

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS CONCERNING SERIAL MURDER

The author will now critically examine the different ways in which serial murder has been understood from various theoretical positions and paradigmatic orientations. Such theoretical positions mimic theoretical divisions relating to general violence and crime with different disciplines analyzing the causes of violence at different levels such as the structural, institutional, interpersonal and individual.

Generally, such theories frame the “creation” of serial murder as a manifestation of some dysfunction at any one of these levels. The basic viewpoints can be grouped under: individual focused theories and contextual viewpoints. The author will begin discussion of theories of serial murder with a review of the individual focused theories on serial murder. Due to the small amount of theories (both locally and internationally) that have attempted to explain serial murder specifically, this chapter will first outline theories addressing violent behaviour in general for each section and then move on to discussing any theories within the specific sub-category (e.g. individual and contextual) that have attempted to explain serial murder, in particular.

Individual-focused theories seem to argue for some nature of dysfunction either in the physical aspect and biology of the person involved or in the psychological development or functioning of the individual concerned. These positions will now be discussed under the headings of organic, psychological and socio-cultural theories.

3.1 ORGANIC THEORIES

Organic theories operate at the level of the individual, assuming that people have a neurological or genetic tendency towards violent behaviour (Reiss & Roth, 1993). These will be discussed with regards to approaches that focus more specifically on neuroanatomy/neurology and genetics respectively in relation to criminal behaviour and serial murder in particular.

3.1.1 Neuroanatomy/neurology

In terms of neuroanatomy, the limbic system has been drawn upon as an area that may affect the emotional processing of events by individuals who commit murder (Money, 1990). This part of the brain is responsible for the mediation of emotional states and regulation of emotional responses to the environment (specifically response to perceived threats from such an environment and decisions to attack), a lesion in, or damage to limbic system may affect the individual's ability to respond with accurate emotion to their environment (Ellis & Walsh, 2000; Hagan, 1996).

In the case of sexual sadism, Money (1990) argues that the aggressive signal is incorrectly coupled with the sexual drive, and hence violence is eroticised or sexually stimulating to the individual concerned. The difficulties in the processing of emotional stimuli mentioned above in terms of limbic system functioning have also been explained by investigating the differences in hemispheric processing in the brain. It has been suggested that individuals who commit serial murder may rely predominantly upon left, verbal-analytic hemispheric

processing than right hemispheric processing with the result that the “feeling” part of emotional interpretation is lacking resulting in a lack of empathy and callousness (Money, 1990). Little data exists however, indicating the number of cases in which such a neurological dysfunction has been present and accountable for the sexually sadistic behaviour. Additionally, it is difficult to separate the influence of psychological and environmental factors on etiology in many of these biological theoretical arguments.

Research has also focused on the diencephalic structures of the thalamus and hypothalamus, which have been suggested as having a direct role in aggressive behavior, as well as a role in associating positive or negative emotions with incoming stimuli (Siegel, 2000). Abnormalities in the thalamus have been proposed to explain a serial murderer's inability to maintain personal relationships or display empathy for his victims (Sears, 1991).

The thalamus has also been associated with pathological activation of fearful and combative behavior (aversive experiences) along with oral and sexual functions (pleasant experiences). When one area is stimulated, arousal may extend to other areas, producing pleasurable feelings associated with violent acts. The hypothalamus plays a role in the reticular activating system, which may block otherwise stimulating activity from reaching the judgment-related cerebral cortex. It has been suggested that such a mechanism may be what is responsible for chronic underarousal in the psychopath, leading to antisocial behavior in an attempt to increase cortical levels of arousal (Bartol, 1980).

In some cases, specifically with respect to those serial murderers classified as disorganised types (Holmes & Holmes, 1996; discussed previously), it has been suggested that these individuals may suffer from a degree of mild to moderate mental retardation. This has been applied to individuals such as Edmund Kemper and Harrison Graham in the USA (Leyton, 2001). However, the link is not particularly tenuous for the reason that it has not

been consistently shown to be the case that individuals who are mentally retarded manifest a disorganised manner of committing murder.

Additionally, it is particularly dangerous to construct a link between mental retardation and violent crime, particularly serial murder, in the absence of reliable evidence, given the additional stigmatization that may be placed upon this group of individuals. Whereas mental retardation on the part of the individual who commits serial murder may influence the manner in which the murders are carried out, it may be inaccurate to go the further step of claiming that the mental retardation itself causes the offending behaviour.

3.1.2 Genetics

Genetic factors have also been implicated in arguments of causality with regards to criminality (Stephenson, 1992). One theory that has been applied increasingly to the category of sexual crimes and violence is that of the XYY chromosome (Kumra, Wiggs, Krasnewich, Meck, Smith, Bedwell, Fernandez, Jacobson, Lenane & Rapoport, 1998; Schroder, De la Chapelle, Hakola & Vikkunen, 1981). The XYY theory refers to a condition where a male individual has an extra Y chromosome as a result of irregular sperm propagation on the part of the biological father. Such individuals are usually considerably taller than average; have a greater amount of facial hair; and are thought to exhibit pronounced masculine traits and hypersexuality (Berner, Grunberger, Sluga, Schnedl, Wagenbichler & Herbich, 1977; Diego Nunez, Prieto Veiga, Rey Sanchez, Salazar Veloz, De Manueles Jiminez, Santos Borbujo, Martin Ruano, Alvarez Aparicio & Cedeno Montano, 1992).

During the 1960's, these individuals were found to be overrepresented in legally incarcerated populations, leading to widespread beliefs that XYY individuals were by nature more likely to commit crimes, specifically those involving considerable sex and violence

(Berner *et al.*, 1977). These beliefs have recently been dispelled (Delisi, Friedrich, Wahlstrom & Crow, 1994) however, and it appears that the mild learning and behaviour problems that may accompany the syndrome are responsible for those XYY individuals who do undertake criminal activity being apprehended more easily (Berner *et al.*, 1997).

With regard to serial murder, to date, no individual who has committed serial murder has been found to have been an XYY individual, although Edmund Kemper, an American serial murderer who, responsible for the “Co-Ed” series of murders in Santa Cruz in the 1970’s, was the subject of such speculation given his physical characteristics (above average height and build) and hypersexuality (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Leyton, 2001). However, it was later established that his chromosomes were normal (Leyton, 2001). Consensus on the XYY syndrome link to serial murder (and general criminal behaviour) appears to be that such links to the XYY syndrome are largely correlative at best with no solid causal links established (Faber & Abrams, 1975).

3.1.3 Critique of organic theories

Organic theories can be critiqued on several grounds in general. Firstly, samples upon which these theories or suggestions are based, frequently are contrasted by samples of serial murderers who either manifest the problem behaviour in question without the accompanying organic dysfunction or manifest no such behaviour in the presence of neurological dysfunctions (Kolb & Whishaw, 1996).

Samples of serial murderers upon which organic theories are based are additionally very small and often anecdotal in nature, often on account of these samples being limited to incarcerated serial murderers (Egger, 1984). This may not completely discredit these theories but samples are too small to discount the potential influence of other factors in the

manifestation of serial murder, be they biological or environmental or psychological. As a result, organic theories run the risk of being reductionist and eliminating the opportunity and need for change or amelioration of social/environmental conditions and factors that may play a part in “etiology”.

Causal direction in organic theories is also frequently unclear with uncertainty surrounding whether pathological behaviour alters brain functioning or vice versa (Kolb & Whishaw, 1996). This general critique of organic theories of neuropathology may be extended to organic theories that attempt to explain serial murder in the sense that the direction of causality may be queried with regard to brain or other organic abnormalities and serial murder offending.

A large proportion of the critical scrutiny and assessment of organic theories as related to violent behaviour has proceeded from the legal domain (Rice, Harris & Quinsey, 1990). Organic arguments have often been involved in legal applications in terms of assessing culpability of individuals committing murder and serial murder with the result that they are often viewed skeptically as attempts to exonerate such individuals and as such, divert the cause of justice (Litwack & Schlesinger, 1987). Such a context has resulted in research that has examined the thinking and feeling components of neurological functioning with the aim of establishing whether individuals who commit murder may “know” that their actions are wrong or immoral yet not feel the same way to support varying legal arguments.

Additionally, whereas aggression has largely been viewed as a biologically-based behaviour, violence is a social construction (Rivara, 2002). Much debate characterizes the literature with regards to defining and distinguishing these two concepts (Monahan, 1999; Rivara, 2002), however it would appear that whereas aggression refers to a biological factor present throughout the animal kingdom and related to ways of acting, violence is more man-made and dependent upon the consequences of an act of aggression, that is, involving

intentional harm to the object at which aggression is directed (Archer, 1994). Consequently, it may be argued that organic theories may be able to explain aggression, but necessitate an understanding of the social context, and relationship between actor/s and object/actor in order to explain acts of violence. Given that serial murder constitutes an act of violence, organic theories are limited in their ability to explain such a phenomenon independent of other violent acts.

Finally, organic theories frequently negate the possibility for rehabilitation of serial murderers or influence forms of rehabilitation that isolate an individual either physically or behaviourally (Vachss, 1993). These forms of rehabilitation are often accompanied by the neutralization of such an individual via medical technology either in the form of psychotropic drugs or psychosurgery. As a result, it remains to be seen whether rehabilitation of a serial murderer is a viable possibility.

3.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Psychological theories that have been applied to the understanding and explanation of serial murder can be differentiated with respect to where they position themselves along a continuum of more intrapsychic or more interpersonal outlooks. Psychodynamic theories emphasise the intrapsychic and tend to focus upon phenomena that take place within the mind or psyche to explain human behaviour (Schwartz, 1999). These theories tend to place less emphasis on external factors in the person's context or environment. Interpersonal theories and cognitive psychology or behavioural theories tend to engage in less depth psychology, and rather place greater emphasis on the person's interaction with their environment or significant persons or elements within such an environment - that is, they appear to be more socially oriented. Psychological theories of serial murder will now be discussed with respect

to the psychodynamic position; the cognitive-behavioural and learning theory position; and then examine other psychological theories used to explain serial murder that do not fit into the above classifications.

3.2.1 Psychodynamic theories

As with organic theories above, psychodynamic theories focus on the individual in order to explain serial murder. Psychodynamic theories refer broadly to those theories that emphasise the unconscious as the primary element of intrapsychic processes together with elements such as conflicts and instinctual energies. These theories examine the interaction of these unconscious and conscious processes as they influence personality, behaviour and attitudes (Schwartz, 1999).

Psychoanalytic theories refer specifically to the theories of Sigmund Freud and fall within the broader category of psychodynamic theories. While maintaining an overarching emphasis on the role of the unconscious, psychoanalytic theory focuses more specifically on processes such as repression and concepts such as infantile sexuality and the psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic/oedipal and latency), resistance, transference and division of the psyche into the id, ego and superego (Harre & Lamb, 1983).

Within psychodynamic theory, serial murder is thought to be a reflection of the workings of inner drive processes and remnants of internalized developmental conflicts with significant care figures. Psychodynamic theories are considerably prevalent in theories exploring the psychological factors that influence serial murder (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Holmes & Holmes, 1996; Pistorius, 1996; Ressler et al., 1988; Ressler & Schachtman, 1992; Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003). These schools of thought have been thought to automatically lend themselves to explanations of serial murder by virtue of the fact that psychodynamics has

emphasized the role of both sexual and aggressive drives in its theoretical tenets and serial murder is frequently considered to have strong sexual and aggressive overtones.

Further, the concept of fantasy plays an important role in psychodynamic theories and serial murder (e.g. the oedipal complex). Due to emphasis on the role of fantasy and dysfunctional family in some theories (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler *et al.*, 1988) of serial murder, and understandings of serial murder as a psychologically/internally motivated crime (as discussed in Chapter 2), psychodynamic theories with their emphasis on primary relationships and internal psychological fantasy life (Freud, 1966) appear well suited. These aspects will now be examined within a psychodynamic theoretical paradigm after a cursory note on the role of the dysfunctional family in theories of serial murder.

The role of the dysfunctional family in theories of crime has featured in both cognitive and social learning, and psychodynamic theories of serial murder (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Ressler *et al.*, 1988). The individual who commits serial murder is seen to have been affected developmentally by the dysfunction, which characterises his environment and so develops into an adult who repeatedly attempts to resolve such dysfunctional development or mimics the behaviour or conditioning such an environment has cultivated in him. Such an environment may consist of persistent abuse (physical, emotional or sexual) at the hands of caregivers or neglect. Lloyd (1995) found a link between violence and abuse in childhood, while Jehu (1991) found that up to 57% of sex offenders reported being sexually abused in childhood.

Supporting evidence for such theories in cases of serial murder is mixed however. Serial murderers such as Edward Gein and Albert DeSalvo in the United States, and Stewart Wilken in South Africa, report childhoods characterised by abuse and neglect (Lane & Gregg, 1992); however, individuals such as Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy in the United States, report happy childhoods (Lane & Gregg, 1992). As a result, references to the importance of the

dysfunctional family in the etiology of serial murder should be interpreted cautiously, especially as what constitutes dysfunctional has yet to be clearly specified.

- **The role of fantasy in psychodynamic theories of serial murder.**

The role of fantasy, specifically sexual and sadistic fantasy, has been postulated to play a strong role in serial murder, and serial sexual murder specifically (Claus & Lidberg, 1999; Myers, Burgess & Nelson, 1998). Psychodynamic perspectives have lent themselves easily to discussions of the role of fantasy in serial murder by virtue of their emphasis on internal processes, drives and sexual energy or libido (Smith, 1996), all of which can be used to explain different elements of fantasy.

Prentky, Burgess, Rokous, Lee, Hartman, Ressler and Douglas (1989) define fantasy as “an elaborated set of cognitions characterized by preoccupation anchored in emotion, and originating in daydreams” (p. 889). Johnson and Becker (1997) regard sexually sadistic fantasies to be indicators of future homicidal pathology and interviews with individuals who committed serial sexual murder in the USA by both Prentky et al. (1989) and Warren *et al.*, (1996) found violent sexual fantasies in at least 80% of the individuals interviewed.

The fantasy-based motivation model has further been supported by Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas and McCormack (1986) who found evidence for daydreaming and compulsive masturbation in 80% of their sample of 36 sexual murderers when this model was tested, as well as Prentky *et al.* (1989) who found a higher prevalence of fantasy as well as five paraphilias (compulsive masturbation, indecent exposure, voyeurism, fetishism and cross-dressing) in a sample of serial murderers when these were compared to a sample of single murderers. Similar models have been proposed by Norris (1988) as well as Abel and Blanchard (1974) who argue for social learning processes as pairing deviant fantasy with sexual arousal.

Burgess *et al.* (1986) developed a fantasy-based motivational model for serial sexual murder. This model consisted of five components, namely,

- impaired development of early attachments;
- formative traumatic events;
- patterned responses that serve to generate fantasies;
- private, internal world consumed by violent thoughts that leaves the person isolated and self-preoccupied; and
- a feedback filter that sustains repetitive thinking patterns.

Hazelwood and Warren (1995) elaborated upon the structure of sexual fantasy and also argued for five components, namely:

- relational (that is, involving a relationship between individuals);
- paraphilic (that is, involving some form of deviant sexual behaviour);
- situational (that is, taking place in a particular location);
- self-perceptual (that is, furthering the individual's sense of self in some manner);
- and
- demographic (that is, involving specific details about the other individuals involved such as age and/or race and/or gender).

Meloy (2000) argues that the manner in which a sexual fantasy is structured along the above lines, is useful in establishing the manner in which sexual murders will be carried out by a particular individual, as well as the types of victims that such an individual will search for.

This can be seen to have useful applicability for investigative operations in terms of guidance with regard to type of offender and victim. The fantasy may also be a useful guide in terms of gaining insight into developmental experiences of the offender that may have contributed to both the shaping of the fantasy as well as the serial murder behaviour.

The model of Burgess *et al.* (1986) above, is elaborated upon by Whitman and Akutagawa (2003) who detail the processes entailed in an acquired dependence upon fantasy in serial sexual murder. Whitman and Akutagawa (2003) argue that in the absence of secure attachment and affection from the primary caregiver, the individual concerned turns to fantasy as a pleasurable substitute. The emotional unavailability and distancing of the caregiver prevents the child from developing empathy for others as well as healthy means by which to channel and modify libido and aggression in appropriate manners (Money, 1990). The role of fantasy in serial sexual murder thus functions as a means of reducing the anxiety associated with rejection, or anticipated rejection, by significant others and a means of challenging libido and aggression that have remained relatively unmodified from their original, immature state (Whitman & Akutagawa, 2003) and a means of enacting power, domination, manipulation and control (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Holmes & Holmes, 1996).

Ressler *et al.* (1988) have attempted to explain how individuals move from fantasy to acts that attempt to fulfill their particular fantasies in reality. They argue that certain antecedent factors may provoke such a move. These include life stressors (such as loss of a job, end of a relationship), frame of mind (such as anger, hostility or frustration) and planning (such as details of where, and when the murder will occur) (Ressler *et al.*, 1988). Meloy (2000) states that an individual will also tend to act on the fantasy when the response tendency exceeds the intensity of the rehearsal fantasy, and a viable opportunity for such acting out is available.

Holmes and Holmes (1996) argue for a cyclical process with respect to the acting out of fantasy, both in terms of activity leading up to the first murder and then with respect to each subsequent murder. Initially, each attempt to begin to act out a fantasy (which may include voyeuristic activity, compulsive masturbation, or other paraphilic activity and rape) is thought to temporarily reduce anxiety or fulfill the particular fantasy of the individual concerned after which the cycle of frustration, subsequent and more detailed attempt and temporary

satisfaction gained thereby is repeated. Eventually, according to Holmes and Holmes (1996), a murder is committed, and the cycle continues with each subsequent murder an attempt to fulfill sadistic fantasy with greater accuracy.

To summarise, theorists who have emphasized the role of fantasy in serial murder appear to view fantasy as serving to empower the individual concerned in light of perceived abandonment or emotional neglect by the primary caregiver; traumatic experience; and subsequent anxiety in relation to these experiences (Burgess *et al.*, 1986; Hazelwood & Warren, 1995) as well as similar experiences in adulthood (Ressler *et al.*, 1988). Such a dependence upon fantasy appears also to be cyclical (Holmes & Holmes, 1996). As a result, interviewing the current and past girlfriends and wives of suspects in an investigation may yield considerable insights into the fantasies of that individual which can be used to further guide the investigation and interview potential suspects (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2004).

- **The role of primary attachments in psychodynamic theories of serial murder.**

Ressler *et al.* (1988) postulate that individuals who commit serial murder have ambivalent attitudes towards their mother as a result of mixed messages communicated towards the individual as a child and anger towards an absent or emotionally unavailable father. Whereas the above may be seen to draw more upon interpersonal than intrapsychic relations, Ressler *et al.*, (1988) describe the role of fantasy, namely that serial murder involves a continued, repetitive attempt to enact the fantasy in reality, echoes Freud's repetition compulsion to resolve points of fixation in development. Such fantasy, and its constituent elements, is thought to be derived from developmental experiences and significant figures that featured during such a period, and is largely a manifestation of introjected, intrapsychic dynamics.

The attachment theory of Anna Freud (1966) has been used by Ressler and Schachtman (1992) who postulate that individuals who commit serial murder have been deprived of love in their primary attachments with their mothers. Such relationships are thought to be characterized as uniformly cool, distant, unloving and neglectful with little physical contact or emotional warmth. As a result, the innate aggressive impulses and drives of such individuals are left unmodified and the capacity for empathy vastly diminished. This lack of an emotionally fulfilling, warm relationship with the primary caregiver is thought to explain the individual's use of auto-eroticism (in the absence of pleasurable physical contact with the mother) as well as withdrawal and dependence on fantasy as a pleasurable substitute to the absent attachment relationship.

Pistorius (1996), develops Ressler *et al.*'s (1988) and Ressler and Schachtman's (1992) theoretical arguments further, and holds that a major causal agent of serial murder is a fixation at one or more of the stages of psychosexual development. This fixation is seen to fuel and shape the fantasies that characterize later life. Due to the emotional poverty that characterizes the relationship with both parents, Pistorius (1996) argues that super-ego development is limited and consequently, the relatively unmediated division between conscious and unconscious encourages fantasy life. The lack of super-ego would also explain a lack of guilt or fear of perceived punishment on the part of the individual concerned. This, and the lack of mediation between conscious and unconscious is thought to be responsible for the lack of repression of primitive sexual and aggressive impulses which result in a fixation at latency, characterized by an inability to socialize, empathize and develop positive interpersonal relationships.

Whitman and Akutugawa (2003) argue that anxiety related to feelings of inner emptiness and impotence in the serial murderer persists into later development and adulthood. As a result, compulsive masturbation, paraphilias and fantasy are used to relieve such anxiety. It is

thought that serial murderers defend against such underlying anxiety with reaction formations that transform feelings of impotence into omnipotence. The emotional starvation that exists as a result of failed early attachments is postulated to leave an intense, chronic state of emotional hunger and rage that is only temporarily satisfied by each murder. Whitman and Akutugawa (2003) argue that the relative rarity of serial murderers is a result of mediating biological factors which act as necessary conditions for factors such as failed attachments to contribute fully to the development of a serial murderer.

As can be seen from the above work, the physical or emotional absence of the primary caregiver appears to be a significant factor in psychodynamic and attachment theory perspectives on the etiology of serial murder (Pistorius, 1996; Ressler *et al.*, 1988). Its significance appears to be particularly prominent in accounting for the considerable rage, violence and anger with which some of the murders are committed (Whitman & Akutugawa, 2003).

3.2.2 Critique of psychodynamic theories of serial murder

With regards to psychodynamic theories of serial murder, these are problematic for the following reasons. They are largely anecdotal in nature, focusing upon intensive case studies that lack valid generalisability (Schwartz, 1999). They are not falsifiable, by virtue of their grounded tautological argumentation with regard to psychosexual stages and personality structure (Cooper, 1996). They are also too broad in their characterization of the “causes” of serial murder, which appear to be explicable with reference to a fixation at any stage that can be seen to match offending behaviour patterns post hoc (Smith, 1996). This is not really helpful for case investigation or guidelines when searching for suspects.

As with organic theories, psychodynamic theories negate the possibility for rehabilitation of serial murder due to the expense and duration of psychoanalysis; the limited number of therapists willing to practice such a therapy in the context of prison; and the ingrained permanence that is attributed to the fixations postulated. Additionally, no explanation is provided of what happens to these drives when an individual is incarcerated. Many individuals who have committed serial murder have been found to function adequately within a prison system without any aggressive behaviour (Stephenson, 1992). Intrapsychic theories appear to ignore the influence of contextual factors that may mediate and alter the behaviour and coping ability of such individuals (Labuschagne, 2001).

Psychodynamic theories also place considerable emphasis on the role of fantasy. Although present in a proportion of serial murderers, fantasy does not always play a role in serial murder. This is notably the case with South African serial murderers, who seldom reflect the central role of fantasy in relation to their offences, and seldom report engaging with a rich fantasy life (Hodgskiss, 2002; Labuschagne, personal communication). Additionally, there appears to be a lack of attention to non-sexual serial murder and the role that fantasy does or does not play in such a series. As a result, the overriding impression from the international (predominantly law enforcement FBI arena) seems to be that serial murder and serial sexual murder are one and the same thing, and that consequently, all serial murder is sexual in nature, when in fact, individuals such as Leyton (2001) argue that serial murder is frequently more about class inequality.

With respect to the “dysfunctional family” and its role in serial murder, another significant problem is the many occurrences of cases in which individuals who have committed serial murder such as Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer in the USA, who have reported relatively normal childhoods with no instances of significant dysfunctional developmental milestones such as failed attachments (Masters, 1993). In the case of these

individuals, no biological anomalies have been found either, and as a result the “necessary condition” qualification of psychodynamic theories such as those discussed in Whitman and Akutagawa (2003), does not save these theories from their evident weakness in accounting for certain cases of serial murder.

With regards to the applicability of Pistorius’ (1996) theory to the South African context, her work can be critiqued in that it appears to take limited cognizance of particularly South African aspects of serial murder and seems to reinforce dominant Western paradigms, and is based on a very small sample.

Most of her analyses are also based upon anecdotal evidence and lack verifiable empirical proofs. She draws frequently upon the work of Robert Ressler and other FBI behavioural science individuals such as John Douglas to substantiate her theory. As discussed previously, it has been shown that the work of such individuals is based upon samples that differ considerably from South African cases (Hodgskiss, 2004). Psychodynamic theory may also be limited to the extent to which it may inform investigative applications due to the variability in the manner in which aspects of crime scene and criminal behaviour can be interpreted within such a paradigm, as discussed previously (Smith, 1996).

Pistorius (1996) has also been inconsistent with respect to her explanations of serial murder - on the one hand, being cited as claiming that cultural context is not important with regards to serial murder in the press and on the other, attributing the incidence of serial murder in South Africa to poverty, crime, violence and the disbanding of families (Pistorius, 1996).

3.2.3 Cognitive-behavioural and learning theory models

Whereas psychodynamic theories of serial murder appear to emphasise sexual and aggressive drives and internalized representations of relationships with primary caregivers, cognitive and behavioural schools emphasize thought patterns and observational learning as factors that contribute to the development of criminal behaviour (Moorey, 1996).

- **Learning theory.**

Learning theory argues that individuals model their behaviour on what they observe in their environment (Weiten, 1995). Following from this, it has been argued that criminals “learn” their behaviour as a result of observing such behaviour in their immediate environment at early developmental stages and adolescence. Bandura (1973) conducted some of the foundational studies on aggression and observational learning, in which he established the increased likelihood of observers learning aggressive behaviour when that behaviour was seen to result in positive consequences for the modeling agent. Consequently, if an individual grows up in a family where violence is used as a means of achieving goals and resolving conflict, he/she may learn to behave in similar ways later on in life. A similar argument could possibly be made for the development of deviant sexual behaviour, specifically with reference to families or developmental environments where sexual abuse may have taken place.

Dollard and Miller’s (1950) social learning theory has been interpreted as indicating that individuals are socialized to seek affection and approval from those whom they love (Wright & Hensley, 2003). When such an interaction is mutually fulfilling, the individual in question learns trust and empathy in relation to interpersonal relationships and social interactions. However, in situations where the individual in question’s need for approval is frustrated, and he/she is prevented from retaliating towards the aggravating individual, he/she may seek out

other persons, animals or objects upon which to vent their anger. Wright and Hensley (2003) have used such theories to explain serial murder and the potential graduation link from cruelty to animals in childhood to serial murder in adulthood. Their theory may explain how an individual goes on to commit violent acts towards others, but there is nothing that specifically links this outcome to serial murder behaviour.

Hale (1993) goes further than Wright and Hensley (2003) by arguing that it is only individuals who internalize humiliation as a motive that go on to commit serial murder. Using Hull (1943) and Spence's (1936) theories of discriminant learning, Hale (1993) argues that the ability to discriminate between similar situations and behave in a way appropriate to the situation in question is based upon the presence of a reinforcement or rewarding stimulus. Hale (1993) states that in early caregiving relationships of individuals who go on to commit serial murder, there is an absence of a rewarding stimulus. Consequently, individuals who commit serial murder are unable to discriminate between the original and subsequent perceived humiliatory situations. In this way, the individual will displace the aggression and anger associated with the original humiliation in childhood, upon a new, weaker victim in the presence of a potentially humiliating situation. This approach may be critiqued by arguing that many individuals who witness similar interactions or relationships between others do not necessarily go on to commit serial murder. Additionally, this approach does not explain why individuals who commit serial murder go to the extent of murdering another individual as opposed to engaging in sadistic or humiliatory behaviour patterns with others.

- **Cognitive-behavioural theories.**

Other salient factors in cognitive theories of crime and criminals include distorted thinking patterns or cognitions; deviant conditioning; and lack of empathy. Developing the argument for the role of cognitions and thought processes in crime and criminality, Yochelson and

Samenow (1976) claim that criminal thinking patterns are characterized by different reasoning ability and a greater degree of irresponsible and erroneous thinking. Such thinking develops as a result of faulty social learning which results in unrealistic perceptions of the world as an arena for self-indulgence, and an inability to recognize the rights of others or personal responsibility (Stephenson, 1992). This theory has been applied to the area of psychopathy (Finkenbauer & Kochis, 1984; Launay & Murray, 1989), specifically to the frequent tendency towards rationalization of criminal behaviour evidenced in psychopathic behaviour. This could also be used to explain the traits of neutralization and compartmentalization discussed previously in relation to serial murder.

Cognitive-behavioural theories and interventions have been used specifically in relation to sex offenders (Jehu, 1991), who are understood as manifesting dysfunctional thinking patterns; deviant arousal and conditioning; lack of empathy; poor self-esteem; as well as overwhelming shame and guilt. The literature on serial murder does not seem to document any attempts to use similar interventions with individuals who have committed serial murder. It would be interesting to see if such interventions could be applied successfully and a deeper exploration of such thinking patterns in the individuals concerned, given previous arguments with regard to the frequently sexual nature of serial murder (Geberth, 1998; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988).

- **Rational choice models.**

Extending the cognitive argument that emphasizes the role of thought processes in governing criminal behaviour, is the rational choice model of crime. Rational choice theories of crime argue that the decision to commit a crime is subject to the same processes of reasoning that characterize non-criminal human behaviour (Stephenson, 1992). Tuck and Riley (1986) applied Ajzen and Madden's (1986) Theory of Reasoned Action to explain criminal

behaviour as the product of beliefs about the consequences of behaving in a particular way and evaluation of those consequences. Consequently, a decision to behave in a criminal manner is based upon attitudes towards the crime in question and evaluation of the pros and cons of behaving in that particular way. If the pros outweigh the cons, the crime is committed.

A rational choice to commit a crime involves an evaluation consisting of beliefs about the outcome of the crime; normative beliefs or attitudes and individual motivation to comply with such norms; and beliefs about resources and opportunities available (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Once again, the literature on serial murder does not appear to document any attempts to explain serial murder as the product of rational choices on the part of the individual concerned. It would seem that any such attempt would still have to explain the deviant nature of the behaviour in question and questions of etiology. However, it may well be that planning of the murders in question operates along rational choice lines.

- **An addiction model of serial murder.**

Another variation on the cognitive-behavioural model of crime is one that argues that criminal behaviour may operate as a form of addiction. Pomerleau and Pomerleau (1988) defines addiction in the following way, namely, as

the repeated use of a substance/ or a compelling involvement in behavior that directly or indirectly modifies the internal milieu (as indicated by changes in neurochemical and neuronal activity) in such a way as to produce immediate reinforcement, but whose long-term effects are personally or medically harmful or highly disadvantageous to society. (p. 345).

Anderson (1994) holds that serial murder can be seen as an addiction to murder by virtue of the fact that the individual is driven to murder by an intrusive fantasy life. The act of

murdering temporarily (but incompletely) satisfies the fantasy with the result that the drive regenerates and eventually results in another murder. Shaped by a dysfunctional childhood and faulty learning, Anderson (1994) believes that the individual who commits serial murder develops fantasy as a coping mechanism. As a consequence, in times of stress in later life, fantasy is called upon in order to deal with such stress.

The murder component, for Anderson (1994), constitutes a related effect required to fuel the richness and power of the fantasy life. An addiction model of serial murder would seem appropriate in terms of capturing the apparent compulsive element that characterizes some instances of serial murder. However, Anderson's (1994) theory does not seem adequately supported in terms of establishing that murders occur in the service of fantasy. Given previous discussions, it would seem that stronger support is provided for the act of murder as the central component of serial murder (Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Holmes & Holmes, 1996), and that, rather, this is the addictive element. Additionally, the addictive element in the form of the act of murder appears to disappear once these individuals are incarcerated. This theory does not account for how this is transformed or what happens to the individual's need or dependency on the act of murder once he/she is in prison.

3.2.4 Critique of cognitive-behavioural and learning theory models of serial murder

Cognitive-behavioural theories of serial murder appear to hold considerable promise with regard to the potential for viable interventions and rehabilitation that they offer. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has demonstrated considerable effectiveness with sex offenders (Jehu, 1991) and is generally more cost-effective and efficient than psychodynamic alternatives (Moorey, 1996). Cognitive-behavioural and learning theories also potentially

provide more tangible, empirically testable elements (such as thought processes and behaviour) than psychodynamic theories (such as parental introjects) (Barkham, 1996).

As with theories of serial murder across the theoretical spectrum however, cognitive-behavioural and learning theories of serial murder are plagued by exceptions and inconsistencies. For example, social learning theory approaches to serial murder may be challenged by examples of individuals who report growing up in relatively healthy family backgrounds such as Jeffrey Dahmer (Lane & Gregg, 1992) or Ted Bundy (Leyton, 2001) and observational learning can be challenged by examples of individuals who have grown up in environments or families modeling violence as a means to achieve goals and who have not gone on to commit serial murder, or any other violent crime.

An example may be the sibling of an individual who has committed serial murder, such as Albert De Salvo who had sisters that did not go on to commit serial murder despite growing up amidst considerable physical abuse by their father. Theorists such as Wright and Hensley (2003), while providing useful and plausible theories of serial murder, are also weakened in the same way as some psychodynamic theories (such as Ressler *et al.*, 1988) by virtue of their use of anecdotal case studies and popular source material such as true crime novels.

3.2.5 Other theories emphasizing psychological factors

The discussion of serial murder will now review other theories that have attempted to explain the phenomenon with reference to psychological factors in a broader sense, with postulates derived from various paradigmatic orientations and blended in the theoretical explanations.

Ressler *et al.*'s (1988) theory of serial murder (specifically serial sexual murder) incorporates the family context; substance abuse; structural factors such as the community

and education system; and interpersonal skills. They argue that social bonding is affected in the development of serial murder due to the stifling of the formation of close contact or bonds within the family. The individual concerned is consequently limited in terms of his ability to form close bonds with individuals outside of the family. This may occur as a result of neglect on the part of the parents or as a result of the rationalization or normalization of unacceptable behaviour by parents or caregivers. Substance abuse within the family, as well as criminality and psychopathology in the family, may further contribute to the development of deviant behaviour patterns in the individual who will go on to commit serial murder.

Ressler *et al.* (1988) additionally postulate that there may be emotional, physical or sexual abuse present, resulting in distress which is ignored by the parents and consequently results in the individual concerned being desensitized, lacking the ability to empathise or display positive affect and forming negative interpersonal relationships. According to Ressler and Schachtman (1992):

In a situation where you find a distant mother, an absent or abusive father and siblings, a non-intervening school system, an ineffective social services system, and an inability of the person to relate sexually in a normal way to others, you have almost a formula for producing a deviant [not necessarily murderous] personality (p. 93).

Turvey (1998) incorporates the familial context; relationships with primary caregivers; and community or social intervention. According to him, there may be prevalent criminality, substance abuse and emotional abuse within families of individuals who commit of serial murder. He holds that in these individuals, the first formative years (birth to age six or seven) may be characterized by poor relationships with primary caregivers that lack warmth and love and demonstrate poor supervision. As a result the individual in question may lack empathy and display an abundant egocentricity in relation to the rest of the world.

Turvey (1998) holds that individuals who grow up in such conditions and do not go on to commit serial murder may receive some form of intervention in preadolescence. This may involve nurturing peer relationships or relationship with another significant adult or intervention by social services and removal from the household. In the absence of any intervention, the dysfunctional behaviour of pre-adolescence is thought to be consolidated. Adolescence may reflect some acting out and antisocial tendencies such as substance abuses and fire starting and the commencement of a criminal record.

As a result of poor interpersonal skills, the individual experiences considerable social isolation, cultivating a greater dependency upon fantasy and exclusively auto-erotic sexual experimentation – in Turvey's (1998) study, 79% of serial murderers engaged in compulsive masturbation, 72% voyeurism, 81% pornography and 72% fetishism. Turvey (1998) holds that there is possibility for further intervention during adolescence at the level of the school or social services that may encounter the individual concerned in relation to more minor offences.

Holmes and Holmes' (1996) theory of serial murder may also be seen as adopting an interactionist stance by virtue of its seeming blending of cognitive and psychodynamic psychological components. For these theorists, serial murder is a result of an individual trapped in a pattern of five cyclical phases. The first stage consists of distorted thinking patterns, which sees the individual, concerned overly aware of intrinsic or extrinsic rewards at the expense of an awareness of the consequences of his actions. The second stage is called "the fall" and involves a reality challenge to the ideals of the individual concerned by a real or imagined event. Such a reaction or experience leads on to the third stage where there is a negative inward response that necessitates a need to validate self status in the form of stage four or the negative external response (which frequently involves murder). Following this, potential dangerous consequences are realized which necessitates restoration or steps to

minimize personal risk. The cycle builds up again to the first stage as a result of fantasy and other possible intrapsychic mechanisms such as internalized primary relationships, or possible paraphilic traits.

Labuschagne (2001) adopted a systemic interactional approach to investigate serial murder. He described such an approach as attempting to investigate serial murder in as much as it is situated as part of a relationship between persons and manifests as part of the manner in which an individual interacts with his/her context. Interviews were conducted with two individuals incarcerated for serial murder and were supplemented with psychometric measures such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

Labuschagne's (2001) findings were that, within an interactional paradigm, serial murder may signify a communication or act against something. Further work by Labuschagne (2001) found that serial murder may be symptomatic of larger dysfunction in South African society. He stated that an increase in crime coupled with low effectiveness of government services equipped to deal with such a phenomenon may have resulted in a change in the social ecosystem which results in a mutation or new phenomenon, namely, serial murder. Within such an interactional perspective serial murder may be seen as a negative symptom possibly maintained by the system due to a perceived secondary gain. Labuschagne (2000b) acknowledged the limitation of his small sample of individuals and recommended research based on a larger sample as well as acknowledging the need for more work from a social constructivist perspective to supplement the existing research base.

Labuschagne's (2001) work is advantageous in that it takes the local South African socio-cultural system replete with its particular historical features into account and consequently, lays a more locally-specific platform from which to develop South African understandings and involved interviews with incarcerated serial murderers in South African prisons. The perspective adopted, namely an interactional approach, provides a novel way at understanding

serial murder, and would appear to be particularly advantageous in that it affords an opportunity to examine the manner in which an individual who commits serial murder might interact with other individuals, as well as his/her context, as well as the socio-cultural significance of serial murder as an act against something at a broader systemic level (Labuschagne, 2001). This may have possible applications for rehabilitation.

Hodgskiss (2001) conducted research on the offence behaviours of South African serial murderers for his Masters dissertation, also by interviewing incarcerated offenders. To this end, he attempted to create a multivariate model of serial murder offence characteristics in South Africa, using the technique of Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) and Small Space Analysis (SSA), evidenced greatly in the work of David Canter at the University of Liverpool in the service of geographical profiling. Hodgskiss (2001) work would appear to be particularly useful in that it seems to be one of the first South African studies that draws specific attention to differences between South African serial murder and serial murder as it exists in the available literature. These differences will now be examined more closely.

Hodgskiss (2001) found the following differences in terms of developmental and psychiatric factors: an absence of the following: catathymia; cruelty to animals; violent fantasies and history of child conduct disorder; and Macdonald's behavioural triad (1961) components such as bed-wetting, fire-setting and as above, cruelty to animals in South African cases. Hodgskiss (2001) also found that the role of fantasy in instances of South African serial murder was considerably reduced, as well as the correlation between the content of fantasy and details of offences.

Hodgskiss (2003) additionally argues that due to the nature of the South African context and socio-economic composition, factors incorporated into international typologies like the Disorganised/Organised typology (Holmes and Holmes, 1996) such as vehicle ownership, level of education and employment history are of little use. Local offenders are more likely to

make use of public transport systems and educational requirements and desirable levels of attainment will differ; as well as types and profile of employment levels and opportunities in the country (Hodgskiss, 2003).

Hodgskiss (2001) also found differences with respect to ethnicity and age characteristics of offenders and their victims, as well as duration of serial murder cases. Ethnically, many US studies (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler & Shachtman, 1992) have stated that serial murderers will choose victims from within their own ethnic group – in South Africa, five out of eight white offenders interviewed by Hodgskiss (2002) chose victims of a different ethnicity. Reasons for this are postulated to be more about victim availability than politics. In South Africa, the lower socio-economic grouping is comprised mainly of black individuals and this group is more available as potential victims of serial murder.

The USA sample of individuals who have committed serial murder consists of a dominant profile of white males between the ages of 25 and 34, with cases varying in duration from less than 1 year to 37 years (Gorby, 2000; Holmes & Holmes, 1996) contrasts sharply with a predominantly black male South African sample varying in age from 16 to 54 years of age, with cases varying from less than 1 year to 5 years (Hodgskiss, 2003).

In terms of offence characteristics, South African serial murder shows a greater degree of heterogeneity - murder is largely the central focus of the offence, and the victim, in most cases, is depersonalized and treated as object (Hodgskiss, 2002). In these terms, one could say that South African serial murder is predominantly act-focused, if interpreted with respect to the Holmes and DeBurger (1988) distinction.

South African offences also seem to be less sexually driven than postulated for international serial murder, and more about total control as the driving motivation with little attempt at interpersonal relationship development before the offence (Hodgskiss, 2001).

External events prior to offence also appear to play a large role in influencing offence characteristics during the offence.

In terms of offender characteristics, developmental and psychiatric factors in common between South African and international findings included mood disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, chronic interpersonal isolation, lack of sexual abuse, psychotic features but not serious enough to constitute psychotic disorder, paranoid and schizoid traits (Labuschagne, 2001).

In light of Hodgskiss' (2001) work, the validity of applying international research uncritically to the local context is evidently compromised and seems to necessitate a greater impetus on locally oriented research in order to aid the development of South African understandings of serial murder and investigative initiatives based thereon. Hodgskiss' (2001) research also appears to be particularly useful to investigative applications by virtue of its focus on offence and offender characteristics in South African cases of serial murder.

His research can be critiqued however in that it uses a methodology, namely Small Space Analysis (SSA) that may be interpreted in a number of different ways, each with equitable validity and support if provided (Wilson, 2000). In this way, his findings may be viewed as one of a number of ways in which the data on offence characteristics in South Africa can be interpreted. In order to consolidate Hodgskiss' (2001) findings, replication of the study would be advisable. This appears to be of even greater saliency given the lack of similar studies on serial murder in South Africa, which may provide confirmatory or supportive findings. As with Labuschagne's (1998, 2001) work, Hodgskiss' (2001) sample is small, consisting of interviews with thirteen individuals and archival data such as casefiles, and hence, generalization to South African serial murder as a whole, is limited.

3.2.6 Critique of other theories emphasizing psychological factors

The above theories may be challenged by examples of siblings of such individuals who have been raised in the same environment and not become serial murderers. In these cases, response to criticism often sparks reference to biological theories that are used to supplement such explanations.

With regard to theories or models such as that of Ressler *et al.* (1988), data on which their study was based was derived exclusively from self-report information from individuals incarcerated for sexual murder, who were prepared to participate in the study. Consequently, their model is only applicable to a limited sample of individuals who have committed and been apprehended for serial murder, neglecting those still at large or never detected. Additionally, this data may be subject to possible social desirability effects, which refer to when respondents attempt to answer in a manner that portrays them in a more favourable light or in accordance with how they assume society expects them to behave. Turvey's (1998) theory is more helpful in as much as it provides tangible entry points for possible interventions to proactively assist individuals who potentially may go on to commit more serious violent offences.

The above theories appear to hold the greatest promise with regard to their greater holistic interpretation of etiological factors in serial murder. In this way, the theories avoid reductionism and provide numerous points that could be targeted both in proactive prevention of serial murder and offender rehabilitation. Criticism, however, can be leveled at the etiological model that is applied (in much the same way as with intrapsychic and organic theories). There is an implicit assumption that serial murder is a condition, pathology or illness at an individual or social level, whereas it may be the case that it is a variation on general criminal behaviour patterns such as envisioned by economic models of crime (Stephenson, 1992).

3.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES

Theories of crime frequently make reference to the socio-cultural context to explain its form and etiology. It is argued that the nature of criminal activity frequently reflects core tenets of the cultural and social networks in which it takes place, and is a manifestation of the dominant trends, values and philosophies of the time and place in which it occurs. Serial murder has not been immune to theoretical exploration with reference to socio-cultural developments, and such discussion will now be detailed, commencing with a general overview of criminological theory of deviance and progressing to more specific application of these theoretical positions.

3.3.1 Sociological and criminological schools and crime

Durkheim's (1897/1952) theory of *anomie* has often been used to account for criminal behaviour especially with respect to societies in transition. *Anomie* refers to a state where norms or expectations on behaviours are confused, unclear or absent. Durkheim (1897/1952) held that this state is particularly prevalent in societies that are undergoing or have undergone a transition period in which the norms and values are re-evaluated and assessed. For him, deviance could be explained with reference to states of *anomie*, where restrictions imposed by clearly defined norms are relaxed as a result of norm confusion. This theoretical position argues that crime or the criminal is a necessary component of society in terms of its role as an indicator of loosening social bonds and dilution of value systems.

According to Durkheim (1897/1952), the sophistication of a society is dictated by the degree to which its individual members are interdependent, although individually specialized. Morality is a means by which such interdependence is celebrated. During times in which there are great transitions in a relatively short space of time, “old ideals and the divinities which incarnate them are dying because they no longer respond sufficiently to the new aspirations of our days, and the new ideals which are necessary to orient our life are not yet born” (p. 47).

With South Africa having undergone significant political changes in the course of the last decade, this theoretical position has great potential for understanding crime in a South African context, specifically with regard to South Africa’s considerable increment in violent crime post-1994. Labuschagne (in Hodgskiss, 2004) argues that the increased diversity and broadening of parameters that occurred around 1994 may have contributed towards an increase in serial murder as part of a greater susceptibility to crime in general in society, together with a sense of anonymity created by ineffectiveness of government services to manage crime problems. Understandings of the place of serial murder within such a transition, and as a possible indicator of loosened societal norms and bonds, may provide insights into the character and nature of South Africa’s *anomie*, and possibly indicate which aspects of social cohesiveness require reinforcement.

Merton’s Strain Theory (1968) has also been made use of to explain crime as one of the ways tension between society and the individual is manifested. Strain Theory argues that the real problem is not created by a sudden social change, as Durkheim (1897) proposed, but rather by a social structure that holds out the same goals to all its members without giving them equal means to achieve them. It is this lack of integration between what the culture calls for and what the structure permits that causes deviant behaviour. Deviance then is a symptom of the social structure. With respect to serial murder, strain theory has not been used specifically to explain such a phenomenon. However Myers, Raccoppa, Burton and McElroy

(1993) found that a predisposition to resort to illegitimate means to obtain social goals was confirmed in 60 percent of serial murderers having previous criminal convictions. Despite such findings, it would appear that a relationship between serial murder and social opportunity or “strain” is spurious and may be influenced by a number of other factors such as individual characteristics of the person concerned.

In South Africa, changes in the political leadership and culture of the country ushered in a democratic era with the promise of many new opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups. Over the last decade, however, many of these opportunities remain out of reach for the majority of the population, and consequently, Strain Theory may be one way of explaining the apparent increase in general crime this country has experienced. However, this theory does not explain why certain types of criminal activity or deviance occur more frequently than others and hence, cannot really provide further insight into the relatively recent proliferation of serial murder.

The Chicago School of Criminology (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925) has also lent considerable impetus to the development of understandings of crime and the criminal. It holds that structural and social factors are important in understanding crime and deviance, and focuses upon the surrounding community or ecology to explain the causes and form of criminal behaviour (Holmes & Holmes, 1996). Humans are viewed as social creatures and their behaviour as a product of their social environment. This environment provides values and definitions that govern behaviour. Frequently, urbanisation and industrialisation break down older and more cohesive patterns of values, thus creating communities with competing norms and value systems.

The breakdown of urban life results in basic institutions such as the family, friendships and other social groups becoming impersonal and almost anonymous. As values became fragmented, opposing definitions about proper behaviour arise and come into conflict with

other behaviour. Given South Africa's extensive history of migrant labour and generally high population mobility between and within urban areas, effects of urbanization and traditional value fragmentation could very well be causal factors in relation to South African crime. Once again, as with the above theory of crime, there is little scope for understanding the prevalence of certain types of crime such as serial murder.

Sutherland's (1937) theory of differential association asserts that criminal behaviour is learned in primary group relationships as opposed to secondary sources such as television and the press. Mitchell (1997) has attempted to apply this to serial murder by arguing that many offenders are incarcerated prior to their first murder, and may learn techniques and formally conceptualise their plans in prison stays. Holmes and Holmes (1996) have stated in this regard, features of *modus operandi* such as the application of duct tape as a restraining technique may be learnt in prisons. While such a theory may explain how certain elements involved in committing a crime may develop, it does not seem able to convincingly argue that differential association causes serial murder.

- **Socio-cultural theories focusing specifically upon serial murder.**

The following arguments are grounded in one or a combination of the above socio-cultural theories, but have focused specifically on serial murder. Reinhardt (1962) argues that individuals who commit serial murder lack a workable system of social or personal frames of reference due to never having experienced normal communication with a dependable, understanding part of the social world around them. Hazelwood and Douglas (1980) support such a view by arguing that a lack of socialization in the midst of a climate of conflict and neglect results in a lack of available positive ways of coping developing in the individual concerned.

While lack of socialization may explain some aspects of serial murder, particularly antisocial or psychopathic traits, it would appear to fail to explain causation of serial murder completely. As mentioned previously with respect to the dysfunctional family, a number of individuals grow up in similar environments and do not go on to commit serial murder (Mitchell, 1997). The above observations have also not been tested against suitable control groups and, just as discussed with regards to the dysfunctional family, it would seem that biological and personality factors may also play a part in the development of such individuals.

Wilson (2000) argues that the nature of prevalent crime or developments in the nature of criminal activity is frequently indicative of the cultural development of a society. He states that an increase in sex crime in the 1900's actually reflected a general improvement in the conditions of society that freed up a greater proportion of the population from concerns of work. The Industrial Revolution changed the nature of "work" or work activity so as to free up more leisure time. Within a Maslowian paradigm (Maslow, 1954), an increase in leisure time and relative security of the work proportion of one's life, meant that crime evolved to focus on intimacy and sex or love as opposed to previously focusing upon subsistence.

As views towards sexuality have become less conservative over the progression of the twentieth century, crimes have developed and centred more on resentment and a desire for recognition or acknowledgement than sex, progressing according to Maslow's next level of hierarchy. Serial murder, for Wilson (2000), constitutes a combination of a need for recognition together with sexual desire or need for intimacy and a deviant attempt via which to secure these ends in contrast to the more conventional means that usually characterize this level of development.

Marsh (1999) supports the Durkheimian view with respect to societies in transition, which he believes are more vulnerable to crime in general and serial murder due to the fact that they often involve a decay of social support structures resulting in a lack of healthy outlets for

success. Social messages advocating the importance and desirability of success continue however with the result that individuals seek such power by any other means, namely deviant ones, in line with Merton's Strain Theory (1968).

Tannahill (1992) also supports this by arguing that the sexual revolution of the 1960's resulted in complacency towards sex that inspired a desire for difference and ability to shock that encouraged more deviant sexuality. This coupled with desensitization to violence in the general media, and the representation of the individual who commits serial murder as quasi-celebrity in popular sources may have contributed to a cultural milieu that accommodated the serial murder phenomenon.

In this light, Gresswell and Hollin (1994) argue that the initial motivation for serial murder may be superseded by the need to generate and maintain public interest. Ressler *et al.* (1988) found that a proportion of their sample of individuals convicted of serial murder followed their crimes in the media, as a means to increase post-offence excitement.

Mitchell (1997) argues that the large amount of public and media interest surrounding serial murder serves to glorify it, and he believes that these frequently contribute towards copycat murders such as with Jack the Ripper, where newspaper coverage of the crimes is thought to have resulted in similar crimes being committed by another individual. Theories that emphasise the role of the media may explain part of the motivation for serial murder, particularly for individuals who may enjoy the attention. However, such theories still fail to reveal what the initial motivation consists of, or why many more people who are exposed to serial murder in the media and press do not go on to commit such offences.

Leyton (2001) argues that multiple murderers are "very much products of their time", their arrival "dictated by specific stresses and alterations in the human community" (*ibid.*) - "he is in many senses an embodiment of the central themes in his civilization as well as a reflection of that civilization's critical tensions" (p. 258). Leyton (2001) consequently divides

multiple murderers according to periods pre- and post-Industrial Revolution, much like Wilson (2000), in terms of their particular characteristics as well as those of their victims. He argues that the pre-Industrial Revolution multiple (or serial) murderer was an aristocrat who preyed on peasants while during the Industrial Revolution, the multiple (or serial) murderer was a new bourgeois who preyed upon prostitutes, homeless boys and housemaids. In the post-Industrial Revolution era, the murderer is more than likely a faded bourgeois who stalks middle class figures such as university women.

It seems that Leyton (2001) is postulating that individuals reflect the general issues of crisis affecting their class in their offences. One must wonder why multiple murder and not, say, theft would reflect this and Leyton (2001) does not provide answers to these questions. Additionally, despite their development within a post-Industrial Revolution era, many individuals who commit serial murder, such as Peter Sutcliffe in the United Kingdom, selected prostitutes as victims.

Similar to Leyton (2001), Ratner (1996) argues that serial murder represents an ideological leakage, in the sense that serial murder constitutes a rupture in the ideological status quo of society. Operating on the assumption that the early environment of individuals who commit serial murder involves a lack of adequate socialization, Ratner (1996) claims that such individuals lack ideological controls.

At a broader societal level, consequently, serial murder represents a means by which to homeostatically return society to a state in which conservative ideology is more firmly established. This would appear to apply aptly to the South African context, given that serial murder seemed to emerge at a time of great social upheaval and ideological uncertainty. However, this argument would seem to represent serial murder in a light that potentially frames it as a social necessity in times of uncertainty, with the individual who commits serial murder potentially framed as a martyr-like sacrifice for the benefit of society. As a result, this

argument would always border on potentially condoning serial murder, which one would think is not acceptable. Additionally, as with Leyton (2001) above, there is no justification as to why serial murder in particular assumes this social role.

3.3.2 Seltzer's theory of serial murder and wound culture

Seltzer (1998) sees serial murder as an artefact of a public wound culture of “addictive violence” (p. 1) characterized by public fascination with the wound or open body. The serial murderer as one aspect of such a culture forms one of many representations of a crossing point of private desire and public fantasy. For Seltzer (1998) the wound in the twentieth century, has become a fashion accessory, and hence one who inflicts the wound (and thereby displays his own) becomes fashionable especially with respect to the serial murderer who does so on such a grand scale.

Senseless murder, however, additionally represents the area where our basic senses of body and society, identity and desire, violence and intimacy are secured and brought to crisis. Seltzer (1998) believes that sex crime in particular elicits a postmodern fluidity between public and private spaces and identities, and as such, the individual who commits serial murder becomes iconic to the twentieth century and its postmodernism by tapping such a fluidity, specifically with regards to perception and identity. He also argues that as part of the growing culture of information, numerical data, repetition, number counts – the individual who commits serial murder conforms to such a culture by virtue of the seriality of his particular crime.

During the nineteenth century, Seltzer (1998) argues there was a cultural shift in ways of looking at crime and sexuality from the nature of the act, to the character of the actor. It is in the midst and intersection of such a shift, that the serial murder typology was created. He

identifies the following factors as contributing towards the creation of the serial murderer, namely:

- a pathological public sphere characterized by stranger-intimacy,
- an intricate rapport between murder and machine culture (enumeration, statistics, graphomanias, recording) and
- the mass in person as characterizing the form of the person who commits serial murder.

Seltzer's (1998) account may be a bit relativist but is a very competent post-modern, constructivist view of serial murder, which sees it as a phenomenon of the transformed 1800-present cultural milieu as opposed to an entity existing of its own accord.

3.3.3 Cameron and Frazer's social constructionist theory of serial murder

Cameron and Frazer (1987) see serial murder as a result of a number of historical, popular and cultural strands that have woven together to create the phenomenon concerned. The sex murderer of the late 19th and early 20th century was framed in either two ways, namely, either as someone outwardly repulsive or monstrous; or as a Jekyll/Hyde master of dual identity - one socially acceptable, the other deviant. Such an individual grew in the fascination of the public via the increasing attention paid to crime in broadside publications and true crime magazines. The voyeuristic public fascination with crime and the criminal is thought to have been coupled with a Gothic genre that encouraged a fascination with evil and terror as well as sex and death. Individuals such as the Marquis de Sade depicted the sadist as a rebel and martyr, challenging accepted convention and unrecognized by a repressed and ignorant society.

This followed the philosophical trend epitomized by existentialism that saw murder as the ultimate manner in which true essence and freedom could be embraced by one's liberation from the laws of both man and God. The third strand involved the development of a clinical model of the sexual deviant in the newly created disciplines of criminology and psychology as well as more established fields such as medicine.

Within such a model attempts were made to locate the source of the pathology or the pathology itself, which was causally linked to deviant sexual behaviour. Cameron and Frazer (1987) claim that these three strands cemented the sex murderer as a phenomenon of social awareness, public fascination and professional preoccupation, and can be seen to have laid the foundations for ideas surrounding modern day serial murder.

3.3.4 Holmes and DeBurger's socio-cultural interactionist approach to serial murder

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) argue that "violence-associated learning" (p. 43) plays a part in influencing the development of inclinations toward serial murder. The first source of such learning is to be found in a continuous culture of violence coupled with a continually changing relationship of the individual to his environment. With reference to American culture, they believe that the following factors are responsible for an increase and perpetuation of violence, namely – normalizing of interpersonal violence; emphasis on personal comfort; emphasis on thrills; extensive violence; magical thinking; unmotivated hostility and blaming of others; normalizing of impulsiveness; violent role models; anonymity and depersonalisation in overcrowded areas; extensive and accelerating spacious geographic mobility; and emphasis on immediate gratification of needs.

The second source involves patterns of interaction between the individual and their immediate family. Such a theory explains how serial murder is accommodated, promoted or

nurtured by the socio-cultural milieu but seems to depend on family dysfunction to explain how it may manifest itself in the individual.

Leibman (1989) elaborated upon the second source of violence by suggesting five factors that may characterize the dysfunctional family context. These include:

- a childhood marked by cruel and violent patterns;
- rejection by parents;
- rejection by a member of the opposite sex during adulthood;
- confrontation with the law during adulthood; and
- admittance to psychiatric hospitals.

The final factor may be more effect than cause though (as may the other factors). Leibman's (1989) study had a very limited sample however – four case studies – and there will be many cases of serial murder which can be shown to have none of these developmental factors as well as many individuals who have been subjected to similar childhood backgrounds and not committed serial murder.

3.3.5 Jenkins' social constructivist theory of serial murder

Jenkins (1994) has explored the social construction of serial murder and debates the functions that such a construction may serve in contemporary society. He argues that serial murder as a socially constructivist phenomenon emerged at a time in American history, namely the early 1980's, where there was a need to reinforce conservatism and social control after the liberalism and freedom of the 1960's and 1970's.

Jenkins (1994) argues that the serial murderer has been constructed as an individual who exercised no control over aggressive and sexual impulses and demonstrated no respect for criminal law or social convention. He also believes that the serial murderer has

simultaneously been constructed as extremely dangerous, evil and/or mentally disturbed. These two portrayals of the serial murderer, in turn, are thought to construct the serial murder as needing to be contained, thereby prescriptively reflecting the consequences of transgressing conservatism and societal norms and reinforcing agencies of law and order within such a society, such as the FBI, and conservative values. Jenkins (1994) argues that newspapers and the popular media served as vehicles through which such constructions were communicated and further elaborated so that the concept of serial murder developed through the interaction of the ostensible reality of criminal justice and popular culture.

3.3.6 Simpson and the popular representation of serial murder

Simpson (1999) describes serial murderers as immortal and profitable cultural icons that answer a human need to personify free-floating fears aggravated by the indeterminacy of the postmodern world. Adopting a strategy similar to that of Jenkins (1994) above, Simpson (1999) argues that serial murder encodes cultural phobias in terms of its victim selection and characterization. Simultaneously to the revulsion with which he/she is regarded, the individual who commits serial murder is also paradoxically elevated to hero status due to his/her ability to transcend societal norms.

Simpson (1999) supports Jenkins (1994) by arguing that the construction of serial murder serves to maintain the societal status quo and patriarchal dominance by diverting attention away from more pressing “evils” such as social or government policy, that actually affect a wider group of persons. Simpson (1999) analyzes the construction of serial murder in popular fiction and isolates the following dominant themes, namely, the coupling of murderous impulse and creative urge; the serial murderer as superb game player; the serial murderer as masculine hero; and the serial murderer as demonic messenger or punisher. He believes that

there is a significant interaction between constructions of serial murder in fiction and general perceptions of serial murder in the public domain.

3.3.7 Feminist theories of serial murder

Serial murder has invited considerable analysis and commentary from feminist theorists. This may be attributed to the overwhelming majority of male perpetrators and female victims that constitute the American, English and South African profiles of serial murder. As a result, serial murder has come to be viewed as a manner in which patriarchal dominance is reinforced and female subjugation ensured. These theories will now be examined in further detail.

Caputi (1992) views the serial murderer as one of many patriarchal agents responsible for enforcing female submission. Serial murder symbolizes an extreme patriarchal measure required increasingly as a result of the comparative increase in freedom and opportunities for women that threaten the dominant power imbalances. Caputi (1992) argues from a feminist perspective that the origins of violence against women, and consequently most serial murder, lie in systems of gender inequity – “they're actually performing a cultural function in enforcing misogyny in showing that women are prey, etc. and acting out masculinity in totally dominating the feminine” (p. 45). Serial murderers perform a cultural function in terms by disciplining women and reinforcing their subjugation via fear and behavioural inhibition.

Feminist views such as these have been extended by authors such as Cameron and Frazer (1987) in relation to serial murder. They hold that, other than feminist perspectives, all other theories of serial murder fail to address the question of gender directly. Victims of serial murder remain mostly female while the perpetrators of serial murder are increasingly male. Serial murder generally therefore constitutes violence against women with male sexuality

within such an act constructed as aggressive and predatory requiring unlimited access to the female.

The female consequently has to police her own sexuality to guard against potential attacks and sexual murder can consequently be perceived as sex terrorism on the female population. Additionally, sexual murder can be seen as masculine transcendence from the struggle to free oneself from the material constraints dictating human destiny (as discussed above with respect to the influence of existentialism). The subject of such transcendence is masculine however and consequently attempts to transcend one's objective nature that are lauded in the masculine subject are represented as "foolish" or "wicked" in the female subject. Serial murder consequently becomes an additional tool to limit the expression of female sexuality and further oppress the female under patriarchy (Cameron & Frazer, 1987).

3.3.8 Hook's post-structuralist approach to serial murder

Hook (2003) undertook a post-structural deconstruction of psychoanalytic narratives surrounding the life history of Cobus Geldenhuys, the individual labeled as the "Norwood serial murderer". He found that accounts of the life history of Geldenhuys and explanation of his criminal behaviour were influenced largely by popular representations of serial murder informed by popular psychoanalytic theory, reflected in an emphasis on aspects such as a domineering mother and absent father; prohibition on masturbation and early adolescent sexual experimentation or expression which manifested in a phallic fixation; ambivalent feelings towards women; and insufficient super-ego development.

Hook (2003) additionally perceived such accounts as being sensationalistic, sentimental and moralistic in tone and persistently adhered to in the face of alternative explanations and contradictory accounts. Hook (2003) explained such processes as necessary for the

objectification and othering of the individual who commits serial murder. He argues that this othering serves the purpose of distancing the individual who commits serial murder from those who talk of and observe such an individual so as to prevent identification with such a person and his criminal actions.

Hook's (2003) study provides insights into social processes and the social construction of serial murder, and demonstrates that post-structuralist work lends considerable qualitative richness to understandings of serial murder. Also, this work demonstrates the complex interaction of popular culture and psychology, as well as the politics of information and knowledge production.

This would appear to be an important factor to bear in mind when conducting research on serial murder, especially given the seemingly large amount of attention bestowed on this phenomenon in particular by the popular media. However, there seems to be a lack of grounded support for Hook's (2003) claims, and as a result this paper appears to be based on the anecdotal, personal interpretations of the writer. This may be due to Hook's (2003) lack of specialization in the field of serial murder or criminal psychology, and his primary specialization in discursive psychology. Hence, the topic of serial murder serves to increase understandings of popular cultural and socio-cultural constructive processes, as opposed to understandings of serial murder specifically.

Additionally, Hook's (2003) work would appear to bear little use for investigative applications, and does not contribute to a solid etiological explanation from a psychological perspective. Given the methodology utilized, a single case study does not appear problematic for the study in question; however, it is difficult to state whether similar processes may occur with different cases of serial murder. This is made more difficult by the absence of detail regarding Hook's (2003) sources. The detail that is provided would appear to situate such accounts as deriving from "expert" opinion such as that of the criminologist Irma

Labuschagne, and the third year psychology students taught by Hook (2003). This would have to be borne in mind when evaluating the reasons why narratives and interpretations may have been shaped in the way documented, and it may be interesting to conduct similar exercises in different contexts to establish whether the same themes and processes prevail.

3.3.9 Du Plessis' grounded theory approach to serial murder

In line with social constructionist attempts to study South African serial murder, Du Plessis (1998) explored the psychological themes in serial murder via a grounded theory approach as part of his thesis for a Masters degree in psychology from interviewing serial murderers incarcerated in South African prisons. He highlighted the following themes as the most salient: a dependent personality structure with underlying anxiety; presenting as reasonably normal without indications of severe pathology; an incapacity to form meaningful relationships; and a possibility of growing up in a psychologically deprived environment. He also clustered themes with respect to theoretical perspectives.

As a result, Du Plessis (1998) identifies ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic references (psychodynamic); cluster C personality traits (psychopathology); elements such as conditioned conscience and modeling (social learning theory); and evidence of neurological difficulties (neuropsychology). From a systemic perspective, Du Plessis (1998) interprets serial murder as serving a function within the system of the family from which the individual originates: for example, his behaviour may serve as a common problem that holds a family together. He also identifies themes that emerge that are in common with previous work in the literature such as an absent father figure; abused childhood; introversion, shyness and poor peer relations; inability to maintain meaningful relationships; self-centredness; and a

charming personality with an absence of hallucinations. These themes were found across the sample of two individuals interviewed as opposed to consistently in each case.

Du Plessis' (1998) study is useful from a psychological perspective in that, given the extent to which serial murder has been understood as the product of intrinsic motivation (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Labuschagne, 2001; Pistorius, 1996), a research approach such as grounded theory, which aims at ethnographically exploring the world view of the research participant from his/her perspective, seems particularly useful in understanding such the nature of the afore-mentioned motivation. His systemic interpretations are also useful in that the system in which an individual who commits serial murder functions, may be enlarged to apply to a particular society or at the level of culture.

As with Hodsgkiss (2001) and Labuschagne (1998, 2001), the sample size was small (two individuals) and consequently, as mentioned above, generalization is limited. While restricting the extent to which Du Plessis' (1998) study might be useful for investigative purposes, the size of the sample might not pose as significant a challenge to the grounded theory approach as discussed above.

3.3.10 Critique of socio-cultural theories

Theories that focus upon sociogenic factors give a large volume of information on the etiology of serial murder in terms of the social forces and structures which produce such a phenomenon, but are limited in terms of their potential for investigative and rehabilitative application.

From an investigative perspective, socio-cultural theories do not provide any information that could be used pragmatically to guide investigations. Any insights that are provided are at an abstract level, framed in social processes, and are limited in their ability to provide

practical details necessary for serial murder investigation. They seem better suited at developing understandings of serial murder at a phenomenological level.

In terms of rehabilitation, sociogenic theories provide little input at the individual level, in terms of immediate interventions that could be used to help individuals who commit serial murder and prevent or limit future cases of serial murder. Rather they illuminate flaws in the broader social structure, which would require a longer spate of time in which any effects of modification in the character of social fabric could be monitored, assessed, or observed.

Finally, as has been mentioned in discussion of socio-cultural theories, as much as they explain and describe the roots of deviance and criminality in society with convincing argument, they do not appear to explain why certain types of crime or deviance occur. Even with reference to those that have attempted to focus specifically on serial murder, their argument may apply equally as well to other types of crime prolific in the twentieth century.

3.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study has chosen to work from a systemic theoretical paradigm, focusing specifically on family systems theory in order to investigate serial murder. The systemic framework facilitates a focus on relationships and process as opposed to the content and individualistic focus of more intrapsychic approaches. Additionally, systemic theory provides an alternative to established linear ways of conceptualizing pathology by proposing a more circular approach to causality, and avoiding blaming or pathologizing individuals for symptomatic or problem behaviour (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). As a result, problems are viewed as interactional and situational, and as having a particular function within a system. In the case of serial murder, such an approach is useful, specifically in relation to

family systems, as it has not always been productive to blame specific family members (such as parents) for the occurrence of serial murder behaviour in another member.

An approach that focuses on relationships also taps an important aspect of serial murder, namely the relationship between perpetrator and victim which has frequently been fundamental in discerning serial murder from other types of crimes, mainly due to the fact that these two individuals are frequently strangers (i.e. the victim is not known to the perpetrator). Consequently, this would seem to point to the fact that it is the relationship between the two individuals rather than individualistic, personality factors that influence the manifestation of serial murder. An approach that focuses on this aspect, such as systemic theory, may yield productive findings as a result.

Importantly, the systemic view does not discount approaches that have a more intrapsychic, individual focus; rather it views such approaches as alternative ways of viewing phenomena. As a result it is possible to study serial murder from a systemic perspective and yet still integrate traditional literature into one's final understanding of the phenomenon. Given the lack of success that traditional approaches appear to have had in fully comprehending serial murder and the individuals who commit serial murder, an alternative approach that focuses more on process and patterns and family systems may yield information that could be used effectively either on its own or combined with existing data.

The systemic perspective's reluctance to engage in blaming and pathologizing of behaviour means that it may offer a novel approach to understanding criminal behaviour and challenging perceptions regarding the individuals who engage in such behaviour. It may free up such individuals as well as their families to be viewed as consisting of more than the criminal behaviour concerned in terms of public perceptions and opportunities for constructive work with such groups and individuals. This is not to say that the behaviour

should be condoned, but rather that individuals associated with such behaviour need to be viewed in their own right.

Consequently, the systemic theoretical perspective appears to provide an opportunity for a novel approach to studying serial murder and thus possess considerable potential for producing findings that may extend and elaborate understandings of such a phenomenon. In the following chapter, such an approach will be elaborated upon with regards to how it will be used to inform the current study.