come to commit violence or sex offences, there is nothing to specifically link these results to serial murder. Thirdly, while certain characteristics and dysfunctions (be they familial, developmental, or behavioural) are consistently found in a sample of those convicted of serial murder, these cannot be generalised to apply to all such individuals. Serial murderers are a more heterogeneous group than these listings would lead us to believe. Finally, no normative information on the prevalence of such characteristics, or life-events, is given for the community from which the sample of serial murderers is drawn. This means it cannot be said with any certainty whether these background characteristics are prevalent in certain segments of society, or unique only to those who become murderers, or are also seen in a significant number of offenders generally. Thus the hostile social environment of childhood cannot sufficiently

explain serial murder. A more dynamic explanation, emphasising the offender's ongoing development, is needed (Canter, 1994).

2.3.2.2 The relationship between the society and serial murder

The social environment of the individual will be influenced by the society in which he lives. The other strand of social and environmental research into serial murder looks at the potential relationships between the characteristics of society and serial murder. These are mainly concerned with societies where serial murder seems more prevalent. What is it about these countries that appear to make them vulnerable to serial murder (Leyton, 1989)? Holmes and DeBurger (1988) proposed a list of features of North American society that correlate to an increase in violence in general:

– Normalising of interpersonal violence;
– extensive violence;
– excessively violent role models;
– unmotivated hostility and blaming of others;
– normalising of impulsiveness;
– emphasis on thrills and personal comfort;
– emphasis on immediate and fast gratification of needs;
– anonymity and depersonalisation in over-crowded areas;
– extensive and accelerating geographic mobility.

Many of these factors are applicable in the South African context with its widespread poverty, population migration, violence and its history of disruption (Labuschagne, 2001; Ndabandaba, 1987).

As far as can be assessed, South Africa is in the top five countries in terms of numbers of serial murderers (Gorby 2000; Pistorius 2002; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, June 2002). Between 1936 and 2006, there were 73 confirmed serial murder series in South Africa (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, September 2006). However it is not merely the presence of certain features in a society that make it more susceptible to violent crime and serial murder. Labuschagne (2001), drawing on Durkheim's (1897/1952) insights, states that the increased diversity and broadening of parameters as occurs in, for example, situations of rapid social change, makes a society more susceptible to crime. This is evidenced in South

Africa's shift from apartheid to post-apartheid society, and subsequent influx of illegal immigrants from across Africa:

> The overall increase in crime and possible ineffectiveness of government
>
> services to manage the problem had made boundaries become blurred.
>
> This helps create a sense of anonymity, which makes a ripe playing field
>
> for serial murder. Thus a change in the ecosystem leads to new
>
> phenomenon appearing or mutating (Labuschagne, 2001, p.270)

This perspective calls attention to the possibility that serial murder functions as a systemic symptom of highly disruptive or badly managed social change. Marsh (1999) found that societies in transition are more vulnerable to crime and serial murder due to their having weakened support structures, with Leyton (1989) suggesting that serial murder is a reflection of the central tensions in that society. The increasing percentage of serial murderers from the developing world (Gorby, 2000) may offer support for the above perspectives. These developing states tend to have less extensive infrastructure, less robust economies, and could be seen as being more susceptible to socio-economic disruption than their European or North American counterparts. The rising number of serial murders in these states could be a symptom of their inability to effectively manage social change.

Significantly, the number of detected serial murders in South Africa increased significantly during the 1990s, a time of unprecedented violence and disruption. The highest recorded annual murder rates occurred between 1994 and 1997, the same years in which the highest number of serial murder series began. The formation of the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service in 1996, specifically to deal with crimes such as serial murder, may however have contributed to this apparent rise due to the better recognition of serial murder it engendered (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009). Perhaps more interestingly, both murder and serial murder rates fell between their respective peaks in 1994 and 1997 and 2004 (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, June 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004; Pistorius, 2002; SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre, 2002) although South

African serial murder rates have subsequently risen again (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009). Hickey (2002) observed a similar parallel rise in the USA, with male serial murder beginning to accelerate sharply in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while murder and manslaughter rates, at around the same time, began a 20-year rise which saw them increase by 300%.

While the limited number of serial murder cases and variations in crime recording practices make it difficult to accurately predict trends in serial murder, this observation would seem to indicate that murder and serial murder rates are subject to the same influences. These findings suggest that situations of rapid social change and disruption are coupled with an increase in the violent crime, murder and serial murder rates. There are a number of potential reasons for the correlation. With reference to South Africa, a turbulent past may mean that a large proportion of the population have been exposed to, and possibly traumatised by, interpersonal violence. For example, Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson and Zak (1986) found that witnessing parental violence can have just as much an affect on future adjustment difficulties as being physically abused by parental figures. As stated, being exposed to interpersonal violence has been correlated with increased violent acts (Inglis, 1978).

Neutralisation theory is another aspect of social learning theory that may further help explain the relationship between a violent society and individual violence. According to Sykes and Matza (1957), offenders make use of justifications and excuses to rationalise their criminal actions. By doing so they neutralise their personal values, validate the offending behaviour, and so increase the likelihood of their re-offending. This shifting of blame and the accompanying guilt allows the offender to move comfortably between the criminal and 'conventional' arenas of their lives (Bandura, 1974). Current research suggests that serial murderers frequently dehumanise their victims (Hickey, 2002). These techniques of neutralisation could be seen to operate on a broader social level. As Charney (1980) notes, subtly dehumanising others can become a routine part of everyday life. We can hypothesise that these dehumanising neutralisations will be especially commonplace in violent societies. This is particularly relevant to the history of South Africa, which is characterised by widespread cultural conflict and the subsequent dehumanisation of groups (Hodgskiss, 2004). Neutralisation techniques could therefore be influenced by societal

norms. The pervasive dehumanisation of others could in turn be reflected in increased incidents of violent crime and serial murder.

Thus social learning influences the development of serial murder through the individual's personal history, societal norms, or both. However the literature suggests these theories cannot account directly for the appearance of serial murder. For example, they have not been considered able to account for idiosyncratic offence behaviours and while they demonstrate societal influences on crime, they cannot convincingly explain increases in specific types of crime such as serial murder (Del Fabbro, 2006). Rather, social and environmental influences have been most productively applied to serial murder as part of motivational models of behaviour.

2.4 MOTIVATIONAL MODELS OF SERIAL MURDER

A number of motivational models of serial murder have been proposed in academic literature. These models attempt to synthesise various causal explanations, with particular emphasis on social and environmental factors, into systems that explain how serial murder is created, maintained and develops. They therefore combine discussions of motive, with models of development. In so doing they offer a more holistic view of the aetiology and maintenance of serial murder than any other proposed 'cause' does, in isolation. This holistic view can better demonstrate what aspects of serial murder would benefit from further research.

A differentiation should be made between the motives for an action, and the causes thereof. Motive refers specifically to the reasons a person gives for behaving in a certain way, while cause may not originate from within the individual and may be something they are unaware of (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, July 2009). This study considered the reasons the participants gave for having committing the offences their motives. However in these models this differentiation between cause and motive overlaps is not always made.

This section will focus on two of the best known models: Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas, and McCormack's (1986) Motivational Model and Hickey's (2002) Trauma-Control Model. These two models were selected for discussion here because they

were based primarily on research on serial murder. This is unlike other suggested models, such as Kurtz and Hunter's (2004) 'offence cycle theory', which is a merely a model used in the treatment of sexual offenders applied to serial murder. Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) and Hickey's (2002) models were also selected to demonstrate the way in which models with different theoretical underpinnings reach similar conclusions around the fundamental nature of serial murder. Both models find serial murder is motivated by an interaction of various factors and aim to synthesise the various influences on serial murderers' development in an explanatory system. Both aim to illuminate the aetiology, process, and maintenance of serial murder. Both models emphasise that serial murder is influenced by social learning (although the degree of this influence varies between models). They thus offer a thorough summary of how the literature conceptualises and articulates the process of serial murder.

2.4.1 Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas, and McCormack's motivational model of serial sexual homicide

Burgess, *et al*'s (1986) model was the first theoretical model offered for serial homicide. It conceptualised of these offenders as primarily sexual offenders. This model grew out of the FBI's research project into sexual murder (Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman & D'Agostino, 1986; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1993), and is entwined with the FBI's narrative of offender profiling. This FBI research project was extremely influential, giving rise to a number of well known publications in serial murder and offender profiling (e.g. Douglas *et al.,* 1986; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993; Ressler *et al.,* 1986) and laying out the terms in which serial murder has been discussed since. It also gave rise to the well-known 'organised-disorganised' typology of serial murder.

Burgess *et al.* (1986) analysed the background characteristics of 36 sexual murderers. They analysed these characteristics in terms of the offender's developmental stages, and the central role played by cognitive structures (here, sadistic fantasy) in motivating sexual murder. They proposed a five phase model consisting of:
1. Ineffective social environment.
2. Formative events.
3. Patterned responses (critical personal traits and cognitive structures).

4. Actions towards others and self.
5. Feedback filter.

The development of active aggressive fantasies and daydreams, sexually reinforced by subsequent masturbation and increasing social isolation (that is, detachment from the social rules of conduct) provide the framework within which subsequent violent behaviour is reinforced. The five components of the model interact, forming a cycle of motivation and offending.

Figure 1: *Motivational model of sexual homicide*
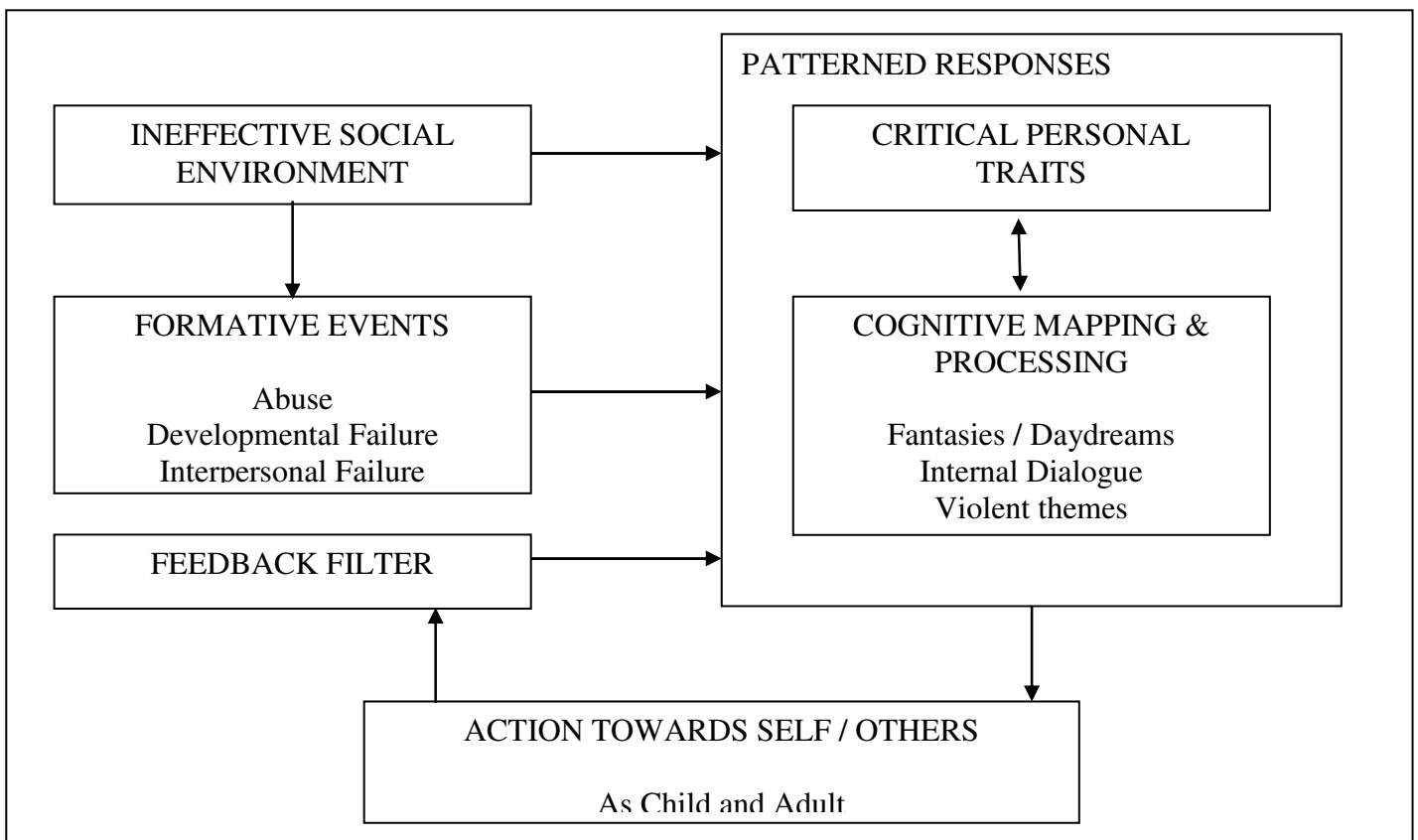
Note: Adapted from Burgess *et al*. (1986), Sexual homicide: a motivational model.

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2.4.1.1 Ineffective social environment

'Ineffective social environment' refers to the quality and structure of the child's family and social interactions, especially how the child perceives these. Burgess *et al.* (1986) use this term to refer to a number of overlapping negative social processes. Most notable of these negative social processes is the use of neutralisations (Sykes & Matza, 1957) by the child's family or caretakers to justify the child's, or their own, dysfunctional or criminal behaviour. Using neutralisations also encourages the child to employ them in future. The development of these neutralisations occurs alongside a situation where adults and others do not nurture, protect, or intervene on behalf of the developing boy. Burgess *et al.* (1986) state that ineffective social environments compromise the quality of the child's bonding with their parents and family. These negative or failed bonding experiences then translate into a "blueprint of how the child will perceive situations outside the family" (p. 261). This ineffective social environment thus eventually expands to include other members of the community who come into contact with the child (such as social workers or the police).

2.4.1.2 Formative events

'Formative events' interact with this environment. Burgess *et al.* (1986) identify three formative factors. The first, 'Abuse' refers to the previously discussed findings that the childhoods of a majority of serial murderers are characterised by rejection, abuse, and dysfunction. This abuse results in structured, patterned types of thinking. That is, the child fixates on the abuse he has suffered. These fixated thoughts help generate compensatory daydreams and fantasies of domination and control (Schlesinger, 2004). Burgess *et al.* (1986) state these fixated thoughts are supported by the other two factors in the 'formative events' phase: developmental failure and interpersonal failure. Developmental failure refers to the child's failure to bond with an adult caretaker, mentioned above. This failure leads to a diminishing in the child's capacity to react emotionally to others. The third factor, interpersonal failure, refers to the failure of the child's caretakers to provide consistent care and be positive role models. These formative events and ineffective social environments then help create and maintain 'patterned responses'.

2.4.1.3 Patterned responses

Patterned responses refer to the critical personal traits and cognitive structures in the developing offender. That is the developing serial murderer cultivates negative traits that interfere with the development of social relationships with others. These traits include lying, aggression, rebelliousness, a sense of entitlement, and a preference for auto-erotic activities. These underscore the individual's pervasive mistrust of others. As a result, the individual becomes increasingly isolated. An integral part of their stage of patterned responses is 'cognitive mapping and processing'. This term refers to the structure and development of thinking patterns, which function to generate meaning for the individual. In those who go on to commit murder, this mapping is "repetitive and lacking socially enhancing cognitions, moving the individual to an antisocial position and view of the world. What emerges is a primary sense of entitlement to express oneself regardless of its impact on others" (Burgess *et al*., 1986, p.264). These persistent and repetitive cognitive maps take the form of daydreams, fantasies, nightmares or thoughts with strong visual components. They act as a substitute for positive social interaction and control over the environment. They are characterised by themes of dominance, power, control, revenge and violence (including rape and torture). These thoughts are accompanied by high levels of arousal. This leads to the developing murderer coming to prefer fantasy to social interactions.

Burgess *et al'*s (1986) proposals around the role of fantasy in the development of serial murder have been taken up by a number of subsequent theorists. These theorists concur that sexual and sadistic fantasies play a strong role in serial murder (Anderson, 1994; Claus & Lidberg, 1999; Myers, Burgess & Nelson, 1998; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003) with these fantasies considered an indicator of future tendency towards homicidal behaviour (Johnson & Becker, 1997), and being present in a significant proportion of persons who committed serial murder in the USA (Prentky *et al.*, 1989).

2.4.1.4 Actions towards self and others

This disturbed cognition is then expressed in 'Actions towards self and others', the fourth phase of the model: "the preoccupation with aggressive themes, the detailed cognitive activity, and elevated kinaesthetic arousal state eventually move the person into actions" (Burgess *et al.,* 1986, p. 265). They offer an extensive list of behaviours that the individual may engage in. As a child they may engage in behaviours such as negative play patterns, cruelty towards animals and other children, fire setting and destruction of property. As an adult the behaviours are more severe and may include assault, burglary, rape, nonsexual murder, and finally sexual murder involving torture, mutilation and necrophilia. These violent actions reinforce the murderer's social isolation, and thus their orientation towards fantasy. This reinforcement occurs in the last phase of the model 'feedback filter'.

2.4.1.5 Feedback filter

Through this 'filter' the person who commits serial murder evaluates their actions, and feeds the evaluations back into their patterned responses (see Figure 1).

> Through the feedback filter, the murderer's earlier actions are justified, errors are sorted out, and corrections are made to preserve and protect the internal fantasy world and avoid restrictions from the external environment. The murderer experiences increased arousal states via fantasy variations on the violent actions. Feelings of dominance, power, and control are increased… All this feeds back into the patterned responses and enhances the details of the fantasy life (Burgess *et al.,* 1986, p.266)

This model thus does not emphasise any specific event, rather emphasising the individual's response to events. The five stages are cumulative. Their motivational model "suggests that traumatic and early damaging experiences to the murderers as

children" (p. 270) underpin the subsequent development of the cognitive schemas that lead to serial murder. Prentky, Burgess and Carter (1986) expand on these findings. They found fantasies common amongst serial sex murderers, and hypothesised that these offenders attempt to replicate their fantasies in their offences. However since the offender inevitably has incomplete control of their offence, the actions will never live up to the fantasy. Thus in a system analogous to Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) model, a further attempt to recreate the fantasy is needed, with each new murder providing 'fuel' for future homicides.

2.4.1.6 Limitations of the motivational model of serial sexual homicide

While they acknowledge that the proposed phases interact, Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) model tends to be repetitive. That is, a number of stages seem to have the same function. For example, most stages ('formative events', 'patterned responses, 'action towards others' and 'feedback filter') make reference to the murderer's hostile and fantasy-obsessed thought patterns. It is not clear whether this is reiteration or refers to different phases in the thought-development. Perhaps more revealingly, 'formative events', 'patterned responses' and 'action towards others' all refer to and dictate the quality of the person's interaction with others. These three phases could thus be regarded as tautological. This seeming repetition is perhaps a function of the model trying to apply psychoanalytical and social learning theories simultaneously and so placing the formative event *both* in early childhood *and* in the developing and ongoing social interactions. This confusion impairs the model's clarity, and possibly its validity.

By adopting aspects of psychodynamic theory to explain serial murder, this model also opens itself to criticisms of psychodynamic theories of serial murder. Cooper (1996) comments that psychodynamic explanations adopt tautological arguments, and are thus not falsifiable. They can also characterise cause too broadly, matching offending patterns to psychosexual fixations after the event, which is not helpful to investigations (Del Fabbro, 2006).

This model also tends to define social and interpersonal interaction narrowly. For example, with reference to 'patterned responses' Burgess *et al.* (1986) state that the

serial offender increasingly develops in social isolation, that is, without interaction from others. It does not appear to consider the proposition that as the developing offender increasingly develops and expresses their negative cognitions, social and interpersonal interaction is still occurring. 'Social isolation' thus more likely refers to extremely limited or negative forms of interaction with others, rather than the near-impossible absence of all interaction implied by the model. This reflects the criticism that psychodynamic theories ignore the influence of the context in mediating the behaviours of individuals (Labuschagne, 2001). Again, the underlying psychodynamic assumptions of the model sit uncomfortably with the elements of social learning it incorporates.

2.4.2 Hickey's trauma-control model

Like Burgess *et al*.'s (1986) proposal, Hickey's (2002) "Trauma-Control Model of the Serial Murderer" (p.106) emphasises the destabilising affect of traumatic events in the childhoods of developing offenders. As in the previous model, the developing offender fails to deal adequately with this combinatorial and exponential trauma. This failure leads to the development of "low self-esteem", and increasingly violent fantasies (p. 107). These fantasies contribute to and maintain serial murder. There are however important differences between the models. The process of Hickey's (2002) model is represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Trauma-control model of serial murder*
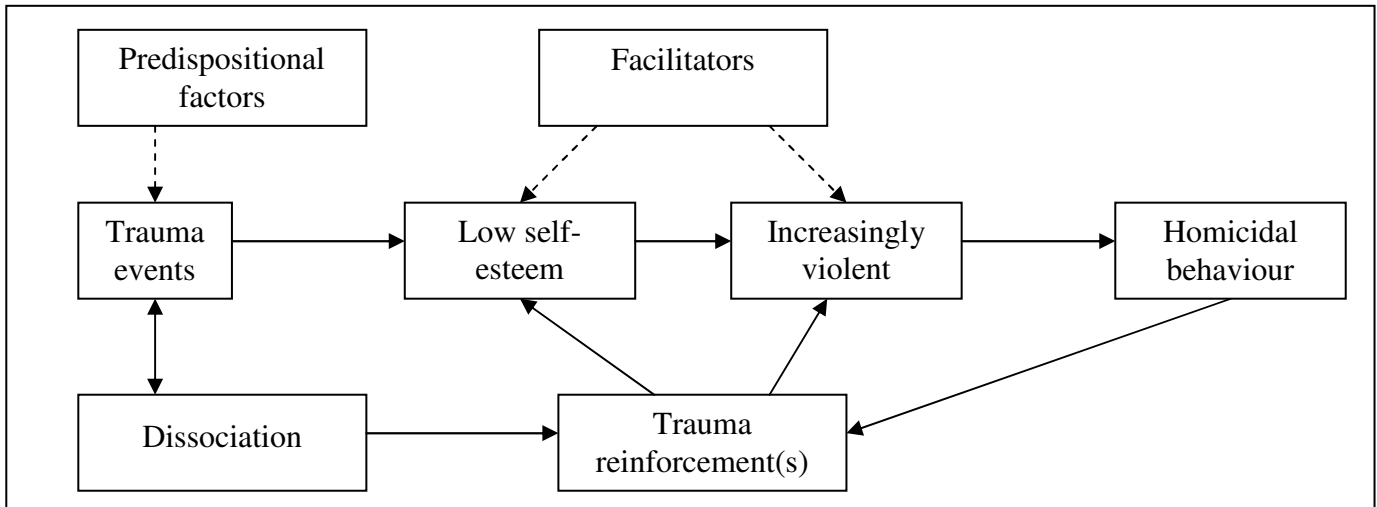
Note. Adapted from Hickey (2002), *Serial Murderers and their victims* (3rd Ed.), p. 107.

2.4.2.1 Predispositional factors and traumatisations

As with the previous model Hickey (2002) finds that multiple interacting factors cause serial murder, with the most important of these factors being the combinations of trauma suffered. The combinations of these trauma exponentially increase their effects. Hickey adds that the developing offender's inability to deal adequately with this trauma may be the result of "predispositional factors" (p. 107). These factors could include elements proposed in other studies on violent crime, such as head trauma, biological vulnerabilities, and sociological or psychological dysfunction. Traumatic life events, which Hickey terms 'traumatisations', then act together with these predispositional factors to destabilise the developing offender. Traumatisations can include physical and sexual abuse, unstable home life, and the absence of caretakers. The child reacts to these traumatisations by a combination of dissociation and fantasy development. That is, they will respond to the feelings of powerlessness that these traumatisations invoke by dissociating themselves from the trauma (e.g. by repressing the memory, or the negative emotions associated with it) and developing fantasies of power and control. As shown in Figure 2, this process is reinforced and exacerbated by further trauma ('trauma reinforcements').

2.4.2.2 Facilitators

Hickey (2002) adds that the process of fantasy development has a relationship with various 'facilitators'. These include pornography as well as the use of drugs and/or alcohol. He finds these facilitators are present in most of the case-histories of serial murderers. Hickey states the role of these facilitators is unclear. While they have been correlated with violent offending and serial murder, Hickey discourages the assumption that they necessarily encourage offending. For example, while he cites research linking pornography and violence, he states that this apparent linkage does not account for the type of pornography viewed, or acknowledge that pornography may act as a safe release for certain offenders and so prevent them from becoming violent. Hickey therefore concludes that these facilitators are not mandatory elements in the construction of a serial murderer. Rather, they are expressions of the serial murderer's growing rage and he contends that "without alcohol or pornography the offender in all likelihood would kill anyway" (p.111).

2.4.2.3 Increasingly violent fantasies

As with Burgess *et al.* (1986), fantasy plays a critical role in Hickey's (2002) model. Like Burgess and colleagues, Hickey includes daydreams and repetitive thoughts in his definition of 'fantasy' and these fantasies lead to offending. However, unlike the previous model, Hickey does not see these fantasies as fundamentally a combination of strong violent and sexual content. Rather, the fantasies focus on control. Thus it is not the attempt to re-create a sexually gratifying violent fantasy that maintains offending (Burgess *et al.*, 1986; Prentky, *et al.,* 1986) but rather the attempt to regain and retain a sense of control which is otherwise absent from the offender's life. As in the previous model, these fantasies cannot be satisfactorily enacted, and control and self-esteem can never be adequately restored. As in Prentky *et al.*'s (1986) hypothesis, Hickey sees these failures then feeding back into future offences but he goes further in explaining how fantasy may maintain offending. Future offences may not merely be further attempts to re-create fantasy. They may also be precipitated by events that threaten the offender's tenuous sense of control, such as being made unemployed, or being rejected by a woman. These events would cause an increase in fantasies of control, and eventually a further offence. Hickey adds that these control fantasies can

also be sexual, but that sexual behaviours at the crime scene always remain primarily a method of control.

2.4.2.4 Dissociation

Hickey (2002) adds that the dissociative strategies used by offenders in an attempt to deal with traumatisations may break down in the course of the offence. For example, memories of the offender's own trauma, which he has attempted to repress and dissociate from, may return. The offender may then attempt to recreate their trauma and thereby control it. This phenomenon is used by Hickey to explain such examples as the serial murderer who, as a child, had been beaten, sexually abused, bound, and locked in dark cupboards. As an adult, the offender began torturing boys by beating them, tying them in heavy cords, and holding them captive in dark places.

2.4.2.5 Comments on the trauma control model

Hickey's (2002) model draws on many of the basic findings of Burgess *et al.* (1986). However he simplifies the process and removes the repetition that made Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) model difficult to understand. Perhaps more valuably, Hickey avoids the conceptual confusion of his predecessors by avoiding their dependence on psychodynamic theory and assumptions. Rather, Hickey sees serial murder as a result of social learning. Unlike Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) finding that serial murder is sexually motivated, Hickey finds that control is fundamental to serial murder. Hickey's conclusion has been supported by statistical research on a sample of North American serial murderers, which found that power and control appear to be at the heart of their offences (Canter & Wentink, 2004). Research on South African serial murderers also partially supports Hickey's (2002) hypothesis, finding that rather than being fundamentally sexual, South African serial murderers' offences centre on the act-focused murder of a depersonalised and passive object (Hodgskiss, 2001). Notwithstanding this, subsequent research has found the trauma control model a useful and appropriate conceptual model to understand serial sexual murder as well (Arndt *et al.*, 2004).

Finally, Hickey (2002) takes a less prescriptive stance on the role of fantasy in serial murder than Burgess *et al.* (1986). Hickey states "fantasy becomes a critical *component* [italics added] in the psychological development of the serial murderer…Although fantasies are generally associated with sexual homicides, they are likely to be found the minds of most, if not all, serial murderers" (p.114). In this statement, Hickey entertains the possibility that fantasy may not necessarily cause all serial murderers. In this, he also introduces the possibility that fantasy may be a concurrent symptom of serial murder, or even a coping strategy employed by the offender (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 3rd March 2007), rather than the primary motivator. Hickey thus presents a more cautious assessment on the role of fantasy, in contrast to Ressler, Burgess and Douglas's (1993) statement that "sexual murder is based on fantasy" (p.33). His findings reflect South African research results, which note that South African serial murderers seem to consistently lack sexually violent conscious fantasy (Hodgskiss, 2004; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 2002).

2.4.3 Summary and critique of motivational models of serial murder

What do these models tell us about the aetiology and motivation of serial murderers? They find that serial murder is the product of numerous, combinatory and overlapping causes. Serial murder is a process, seemingly cyclical. Most importantly, as articulated by Hickey (2002), these models demonstrate that serial murder is comprised of multiple and interacting factors. Where factors interact, no single factor can be attributed as cause. It is then the interplay between factors, and the intensity of these interactions, that determines the resultant behaviour. This interplay compels one to accept that while behaviour in general is complex, it is even more so where extreme forms of behaviour, such as serial murder, are concerned. Thus offender profiling is an inevitably difficult creative, albeit informed and knowledgeable, endeavour (D. Beyers, personal communication, September 2006).

Both models presented here emphasise that an understanding of the offender's perceptions and meaning structures are crucial in understanding his offences. They refer to these meaning structures as 'fantasy'. Yet 'fantasy' is defined very broadly. Fantasy is taken to refer to fixed and repetitive thoughts, which can include

daydreams and nightmares (Burgess, *et al.,* 1986; Hickey, 2002). The models differ on the content of the fantasies; Burgess *et al.* (1986) emphasising a merging of violent and sexual material, whilst Hickey (2002) emphasises control. Burgess *et al.* (1986) state these fantasies are attached to strong emotional content and high levels of arousal. It should be noted that both models treat the offenders' fantasies as conscious, implicitly supporting the assumption that serial murderers are not motivated by compulsion or unconscious fantasy, and so retain some control over their offending.

Both models find that serial murder develops, and is maintained, through a process of social learning, although the emphasis on social learning and the environment differs between the two. They thus concur with findings by Toch (1969) and Huesman and Eron (1989) who postulate that violence and its expression are learned patterns of behaviour that develop young, remaining consistent and resistant to change across time and life contexts. Salfati and Canter (1999) suggest that these learned strategies could provide a linkage between the interpersonal, thematic characteristics of an offence and those of an offender. However neither model describes the mechanisms by which the social environment influences the individual in detail. This reflects a general bias in the research into the cause and motives of serial murder. Research has tended to assume the cause of serial murder is pathology or dysfunction within the psyche of the offender. As Schlesinger (2004), who prefers the term 'compulsive' to 'serial' murder, explains: "the compulsive offender lies on the extreme endogenous end…of the motivational spectrum and is (thus) least influenced by external or sociogenic factors" (p.195). This view, that the serial murderer is primarily motivated by psychogenic and internal factors, is pervasive in the narrative around, and study of, serial murder. There is a tendency to minimise the role played by the social environment, while simultaneously treating social interaction as important in causing serial murder (as seen particularly in Burgess *et al*., 1986). Thus the influence of social and environmental factors is acknowledged, but not discussed in any depth, or with much subtlety (Del Fabbro, 2006; Labuschagne, 2001)

While Hickey's (2002) and Burgess *et al*.'s (1986) models emphasise the dynamic and cyclical nature of serial murder, they both seem focused almost solely on an analysis of the offender's childhood. Although they state that the offender's development is an ongoing process, they do not discuss the ways in which the

offender's fantasies and offences develop and change, or the role played by environment and context at the time of the offence. Furthermore the models do not sufficiently explain the offender's development in adulthood. They are thus not able to explain findings that emphasise the behavioural changes that occur within a these offenders' series of murders (Hodgskiss, 2001; Wentink, 2001). Like personality trait theories (Canter, 1994; Maruna, 2001) they may lack the developmental focus, and not be dynamic enough, to analyse criminal behaviour satisfactorily.

It should be remembered that these are models of causal factors in serial murder, and not investigative tools. Both models regard violent fantasy as fundamental to the generation and continuation serial murder, but neither aims to discern how the offender's fantasy is expressed in his crime scenes. Given that it was not necessarily their goal, the models do not provide a reliable framework for linking the fantasy expressed in the crime scene with the offender responsible for it. These models thus have limited utility in supporting offender profiling.

2.5 TYPOLOGIES OF SERIAL MURDER

Typologies have been a common method for studying the diverse behaviours and backgrounds of those who have been classified as serial murderers. These typologies aim to clarify the nature of those who commit serial murder by dividing them into different categories on the basis of a variety of background and offence characteristics (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Douglas, Burgess, Burgess & Ressler, 1992; Wentink, 2001). Holmes and DeBurger (1988) highlight the need for classification of these offenders:

Careful study and classification of pertinent data is one of the most fundamental steps in developing adequate knowledge about criminal behaviour patterns such as serial murder...The purpose of a 'model' is to list and demonstrate how major components of a specific phenomenon - serial murder, in this case - are interrelated. The intent of a 'typology' is to

provide an inclusive set of categories for describing a particular behaviour

or phenomenon (p 46-47).

Typologies have traditionally been used in the study of criminal behaviour to create theory. By determining the ways in which various 'types' of offender differ from one another, we can identify the factors that contribute to their particular developmental and offence patterns. These factors then form the basis for theory (Canter, 2004; Hodge, 2000). While some view the construction of serial murder typologies as purely a theoretical exercise (Keppel & Birnes, 1998), typologies have been used in offender profiling to link offender's characteristics with those of an offence (Hodge, 2000). This is an especially prevalent use of the typologies offered for serial murder (e.g. Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1993), and so they have tended to be associated with narratives of offender profiling. Therefore the following typologies will be discussed in terms of both their theoretical and investigative value. This discussion aims to address whether these typologies satisfactorily link offence and offender characteristics, and how they contribute to ongoing research. This section will also try to assess the suitability of these typologies in the South African context.

The most widely cited typologies of serial murder are Ressler, Burgess and Douglas's (1993) organised-disorganised classification, and Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) four-fold differentiation between Visionary, Mission, Hedonistic, and Power / control types of serial murderer. These typologies attempt to classify serial murderers according to a number of personal and behavioural factors evident in the history and criminal behaviour of the murderer. These typologies imply a range of historical, behavioural, and personal characteristics (such as marital status, employment history, education, and criminal histories) specific to each category of serial murderer (Canter & Heritage, 1990; Geberth, 1996; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). The categories suggested by these theorists are, however, the source of much debate. This is due to each author, in the construction of their typological system, having different emphases and areas of concern which means the factors taken into account in each typology vary. Whilst there are differences between them, they also exhibit significant similarities. This will be demonstrated below.

2.5.1 Ressler, Burgess and Douglas's organised – disorganised typology

Ressler, Burgess and Douglas (1993) propose a typology whereby serial murderers are categorised according to whether they are 'organised' or 'disorganised' in their crimes and personal lives. The crime scene itself is the primary focus of this typological system, with the characteristics of the offender being extrapolated from this (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). They therefore assume that an individual who commits a crime exhibiting 'organised' characteristics exhibits a similarly 'organised' life-style and behavioural qualities. This approach has the primary objective of using typologies to aid law enforcement in apprehending offenders, rather than developing theory. This typology has been widely used by, and associated with, the FBI and their narrative around offender profiling.

Salfati and Canter (1999) point out that this typology was the first proposal to draw attention to the thematic links between an offender's criminal behaviour and their background characteristics. That is, it demonstrated that offenders displaying certain behavioural themes in their offence behaviour display similar behavioural traits in their backgrounds. This, taken alongside the FBI's narrative of offender profiling and the FBI's association with narratives of the cause of serial murder, explains why the initial research by the FBI has had such a lasting influence: it established many of the terms of reference used to articulate the key concerns in this field.

This typology was first introduced in an examination of lust and sexual murders (Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman and D'Agostino, 1986), but then put forward to differentiate all serial murders and arsons in subsequent publications by the same FBI authors (Burgess, Burgess, Douglas, & Ressler, 1997; Ressler *et al.,* 1986; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993). The synthesis of sexual and serial murder was also enshrined in the motivational model of serial sexual murder associated with the FBI narrative (Burgess *et al.*, 1986). This combining of the categories of sexual and serial murder has persisted and has resulted in the widely held belief, within both policing and clinical environments, that a majority of serial murders are sexual in nature (Anderson, 1994; Claus & Lidberg, 1999; Lunde, 1976; Myers, Burgess & Nelson, 1998; Ressler *et al.,* 1986; Schlesinger, 2004; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003). Due to this belief this typological system has since been widely applied to all 'types' of serial

murder, both in theory construction and investigations (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Geberth, 1996; Pistorius, 1996). This study does not share the assumption that serial murder is necessarily fundamentally sexual in nature, but the ubiquity of the organised-disorganised typology in the study of serial murder means that it will be reviewed here.

Based on an investigation of 36 incarcerated sexual offenders, Ressler *et al.* (1986) divided serial murderers into two categories: 'organised' and 'disorganised'. Burgess *et al.,* (1997) subsequently warned that in some cases offenders may present as a mixture of these categories. A key differentiating factor is that the murders of organised offenders are reminiscent of psychopathy, while those of disorganised murderers tend to display psychotic characteristics (Geberth, 1996; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993). That is, organised serial murderers reveal the pervasive lack of regard for others and guiltless nature associated with an anti-social or psychopathic personality (Davis, 1998; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). Meanwhile, disorganised murderers display characteristics that demonstrate a loss of contact with reality and an attendant deterioration in intellectual, cognitive, psychological, and social functioning (Douglas & Burgess, 1986; Hickey, 2002; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). Thus the organised offender's murders speak of a calculated act, engineered for maximum psychological gain for the murderer, while those of the disorganised offender demonstrate the content, and compromised functioning, of a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia.

2.5.1.1 The organised serial murderer

According to Geberth (1996), the organised serial murderer is most likely to possess normal to superior intelligence, and have completed high school with perhaps some tertiary education. Ressler and Shachtman (1993) note however that these offenders may have been considered disciplinary problems at school with a tendency towards senseless acts of aggression, and may be academic underachievers. The organised serial murderer is likely to be a middle class individual with no mental health record (Geberth, 1996; Ressler *et al*., 1986). His work record will be unsatisfactory and erratic. Furthermore, the organised serial murderer would possibly have a criminal record for violent or sexual crimes, and a reputation for a violent and uncontrollable

temper (Geberth, 1996). These factors will be masked by a socially acceptable facade. He will present as a socially competent, outgoing, and gregarious individual with good interpersonal skills. He dresses well, generally 'looking after himself'. He owns a well-maintained, reasonably new model vehicle and is therefore mobile. He is also sexually competent and will either be married, be in an intimate relationship with someone, or have multiple sexual partners (Geberth, 1996; Ressler *et al*., 1986). He is a consummate actor and utilises this to hide his deep narcissism. He is ultimately "irresponsible, indifferent to the welfare of society, only cares about himself and...(he) feels no guilt or remorse for his actions. He is an amoral person" (Geberth, 1996, p.734).

This offender thus tends to be more skilled, educated and intelligent. With reference to their behaviour around the time of their offences, Ressler *et al.* (1986) found that an organised murderer is more likely to:

- Think about and plan the crime;
- be angry or depressed at the time of the murder;
- have a precipitating stress;
- follow crime events in the media;
- change job or leave town following the offence.

The offences of the organised serial murderer are planned and the fantasy is considered the blueprint for the murder. As proposed in Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) motivational model he fantasises about the murders prior to the event, and will plan the offence and select victims to conform to this fantasy (Geberth, 1996; Ressler *et al*., 1986). Also consistent with Burgess *et al.*'s (1986) theory, the organised serial murderer goes over details of the offence repeatedly and will correct previous mistakes in order to create the 'ultimate fantasy'. His modus operandi is thus adaptable, and he will bring the necessary props, such as weapons or restraints, to the scene with him. He may also collect a trophy from the victim, such as the victim's jewellery or some other personal item that will heighten subsequent fantasies (Ressler & Shachtman, 1993).

Ressler *et al.* (1986) also found that, in their offences, organised murderers would be more apt to commit sexual acts with live victims, show or display their control over

victim, and use a vehicle. Sexual acts and torture on the victim are usually committed pre-mortem, and the victim is not depersonalised by the murderer. The victim's body will usually be hidden, destroyed, or transported by the offender to avoid arrest (Geberth, 1996; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993). Overall the planning and conducting of murders by the organised murderer reveals his need to control and dominate. He will plan his crime, select the site, stalk his victim, correct previous mistakes, and generally 'get better at what he does' (Geberth, 1996).

2.5.1.2 The disorganised serial murder

In contrast to the organised serial murderer, the disorganised serial murderer shows evidence of psychotic disturbance and generally lowered functioning in his crimes (Douglas *et al.,* 1986). He is generally of below average intelligence and a high school dropout. It is unlikely that he attended a tertiary educational institution, and he is probably from a middle to lower socio-economic class (Geberth, 1996). He may have a history of mental disorders, especially psychotic or schizoid-type behaviours (Ressler *et al*, 1986). He is not likely to be employed, or if he is, this employment is unskilled. Furthermore (in marked contrast to the organised offender) he has a societal aversion, and is a withdrawn loner with no close personal friends. Interpersonal interactions are difficult for this offender. He is likely to be single and sexually incompetent. He may seem strange and unkempt in both appearance and behaviour (Geberth, 1996). This offender is 'asocial', while the organised offender is 'non-social' (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). In the background of the disorganized offender, Ressler *et al.* (1986) found that they were more likely to:
- Be low in the birth order;
- come from a home where the father's work is unstable;
- have been treated in a hostile manner as a child;
- be sexually inhibited and ignorant, and to have sexual aversions;
- have parents with a history of sexual problems;
- live alone.

With reference to their offences, Ressler *et al.* (1986) found that the disorganised murderer is more likely to know the victim and be frightened or confused at the time of their offences. The murder scene of the disorganised offender is likely to be

chaotic. Unlike those of the organised individual, the murders are usually committed opportunistically, in a frenzy, with the victim being killed quickly. There is little regard by the offender for the clues left behind, and the crime scene is 'sloppy' (Geberth, 1996; Ressler *et al.* 1986). This offender does not bring a murder weapon to the scene; rather he finds it there (Douglas *et al.* 1986; Hickey, 2002; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler *et al.* 1986). Ressler and colleagues (1986) found these offenders are likely to leave the weapon on the scene and engage in post-mortem behaviours with the victim, such as depersonalising or mutilating the body, positioning it, or performing sexual acts with it. They are also more likely to cannibalise the victim (Geberth, 1996). The victim's body is likely to be left where the murder occurred. The offender may also take souvenirs from the crime scene: some object, article, or even a body part as a remembrance of the victim (Geberth, 1996).

Finally, the disorganised offender is more likely to commit his crimes close to his home or place of employment, thus operating within his comfort zone (Ressler *et al.* 1986). He does not share the mobile characteristics of the organised murderer. He is less likely to use a vehicle in his offences. He, also unlike the organised murderer, has little interest in the police investigation (Geberth, 1996). Tables 2 and 3 summarise the differences between organised and disorganised serial murderers.

Table 2: Comparison of personality characteristics between organised and

disorganised serial murderers

Organised	Disorganised
Average or high intelligence	Below average intelligence
Socially competent	Socially incompetent
Prefers schooled labour	Unschooled labour or unemployed
High order of birth	Low order of birth
Father: stable employment	Father: unstable employment
Inconsistent discipline	Strict discipline
Controlled mood during murder	Anxious mood during murder
Uses alcohol during murder	Minimum use of alcohol
Precipitating stress	Minimal stress
Abides with partner	Lives alone
Reads news on case	Minimum interest in news coverage

Note: From Ressler *et al.*(1986) *Sexual homicide: patterns and motives* (p.123)

Table 3*: Comparison of crime scenes between organised and disorganised serial murderers*

Organised	Disorganised
Offence planned	Spontaneous offence
Victim is a targeted stranger	Victim taken from location known to offender
Personalises victim	Depersonalises victim
Controlled conversation	Minimal conversation
Crime scene reflects overall control	Crime scene random and sloppy
Demands submissive victim	Sudden violence to victim
Restraints used	Minimal use of restraints
Aggressive acts prior to death	Sexual acts after death
Body hidden	Body left in view
Weapon or evidence absent	Weapon or evidence often present
Transports victim or body	Body left at death scene

Note: From Ressler *et al*. (1986) *Sexual homicide: patterns and motives* (p.123)

2.5.1.3 Limitations of the organised-disorganised typology

While developing this typology Ressler *et al.* (1986) found that there were no situations where organised and disorganised offenders were mutually exclusive. Burgess, *et al.* (1997) state that the majority of crime scenes and offenders will present somewhere on a continuum between the two extreme classifications of 'organised' and 'disorganised', not as simply one or the other. However, as Hodge (2000) points out, if there are no examples of a 'pure' organised or disorganised offender, then it can be argued that this typology does not distinguish between the two types. This implies that these two proposed types of offender do not in fact exist. This is supported by a statistical analysis carried out by Canter *et al.* (2004), operating from within the empirical and statistical narrative of offender profiling, which found

that the organised-disorganised dichotomy was untenable. Their analysis of crime scene variables found that organised and disorganised variables did not co-occur as Ressler *et al*'s (1986) model would predict. Rather, there seemed to be a sub-set of organised behaviours common to most serial murders.

In order to accommodate this sort of critique, Burgess *et al.* (1997) added a third category to the original dichotomy for those offenders that did not fit in either category – the 'mixed' offender. It was suggested that these offenders would display characteristics that are a combination of those found in the first two categories. The necessity for the addition of a third category to the original two due to some offenders not fitting into the existing categories clearly illustrates the problems of using rigid systems of categorisation (Hodge, 2000). Similarly, rigid classifications may fail to take into account the evolution of criminal behaviour over time.

Beyond these limitations in classification, this typology ignores the socio-economic aspects that may be the cause of, for example, the offender's lack of employment, schooling, or a vehicle. This may explain Hodgskiss's (2001) research findings that the characteristics proffered for these categories are less applicable in the South African context, with offence and offender characteristics not matching as the typology would suggest. Finally, Holmes and Holmes (1998) argue that this typology's failure to take the aetiology of serial murderers into account makes it inadequate. They feel that the terms 'organised' and 'disorganised' should be applied to the crime scene only, and not to the personalities and characteristics of the offenders themselves.

2.5.2 Holmes and DeBurger's four category typology

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) propose a further descriptive model of serial murderers based on their analysis of sample of 44 serial murderers. Unlike the previous typology this classification system is not limited to sexual murderers and the motives and anticipated gains of the offender are taken into account. It aims to combine these motivational factors with an analysis of the crime scene. This typology is thus more focused on the generation of theory than utility in investigations. It is therefore also

not clearly associated with any narrative of offender profiling or narrative of cause for serial murder.

Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) typology uses four interdependent classification factors to generate four categories of serial murderer. The four classification factors are:

–   Psychological, sociogenic, and biological aetiology of serial murder.
–   Characteristics of the victim ('victimology'): their characteristics, habits, and relationship to the offender.
–   Pattern and method of the murder (including planning versus spontaneity, organised versus disorganised, and process versus act focused).
–   Location of the murders: whether they are concentrated or dispersed with reference to one another, as well as whether the murderer is geographically stable or transient (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988).

The last point refers to whether a murderer kills in the general region in which he lives ('geographically stable'), or whether he travels continually throughout his series of murders ('geographically transient') (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). They believe that most serial murderers belong to the latter category. The third point in the above list, referring to the pattern and method of the murder, includes a differentiation between an 'act' and a 'process' focused murder. An act focused murder is one in which the act of killing the victim is of central to the offence. The offence is thus directed toward accomplishing this goal as quickly as possible. On the other hand a process focused murder is one in which the actions occurring prior to the victim's death are the focus of the offence. The process of the killing, rather than the murder itself, becomes central. According to Holmes and DeBurger sadistic torture and actions such as pre-mortem sodomy and rape are expected in this category. The scene itself will reflect great planning and attention to detail, so that the offender's pre-crime fantasies are fulfilled. Actions such as mutilation and dismemberment also reflect a process-focused murder (Holmes, DeBurger & Holmes, 1988). Using these categories as a basis, Holmes and DeBurger (1988) offer a typology of four types of serial murderers: 'visionary'; 'mission'; 'hedonistic' and 'power / control' types. Table 4 summarises Holmes & DeBurger's (1988) classification of serial murderers.

Table 4*: Four category typology of serial murderers*

	Visionary	Mission	Hedonist	Power
Victim Selection				
Specific		✓	✓	✓
Non-specific	✓			
Random	✓		✓	✓
Non-random		✓		
Affiliative				
Strangers	✓	✓	✓	✓
Methods				
Act-focused	✓	✓		
Process-focused			✓	✓
Planned		✓	✓	✓
Spontaneous	✓			
Organised		✓	✓	✓
Disorganised	✓			
Spatial Locations				
Concentrated	✓	✓		
Nomadic			✓	✓

Note: Adapted from Holmes and DeBurger (1988). *Serial murder*. p. 255

2.5.2.2 The visionary serial murder

The visionary type of serial murderer kills because they hear voices, see visions, or believes that they have received instructions from a supernatural force to do so (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The visionary type of serial murderer has typically very little involvement in the selection of his victims and commits act-focused murders that tend to be spontaneous. This type of murderer can therefore be seen, atypically for serial murderers, as psychotic (Holmes & Holmes,

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1998). He has little conception of the criminality of his act due to this mental illness, and would usually be considered unfit to stand trial (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988).

2.5.2.3 The missionary serial murderer

The motive for the 'missionary' type of serial murderer is the elimination of a certain identifiable group of people (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). He does not commit murder due to visions, voices, or supernatural mandates, as the visionary murderer would, and is neither psychotic nor criminally insane (Holmes, 1997). Rather, he has taken a decision to eliminate all those members of a group that he deems to be unworthy, undesirable, or dangerous (Holmes *et al.,* 1988). He therefore selects victims according to strict criteria, non-randomly, and the killings are act-focused (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988).

2.5.2.4 The hedonist serial murderer

The 'hedonist' type of serial murderer offends for the personal pleasure that they gain from the murders (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). They are not psychotic. There are three sub-categories to the hedonistic type of serial murderer: 'lust', 'thrill' and 'comfort' murderers. The lust murderer is motivated by the sexual enjoyment experienced in the homicidal act (Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980). Cannibalism, dismemberment, necrophilia and other forms of paraphilia are prevalent in this form of serial murder (Holmes & DeBurger, 1985). The second subcategory of hedonistic serial murderer is the 'thrill' murderer. Holmes and DeBurger (1985) have bluntly expressed the motive of this type of murderer: "They kill because they enjoy it" (p.13). Here, the thrill of committing the murder becomes an end in itself. Since it is the murder, rather than the victim's death, that brings them pleasure, these two sub-categories of serial murderer tend to commit process focused offences.

The final sub-category of 'hedonist' serial murderers is the 'comfort' murderer. Such individuals kill because it enhances their personal or social status (Holmes *et al.*, 1988). The motive for the murder is the material benefit that can be gained as a result. The murder committed by a comfort murderer is thus act focused. This contrasts with the process focused killings of the lust and thrill sub-types. An example of a comfort-

oriented serial murderer would be someone who kills relatives in order to make on claim on the victim's life insurance policy. Holmes and Holmes (1998) also place the paid assassin, or organised crime hit-man, in this category.

As discussed in section 2.2.2.2, this contention has been criticised on the grounds that these individuals have a clear extrinsic motive for their murders, and so the act or process of the murder becomes secondary to the material gain that results from it (Ferguson *et al.*, 2003; Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2004; Pistorius, 1996; Wilson, 2000). As previously mentioned, this would be a problematic category in South Africa, given the number of murders that occur in the course of materially motivated crimes (such as during robbery or vehicle hi-jacking). This author therefore agrees with the stance that the offender whose *primary* motive is financial gain should not be classified as a serial murderer.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) find that that the hedonistic serial murderer is typically intelligent, or at least cunning. The pleasure afforded to the murderer by these offences ensures that they will try avoid capture for as long as possible. This makes the investigation of a case involving these serial murderers particularly difficult, especially if the offender is geographically transient.

2.5.2.5 The power/control serial murderer

The 'power/control' serial murderer is motivated by the gratification they receive in holding complete power over another individual (Holmes & DeBurger, 1985):

> By exerting complete control over the life of his victim, the murderer experiences pleasure and excitement, not from sexual excitation or the rape, but from his belief that he does indeed have the power to do to whatever he wishes to another human being who is completely helpless and within his total control (p.13-14).

Similarly to the hedonist type, the power/control oriented murderer exhibits psychopathic rather than psychotic characteristics. While most hedonist murderers (apart from the 'comfort' sub-type) receive sexual pleasure from the murder of the victim, this sub-type gains his pleasure from the total subjugation of the victim (Holmes *et al.,* 1988). The murder is clearly process focused, and the murderer is not psychotic (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988).

2.5.2.6 Limitations of Holmes and DeBurger's typology

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) suggest that there are clear differences between the various categories, and propose that these differences have implications for serial murderer investigations and theory. However no attempt is made to quantify the occurrence of the traits outlined above in each group (a weakness this typology shares with the organised – disorganised typology). Furthermore, no indication is given of the number of characteristics needed for an offender to be categorised as one type or the other (Hodge, 2000). Neither Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) or Ressler *et al.*'s (1986) typology takes the frequencies of the different crime scene behaviours into account, and frequency affects the inherent ability of behaviours to differentiate between types of offender (Salfati & Canter, 1999). Put simply, any behaviour that occurs in a majority of cases is unlikely to help differentiate between offenders. This is not taken into account in the construction of the above typologies.

These shortcomings, as Hodge (2000) indicates, are exacerbated by the absence of any statistical analysis between the groups. She finds that this makes it unclear how different the types of serial murder proposed are. This is especially pertinent given that a number of the characteristics suggested by Holmes and DeBurger (1988) are shared by many of the types, as shown in Table 4. Similarly, many of the factors listed above are merely opposites of one another, and thus unnecessary additions to a typology (Hodge, 2000). Canter and Wentink (2004), in a statistical analysis of North American serial murderers, found limited support for the 'lust', 'mission' and 'thrill' styles of murder proposed. Rather, they found that the characteristics described in 'power/control' murders were typical of the sample as a whole. South African statistical research tends to support this, finding that serial murders in this country were focused primarily on the act-focused killing of a depersonalised victim

(Hodgskiss, 2001). This act-focused murder could be interpreted as the ultimate expression of control.

A further critique is that many of the variables used in these typologies (such as stated motive in Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) typology) come from the offender's testimony and so cannot be used in an investigation since they are not visible at the crime scene (Salfati & Canter, 1999) or accessible through police enquiries. Holmes and DeBurger's typology also tends to emphasise motive, rather than what actions actually occur in the offence (Canter & Heritage, 1990; Hodge, 2000). These factors limit the utility of this research, in the offender profiling and investigation of serial murder.

2.5.3 Summary and critique of typologies

The above typologies, although not the only ones proffered for serial murders, have been the most widely used within both investigations and formal academic study. They share two common features. First, they are both linked, in varying degrees, to the causal narratives offered for serial murderers with aetiological perspectives influencing therefore typological assumptions. Second, the typologies given here are interrelated and, to an extent, interdependent. For example: Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) 'visionary' is virtually interchangeable with Ressler *et al.*'s (1986) 'disorganised' category of serial murder. Similarly, Holmes and DeBurger (1988) make use of the organised/disorganised dichotomy in describing crime scenes, basing an important aspect of their typology on that of Ressler *et al.* (1986). These typologies, and the characteristics they imply, should thus be viewed together in the study of serial murderers; which implies that the shortcomings of one can potentially affect, or apply to, the others.

The above typologies have been subject to a number of critiques. The critiques have focused on their validity (Alison & Canter, 1999; Canter, *et al.*, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004), their use in offender profiling (Turvey, 1999), and their fundamental structure (Canter, 1994; Hodge, 2000). These criticisms will be discussed in turn. Primarily, and perhaps unavoidably in the case of serial murder, any typology is limited in applicability by the sample from which it is drawn. It seems unlikely that a

sample of, for example, 36 sexual murderers can adequately represent all serial murderers across all cultures.

Another critique is that typologies are rigid systems of classification. An offender whose behaviours or characteristics fell across the boundaries between types, or who changed from one type to another for any reason, would be unclassifiable using these systems (Hodge, 2000). This problem is exacerbated by these typologies giving no indication of the number of characteristics needed for an offender to be categorised as one type or another (Gresswell & Hollin, 1994; Hodge, 2000). This limits these typologies' practical usefulness (Salfati & Canter, 1999). In light of these factors, Hodge (2000) asserts that any system of classification must not make use of mutually exclusive categories, rather "any system of classification generated, then, must allow for…classification on the basis of dominant themes of behaviour…More than one theme may be present, but one may be significantly more so than others" (p.252).

Typologies are also criticised for being static constructs. The criticisms aimed at personality traits and aetiological theories can therefore equally apply to them (Canter, 1994; Maruna, 2004). That is, they are not able to sufficiently explain the dynamic nature of evolving criminal behaviour. This criticism is especially relevant to serial murder, which is fundamentally temporal and evolving.

Thus, overall, typologies of serial murder tend to be contradictory and problematic. There is limited consensus around the characteristics of offenders who commit serial murder and the relationship between these factors and their offences (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Canter *et al.,* 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Ferguson *et al,* 2003; Wolf & Lavezzi, 2007). This situation is contributed to by the fact that the construction of typologies tends to be based on vague and untested theoretical premises rather than the empirical rules of evidence (Canter, 1994). As Burgess, *et al*. (1997) themselves admit, in reference to the organised-disorganised classification they proposed a decade earlier: "at present there have been no systematic efforts to validate these profile-derived classifications" (p.22) and the research that subsequently sought to validate these typologies has shown that they are problematic (Canter *et al*., 2004).

The limitations of typologies have implications for the study and successful investigation of serial murderers, especially as it relates to the practice of offender profiling (Canter & Heritage, 1990). Canter and Heritage (1990), voicing the empirical and statistical narrative of offender profiling, find that the above typologies make little distinction between the actions that occur in the course of an offence and the explanations that are given for them. Thus when used in investigations, the offender's motives and life style are confused with his "offending behaviour" (p. 187-188). This implies that each classification cannot be separated from the explanatory framework underlying it and the links between characteristics of the offender and his offence remain unverified by empirical evidence (Canter, 1995). These typologies are thus dependant on the theoretical presuppositions of the researchers concerned and are therefore risky to apply in investigations. This is even more pertinent in the South African context, where the theoretical assumptions underpinning the typologies may be inapplicable or irrelevant when applied to non-North American serial murderers (Hodgskiss, 2004). None of these typologies have been tested for their empirical validity in the South African setting (Labuschagne, 2003). Typologies leave the central investigative and psychological questions in offender profiling only partially answered.

2.6 THEMATIC MODELS OF SERIAL MURDER

An emerging body of research advocates a thematic analysis of offence behaviours to overcome the disadvantages of typologies (Hodge, 2000; Salfati & Canter, 1999). This research proposes that identifying themes of behaviour will help establish relationships between offence and offender behaviours, thereby aiding offender profiling (Hodge, 2000). With reference to narratives of offender profiling, where typologies tend to be associated with the FBI narrative these thematic models tend to be associated with the empirical and statistical narrative. This thematic approach has focused on the classification of behaviours and characteristics using Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) techniques. These techniques have been applied to studies of rapists, arsonists, child molesters, and serial sexual murderers, amongst others (Canter, 1994; Canter & Fritzon, 1998; Canter & Heritage, 1990; Canter, Hughes & Kirby, 1998; Hodge, 2000; Salfati & Canter, 1999). Such studies have begun to demonstrate a correlation between the characteristics of an offender and their

offence, with the offender typically operating within a distinctive sub-set of actions (Hodge, 2000).

These MDS techniques have been applied to serial murder through their being used to test the validity of Holmes and DeBurger's (1988) and Ressler *et al.*'s (1986) models of serial murder (Canter *et al.*, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004). They have also been used to confirm, and generate, insights into serial murderers' behaviours.

2.6.1 Interpersonal thematic models of serial murder

Hodge (2000) found an interpersonal perspective valuable in thematically analysing serial murder. This perspective proposes that the offence is an interpersonal transaction involving characteristic ways of interacting with others. These characteristic styles of interaction will be present in both offence behaviours and other aspects of the offender's lifestyle. They can thus be a means to link an offence to an offender (Canter, 1994; Canter & Heritage, 1990). Hodge (2000) also demonstrated that serial murderers who commit crimes with one style of interpersonal interaction are thematically distinct from those that commit offences with other interpersonal styles. She divided serial murderers into those that treat their victims as an object, those where the victim is a vehicle for their emotional state (such as anger or frustration) and those where the victim is a person. In the last category, offenders attempt some rapport or pseudo-intimacy with the victim (from Canter, 1994). Similarly, Salfati and Canter's (1999) study of stranger murder demonstrated that offenders and offences can be divided into sub-sets on the basis of the role aggression plays in their offences. They revealed a fundamental distinction between 'instrumental' (or functional) and 'expressive' aggression in defining offence and offender themes. The former uses violence to facilitate the successful commission of the offence (e.g. by controlling the victim). In contrast, 'expressive' aggression is used to express the offender's emotional state.

Drawing on these findings, Hodgskiss (2001) analysed the offence behaviours of a sample of 13 male South Africans who had committed serial murder. His research found it is possible to differentiate distinct themes in their offences. These themes centred on the use of violence in the offences. He found South African serial

murderers' offences divided into 'aggressive-expressive', 'sexual-expressive' and 'criminal-instrumental' themes. The aggressive-expressive theme consisted of behaviours involving the infliction of extreme, often excessive, violence to the victim. The sexual-expressive theme referred to offences which demonstrate the offender investing the crime with a certain sexual, emotional or psychological significance. This is expressed in the offender displaying a greater level of psychological involvement with the victim (or offence), including more sexual interaction. Finally, in the criminal-instrumental theme, instrumental actions take precedence over expressive needs, with offences being act rather than process focused. However Hodgskiss made no attempt to correlate these themes with the background characteristics of the offenders. The definition for 'instrumental' and 'expressive' used in his study also varied from that used by Salfati and Canter (1999). This renders reliable comparisons across findings almost impossible.

2.6.1.1 Developmental implications of interpersonal thematic models

Wentink (2001) studied the first three offences of 100 North American serial murderers in order to investigate the patterns of serial murder behaviour across a series of offences. Using Smallest Space Analysis (SSA), she demonstrated that the serial murderer's offences evolve thematically as the series progresses, with the offences become increasingly differentiated into various themes. The offences also tend to become more expressive. Her study calls attention to the evolutionary and developmental nature of serial murder. It is also an empirical confirmation, albeit partial, of the patterns of offence evolution hypothesised by Burgess *et al.* (1986) and Ressler *et al.* (1986). Wentink (2001) concluded that any model for classifying serial murder must be developed through a thorough, systematic analysis and an understanding of the ways patterns of behaviour develop over time and across offences. She suggests the insights of developmental psychology can contribute to the understanding of increasingly complex thematic changes across serial murder offences, and improve our understanding of serial murder as a whole. This agrees with recent criminological literature stating that developmental pathways, rather than typological classifications, are more useful and insightful way to understand criminal behaviour (Francis *et al.*, 2004; Wright *et al.*, 2008).

Increasing thematic differentiation does not mean that the characteristic themes of an individual offender's crimes change as the series progresses. That is, those who commit serial murder tend to remain thematically consistent across their offences (Salfati & Bateman, 2005). Hodgskiss (2001) found analogous processes in South African serial murderers. He found that an offender's behaviour evolves as the series of murders progress, with a distinct mode of operation developing. As with Wentink's (2001) sample, the offences became more thematically distinct as the series progresses. Hodgskiss's (2001) results leant support for an interpersonal perspective on serial murder, finding that offence behaviour can alter markedly in response to external factors, such as victim response. However Hodgskiss (2001), unlike Wentink (2001), did not base these conclusions on formal, statistical analyses. Notwithstanding this, the thematic approach to modelling the behaviour of serial murder has potential for assisting offender profiling in South Africa and this potential, as shall be shown, could be realised through the application of narrative psychology.

2.7 RESEARCH ON SERIAL MURDER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Hickey (2002) identifies three key issues in the study of serial murder from an international perspective: (a) serial murder is defined or considered differently in different cultures, (b) cultural differences influence the motives and methods for serial murder, and (c) offender profiles produced outside the USA are contradicted by those compiled within the USA. While geographical, socio-economic and cultural differences are assumed to affect the behaviours and aetiologies of serial murderers (Hickey, 2002), there is little research stating what these affects actually are, or how they occur. All these points are represented in South Africa. While there is a growing body of systematic studies of serial murder in South Africa; for the most part those involved in researching and investigating serial murder have been obliged to rely on findings from the USA and UK (Hodgskiss, 2004). South African research findings have been incorporated into the preceding discussion of the literature, and this section will summarise the similarities and differences between South African and North American or British serial murderers. By doing so, it will also draw attention to the South African research requirements. This is especially needed, as the influence of the media and popular representations of serial murder have already been seen to skew the way serial murder is construed in South Africa (Hook, 2003).

2.7.1 Introduction to South African research into serial murder

It is not clear how similar or different South African serial murderers are from their counterparts elsewhere, likely due to a lack of research attention (Hodgskiss, 2004). While South African research into serial murder is unique in the degree to which offender interviews have been used (e.g. Del Fabbro, 2006; De Wet, 2005; Du Plessis, 1998; Hodgskiss, 2001; Labuschagne, 2001), the potentially distinctive features of South African serial murderers and their behaviours have seldom been explicitly explored in formal research (Hodgskiss, 2004).

In a similar vein, while a number of South African studies of serial murder make piecemeal contributions to the process of offender profiling in cases of serial murder (Hodgskiss, 2001; Labuschagne, 2001; Pistorius, 1996), none focus primarily on the issues surrounding this practice. Pistorius (1996) undertook a psychodynamic exploration of the aetiology of serial murder. Labuschagne (2001) adopted a systemic interactionist perspective in his analysis of serial murderers. He emphasised that interpreting the individual's interpersonal styles and strategies can enrich and broaden our conceptions of serial murder. Both studies illuminate aspects of the development and characteristics of South African serial murderers, and may be of use in offender profiling (Pistorius's 1996 findings being used explicitly to this end), but neither analyse the crime scene directly as an entity separate from the explanations for the murderer's behaviour. Hodgskiss (2001) focused on the offences of South African serial murderers and identified behavioural themes in their crime scene actions. Yet he made no attempt to explore the connections between offence and offender characteristics or formally analyse the evolution of crime scene behaviours. This limits his study's applicability to offender profiling. Perhaps more tellingly, there is an assumption that the coding framework used in Hodgskiss' (2001) quantitative study adequately accounts for the salient crime scene behaviours.

2.7.2 Offender profiling in South African serial murder investigations

Offender profiling is extensively used in serial murder investigations in South Africa. This is due to the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The Investigative Psychology Unit was established in 1994 to provide detective training in the recognition and investigation of serial murder and 'psychologically motivated' crimes (Labuschagne, 2002). The Investigative Psychology Unit also actively advises ongoing investigations using investigative support activities such as offender profiling.

This combination of detective training and expertise, supported by offender profiling, has achieved some remarkable results. The SAPS is one of few police services that have never had an ongoing case of serial murder remaining unsolved (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 2002). The speed at which serial murder cases have been solved is also impressive. To give some examples: one offender was apprehended three months and two days after the investigation team was put together; a man shooting courting couples, claiming ten lives, was captured a week after the investigation team began their enquiries; another was captured within six weeks of his first murder; and the perpetrator of a series of prostitute murders was captured within 22 days of the Unit's first meeting with the detectives in charge of the case. These figures are all the more remarkable given that the international average for capturing a serial murderer is two years (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 2002; M. Pistorius, personal communication, 2000). The SAPS has had a 100% conviction rate for all persons charged with serial murder brought to court (G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, 2003). The study of serial murder in South Africa is largely a result of the Investigative Psychology Unit's existence. So while there is not yet a distinctly South African narrative of offender profiling or serial murder; it is highly likely that South African research into serial murder, especially that supporting offender profiling, will be applied in ongoing investigations.

2.7.3 Historical context of serial murder in South Africa

Although it is difficult to assess the historical incidence of serial murder in South Africa, it is likely a relatively modern phenomenon. 72% of documented serial murders in South Africa occur after 1990, with more between 1990 and 1994 than in the preceding 70 years (Hodgskiss, 2004; Pistorius, 2002). The elevated number of serial murderers in South Africa in the early to mid-1990's may in part be a function of the SAPS detecting serial murder cases more efficiently. As discussed, the collapse of apartheid, and the subsequent rapid and badly managed social change, is also likely to have played a role in this rise (Labuschagne, 2001). There is also evidence to suggest that a history of violence, cultural conflict and forced urbanisation may have contributed to the severity of serial murder problem in South Africa (Hodgskiss, 2004). These findings are echoed by research into the rise of serial murder in the USA (Hickey, 2002; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Leyton, 1989; Marsh, 1999), and by the previously discussed application of neutralisation theory (Bandura, 1972; Sykes & Matza, 1957) as part of social narratives of cause; although research has failed to establish definite causal links between sociological factors and the incidence and features of serial murder. This study does not aim to resolve this failure. However, all the evidence suggests that an understanding of the social and cultural environment is essential to fully understand serial murder (Leyton, 1989).

2.7.4 Comparisons between South African and foreign serial murderers

A comparison between South African and foreign serial murderers reveals a number of differences in characteristics and behaviour. The most marked differences are the higher incidences of cross-ethnic offending, with 40% of South Africans who commit serial murder offending across ethnic groups; a lower rate of 'team killers' in South Africa; the lack of female serial murderers in South Africa; and the fact that 34% of South African serial murderers are either the same gender as their victims, or murder victims of both genders (Gorby, 2000; G.N. Labuschagne, personal communication, September 2006; Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004; Pakhomou, 2004). Hodgskiss (2004) found that the offender characteristics proposed in the USA, as well as the proposed relationships between them and offence behaviour, were less relevant and reliable in the South African context. Similarly, some developmental features

associated with North American offenders (e.g. sexual fetishes and the triad of fire setting, cruelty to animals and enuresis) were not consistently found in South African serial murderers (Hodgskiss, 2004; Labuschagne, 2001). Finally, as already discussed, research noted a lack of sexually violent conscious fantasy in South African serial murderers. This is potentially significant given the causal and motivational role ascribed to fantasy in models such as Burgess *et al.*'s (1986). Overall, South Africans who commit serial murder display more behaviour in common with their counterparts from the developing world than with serial murderers from the USA (Gorby, 2000; Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004). Here, the 'developing world' refers to South and Central America, Africa, the middle-East, Asia, and Oceania (Gorby, 2000). While the increased cross-ethnic offending may be an obvious function of the demographics of South Africa, neither this or the other observations have been fully explained.

These differences occur alongside some notable similarities. Firstly, as with these offenders elsewhere, South African research found coherent and structured variations in serial murderer's offence behaviours (Hodgskiss, 2001; Pistorius, 1996), suggesting it is possible to construct a model of the behaviours involved in serial murder in South Africa. Secondly, in common with North American offenders, South African serial murderers all reported profound, chronic loneliness and isolation. This was often allied with a sense of interpersonal inadequacy and helplessness (Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2001; Labuschagne, 2001). Labuschagne's (2001) qualitative study noted similar psychiatric features in South African and North American offenders convicted of serial murder. Finally studies by Hodgskiss (2001), Labuschagne (2001) and Du Plessis (1989) also found that a vast majority of South African offenders suffered significant childhood trauma, rejection and violent abuse. Again, similar findings were made with reference to males who committed serial murder in the USA (Hickey, 2002; Pakhomou, 2004; Wolf & Lavezzi, 2007) and Germany (Harbort & Mokros, 2001).

Turning to offence behaviours, while South African findings are still not entirely clear, there is a suggestion that the desire to exert control over others may be a fundamental motivating factor (Hodgskiss, 2001). This chimes with Hickey's (2002) trauma-control model and findings around the 'core' behaviours of North American serial murderers (Canter & Wentink, 2004). South African and North American

offenders also seem to follow a similar behavioural evolution in their crime scenes, gradually progressing towards more distinct, unusual and expressive behaviours (Hodgskiss, 2001; Wentink, 2001). External factors and interpersonal interaction can significantly alter both South African and North American offender's offence behaviours (Hodgskiss, 2001; Ressler & Shachtman, 1993; Schlesinger, 2004). Geographical behaviours are also similar (Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2004). Furthermore, the absence of completely thematically consistent offence behaviours in Hodgskiss's (2001) study of South African serial murders lends support to international criticisms of rigid offender typologies (Canter *et al.*, 2004; Hodge, 2000; Salfati & Canter, 1999). Given this mixed picture of similarity and difference it remains unclear how similar South African serial murderers are to those who commit these offences elsewhere, and whether the processes of offending are similar or different between groups.

2.7.5 Summary and current situation of South African research into serial murder

Research into South Africans who commit serial murder has begun to illuminate their salient features and can potentially contribute to a better understanding of serial murder globally. Notwithstanding this, marked ambiguities were found in comparisons between South African serial murderers and their counterparts elsewhere, making it unclear how applicable foreign research findings are in the South African context. This is particularly relevant with reference to research supporting the offender profiling of these offenders. This may affect the applicability of both the narratives around offender profiling, and the causal narratives of serial murder in South Africa. There are thus very significant research requirements around South African serial murder. Research has also shown that dynamic interpersonal, social, and cultural factors are significant in understanding serial murder. This is especially relevant in South Africa, where the socio-cultural context is markedly different from the nations where most of the research into serial murder comes from, namely the USA and UK.. Given these ambiguities and gaps in understanding, a study with a phenomenological and social constructivist orientation may help increase our understanding of South African serial murder.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This literature review addressed the major contributions made by theory and research to the fields of serial murder and offender profiling, as well as the competing and interrelated narratives that characterise them. A thematic and developmental approach to analysing crime has been proposed to overcome the limitations of traditional typologies in linking offence and offender in serial murder (Canter *et al*., 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Canter, 2000, 2004; Francis *et al.*, 2004; Hodge, 2000; Salfati & Bateman, 2005; Salfati & Canter, 1999; Wright *et al.*, 2008). This thematic approach accords well with the fundamental findings that serial murder is a dynamic and evolving activity, displaying structured variations in behaviours which are underpinned by the offender's cognitive and meaning structures (Arndt, *et al.*, 2004, Burgess *et al.*, 1986 ; Canter, 1994; Canter *et al.*, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Hickey, 2002; Hodgskiss, 2001; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2001; Pakhomou, 2004; Ressler *et al.,* 1986; Wright *et al.,* 2008). The thematic approach to analysing crime has been articulated best in interpersonal narrative models of crime, which propose that crimes reveal an offender's characteristic style of interpersonal interaction (Canter, 1994). Their style of interaction, or personal narrative, will be consistent over time and reflected in everyday behaviour (Hodge, 2000).

These characteristic interpersonal narratives may thus be the most productive basis for inferring offender characteristics from offence details, that is, for offender profiling (Youngs, 2004). Interpersonal perspectives acknowledge the emphasis on environmental influence that is an implicit part of a number of the explanatory narratives applied to serial murder: such as neutralisation theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957) as a causal narrative; the influence of others and the environment in the motivational models (Burgess *et al*., 1986; Hickey, 2002); and the societal influences on serial murder globally and in South Africa (Hickey, 2002; Holmes & De Burger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2001; Leyton, 1989). This emphasis on the relationship between the environment and the individual's evolving systems of meaning reflects the key concerns of a social constructivist approach. Narrative modes of understanding crime may therefore be particularly suited to the study of serial murder, as well as having advantages for offender profiling. This will be explored in the following chapter.