

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW: HISTORY, DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORIES OF SERIAL MURDER**

For the past two decades, serial murder seems to have occupied an increasingly privileged place in the fascination of popular culture. Such fascination appears to have combined with academic and investigative endeavors to produce a plethora of historical and theoretical explorations of the subject. This literature review will investigate defining the concept of serial murder and outline the historical origins of the phenomenon of serial murder as well as the various ways in which serial murder has been classified and understood.

### **2.1 DEFINING SERIAL MURDER**

There is much confusion, even in the scientific community, with regards to defining serial murder. In 2005 at the FBI's serial murder symposium, one of the symposium's objectives was to come to a consensus amongst professionals about the definition(s) of serial murder (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2006). In order to arrive at defining this concept, it is necessary to distinguish serial murder from other acts of multiple murder, such as mass murder and spree murder (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Dubner, 1992; Gresswell & Hollin, 1994; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Warren, Hazelwood & Dietz, 1996).

#### **2.1.1 Mass and spree murder**

Mass murder has been defined as "an act in which a number of people are slain by a single assassin during a short period of time in roughly the same location" (Lane & Gregg, 1992, p.1). Consequently, the murders all take place in the same location and are committed

quite closely after one another, if not simultaneously. An example of mass murder in South Africa would be Barend Strydom who in 1981 murdered a number of people in Strydom Square in Pretoria.

Spree murder involves “multiple killing [which] takes place over a marginally longer period of time – hours or days” (Lane & Gregg, 1992, p.1) usually at different locations. Consequently, it would seem that, on the continuum of multiple murder, spree murder is further along a distance dimension with regard to time and location with murders that are spaced out more than in the case of mass murder, yet within the context of one ongoing event. An example of spree murder in South Africa would be Charmaine Phillips and Peter Grundling who in 1983 murdered four victims over a three week period during which they moved from their starting point in Durban, to Melmoth, Secunda and ended in Bloemfontein (Labuschagne, 2003). Definitional commonalities between these two types of multiple murder, appear to lie in the act itself - that is, murder is committed - and the plurality of the act concerned – that is, two or more murders take place.

It would appear that the above differentiations are based primarily upon differences in temporal and spatial dimensions, with respect to the amount time passing between individual murders and the number of locations at which the murders are committed. All three forms of multiple murder can be seen as lying upon a continuum with respect to distance in space and time. Now, the definitions of the third type of multiple murder, serial murder, will be discussed.

### **2.1.2 Serial murder**

Academics and law enforcement professionals have attempted to create a suitable definition for serial murder for the purposes of communication, research, and theoretical

understanding, as well as practical applications in the form of criminal investigation tools. As a result, there has been a proliferation of definitional postulates for serial murder that have varied greatly with regard to the fundamental elements stipulated as essential to classifications of serial murder. Whilst there are a number of communalities in almost all, there are considerable differences in opinion as to what serial murder entails and a few of these definitions will be discussed now. This discussion will first deal with international, predominantly US, definitions and then move on to South African definitions of serial murder. The pros and cons of each will briefly be highlighted.

- **Definitions of serial murder: international.**

Definitions of serial murder from the USA would appear to originate predominantly from the domain of law enforcement, specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the United States, which played a central role in defining and investigating serial murder in the 70's and 80's.

Ressler *et al.* (1988) from the Behavioural Science Unit of the FBI define serial murder as:

- three or more separate murders, with
- an emotional cooling-off period between homicides, and
- taking place at different locations.

This definition does not specify the number of suspects or perpetrators involved and does not make reference to motivation. It does, however, refrain from referring to gender, which allows for the possibility of both male and female perpetrators of serial murder.

John Douglas, a retired FBI behavioural scientist, together with Mark Olshaker, a journalist, defines serial murder in the following manner in his popular crime non-fiction piece *Anatomy of Motive* (2000):

- murders take place on at least three occasions,
- there is an emotional cooling off period between each incident (this cooling off period may last hours, days, weeks, months, or years), and
- each event is emotionally distinct and separate.

This definition makes no reference to location or to motivation and, as with the first definition, specifies three occasions as the minimum number. The duration of the cooling off period is also allowed to be short enough to possibly result in confusion with spree murder, and due to neglecting to specify separate locations, may result in confusion with mass murder. With regards to law enforcement, such a definition may prove difficult to apply in terms of its emphasis on emotional distinctness which can only be gathered from self-report on the part on the suspect, and hence, difficult to assess prior to the arrest of the suspect.

Holmes and De Burger (1988), who come from a primarily academic background in Professional Justice Administration and have provided the police with assistance on a consultant basis in numerous cases, provide a definition that is descriptive, namely:

- repetitive homicide;
- murders usually occur between two people - a victim and a perpetrator;
- the relationship between victim and perpetrator is usually that of stranger or slight acquaintance;
- apparent and clear-cut motives are typically lacking;
- motives originate within the individual and do not reflect passion, personal gain, or profit tendencies; and
- a common perception that all serial killers are lust killers in light of evidence or observations to indicate the murder was sexual in nature.

In this definition, once again, the notion of serial murder as stranger murder is evident, and the number of people involved in the crime is limited to two, namely, the perpetrator and

victim, and thereby seems to exclude teams of two or more perpetrators. As with previous definitions, the motive is situated within the psychological workings of the individual concerned and not externally available or obvious. The number of murders is not specified, and victimology (beyond “stranger”) is absent in this definition. Interestingly, this definition starts to introduce sexual aspects of serial murder, which have been elaborated in literature that will be discussed later. However, the introduction of a sexual element may limit other non-sexual cases from being included. Furthermore, labeling occurs and the person implicated in such a definition seems categorized with the “diagnosis” of “killer” ignoring the complexities of the person who commits murder.

Egger (1990), a professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Texas provides the following in a detailed definition of serial murder:

- the murders may involve one or more individuals.
- the murders are committed mostly by males.
- there must be at least two murders
- there is no apparent prior relationship between victim and attacker.
- the murders occur at different times and are unconnected.
- the murders are usually in different geographic locations.
- the motive is not for material gain.
- the motive is largely related to the murderer’s desire to have power over his victim.
- the victims have symbolic value and are perceived to be prestigeless and powerless given their situation in time, place or status within their immediate surroundings. For example, vagrants, prostitutes, migrant workers, homosexuals, missing children, and single and often elderly women

This definition mentions motive as well as victimology and defines the relationship between victim and perpetrator as one between strangers, as introduced by Holmes and DeBurger (1988) above. There is a more explicit reference to gender with an acknowledgement of the greater proportion of males committing serial murder. The previous definitions have allowed for the possibility of prior relationship between victim and perpetrator and have not elaborated upon victimology in the extensive manner of this definition. However, the definition of serial murder victimology above appears to be quite narrow, and inherently contradictory in that, as much as victims are proposed as having symbolic value, unique to the individual committing serial murder, their specification as vagrants, prostitutes and so on, is derived from socially marginalized groupings and hence, sources external to the psychological motivations of the individual concerned.

Lane and Gregg (1992), academic researchers, list six criteria for serial murderers in their *New Encyclopedia of Serial Murder*, namely,

- the murders are repetitive.
- the murders often escalate over a period of time, sometimes years and continue until the killer is taken into custody, dies or is himself killed.
- the murders tend to be one-on-one.
- there is no (or very little) connection between the perpetrator and the victim.
- individual murders within a series rarely display a clearly defined or rational motive.
- the perpetrators may move rapidly from one place to another often before a murder has been discovered.
- there is usually a high degree of redundant violence, or 'overkill', where the victim is subjected to a disproportionate level of brutality.

This definition repeats the absence of relationship between perpetrator and victim as well as notions of motive or apparent lack thereof and location. There is no specification of number of offences necessary to constitute serial murder. In this definition, there is an elaboration on modus operandi or manner in which the crime is committed, namely as “overkill”. Once again, the above definition avoids specifying gender of the likely perpetrator and does not explicitly specify the possibility of more than one individual committing serial murder.

Finally, Harbort and Mokros (2001), two German academic researchers, define serial murder in the following manner:

- the perpetrator may be fully or partially culpable. Consequently, severe mental disorder or disturbance would not render him/her accountable for his deed.
- serial murder may be committed alone or with accomplice(s).
- serial murder involves at least three completed murders.
- the murders have to be premeditated and characterized through a new, hostile intent.

Once again, the minimum number of murders appears to be set at three, and each event has been specified as having to be distinct from each other. Interestingly, the possibility of more than one perpetrator in serial murder is introduced as well as notions of insanity and mental disorders as precluding individuals from being classified as having committed serial murder. In other words, *menses rea* (or criminal intent) becomes an important criterion for serial murder.

• **Definitions of serial murder: South Africa.**

In terms of South African definitions, Pistorius (1996) defines serial murder in the following way in her doctoral thesis, *A Psychoanalytical Approach to Serial Killers*:

- A serial killer is a person (or persons) who murder/s several victims.

- These victims are usually strangers.
- The murders take place at different times.
- The murders are not necessarily committed at the same location
- There is usually a cooling-off period between murders.
- 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, mutilation and necrophilia.

Similar to Holmes and DeBurger (1988), this definition appears to describe the person who commits serial murder solely in terms of the acts that they have engaged in, thereby reducing understandings of such a person to their criminal activity rather than encompassing the totality of the individual concerned, for example as someone's partner, son or daughter. Perhaps there needs to be a greater delineation between understandings of an individual who commits serial murder (in terms of personality and character structure for example), and definitions of what serial murder as a type of crime or behaviour entails. This is not clear in the above definition.

The label "serial killer" is additionally sensationalistic and used more by the popular media and fictional domain than academic and law enforcement areas. The definition also neglects the number of murders necessary, and is also too specific in terms of the paraphilias or sexual perversions that may accompany serial murder (but is not always the case). The definition however, is advantageous in its allowance for more than one perpetrator, as well as specification of motive nature and temporal and geographical distinctness.

Labuschagne (2001) in his doctoral thesis entitled *Serial murder revisited: a psychological exploration of two South African cases*, defined serial murder as involving:

- a person who is motivated to kill,



- a person who commits three or more murders occurring at different times, and in an ostensibly unconnected manner,
- a motive that is not primarily for material gain, revenge, or the elimination of a witness.

In this definition, neither victimology nor location are referred to. There is no specification of relationship between victim and perpetrator, nor clear discussion of the number of perpetrators who may be involved. However, temporal individuation of murders and motive are clearly delineated in as much as ulterior primary motives are immediately empowered to discount classification as serial murder.

This definition was subsequently revised in 2004 as the following, and appears to include a number of the excluded dimensions discussed above:

- The person(s) are intrinsically/psychologically motivated to kill.
- The murder of two or more victims.
- The murders occur at different times.
- The murders appear unconnected.
- The motive is not primarily for material gain, nor elimination of witness/es.
- The motive is not primarily for revenge. Revenge may play a role but more indirectly, as against a certain category of individuals such as prostitutes, as opposed to a specific person.
- The victims tend to be strangers (Labuschagne, 2004).

This definition appears to encapsulate the core elements involved in serial murder, and whilst not specifying a specific number of perpetrators, allows for the possibility of more than one perpetrator. However, it omits geographical aspects such as whether the murders have to occur at different geographical locations.

An important note with regards to terminology concerns distinctions between “murder” and “killing”. Whereas murder constitutes a crime punishable by law, killing refers to a more general action of taking life. Consequently, if definitions make reference to killing and killers, they may include many individuals who take life legitimately on a regular basis, or on at least two or more occasions. Such individuals may be military and law enforcement personnel or civilians working in places such as abattoirs or slaughterhouses, killing animals for commercial consumption. One is not indicted for killing, but for murder. To this end, it would seem that the use of the term murder is preferable.

### **2.1.3 Differences and similarities of definitions**

As can be seen from the above definitions, all appear to have a number of factors that overlap, despite and in the presence of obvious variations and differences. These commonalities include number of victims, motive, temporal and geographical distinctions, number of perpetrators, relationship between victim and perpetrator and, in some cases, victimology. An exclusive emphasis on these factors may be disadvantageous however, in that it may prevent dialogue around alternative possibilities and factors that may be equally salient. In this way, novel understandings and definitions of serial murder may be silenced or prevented from emerging.

With regards to differences, these appear to concern the number of murders necessary to constitute serial murder, as well as the extent to which motive and victimology is elaborated upon. All definitions appear to be gender neutral, despite the fact that an overwhelming proportion of the literature operates under the assumption that serial murder is largely perpetrated by males and in some cases, holds that it is impossible for females to commit serial murder. These differences and similarities will now be discussed.

- **Quantity of murders.**

With respect to criteria regarding the number of murders necessary for a series of murders to qualify as serial murder, definitions vary between two or more (Egger, 1990; Labuschagne, 2003), and three or more (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Labuschagne, 2001; Ressler et al., 1988) while some definitions leave this number unspecified (Holmes & DeBurger, 1998; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996).

Merriem-Webster's (2005) dictionary defines the word "series" as - "a group of usually three or more things or events standing or succeeding in order and having a like relationship to each other" (p. 2073). However, any attempt to stipulate a specific number of murders is problematic for the following reason. Egger (1984) highlights problems with setting the number of murders for serial murder at three with reference to individuals who may have committed only two murders before being apprehended but for whom these two murders were the beginning of a "harvest of victims" (p. 5) as part of a serial murder sequence. However, this argument may also be applied to cases where individuals who would go on to commit additional murders are apprehended after the first offence. Hence, any definition that specifies a particular number of murders risks omitting part of its intended sample.

On the other hand, definitions that do not specify the number of murders involved risk loss of clarity, and place decisions to classify a case as serial murder at the discretion of any individual who uses such a definition. As a result the reliability and consistency with which such a definition can be applied uniformly is compromised, and one could argue that the validity with which it characterizes serial murder is also limited.

- **The "cooling off" period.**

Several definitions (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess & Ressler, 1992; Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Pistorius, 1996; Ressler *et al.*, 1988), notably those from FBI behavioural science sources,

allude to a cooling off period to account for the temporal spacing between murders within a series and thereby, distinguish serial murder from other types of multiple murder such as spree and mass murder.

Such a period is described as emotional in nature (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Ressler *et al.*, 1988) and, as will be elaborated upon in discussion of the theories of serial murder, has been argued as constituting a time period in which the individual who commits serial murder temporarily satiates his/her need to murder or enact his/her fantasy of murder, and either regenerates such a fantasy and the desire to act upon it (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000) and/or plans his/her next murder (Hazelwood & Warren, 1995).

The inclusion of an emotional cooling off period in certain definitional criteria raises a number of salient issues. Firstly, despite the stipulation of a cooling off period, there is little detail as to how much time this period entails. Douglas *et al.* (1992) describe such a period as consisting of days, months, weeks or even years; however, this appears to be too broad, and as a result, may lead to confusion between types of multiple murder. For example, the recent Washington sniper in the United States, murdered several people over a spate of days and was classified as a serial sniper. The basis for this classification is unclear (possibly because of the nature of the murders), but the classificatory rationale in this case would certainly seem to omit considerations of time between murders or a cooling off period stipulation that, if adhered to, would have made the Washington sniper an individual who committed serial murder.

Secondly, if the cooling off period is stipulated too narrowly or specifically, it may overlook individual nuances in the psychological and emotional processing of the separate murders within a series by offenders, which may vary from one serial murderer to another. As a result, this may omit certain cases of serial murder or erroneously include others.

Additionally, little research has been done with respect to the qualitative aspects of the cooling off period. These aspects may include details such as whether the length of time period involved varies with age, temperament, gender and personality characteristics or differences between individuals in the ability to self-regulate; impulse control; fantasy life; or intensity of affective functioning. In this regard, the length of cooling off period may vary between individuals with regard to the above factors or within an individual across time in relation to developmental changes and progression, or even coinciding life events or situational factors. For example, one might hypothesize that the presence of stressful life events such as death of a loved one or end of a relationship might impact upon the cooling off period an individual who commits serial murder needs before committing another murder.

Finally, the choice of phrase used to describe such a period, namely, “cooling off” would appear to portray serial murder in a certain light. It seems to imply that murders take place as a result of an intense emotional outburst that overwhelms the capacity to normally contain such emotional material in the individual concerned, after which the individual requires a resting period during which those emotions reaccumulate. It would seem inadvisable to narrow understandings of serial murder in such a way, as it may exclude cases of serial murder where this does not occur, such as where the time lapses between murders may occur as a result of victim availability. Additionally, if police are unable to find bodies (because they have been buried or hidden or moved to another area), they may mistakenly believe that the suspect is in a cooling off period, instead of taking extra steps to find bodies.

- **Motive.**

Motives for crime can be classified as external and internal (Labuschagne, 2003). An example of external motives is a case where a witness is murdered. The motive in this case would be to conceal another crime, with the murder in question being a means to another end, that is, to

get away with the first crime. Internal motives or psychologically motivated crime refers to cases where there is no external benefit for the offender and there is frequently no obvious relationship between offenders and victims. The crime serves to satisfy a psychological need. For example, the kleptomaniac will steal to satisfy an internal drive or compulsion as opposed to the thief who steals for external profit. In some cases, internal and external motives may occur in combination. An example may be a case where a hijacker steals a motor vehicle for external profit in terms of payment but tortures the owner of the vehicle due to a personal sadistic need.

With reference to the above definitions, some do not make reference to motive specifically (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Ressler *et al.*, 1988), while those that do refer to motive specify this as being located internal to the individual concerned (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2001, 2004; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996). Definitions that include motive additionally do not classify it as related to profit, revenge, or passion (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988) but in one case, defined it as relating to power as a function of the interpersonal relationship between perpetrator and victim (Egger, 1990) and in others claim that motive in serial murder is not rational (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Lane & Gregg, 1992).

Definitions that do not refer to motive at all are problematic in that they may include individuals such as contract murderers, who murder for profit, or individuals involved in organized crime, which murder for personal gain, profit or religious or ideological reasons. There has been much debate around this particular point, namely whether those who commit multiple murders and derive some form of evident gain in the sense of material profit or professional kudos, such as the assassin, qualify as being individuals who commit serial murder (Pistorius, 1996; Wilson, 2000). However, by not specifying any details with regard to

motive, definitions may suffer the same threats to consistency as discussed above with reference to quantity of murders.

Definitions that do refer to motive appear to situate this motive intrinsically or internally to the individual concerned (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2004; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996). Serial murder is consequently frequently understood as being psychologically motivated (Labuschagne, 2003). Such definitions have implications for the manner in which such an individual is treated after being apprehended as well as investigative methods used to track and apprehend such a person. By defining serial murder as having motives that are internal, these same attempts to track and apprehend such an individual become very difficult, as there are limitations to the certainty with which future criminal behaviour can be assessed.

Additionally, by virtue of definitions of such motives as being psychological in nature, it seems as if an individual who commits serial murder is distinguished from the criminal population for whom motives are external, which may not always be an accurate assessment. This follows from the possibility that as much as motives may differ, offence behaviour and criminal decision-making may follow similar patterns. Additionally, by excluding cases where there is an obvious external motive, definitions may omit cases where, in spite of this external motive, there is a stronger internal motive that is less obvious but nevertheless, the primary motivation. This may occur in a case where an individual kills a young couple and steals their motor vehicle but where the murder of the two individuals satisfies the suspect's primary need.

Some definitions that refer directly to motive go as far as to specify what kinds of internal motives these are such as power (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988), lust (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988) and compulsion (Pistorius, 1996). Whereas a more detailed description of

motive in definitions may be helpful with respect to investigation of serial murder, motive-based definitions that are too specific may omit cases of serial murder where motives differ.

Additionally, given that such motives are internally located, there may be large differences in interpretation of such motives between those who apply the definition and those who are involved in serial murder. For example, definitions that emphasize the role of power motives in serial murder remain ambiguous in that power itself as a concept is defined and interpreted subjectively with respect to the nature of power - physical, psychological, emotional and/or financial - and relationship, in the sense that power involves a differential between the individual who is powerful in relation to another who is not. The perpetrator may select victims whose powerlessness is obvious to him/her in accordance to an internal set of values and norms but not obvious to those applying power motive-based definitions. As a result, such definitions may omit this individual or fail to link a series of murders. To combat this, Jenkins (1994) has suggested that motive should be included in definitions in as much as the murder is consistent with the perpetrator's internal set of values. This, however, holds little worth for investigative applications in that it would only be possible to establish this information post-arrest, and hence is not helpful in guiding searches for possible suspects. This can also be applied to motive-based definitions that emphasise compulsion or drive, and lust.

Motive-based definitions that are too specific may also often result in presumptive labeling or attributions in investigation. Should a motive-based definition be too exclusive, individuals who commit murder for the pure enjoyment of the act of killing are left out. Additionally, typology-based definitions such as that of Holmes and DeBurger (1988) that classify serial murder in terms of visionary, mission-oriented, hedonistic and power/control motivations, risk creating fixed serial murder types which do not allow enough flexibility for variation in motive or new kinds of motives.



Police investigation that utilizes such types may also narrow its focus to evaluate crime scenes and murder cases within the confines of the typology as opposed to deducing motive from crime scene details and case facts. Such inductive exposition is not entirely accurate and Turvey (1998) warns against the dangers of such inductive logic in terms of the inherent flaws in going beyond the available data with no justifiable ground from which to do so. Definitions which promote certain kinds of motives in serial murder may consequently not only tautologically confirm their definitional elements by reference to subsequent instances but also base their “evidence” on untenable and flawed causal links.

- **Sexuality and lust murder.**

Some definitions of serial murder appear to introduce a sexual component (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Pistorius, 1996). This may be with respect to motive, as with Holmes and DeBurger (1998) and to a lesser degree, Pistorius (1996); with respect to concomitant paraphilias or sexual deviance (Pistorius, 1996); or with regards to the type of victim selected, such as prostitutes and homosexuals in Egger’s (1990) definition.

Definitions such as that of Pistorius (1996), that includes reference to paraphilias such as necrophilia and components such as sexual abuse, risk omitting cases where those components are absent. In South Africa, the extent to which such elements have been seen in serial murder cases varies. Whereas individuals such as Stewart Wilken, engaged in some post-mortem mutilation, cannibalism and necrophilia (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2005), individuals such as the Saloon Killer, Velaphi Ndlangamandla, did not, and shot his victims from a distance with a .22 caliber rifle.

Additionally, there may not be consistency across murders in a particular case of serial murder with respect to sexual elements. For example, Samuel Sidyno strangled his male victims, and yet raped some of the females that he murdered. The case of David Mbengwa

illustrates another difficulty with including sexual components in a definition of serial murder. Much the same as with most motive-based definitions, what constitutes as sexual may vary between perpetrators as well as those applying definitions or interpreting crime scenes. David Mbengwa shot his victims and thus his modus operandi was not explicitly sexual in nature. However, his targets were young couples making love. Whether this constituted a sexual stimulus for Mbengwa or not will depend on his worldview, which may conflict with those of the individual applying a definition of serial murder with sexual components. This may also only be determined on apprehension. Much the same debate has occurred with international serial murderers such as David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, who also shot his victims, which were young couples as well (Lane & Gregg, 1992). Douglas and Olshaker (2000) as well as FBI profilers such as Robert Ressler (1997) have argued that the gun in these cases represented a phallic object, and hence, the murders were sexual in nature. This would seem to be open to argument however.

Sexual homicide has been defined as “the intentional killing of a person during which there is sexual behaviour by the perpetrator” (Meloy, 2000, p. 2). Ressler *et al.* (1988) define sexual homicide as “...murders with evidence or observations that indicate the murder was sexual in nature.” (p. 13), which is not very helpful. Given that sexual homicide appears to refer to a separate kind of homicide or murder, it would appear that in cases where murders within an instance of serial murder conform to the above definitions in terms of displaying obvious sexual components, it would seem more appropriate to classify such an instance as a particular case of serial sexual homicide, as opposed to incorporating sexual elements into a standard definition of serial murder. In other words, serial sexual murder (or homicide) would constitute a sub-type existing within the broader category of serial murder, together with other subtypes such as serial murder as part of organized crime, which would encompass individuals working as contract killers.

- **Number of perpetrators.**

Definitions of serial murder appear to vary with respect to the number of perpetrators that they specify. Whereas some do not specify number at all (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Ressler *et al.*, 1988), others appear to be divided between specifying one perpetrator (Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Lane & Gregg, 1992) and more than one perpetrator (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2003; Pistorius, 1996).

Definitions that refer to single perpetrators risk omitting cases where serial murder involves two individuals such as the Moors murders in England (Ian Brady and Myra Hindley), Fred and Rosemary West in England, as well as Jacques Coetzee and John Frank Brown and the NASREC pair of Mazankane and Motsegwa in South Africa. Those definitions that allow for more than one perpetrator generally appear to avoid specifying a maximum number of individuals that may be involved, or the ways in which aspects of serial murder may vary as a result. For example, in cases where more than two individuals appear to be involved in committing murders, such as the Manson murders in the 1970's in the United States, questions arise as to the apportioning of accountability and responsibility, as a result of group dynamics such as "mob thinking" (Asch, 1956; Janis, 1972). Additionally, definitions that include the possibility of more than two perpetrators appear to avoid specifying whether gangs of individuals who commit multiple murders would qualify as instances of serial murder. It also seems to be unclear whether the same individuals would have to be involved in every murder in a particular series, or whether each individual would have to carry out the same tasks in each instance.

- **Gender.**

With regards to gender, some definitions seem to directly frame serial murder as perpetrated by males (Egger, 1990; Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Lane & Gregg, 1992) while others avoid specifying a particular gender (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2004; Pistorius, 1996; Ressler *et al.*, 1988).

Definitions that describe serial murder as perpetrated solely by males omit cases of serial murder where the perpetrator or co-perpetrator has been a female. These include, Myra Hindley (part of the Moors Murders team with Ian Brady – convicted of three murders) and Rosemary West (part of a team with Fred West – convicted of ten murders) in the United Kingdom, and Aileen Wuornos (convicted of six murders), Christine Falling (convicted of three murders), Janie Gibbs (convicted of five murders) and Gwendolyn Graham and Caroline Wood (convicted of six murders) in the USA. In South Africa, Daisy de Melker is argued to have committed serial murder in the 1930's on Johannesburg's East Rand by poisoning her two husbands and stepson (Lane & Gregg, 1992); however her motive is largely acknowledged to be financial.

Those definitions that do not explicitly refer to a particular gender, while leaving the possibility for a female perpetrator open, do not seem to go far enough by failing to explicitly stating that perpetrators can be male or female. This appears to be reflected by the inconsistent classification of females who commit multiple homicides as serial murderers - for example, individuals such as Daisy de Melker and Aileen Wuornos, as mentioned above.

On the topic of gender, the sexualisation of serial murder definitions (discussed above) has frequently been critiqued by feminist theorists such as Cameron and Frazer (1987) and Caputi (1992), in as much as this often limits the extent to which women can be subsumed under such a definition due to popular conceptions regarding the extent to which a woman can aggressively display her sexuality. As a result, these theorists feel that males who commit

multiple murders are frequently overrepresented in serial murder samples as opposed to women who commit the same crime. In fact, the number of female serial murderers increases by 10-15% in the USA if sexual motives are excluded from definitions of serial murder.

The effects of serial murder definitions that include sexual components can be seen in the recent debate over the classification of Aileen Wuornos, an American woman who murdered six individuals while working as a prostitute in the USA (Lane & Gregg, 1992). While writers such as Douglas and Olshaker (2000) consider her to be the only female American serial murderer, a researcher such as Blanchard (1995) critiques their selective application of serial murder definitions that have excluded other females involved in serial sexual murders such as Catherine Bundy, Karla Homolka and Judith Neely, or conceded their inclusion in classification of serial murder cases by framing female offenders as part of a team, in a more secondary role to their male counterpart (Geberth, 1998). This will be discussed further in the following chapter on theoretical understandings of serial murder.

- **Victim/offender relationship.**

Finally, the aspect of specified relationship between victim and perpetrator in definitions of serial murder will be examined. Some definitions do not make any reference to the details of such a relationship (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Ressler *et al.*, 1988) while others characterize this relationship as between strangers (Egger, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2004; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996) and between two people or one-on-one (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Lane & Gregg, 1992). Labuschagne (2003) allows for the possibility of more than one victim at a time.

Definitions that do not describe the nature of the relationship between offender and victim appear to be limited in the degree to which they can be useful for investigative purposes.

Those that describe such a relationship too explicitly, such as Egger (1990) in terms of his

description of victims as powerless and prestigeless and in terms of membership to certain social categories such as homosexuals, vagrants, and prostitutes, suffer the same criticism with respect to their possible omission of cases of serial murder where this is not the case such as in the case of Jacques Coetzee and John Frank Brown, who were homosexual themselves, Coetzee being a homosexual prostitute, and whose victims were male homosexuals. They also appear to be weakened by the many ways in which “power” and “powerlessness” can be defined and interpreted.

Definitions that characterize the relationship between victim and offender as one between strangers risk failing to link cases where there is an established connection between these two individuals. An example would be Nicolas Ncama in South Africa whose victims included the daughter of a family friend, a housemate and his stepdaughter (Pistorius, 1996) as well as Stewart Wilken who murdered his own daughter and neighbour’s son (Labuschagne, 2004). Definitions that characterize such a relationship as one-on-one are also challenged by cases where this is not the case such as South Africa’s Wemmer Pan killer, Cedric Maake, as well as David Mbengwa, who killed couples. The same criticism would apply on the grounds of cases where there is more than one perpetrator, such as the Moors murders or the Wests in the United Kingdom.

Definitions that emphasise a lack of relationship between victim and offender also appear to propose this as a core feature of victim selection in serial murder. However, frequently this is not the case, and victim selection operates primarily from personal motives of the individual concerned, to which the nature of relationship with the victim is incidental. For example, for John Wayne Gacy, the American serial murderer convicted of the murder of thirty three victims, his particular victim choice was young boys, regardless of whether a prior relationship existed or not (and in fact, in many cases, he was familiar with his victims who worked for him) (Lane & Gregg, 1992).

#### 2.1.4 Concluding remarks on definitions

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2004) defines a “series” as a “number of things each of which is similar to the preceding or related to it as it to its predecessor”. Serial murder consequently would refer to a series of murders with each element of the series related in some way to its precedent and antecedent. Definitions should consequently illuminate necessary connections between instances of murder. One would surmise that consistency of perpetrator would be sufficient to link instances of murder. However, this is challenged by the fact that this is evident only after the individual concerned has been apprehended and by cases where there is more than one individual involved such as serial murder teams or duos.

For investigative purposes, connections thereby come in the form of similarities in the way the murder is committed which results in extensive exploration of apparent modus operandi and elements such as signature, victim choice, location and time between murders, and motive which are assumed to be manifested consistently by an individual perpetrator or perpetrators. Assumptions of consistency cannot be reliably proven to withstand challenges and there have been many instances in which apprehended individuals have claimed responsibility for murders considerably different to the series for which the individual has been charged.

The choice of the term “serial” is of interest in that it reflected a need to create a distinct crime category as opposed to viewing a number of linked murders as a result of a compulsion or addiction on the part of the individual/s concerned, which would have been more in line with a psychological or medical model as opposed to a legal-investigative model.

Consequently, when psychological concepts such as “emotional cooling off period” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000), “motives...that originate within the individual” (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988) and statements such as “motive is intrinsic; an irresistible compulsion, fuelled by

fantasy...” (Pistorius, 1996) are included in definitions of serial murder, complications arise due to the fact that such concepts and statements are not always as empirically and veridically accessible as necessary for investigative applications. Tenuous links that are drawn between the two domains not only add to debates around definitions of serial murder but also frequently add to the confusion surrounding what constitutes serial murder. It would appear that, as much as psychological explanations and concepts might be utilized to inform definitions, should the purpose of accurate definitions of serial murder be largely for investigative purposes, they should be phrased in these terms.

Ferguson, White, Cherry, Lorenz and Bhimani (2003) argue that a clear definition of serial murder is essential in order to standardize reporting of prevalence statistics and to educate criminal justice professionals and the public. Different definitions not only result in general public confusion and misperceptions but also additionally mean that research frequently focuses upon different populations of offenders without acknowledging this difference.

In this light, it is necessary to highlight what appears to be an underlying tension with regard to definitions of serial murder, between psychological and investigative perspectives. Although it would seem that the two domains overlap frequently in understandings of serial murder, and are not essentially mutually exclusive, there are differences between their respective emphases that frequently result in competing tensions within serial murder definitions. For example, the inclusion of the notion of a cooling off period in definitions such as Douglas and Olshaker (2000) and Ressler *et al.* (1988) can be seen to constitute a reference to psychological interpretations of the temporal lapses between the various offences of the perpetrator.

If these definitions were to be strictly investigative oriented it would suffice to say that murders occurred at different times (days, weeks, months apart) such as Egger (1990).



Another example of this is descriptions of victims as having symbolic value (Egger, 1990) that also invokes a need for psychological interpretations of the individual in question.

This interplay is problematic in that it frequently obfuscates the absolute character with which investigative definitions and criteria need to be applied in order to make them as effective as possible. Due to the relativity and multiplicity of psychological approaches available with which to interpret definitional criteria, it is possible to conceive of a number of ways in which such criteria can be structured and applied. For example, psychodynamic approaches may interpret David Berkowitz's use of a gun to commit his crimes as a form of phallic affirmation, and consequently invoke the sexual criterion of serial murder in spite of the absence of overtly sexual elements in his crime scenes and modus operandi (Lane & Gregg, 1992). Other schools of psychology, such as cognitive-behavioural approaches, may not interpret actions in the same way and find no basis for a sexual interpretation and consequently not invoke the sexual criterion as essential for definitions of serial murder.

Such confusion and definitional relativity are counter-productive to investigative applications that necessitate greater clarity and certainty with which to make absolute pronouncements, despite being necessary for dialogue concerning psychological understandings and theories of serial murder. It is interesting to note that most of the above definitions have emerged from law enforcement backgrounds, and that a definitive theory or theories of serial murder are difficult to find (as will be discussed in sections to follow). It is the opinion of the author that there needs to be a greater awareness of these perspectives in serial murder definitions and a separation of their respective elements in definitional criteria so as to facilitate greater clarity.

One solution may lie in a distinction being drawn between definitional criteria and characteristics of serial murder, with the former relating more to law enforcement and investigative purposes, and the latter related more to psychological understandings of serial

murder. To elaborate, definitional criteria might include factors such as number of murders, and timing between murder instances, while characteristics would be more explicitly related to personality and psychological traits, allowing for individual variations within classifications based on the afore-mentioned criteria. These might include factors such as the nature of motive, and possible personality traits, such as disorganised/organised as conceptualized in Holmes and Holmes (1996) below. Until these aspects are distinguished more clearly, definitions of serial murder run the risk of inconsistency with respect to the manner in which cases of serial murder are classified. Consequently, the definitional criteria might be used after the fact, so to speak, to classify an individual as someone who had committed serial murder. Concurrently, a set of characteristics based on personality traits and psychological factors associated with individuals who commit serial murder could also be established and allow for more variation between individuals. Such a group of characteristics would then capture those exceptions that may not meet all the definitional criteria, and yet display personality traits or behavioural patterns characteristic of serial murder.

Labuschagne (personal communication, 2006) elaborates on the above and states that one of the most confounding problems with serial murder definitions is the creators' habit of mixing a criterion with a characteristic. If one looks at a parallel, the DSM diagnostic system (American Psychological Association, 1994), it has a few set criteria that are necessary to make the diagnosis. The DSM then goes on to discuss the characteristics of the disorder. In relation to serial murder, it can be said that to murder two or more victims is a criteria; the fact that they are often prostitutes or vagrants is a characteristic. If it is elevated to a criterion, then it becomes limiting, in that if the victims are middle-class, working people, can the crime not be classified as serial murder? A similar concern could be raised in relation to other characteristics/criteria such as the sexual element. It is a characteristic that the crimes are sexual in nature but if it is elevated to a criterion then a number of murders where the suspect

strangled women could not be classified as a series. Labuschagne further feels that this is in part due to the problem of some definitions defining the concept (serial murder) and some defining the person (serial murderer). Defining the concept might be more useful for investigators; defining the person might be more useful for the criminal justice system, researchers and psychologists.

### **2.1.5 Definition of serial murder for the purposes of this study**

In light of the above discussion and critique, the following definition of serial murder is proposed for the current study, namely as:

- multiple murders committed,
- over a period of time
- by one or more individuals.

In this way, the broadness of many of the above definitions is avoided and a working definition is provided which may then be elaborated upon in terms of characteristics associated with serial murder, from different perspectives (such as psychology, law enforcement, sociology, and other disciplines). This study also chooses to use the term “serial murder” rather than “serial homicide” due to the fact that South African legal terminology for types of crime makes reference to murder and not homicide. Additionally, serial murder will be utilized rather than “serial killing” due to the previously discussed sensationalistic nature of the latter term, as well as the fact that one may kill but the act of killing does not necessarily constitute an illegal act. For example, killing in self-defence or as part of a national defence force in armed conflict. Finally, the phrase “individual/s who commit/s serial murder” will be used rather than “serial murderer/s” in an effort to view such individuals

holistically, and not to adopt a reductionist stance of viewing such individuals as consisting of the sum total of their criminal behaviour/activity.

As discussed above, definitions of serial murder have frequently lost precision due to an apparent attempt to satisfy both psychological and law enforcement or policing perspectives with regards to its usage. By formulating a basic definition such as that above, the author intends to provide a basis for identifying instances of serial murder, which then may be expanded to include exceptions or variations in associated characteristics (such as motive, number of perpetrators, gender and victim/offender relationship, for example). In this way, it is hoped that a clearer distinction is made between a definition of serial murder and the characteristics associated with instances of serial murder, two areas that previously have been less clearly distinguished in attempts to define serial murder.

The author will now discuss some of the ways in which serial murder has been classified. As will be illustrated, many of these classification schemes operate largely on assumptions about the type of individual/s who commit/s serial murder and have been developed predominantly to assist with profiling and investigative applications.

## **2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SERIAL MURDER**

In the following section, the historical background of serial murder will be explored, taking into account the history of serial murder in an international and local South African context. As will be demonstrated in the ensuing discussion, it would appear that a debate concerning the origins of serial murder runs consistently through attempts to document the history of this phenomenon. This debate is concerned with whether serial murder is a recent phenomenon or whether it has existed for the greater part of contemporary history. This

debate together with the international and South African historical background of serial murder will now be discussed.

### **2.2.1 History of serial murder: international**

Considerable contention surrounds the issue of when the first noted case of serial murder occurred. While some argue that serial murder is a recent phenomenon, having risen to prominence over the last three decades (Anderson, 1994; Ferguson *et al.*, 2003), others argue that serial murder has always been part of the human experience, and that the ways in which it has been understood and described have varied with different historical periods and the dominant understanding of human behaviour at that time (Jenkins, 1994; Simpson, 1999; Whitman & Agawa, 2003; Wilson, 2000).

Arguments for and against serial murder as a recent phenomenon may be subject to the effects of crime reporting. Generally, reported rates and statistics for serial murder are considered skeptically due to differences and variability in reporting (especially in light of the different definitions that are utilized) as well as linkage blindness or the lack of reliable linking of cases comprising the series of homicides in a single instance of serial murder (Stote & Standing, 1995). As a result, it is not always easy to assess, with sufficient certainty, whether reported increases or lack of increase are accurately reflecting the phenomenon of serial murder.

Within the literature, the earliest suggested instance of serial murder is claimed to be as early as 54 AD in the form of Locusta of Gaul - a woman who poisoned several members of the Roman royal family to assist others to usurp their positions (Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003). It is also thought that accounts of "monsters" such as werewolves and vampires like Vlad the Impaler in the early 17th and 18th centuries may have been early references to serial

murder (Jenkins, 1994; Simpson, 1999; Wilson, 2000). This sketchy history of serial murder is further elaborated upon by reports of individuals such as Gilles de Rais in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Countess Elizabeth Bathory in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Dr Neill Thomas Cream in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who are thought to have sadistically preyed upon the local peasants and innocent patients respectively, with postulated victim counts of up to thousands (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Wilson, 2000).

The earliest popular documentation of serial murder in the currently accepted format originates in the late nineteenth century, with accounts of Jack the Ripper (Wilson, 2000). This individual is believed to have terrorized the Whitechapel area of the East End of London from August to December 1888, violently murdering five female prostitutes (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000). Police were never able to apprehend the perpetrator and as such, Jack the Ripper's true identity remains a mystery, rendering this modern "antihero" to near mythological status (Lane & Gregg, 1992). Various modern theorists, novelists, profilers and investigators have attempted to identify the most likely candidate from a plethora of possible suspects, but Jack the Ripper's identity remains a case of speculation, ranging from links to royalty to a deranged local butcher.

The romanticization of the Jack the Ripper case in popular fiction can be seen in a multitude of fictional works such as the Sherlock Holmes novels of Arthur Conan Doyle and in several popular films such as *Edge of Sanity* (1989), *Deadly Advice* (1993) and recently, *From Hell* (2001). As a result, it would appear that serial murder has experienced a similar romanticization and elaboration in fictional and factual works, with the borders between these two realms blurred and the representations contained within each utilized interchangeably by the general public and popular understandings. The individual who commits serial murder seems to enjoy a similar elevation to mythical status as a consequence and certain elements of

the romantic in his portrayal in the various expressions of the popular culture in which he is situated.

Since Jack the Ripper in the late nineteenth century, serial murder appears to have attracted attention once again in the 1960's which saw an overwhelming volume of cases such as the Manson family, and Albert DeSalvo (the Boston Strangler) followed by Ted Bundy, Dean Corll, John Gacy and Randall Woodfield in the 1970's in the United States; the Moors murders (committed by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley) and the Yorkshire Ripper, John Sutcliffe, in the United Kingdom; Pedro Lopez, the "monster of the Andes" in South America; and Arthur Chikatilo, Citizen X, in Russia from the 1970's through to the 1990's (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Wilson, 2000).

The 1970's also saw the birth of the term "serial killer", allegedly penned by the Behavioural Science Unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the USA, as well as the emergence of the psychological profile and investigative science aimed specifically at the tracking and apprehension of this "new" criminal type (Wilson, 2000).

There appears to have been a lack of attention to serial murder during the period between the sensation that accompanied the case of Jack the Ripper at the turn of the century, and the re-emergence of such sensationalism with the serial murder cases of the 1960's. The available literature does not appear to suggest any explanations for this silence. One may postulate a number of possible explanations. One explanation may be that crime statistics and crime reporting failed to reflect incidences of serial murder.

Another explanation may be that the frequency of wars during this period in the form of the First (1914-1919) and Second World War (1939-1945), as well as the Korean War (1950-1953), masked incidences of serial murder that may have been noticeable at other times due to either deflection of media and criminal justice concerns to the war effort; absorption of potential serial murderers into a war effort that may have channeled their aggressive

tendencies in more sanctioned pursuits; or, with reference to a more systemic perspective, that a war-time society focused upon survival had no function for an individual working counter to the collective aims of that particular society (Wilson, 2000). However, one could argue that this theory is challenged by incidences such as the Vietnam War (1968-1972) that took place concurrently to the rise of the serial murder phenomenon in the USA and the United Kingdom and does not seem to have masked the serial murder phenomenon in a similar way.

Another explanation may be derived from the work of Jenkins (1994) in the sense that the emergence of serial murder may reflect a need for disciplining society at times when society moves away from conservatism towards a state of more flexible morals and norms. Both the end of the Victorian era (e.g., Jack the Ripper) and the 1960's represented eras where society adopted a more relaxed attitude to norms and values, reflecting a change in the social system. Through victim choice and representation as evil or other, the serial murderer prescribed acceptable behaviour. For example, Jack the Ripper targeted prostitutes, as did many of the 1960's group of serial murderers in the USA (together with homosexuals, vagrants, and other social deviants). In this way, certain ways of life were considered dangerous and made one vulnerable to victimization, encouraging a return to more conservative ways of life. This argument will be elaborated upon further in discussion of the theories that have attempted to explain serial murder (see Chapter 3).

To return to the debate surrounding the historical origins of serial murder, Wilson (2000) counters attempts to trace the historical origins of serial murder to the earliest parts of the history of the human race, by arguing that serial murder is a recent development in criminal history. He attributes the use and origin of the term "serial murder" in 1980's America to an increase in sex crime and "motiveless murder" in the previous twenty years. Conversely, Lane and Gregg (1992) hold that understandings of patterns of behaviour of individuals who



commit serial murder such as those of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Behavioural Science Unit or the “psychologization” of serial murder are more recent developments.

Such developments are argued to have increased the attention bestowed upon serial murder over the last two decades (as an academic topic, psychological case study, media attraction, entertainment feature and fictional protagonist) and have contributed to a false perception of such a phenomenon as recent. Stote and Standing (1995) compared a number of newspaper and statistical sources reporting rates of serial murder in the USA from 1950 to 1990 and found that increases in serial murder had occurred proportionately to increases in general violent crime and homicide. Ressler (in Holmes & Holmes, 1996) supports the view that serial murder is a recent phenomenon and holds that serial murder did not exist in the United States before 1950. Once again, such a statement is arguable but does point to a certain viewpoint, which sees serial murder as a possible chronological benchmark in cultural development, although what constitutes such development remains unclear.

The author will now discuss how serial murder developed in South Africa, including local variations on the above debate concerning the origins of serial murder.

### **2.2.2 History of serial murder: South Africa**

Serial murder in South Africa appears to have risen to prominence in the early nineties (Hodgskiss, 2003; Labuschagne, 2003; Pistorius, 1996). Available crime statistics demonstrate that over the last two decades, South Africa has accumulated a tally of over 50 cases of serial murder (Hodgskiss, 2003). The last decade in particular has contributed considerably to this total (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). In the last twelve years alone, only Russia and the USA surpassed this tally on an international level (Hodgskiss, 2002; Holmes & Holmes, 1996).

The apparent proliferation of serial murder in the early 1990s might be likened to the way that serial murder seemed to rise to prominence in the USA and the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s (Wilson, 2000). In much the same way as debates surrounding international interpretations of the apparent proliferation of serial murder in the twentieth century could be divided roughly between those who view this phenomenon as recent (Anderson, 1994; Ferguson et al., 2003), and those who believe that serial murder has existed historically in some form (Jenkins, 2002; Simpson, 1999; Whitman & Agutagawa, 2003; Wilson, 2000), the considerable increase in awareness of serial murder in South Africa has been debated along similar lines.

In other words, these can be divided between a belief that serial murder is a recent phenomenon in South Africa (Ressler, 1997) and one that it is not a recent phenomenon (Marsh, 1999; Pistorius, 1996). With regards to the former, explanations proposed include the political transformation and social upheaval of the early nineties due to a change from Apartheid government to a democratic system in South Africa, as well as increased Westernization and influence of an apparently Western phenomenon such as serial murder (Ressler, 1997). With reference to socio-cultural explanations of serial murder, one may refer to theories such as that of *anomie* (Durkheim, 1897) and Strain Theory (Merton, 1968) to understand serial murder in South Africa. With regards to the former, the transition, and accompanying reassessment of societal norms and values, that affected South African society in the early nineties, after the end of Apartheid, may have created a climate that fostered an increase in serial murder. With regards to Strain Theory, the end of Apartheid ushered in a period of great expectation and hope amongst a majority population who had previously been denied opportunities for success, prosperity and achievement. One could argue that the apparent increase in serial murder in the early nineties may have been a response to the lack of immediate realization of such opportunities in a democratic South Africa, or the selective

availability of opportunities to realize such goals amongst certain sectors of the previously disadvantaged, and not others.

Individuals such as Marsh (1999) claim that a failure to notice serial murder before 1990 may reflect biases in crime reporting. For example, Elifasi Nsomi murdered 15 people in Kwazulu-Natal province over a period of 18 months in 1950. He blamed the tokoloshe (traditional African spirit) for his crimes but was sentenced to death (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2006). Pistorius (1996) explains the lack of attention to serial murder prior to 1990 as a result of a lack of awareness of such a phenomenon; poorer ability to link cases of murder; insufficient sensitivity or discrimination between crime types on the part of the South African media; and lack of specialized training on the part of South African law enforcement, which only began in the mid-1990s (Pistorius, 1996).

With reference to Marsh (1999), the lack of attention or popular awareness of serial murder in South Africa prior to the nineties may have been the result of differences in reporting of instances of serial murder pre- and post-1990. However, this is difficult to assess given general problems with the ability of crime records to accurately reflect patterns of crime (Stote & Standing, 1995) and problems with crime reporting in the South African context such as: a biased reporting and recording of criminal activity and violent crime during Apartheid, and poor availability and inconsistency in archive management (Marsh, 1999). Schonteich and Louw (2001) support the above and argue that due to the fact that South African Police crime figures during the Apartheid era excluded crimes committed and reported in the homelands and KwaZulu-Natal Province; official crime statistics prior to 1994 should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

With respect to media attention, it would appear that local media attention to South African instances of serial murder seemed to emerge during the early nineties. This can be evidenced in articles across the publication spectrum, such as “Verkragter nie versteurd –

getuie” in the *Beeld* (22 September, 1993) about the Norwood rapist, Cobus Geldenhuys; “Spanwerk los reeksmoord op” in the *Rapport* (31 January, 1999) about the Capitol Hill serial murder case; “Still no end to serial killing” in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* (22 September, 1995); and “2410 years on jail for ghoulish serial killer” in the *City Press* (7 December, 1997), both about Moses Sithole. Prior to this period, South Africa’s media and popular press were interested in, and aware of, true crime stories, particularly those of “sensational crimes” or crimes of passion such as William van der Merwe, the “screwdriver rapist” of the 1970s (Marsh, 1999) and cases such as the Suitcase Murder of 1964 (Kennaugh, 1968). However, references to serial murder appear to be absent in the popular media during this period. This may indicate a lack of awareness of, and/or a lack of interest in serial murder as a type of crime by media sources, or simply reflect the greater lack of awareness of this phenomenon in the wider police and socio-cultural context.

Although considerable skepticism appears to surround South African crime statistics prior to 1990, it is interesting to consider the third option, namely that serial murder did actually increase in prevalence post-1990. Ressler (1997) has attributed the seeming emergence of serial murder during this time period to larger socio-cultural and political developments such as the end of Apartheid and transition to an era of democracy as well as increased exposure to Western culture, which may have encouraged the assimilation of Western phenomena, such as serial murder, into African culture. Pistorius (1996) has argued that a combination of factors such as a highly mobile population and widespread poverty and unemployment appeared to aggregate at this particular point in time, possibly by virtue of socio-cultural developments and political change, creating an atmosphere conducive to the development of serial murder. Hodgskiss (2003) elaborates upon this, utilizing the work of Holmes and DeBurger (1988) and Hickey (2001), to argue that high rates of violent crime in South Africa post-1990, increased urbanization and overcrowding of urban areas resulting in anonymity and

depersonalization, and normalization of interpersonal violence may have created an environment that fostered the development and increase of serial murder in South Africa in the early nineties.

Given the above, it would appear that establishing serial murder prevalence prior to 1990 with considerable validity is difficult. However, individuals such as Pistorius (2002) and Labuschagne (2003), possibly due to their involvement in policing investigation initiatives directed at identifying, investigation, convicting and containing serial murder have attempted to outline a tentative chronology of serial murder in South Africa, based on their own experiences and case file material, which will be discussed now.

Pistorius (2002), in an attempt to historically document serial murder in South Africa in her source-book *Strangers on the Street*, holds that the first known case of South African serial murder actually occurred in Milnerton in the 1930s followed by sporadic incidences spread across the remaining pre-1992 period. Her attempt to retrospectively classify cases of apparent multiple murder as instances of serial murder can be critiqued on a number of levels, notably the possible lack of validity across time and availability of sufficiently detailed archival data on which to base such classifications, as well as on the basis of the general problems with South African crime records highlighted by Marsh (1999) above. Pistorius (1996) herself has highlighted that, prior to initiatives launched by the Investigative Psychology Unit (IPU) of the SAPS in specialized training in serial murder in the early 1990's, a majority of investigating officers were not specifically trained in serial murder investigation. In light of the above, it would seem that retrospective classification of cases of serial murder is flawed and potentially further complicated by disagreements concerning definitional stipulations around serial murder, as discussed previously.

It is consequently the position of this study that although serial murder may have been prevalent in South Africa prior to the nineties, it is only from 1990 onwards that it can be

documented with any arguable accuracy. Additionally, triangulation of data from numerous sources such as police case files, professional discussion and academic research publications, popular media sources, and court records has enabled a more grounded evaluation and confirmation of such cases (Labuschagne, 2001) as may be evidenced in the following table.

Table 2.1

*South African Serial Murder Cases 1936-2003 (Adapted from Labuschagne, 2004)*

Series name	Location	Suspect Name	Years	Victim number
None	Johannesburg	Cornelius Burger	1936-1937	5
None	Cape Town	Salie Lingeveldt	1940	5
None	Kwazulu-Natal	Elifasi Msomi	1953-1955	15
Pangaman	Pretoria	Elias Xitavhudzi	1960s	16
None	Atteridgeville	John Phukokgabi	1974-1978	16
None	Soweto	Joseph Mahlangu	1979	13
None	Pietermaritzburg	Phillip Magoso	1983	5
Station Strangler	Cape Town	Unknown	1986-1994	22
Vlakgrafte	Kuilsrivier	Zola Mqombuyi	1987-2001	5
Norwood Serial	Norwood	Cobus Geldenhuys	1989-1992	5
None	Port Elizabeth	Brydon Brandt	1989-1997	4
Boetie Boer	Port Elizabeth	Stewart Wilken	1990-1997	10
None	Cape Town	Wessels & Havenga	1991	4
None	West Rand	Moses Mokgeti	1991-1993	7
Kaap prostituut	Cape Town	Unknown	1992-1995	19
Eva Nosal	East Rand	Christiaan De	1993-1994	2

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		Wet		
None	Witbank	Nolan Edwards	1993-1994	3
Cross Dressing	East Rand	Brown &	1993-1995	5
		Coetzee		
NASREC	Johannesburg	Mazankane &	1993-1998	17
		Motsegwa		
Cleveland	Cleveland, JHB	David Selepe	1994	14
Strangler				
Pinetown	Pinetown	Unknown	1994-1995	3
Strangler				
Atteridgeville	Atteridgeville,	Moses Sithole	1994-1995	38
Strangler	Boksburg,			
	Cleveland			
Donnybrook	Natal Midlands	Christopher	1994-1995	8
		Zikode		
Pheonix	Pheonix, Durban	Sipho Twala	1994-1997	17
None	Louis Trichardt	Willem Grobler	1995	2
None	Mdantsane, East	Vuyani Mpezo	1995	2
	London			
Kranskop	Newcastle	Bongani Mfeka	1995	4
Wemmerpan	Johannesburg	Cedric Maake	1995-1997	35
Lenyenye	Tzaneen	Unknown	1996-1997	5
Oos Kaap	Kwazakele	Nicolas Ncama	1996-1997	4
None	Carltonville	Unknown	1996-1998	6

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None	Thohoyandou	David Mbengwa	1996-1998	10
Roadside	Northwest Province	Francois Potgieter	1996-2000	16
Langlaagte	Johannesburg	Unknown	1996-2000	2
Piromaan	Jeppe, JHB	Norman Hobkirk	1997	3
Saloon Killer	Piet Retief	V. Nglanamandla	1997-1998	16
Maize Field	Kroonstad	Daniel Ramayisa	1997-1998	3
None	Upington	JAC Nel	1997-1998	2
Skiereiland	Cape Town	Unknown	1997-	3
Nagmerrie				
Doringdraad	Empangeni	Unknown	1997-1998	16
Sleepy Hollow	Pietermaritzburg	Unknown	1997-1999	8
Capital Park	Pretoria	Samuel Sydino	1998	7
None	Vereeniging	Unknown	1998-1999	2
None	Natal	Juan Jordaan	1999	3
None	Barberton	Frank Ndebe	1999	4
Osizweni	Newcastle	Sidney Dlamini	1999-2000	5
Rioolplaas	Cape Town	Unknown	1999-2000	9
Riverman	Durban	Unknown	1999-2001	13
Kleine Fonteine	Pretoria West	Unknown	1999-2001	5
RDP Strangler	Potgietersrus	Ephraim Legodi	2000	4
Hospital View	Potgietersrus	Ephraim Legodi	2000	1
Strangler				

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None	Kwa Dukuza	Unknown	2000-2001	4
None	Keiskammahoek	Mcperson	2001	2
		Nyonga		
PE Prostitute	Port Elizabeth	Unknown	2001	4
None	Randfontein	Unknown	2001-2003	7
None	Mapelo Hans	Awaiting trial	2002	3
Highwayman	Pretoria	Elias Chauke	2002	5
Newlands East	Durban	Unknown	2002-2003	13
Johannesburg	Johannesburg	Awaiting trial	2003	7
Mine Dump				
Rustenburg	Rustenburg	Awaiting trial	2003	2
Child Killer				
Stellenbosch	Stellenbosch	Unknown	2001-2003	3
Child Murder				

Since the early nineties, and apparent rapid subsequent increment, serial murder has been approached in a manner that has seen considerable efforts made to improve investigation (and consequently apprehension) methods especially given the pervasive doubt in the rehabilitation capacity for the individuals who commit such crimes (Pistorius, 1996). One such measure was the creation of the Investigative Psychology Unit (IPU) as part of the South African Police Services' Serious and Violent Crime Component in 1995. The IPU has done considerable work to introduce training programmes for police officers and investigators of serial murder cases, provide investigative support; and conduct research, with the result that South Africa seems to hold the world record for the quickest apprehension time in a serial murder case (six

weeks from first murder and another within 48 hours of a task team being put together). The SAPS also has a hundred percent conviction rate for its serial murder cases brought to trial (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2003).

The IPU is also one of the few law enforcement units in the world with a full-time unit of functional members, albeit stretched in terms of resources given its small compliment of three members. Given its positioning at national level, it is able to centrally communicate with detective units across the country and consequently greatly limit linkage blindness. Each province has a co-coordinator of serial murder and serial rape investigations who also assists in detecting cases and monitoring investigations. The unit also possesses a mandate to be involved in all serial murder cases, which means that it is able to continually monitor serial murder in South Africa, as well as its interventions in relation to it. It is also the only unit in the SAPS allowed to do offender profiling.

Generally, the IPU is concerned with three roles – investigative support; training; and research. It is the only police service in the world with regular training on serial murder for: crime scene photographers; general detectives; serious and violent crimes detectives; family violence, child protection and sexual offences detectives; forensic science laboratory field workers; and facial identification unit members, and additionally, it has a specialized three week course in serial murder investigation (Labuschagne, 2003).

In addition to the IPU, investigative handling of serial murder in South Africa has been supplemented by crime mapping technology, which has allowed for greater ability in terms of linking crimes and offences within cases of serial murder. Such technology has allowed for better presentation in court cases, and has involved liaising with cellular network providers for itemized billing, transmission towers and maps of coverage in cases where cellular phones have been stolen or used by the offender. The SAPS first used computerized crime mapping in 1998 with a nationwide computerized crime mapping system in

development during the last quarter of 2000. Computerized crime mapping has allowed for greater ease of distribution of information within police areas as compared with previous wall maps. In this way, serial murder cases can be identified quickly and monitored effectively, as well as facilitating possible geographical profiling applications.

Many factors still need to be addressed in the realm of investigative police work however. The SAPS lack resources such as money and equipment in order to operate at an optimum level. The varied nature of the South African crime scene and its interaction with cultural factors additionally requires sensitivity to such factors so as to avoid confusion in classifying instances of serial murder. One such confound is muti murder which has may be frequently misattributed to serial murder on the basis of its surface presentation (Labuschagne, 2004). This will receive greater attention in later discussion.

In addition to the above considerations, a large population of mobile, migrant labour also constrains effective investigation and apprehension of criminals as well as surveillance of victims and tracing of missing persons. As such the victims of an individual who commits serial murder may only be discovered months after they have been murdered or abducted, and never identified. The significant amount of poverty which characterizes the South African context also hampers police investigation in terms of providing a large pool of potential victims as well as fostering conditions in which serial murder (according to international literature) may flourish (Hodgskiss, 2002).

To supplement arguments of the importance of law enforcement effectivity in the apprehension of individuals who commit serial murder, studies in the US and Canada (Collins, Johnson, Choy, Davidson & Mackay, 1998) have pointed to lack of/poor communication between law enforcement and criminal justice agencies as allowing for reduced detection of individuals who commit serial murder. Crime linkage techniques in these countries were seen to fail as a result of a lack of detail in reports compiled by investigators

concerned; subjective interpretations of crime scene information; as well as question formats that were too open-ended and broad. It may be safe to presume that some of these factors have also played a part in the South African context and influenced the perception of serial murder and consequently prevalence statistics. However, it appears that initiatives such as the development of an investigative psychology unit in the SAPS; better communication between provincial and regional police stations; and the IPU at national level, training of investigators and other SAPS members in the identification of serial murder, as well as technology such as crime mapping, may improve crime linkage in serial murder cases.

In conclusion, it would appear that South Africa has made considerable advances in a relatively short period of time to develop effective techniques for preventing and containing serial murder at an investigative level. However, many of these techniques require empirical verification and support in the form of a substantial base of research from which these techniques can be developed and informed. Keppel (1989) emphasizes the importance of the collection of physical evidence and interviewing techniques in serial murder cases. He advocates a standardization and clarification of procedure in order to demystify apprehension techniques and common popular perceptions of serial murder investigation which emphasise “luck”, hunches or intuitive practice as opposed to a more realistic and accurate emphasis on routine police procedure, something that the training offered by the IPU hopes to achieve.

Additionally, it would seem that psychological methods for dealing with and understanding serial murder, and working with individuals who commit serial murder after they are incarcerated, are to a large degree still lacking in South Africa. As will be discussed and shown in the following section, many of the research studies on serial murder in South Africa have touched on aspects of the psychology of serial murder (De Wet, 2005; Du Plessis, 1998; Labuschagne, 2001, 2003; Pistorius, 1996), but these have yet to be consolidated into a body of recommendations for dealing with serial murder both proactively and after

incarceration. Further research in the above areas, in a manner that takes the cultural nuances of the local context into account, may go a significant distance in assisting interventions at police, correctional services and psychological levels for dealing with serial murder in South Africa.

- **Muti murder**

Muti murder is defined as “a murder in which body parts are removed from a live victim for the sole purpose of using the victim’s body parts medicinally” (Labuschagne, 2004, p.191). These parts may or may not be mixed with other medicinal substances in the creation of the final end product or medicine (muti). The cause of death of the victim is usually due to the loss of blood from wounds inflicted in attaining the necessary body parts. Labuschagne (2004) also states that muti murder usually involves three role players (in addition to the victim), namely, the client; the traditional healer; and the murderer. These roles may be filled by three different individuals, or occasionally involve one individual performing more than one role.

Turrell (2001) demonstrates factors comprising muti murder which are useful in distinguishing this from serial murder. He states that firstly, muti murder is usually done on behalf of a chief seeking power, business advocate or doctor for powerful medicine. The victim may be related to the beneficiary in some way. Flesh is removed from the victim while they are still alive, and no blood must be spilt. Given the cultural dilution of pure traditionalism that has developed with the growing influence of Westernisation, this type of murder has been criminalized and developed increasingly along the lines of such influence with the result that capitalist competition has played a larger role in its manifestation. Such cases are important as they highlight the cultural particularities which colour the South

African criminal, investigative context and which necessitate a locally sensitive approach in dealing with the phenomena at hand.

Labuschagne (2004) states that muti murder can be confused with serial murder (and vice versa) and consequently mislead the way in which investigators approach the crime scene; compile suspect lists; and draw up profiles to assist with investigation. As a result, one needs to be cautious when encountering a series of murders involving mutilation of the body or removal of body parts. Labuschagne (2004) highlights a need to distinguish between muti murder and other types of murder such as sadistic mutilation and serial murder and discusses a number of ways in which this may be possible.

With regards to sadistic mutilation, there may be more wounds that are less severe as opposed to fewer, more functional wounds that would characterize muti murder. Additionally, in sadistic mutilation the aim of the wound is more about inflicting pain and suffering, whereas with muti murder, the aim is usually to remove the necessary organ. Mutilation or sadistic murders may also demonstrate evidence of sexual assault, including traces of semen, and may be guided by a fantasy being played out – two features which are not usually expected in muti murder (Labuschagne, 2004).

With regards to serial murder, muti murder differs in that it is often an isolated incident, as opposed to being part of a series of incidents. Serial murder may also demonstrate similar mutilation on bodies, whereas with muti murder body parts are specified and consequently, mutilation is unique to a particular victim. As with the above, serial murder may be guided by fantasy, thereby differing from muti murder, and finally, body parts may be kept as souvenirs in serial murder whereas they are usually handed over to traditional healers in muti murder (Labuschagne, 2004).

Despite the above distinctions, the presentation of muti murder continues to mislead investigations due to the subtlety with which the differences present themselves

(Labuschagne, 2004) and classification of serial murder series should proceed with caution to avoid including cases that are not part of the same series, or failing to recognize a series of murders committed by the same individual.

## **2.3 WAYS OF CATEGORIZING SERIAL MURDER**

Throughout the literature, a number of ways of categorizing different variations of serial murder and individuals who commit serial murder have been proposed. These categories often appear to be based on the manner in which the murders comprising a series are committed. Some of these will now be discussed and critically commented upon.

### **2.3.1 Topological classification schemes**

A review of the literature indicates a number of different classification schemes that have been devised to classify serial murder. Such schemes have been devised for investigative purposes, to assist police investigators in searching for possible suspects or devising offender profiles, interviewing suspects once arrested, and drawing up possible victim profiles (Turvey, 1998).

The FBI and their Behavioural Science Unit have devised a typological classification scheme for serial murder that draws distinctions between disorganised/organised offenders (Ressler & Schachtman, 1992). Such an effort stemmed from general work that was done by the FBI in devising crime classification schedules such as the *Crime Classification Manual* (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess & Ressler, 1992) to assist in investigative applications.

This has been followed by similar schemes such as the Holmes and DeBurger (1988) typology as well as Leibman's (1989) ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic classifications of serial



murder. Finally, a classification based on crime scene geography, as put forward by Canter (1994, 2000) and Rossmo (1995, 1997) will be discussed.

- **The FBI's disorganised/organised typology.**

The disorganised/organised typology of serial murder (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992) was constructed by a group of FBI agents in the 1970's and 1980's in the USA from interviews conducted with 36 individuals incarcerated for sexual murder. It consists of a classification scheme based upon the offender's manner of interpersonal interaction together with information about developmental and early life experiences. Such factors were used in conjunction with information about the individual's modus operandi and general crime planning. This also included details such as the way the offender committed a crime and left a crime scene, pre- and post-offence behaviour and lifestyle to classify such an individual as either disorganised or organised.

Ressler and Shachtman (1992) then extrapolated such information and typological links to isolate certain common characteristics or clusters of features that they believe were typical of disorganised and organised types of offenders. Consequently, they argue that when these clusters of features are encountered at a crime scene, investigators can then assess whether they are searching for a disorganised or organised individual and structure their search accordingly. The FBI is quick to stress that classification is often not either/or but often involves a mixed presentation with elements from different categories occurring simultaneously in one offender.

Scientifically, this typology lacks ecological validity due to its limited sample base, lack of falsifiability, and lack of empirically proven reliability (Turvey, 1998). Canter, Alison, Alison and Wentink (in press) hold that there is only one small-scale empirical test of this typological model and that such a test is open to many challenges. Despite the cursory lack of

scientific rigor, however, this typology is still widely used on the basis of anecdotal success. The introduction of a “mixed” classification additionally weakens the dichotomous basis for the disorganised/organised typology, especially if a large number of cases are found to fall into this type (Canter *et al.*, in press).

Turvey (1998) also criticizes inductive profiling applications such as the FBI disorganised/organised typology on the basis that they lack standardized terminology across investigative applications. He believes that the use of such typologies is dangerous especially when involved in the production of gross generalisations across offender type. Canter *et al.* (in press) tested the disorganised/organised typology using a multidimensional scaling procedure to see whether such discrete subsets of offence behaviour could be elicited from the frequency with which they co-occurred in crime scenes of serial murder cases. They found that such discrete subsets could not be supported, and that, rather, only organised clusters could be identified.

Table 2.2 (Adapted from Ressler & Schachtman, 1992)

*Disorganised/Organised Typology*

Disorganised, asocial offenders	Organised, nonsocial offenders
IQ below average, 80-95 range	IQ above average, 105-120 range
socially inadequate	socially adequate
lives alone, usually does not date	lives with partner or dates frequently
absent or unstable father	stable father figure
family emotional abuse, inconsistent	family physical abuse, harsh
lives and/or works near crime scene	geographically/occupationally mobile
minimal interest in news media	follows the news media
usually a high school dropout	may be college educated
poor hygiene/housekeeping skills	good hygiene/housekeeping skills
keeps a secret hiding place in the home	does not usually keep a hiding place
nocturnal (nighttime) habits	diurnal (daytime) habits
drives a clunky car or pickup truck	drives a flashy car
needs to return to crime scene for reliving memories	needs to return to crime scene to see what police have done
may contact victim's family to play games	usually contacts police to play games
no interest in police work	a police groupie or wannabe
experiments with self-help programs	doesn't experiment with self-help
kills at one site, considers mission over	kills at one site, disposes at another
usually leaves body intact	may dismember body
attacks in a "blitz" pattern	attacks using seduction into restraints
depersonalizes victim to a thing or it	keeps personal, holds a conversation
leaves a chaotic crime scene	leaves a controlled crime scene
leaves physical evidence	leaves little physical evidence
responds best to counseling interview	responds best to direct interview

- **Holmes and De Burger's visionary, missionary, hedonist and power/control typology.**

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) devised a typology to organise individuals who commit serial murder according to the nature of motivation for their crime - that is, with regard to whether the murders are committed because of:

- visions as with the visionary type;
- a particular mission;
- the pleasure derived from the crime and
- the power obtained in the act of murder.

These four types of serial murder stem from four aspects of the offence namely, the background of behaviour (psychological, sociogenic and biological); victimology (specific/non-specific, random/non-random and affiliative/stranger); pattern and method (act/process focused, planned/spontaneous and organised/disorganised); and finally, location (concentrated/dispersed).

- **The visionary type.**

Such an individual is motivated to murder by visions, godly messages, voices, demon possession, telepathic messages, and alter egos. He/she may experience hallucinations and, for example, believe that they hear a voice instructing them to murder blonde women. Certain theorists (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Leyton, 2001) believe that Charles Manson from the USA could be classified as a visionary type due to his belief that the Beatles' songs Helter Skelter and Blackbird were calls to take up arms and launch an offensive on elements of American society.

- **The missionary type.**

Such an individual believes that they have a special function to fulfill such as ridding society of “undesirables” such as prostitutes, homosexuals, and drug addicts. Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper in England, believed it was his mission to rid the streets of prostitutes (Lane & Gregg, 1992).

- **The hedonist type.**

This category is divided into another three types based upon the nature of pleasure that is derived from the act of murder. The lust-oriented hedonist is thought to have sexual gratification as his primary motivation and is thought to inflict a considerable amount of mutilation on the sexual organs in the commission of the offence. The thrill-oriented hedonist has the thrill of the act of murder itself as primary motivation and any sexual pleasure as secondary. The comfort-oriented hedonist takes pleasure from the act of murder primarily, but also obtains a secondary benefit/profit such as financial gain.

This last type has been understood differently however by authors such as Lane and Gregg (1992) who hold that the act of murder is incidental to the gain obtained. Some such as Pistorius (1996) have argued that if such a definition is accepted then these individuals should not qualify as serial murderers as they are not motivated primarily by the act of murder.

- **The power/control seeker type.**

The feeling of power motivates such an individual over another life and control of the pain inflicted on the victim. Lane and Gregg (1992) postulate that such a type is reflective of low self-esteem and may manifest sadistic traits.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) qualify their typology by stating that these “types” may be found in combination within an individual. This typology has additionally been grouped in terms of process/act distinctions. Process/act distinctions are based upon how important the

murder is for the individual concerned. A focus on act applies to individuals for whom the murder of a victim is less important than what is symbolized by that victim and consequently, the murder itself takes place relatively quickly. A focus on process signifies that the individual concerned prefers to draw out the act of murder – the victim is primarily a vehicle for the gratification obtained from the murder process and is recognized minimally for the particular characteristics they possess. Process-focused individuals are thought to engage in excessive violence and may mutilate the body post-mortem (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). An example of this may be a sadist, who derives enjoyment from the suffering of the victim in the process of finally murdering him/her.

Process/act distinctions have also been interpreted in terms of their explanatory potential in conjunction with the disorganised/organised typology (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). Frequently, act-focused types are thought to reflect the same characteristics as disorganised type serial murderers, and process-focused types with organised types. It is not clear whether this is advisable as process/act distinctions may represent a distinct alternate classification scheme for serial murder. It would also seem that for classification schemes to be robust, such interchangeability between overarching schematic structures and crime scene characteristics is not advisable and often results in a dilution of the relevance with which such schemes may be applied. This can be seen in articles such as Anderson (1994) that equate disorganised/organised distinctions with process/act-focused distinctions, ignoring subtle definitional distinctions originally stipulated.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) additionally use disorganised and organised as criteria for their typological scheme. For example, the visionary type is thought to be disorganised whereas the remaining types are thought to be organised. This is problematic in that there is no elaboration upon which aspects of the disorganised and organised classifications should be evident in crime scenes, nor empirical support both for the inclusion of these types as criteria

and for the co-occurrence of their respective constituent elements in the classification types of Holmes and DeBurger (1988). As a result, there seems to be a set of assumed relationships between criteria based on anecdotal experience and theoretical speculation (Canter *et al.*, in press).

Table 2.3

*Holmes and DeBurger Typology of Serial Murder*

<b>Serial murder type</b>	Visionary (v)	Mission-oriented (m)	Hedonistic Lust (l)	Thrill(t)	Comfort(c)	Power/control(p)
<b>Factors:</b>						
Victim specific		m	l			p
Victim non-specific	v			t	c	
Random choice	v		l	t		
Non-random choice		m			c	p
Victims affiliative	v	m	l	t	c	p
Victims - Strangers						
<b>Methods</b>						
Process-focused	v	m	l	t	c	p
Act-focused						
Planned		m	l		c	p
Spontaneous	v			t		
Organised		m	l		c	p
Disorganised	v			t		
<b>Location</b>						
Concentrated	v	m	l		c	
Dispersed				t		p

(Adapted from Holmes &amp; DeBurger, 1988)



- **Leibman's ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic classification.**

Leibman (1989) differentiates between ego-syntonic, ego-dystonic and psychotic serial murderers. Within this classification, the ego-syntonic type sees the act of murder as congruous with his/her beliefs and consequently does not experience conflict with his ego functioning or negotiation of reality. The ego-dystonic type experiences considerable conflict with regards to his/her actions of murder, which is not congruous with his/her beliefs.

Consequently he/she will disassociate him/herself with the murder on a conscious level.

Finally, the psychotic type is thought to murder due to a mental illness or symptoms such as hallucinations. As a result, the actions of such a type are not perceived to be based in reality.

Leibman (1989) holds that most serial murderers are ego-dystonic. Adopting a psychodynamic perspective, Pistorius (2002) suggests that ego-dystonic serial murderers may have a degree of super-ego functioning while those for whom murder is ego-syntonic may have very limited super-ego development.

Such a classification scheme may work towards enriching psychological understandings of individuals who commit murder/serial murder, and possibly methods for rehabilitation in terms of psychodynamic psychotherapy, but is not *prima facie* useful in terms of crime scene interpretation for investigative purposes. Additionally, the use of the term ego-

dystonic/syntonic to refer to individuals is problematic - it would probably be more useful to refer to their relationship with the act of killing/murder as either ego-dystonic/syntonic.

Finally, the literature indicates that psychosis is rarely found in individuals who commit serial murder (Meloy, 2000).

### 2.3.2 Geographical classification

Canter (1994, 2000) and Rossmo (1995, 1997) have attempted to classify individuals who commit serial murder, and other serial crimes, with regards to the geographical context in which such individuals operate. Within an environmental psychology paradigm, Canter (2000) has attempted to demystify serial murder by arguing that individuals who commit such a crime follow general patterns which can be applied to other crime categories as well. His classification method focuses predominantly on the geographical planning and situation of criminal activity as well as clusters of behavioural elements that have been found to repeatedly occur within a serial murder sample. As such, classifications which result in the creation of types of serial murderer are avoided and rather clusters of behavioural elements are grouped together to indicate which elements are likely to co-occur, on the basis of observed frequency of types of criminal actions (Canter, 2000). He also argues that this method is more reliable, empirically verifiable and scientific than deductive, inferential profiling approaches based on personal opinion and anecdotal evidence.

Lundrigan and Canter (2001) have applied their work to assisting investigative initiatives with regard to serial murder. They argue that despite the belief that serial murder is an outcome of heightened emotion and poor impulse control, choices involved in details of the various murders can be seen as guided by rational decision-making processes. Spatial patterns of disposal locations have been demonstrated to operate subject to a rational logic and vary according to the range over which the offender operates. It was found that offenders centred their criminal activity around their primary residence; that the location of each subsequent body disposal location was in a different direction to that directly preceding it; and that this process was strongest for individuals who traveled less than 10km on average, and weakest for those who traveled 30km or more on average. In this way, the geographical movements of

offenders can be modeled and assist in identification of a series, tracking an offender and predicting future offence disposal sites with an aim to apprehend the individual concerned. Canter (1994) distinguishes between two predominant types of criminal based on the geographical arrangement of their crimes, namely a commuter type and a marauder type. A commuter usually travels some distance from his/her home base to commit a crime, whereas a marauder will travel shorter distances from his/her home base. This approach has been critiqued due to its ambiguous nature – namely, Canter (1994) is vague in terms of describing what constitutes a short as opposed to long distance quantitatively, thus rendering application of such a model subjective to the investigator concerned and increasing difficulty of ultimately locating the suspect's home base.

Rossmo (1995) supports the notion that criminals tend to commit their crimes close to where they live, according to the “least efforts” or “nearness principle”. The area in which crimes are committed, specifically the first in a series, usually represents the individual's comfort zone, both in terms of physical or geographical factors and psychological elements. Rossmo (1995) additionally states that a number of factors have to be considered when establishing the comfort zone or geographical profile of an individual. These include area demographics with regard to types of victims selected and the geographical distribution of such victim types; arterial routes with respect to street patterns and transport methods such as bus routes; physical barriers such as highways, or rivers; mental barriers such as a lower socio-economic offender not wanting to go into a richer neighbourhood; and displacement, namely possible moves that result due to police activity or media reports. Geographical profiling may also differ if different aspects of the crime are considered. For example, if first point of contact with victims is taken into account, a different profile may emerge than if body disposal sites are focused upon (Rossmo, 1997).

In many ways, this system is less reductionist than schemes that create types of serial murderer. However, the statistical technique (Small Space Analysis) from which such clusters are derived possesses a degree of flexibility and variability that leaves much to the discretion of the researcher for its interpretation (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Consequently, factors may be grouped into different clusters by another researcher.

Rossmo's (1995, 1997) approach is useful, specifically in terms of suspect evaluation and crime prevention; however, Labuschagne (2003) has highlighted the importance of complete and accurate information for such approaches to be useful to police investigations. If any crimes are omitted or any irrelevant crimes are erroneously included or linked within a single series, the geographical profile may be skewed and consequently, inaccurate.

Labuschagne (2003) argues that in South Africa, there is little anecdotal evidence to support the claims of Canter (1994, 2000) and Rossmo (1995, 1997) consistently. For example, Cobus Geldenhuys, the Norwood serial murderer, and Moses Sithole, operated close to their homes; however, Elias Chauke, the Highwayman serial murderer, did not. This still requires empirical testing and validation to establish whether geographical classification methods would be useful in South Africa.

It may also be the case that due to the different nature of the South African geography as compared to the USA, Canada or United Kingdom, as well as the different transport systems and widespread mobility of people, and multiple households occupied by individuals at any one time, it may be difficult to successfully apply geographical profiling in its current format to the investigation of serial murder in South Africa. However, this may be used to inform further research into the applicability of existing methods to South Africa, or the formulation of a geographical profiling approach that is more suitable for South Africa.

### 2.3.3 Concluding remarks on classification schemes

Classification schemes seem problematic for a number of reasons. Many are largely unscientific in terms of empirical criteria of validation, falsifiability, standardisation and reliability; they run the risk of labeling and as such confining the individual in question to fitting his “type” with little scope for contradiction resulting in a tautological kind of argument; they ignore the psychological diversity and multiplicity of human beings; and they encourage inductive profiling of offender characteristics from crime scene data (Canter *et al.*, in press; Turvey, 1998).

Canter *et al.* (in press), criticize typological classification schemes on the basis that human beings rarely can be found to fall into distinct types, and hence, such schemes will struggle to find strong, consistent empirical support. Their optimal use may lie rather in identifying characteristics of the crime scene (i.e. disorganised/organised, process/act focus) without extrapolating grossly to offender characteristics/type.

As discussed with regard to definitions of serial murder, typological classification schemes incorporate many psychological principles despite having been devised primarily for law enforcement purposes. As a result, they may be seen to be characterised with similar tensions as discussed in relation to definitions. The interpretative relativity that results is not assisted by the fact that few of these typologies have been tested empirically, and tend to rely predominantly on anecdotal accounts of their successful or unsuccessful application. As a result, it is difficult to claim, with any certainty, that typological classification schemes aid or hinder understandings of serial murder, or their investigative analysis.

Additionally, none of the above typological schemes have been tested for their empirical validity in a South African setting (Labuschagne, 2003). As a result, it is not possible to state

whether individuals who commit serial murder in South Africa can be classified in the same manner, or require different schematic distinctions.

The following chapter will critically examine theories about serial murder from a number of different perspectives ranging from those that focus more on individual factors, to those that take the broader social context into account.