

A FAMILY SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF SERIAL MURDER

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OPSOMMING

Die navorsing het op die fenomeen van reeksmoorde vanuit 'n sisteemteoretiese perspektief gefokus. Die doel was om gesinsistemiese insig te verkry met betrekking tot reeksmoorde in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Deur gebruik te maak van 'n gesinsistemiese teoretiese raamwerk en die genogram-metode, is gegewens van gesinsisteme van individue wat reeksmoorde gepleeg het, ingesamel, kwalitatief ontleed en deur middel van 'n tematiese inhoudsanalise ondersoek. Die ondersoek het hoofsaaklik emosionele prosesse, multi-generasionele en verhoudingspatrone van gesinsisteme beklemtoon.

Inligting is uit verskeie bronne versamel. Onderhoude is onder andere gevoer met individue wat tans vonnisse uitdien vir reeksmoorde, sowel as met hul gesinslede, asook met professionele persone wat by hierdie persone betrokke was. Inligting is ook uit kliniese observasies en argiefdata verkry. Die resultate van die inhoudsanalise demonstreer aansienlike ooreenkomste, maar dui ook op verskille in die organisering en funksionering van gesinsisteme van individue wat reeksmoorde gepleeg het. Teoretiese insig is ook verkry aangaande die rol van reeksmoorde in gesinsisteme en wat die tans heersende teoretiese perspektiewe met die klem op die enkel individu en linieêre oorsaaklikheid uitdaag.

Hierdie studie bied die geleentheid vir verdere sisteemteoretiese navorsing, veral om die moontlikheid van die betekenis van reeksmoorde in relatief kleiner (bv. ouer-kind of portuurgroepsverhoudings) of groter kontekse (die politieke, kulturele en sosiale sisteme) te ondersoek. Verder bied dit ook geleentheid vir 'n alternatiewe kyk na die fenomeen van

reeksmoord in terme van teoretiese, definiërende, tipologiese, ondersoekende en korrektiewe benaderings.

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to explore the phenomenon of serial murder from a systems theory perspective. The purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of serial murder in a South African context from a family systems approach. Utilizing a family systems theoretical framework and the genogram method, the study, which was qualitative in nature, explored information about the family systems of individuals who committed serial murder via content analysis. The investigation focused mainly on emotional processes, multigenerational and relationship patterns in family systems.

Information was gathered from numerous sources and included interviews conducted *inter alia* with individuals currently incarcerated for serial murder and their family members, and with professionals involved with such individuals; as well as information obtained from clinical observations and archival data. The results of the content analysis demonstrated considerable similarities but also differences in the organization and functioning of the family systems of individuals who committed serial murder. Importantly, the analysis shed novel theoretical light on the role of serial murder within family systems and challenged established dominant theoretical perspectives on serial murder that have emphasized linear, causal and/or individual-focused explanations.

The study opened up considerable opportunities for further exploration of the phenomenon from a systemic perspective, specifically with the focus on the meaning of serial murder in

relatively smaller (e.g., parent-child or peer relationships) or larger (e.g., political, cultural and societal) systems. It also provided opportunities for alternative vistas from which the phenomenon of serial murder can be viewed in terms of theoretical, definitional, typological, investigative and correctional approaches.

10 KEY PHRASES: serial murder; family system; multigenerational patterns; emotional cut-offs; triads; genogram; case study; nuclear family system; violent crime; relationship patterns

AFFIDAVIT

I declare that **A Family Systems Analysis of Serial Murder** is my own work and that all references have been fully acknowledged in the text and the bibliography.

Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at in this research are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, South African Police Service or Department of Correctional Services.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Crime and criminal behaviour have been studied and analysed since before the end of the nineteenth century (Stephenson, 1992). Disciplines as diverse as sociology, psychology, criminology, penology, medicine, psychiatry and philosophy have all studied crime, often focusing on the individuals who commit crime as well as criminal behaviour. A crime that has attracted some scientific and much popular attention for the greater part of the twentieth century is serial murder (Hickey, 2006).

Research in the field of crime and criminal behaviour has focused on its causes, prevalence, nature and impact, with the aims of enriching our understanding of crime and criminal behaviour; developing methods of preventing crime; apprehending individuals who commit such acts; assisting victims; as well as conceptualizing ways of punishing, managing or “treating” convicted individuals. As man’s way of understanding himself and his surroundings has changed with the particular *Zeitgeists* of the last centuries, so has man’s method of conducting social research. From a positivist view, man has expanded his research approach to include post-modern ways of conducting research, including systemic and social constructionist paradigms.

This research study has chosen to tap the above two areas, namely serial murder and post-modern research approaches, by exploring the phenomenon of serial murder from a systemic perspective, specifically with regards to the role played by serial murder in the family systems of individuals who commit such crimes. This chapter will briefly discuss serial murder as an international and local phenomenon and outline the motivation and purpose, as well as focus of the study.

1.1 SERIAL MURDER AS PHENOMENON

One of the academic issues regarding research on serial murder is the difficulty to determine a precise definition of the concept serial murder. The reason is probably that definitions differ with regard to various disciplines' views (e.g., criminology and psychology - these similarities and differences will be discussed in chapter two), despite overlapping to various degrees regarding their descriptions of serial murder. For the purpose of this study, a generic definition was developed, namely: multiple murders committed over a period of time by one or more individuals.

Serial murder constitutes a very specific category of criminal behaviour. After emerging and increasing rapidly in prevalence in the United States of America (USA) during the 1960s and 1970s, figures for serial murder prevalence in the USA show that 50% of the known cases of serial murder in the USA occurred during the time period 1975-2004 (Hickey, 2006). Gorby (2000) found the same pattern for most non-European countries in comparison to European countries that show a slight decrease from 1975-1995, after peaking in the period before this (1950-1974). Consequently, it would appear that serial murder, as a type of criminal behaviour, has been noticed and attended to largely during the last and current century.

South Africa has a particularly high crime rate, specifically in terms of violent crime. Between 1994 and 2004, South Africa's national rate of murder was 57.7 per 100 000 (http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2004/_pdf/crimes/Murder.pdf), while that of rape was 120.6 per 100 000 (http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2004/_pdf/crimes/Rape.pdf). Despite the fact that the above figures show a decrease in both murder (by 8.8%) and rape (by 2.8%)

over the last two years, South Africa's crime statistics are still comparatively high in relation to the rest of the world. For example, the USA recorded 7.1 homicides per 100 000 people for 2001 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm>), in comparison to South Africa's rate of 47.8 per 100 000 for the same year (http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2004/_pdf/crimes/Murder.pdf).

South Africa shows a similar pattern to the USA in terms of the proportion of murders accounted for by serial murder (namely, less than 1.0%, with 55 recorded cases of serial murder between 1994 and 2004). The obvious question to be posed is: why is there a crime such as serial murder; a crime that includes several victims, where it seems as if usually one person shows a repetitive pattern of killing people? Hickey (2001) has attempted to explain the USA data in relation to the proliferation of violence in the media; sado-masochistic and violent pornography; and the patriarchal societal system. In terms of the South African situation, Labuschagne (2001) and Gorby (2000) have argued that the less extensive infrastructure; less robust economy; and rapid urbanization and crowding that characterize developing societies may make them more vulnerable to serial murder. Given the large number of unanswered questions that remain concerning serial murder, it is evident that further research into this phenomenon is required.

1.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR THE STUDY

1.2.1 Interaction of popular and academic sources

Despite the general increase in serial murder cases over time in the USA during the latter part of the last century, this type of criminal behaviour accounts for less than one percent of the total homicide rate for the USA in any given year (Meloy, 2000). However, this

phenomenon attracts a large amount of attention and fascination from the general population. Public fascination with serial murder overseas/internationally has been reflected in, and sustained by, many fictional books and films on serial murder. Examples of these are the books of Thomas Harris, namely *Red Dragon* (1987), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *Hannibal* (1999), as well as films such as *Copycat* (1995), *Se7en* (1995) and *Kiss the Girls* (1997). Hickey (2006) states that during the 1990s there were 150 films upwards with the theme of serial murder.

It would seem that serial murder has featured frequently in the popular media and that a large proportion of knowledge production and information dissemination on serial murder has taken place via this channel and possibly influenced academic or scientific exploration of the phenomenon. In South Africa, this popular media attention to serial murder has been in the form of newspapers, television programmes, non-fiction crime literature and fictional works.

With regards to newspaper sources, references and articles dealing with serial murder can be found across South African newspaper types. The following are examples of serial murder references in the press: Rapport (31 January, 1999) ran an article titled “Spanwerk los reeksmoord op” (team work solves serial murder); the Weekly Mail and Guardian (9 September, 1994) featured an article titled “Station Strangler – Who’s Fooling Whom”; City Press (7 December, 1997) featured an article titled “ ‘Electrician’ may be next serial killer”; Beeld (14 August, 1995) featured an article titled “Reeksmoordenaars nie ‘dieselfde mens’ ” (Serial murderers not the same person); and The Star (21 August, 1997) featured an article titled “18 murders linked in hunt for serial killer”. These form part of a considerably larger sample of articles on serial murder that have featured across newspapers in the past two decades.

Television programmes featuring serial murder have occurred on local series such as *Carte Blanche*, *Third Degree* as well as in the form of documentaries such as *Criminal Minds* (2003) and *Psycho Factory* (2004). *Carte Blanche* has aired episodes on Micki Pistorius, previous head of the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Services, on serial murder cases in South Africa, as well as episodes on forensic entomologist Mervyn Mansell and the serial murder case of Samuel Sidyno, the Capital Park serial murderer (“Crawling with evidence”, April, 13, 2003). The local actuality programme on e-tv, *Third Degree*, has also featured an episode on serial murder in South Africa (“Copy Cat Killers”, March 13, 2001).

Examples of popular non-fiction crime literature in South Africa include the works of Micki Pistorius, namely *Catch Me a Killer* (2000), *Strangers on the Street* (2002) and *Fatal Females* (2004). Local fictional works featuring serial murder include Deon Meyer’s *Dead Before Dying* (1999) and Amanda Patterson’s *I See the Moon* (2003).

In addition to popular sources of serial murder information, there are scientific or academic sources of information; but these seem to influence perceptions of the phenomenon to a lesser degree. International academic research has been conducted by David Canter, Kim Rossmo, Harold Smith, Al Carlisle, Steve Egger, Eric Hickey, Ronald Holmes and James DeBurger and Philip Jenkins, as well as John Douglas, Robert Ressler, and Robert Keppel; locally academic studies also exist and have been conducted largely as part of post-graduate studies by individuals such as Micki Pistorius, Gerard Labuschagne, Cobus Du Plessis, Jackie De Wet, Brin Hodgskiss, and Derek Hook.

The interaction between academic and popular sources of information on serial murder, both locally and internationally have led to certain problems. As described by Hook (2003), there seems to be a tension in the processes of knowledge production on the topic of serial murder, between “biases of popular opinion” (p. 6) as reflected in and by the popular media,

and scientific or academic fact. This would appear to be further complicated by the apparent frequency with which academics and professionals in South Africa feature in the popular realm on the subject of serial murder and make knowledge claims about the topic with limited experience or reference to sources of empirical support. For example, Robert Ressler, an ex-member of the FBI Behavioural Science Unit, chose the *Beeld* (17 July, 1995) to make his claim that the end of Apartheid ushered in a new era for serial murder in South Africa due to the lifting of tight police controls and the exposure of consequences relating to brutal, unfair and unjust practices of the 70's and 80's. His statements in this article featured no details about supporting arguments or evidence upon which such claims were based. Often these academics and professionals make opinions in the popular media without ever having consulted the investigator or seen the case file materials (Labuschagne, personal communication, 2006).

In the same vein, Pistorius (1996) attributed serial murder in South Africa to poverty, crime, violence and the disbanding of families in the press, despite her academic work that places emphasis on intrapsychic factors in the etiology of serial murder. Dr Mark Welman, previously of Rhodes University (*City Press*, 11 January, 1998), Dr Rika Snyman, a Unisa criminology researcher (*Independent Newspapers*, 1997), and Dr Irma Labuschagne, a criminologist (*Maxim*, August 2000) are individuals who have also been featured in newspaper articles on the topic of serial murder, in the context of more popular rather than scientific understandings of serial murder.

As a result, it would seem that some of the confusion surrounding understandings of serial murder, both locally and internationally, may be attributed to the blurring of popular and professional contexts, with professionals frequently failing to support their arguments or make claims in the way expected of them in the scientific community when they feature in the popular media. This may also be as a result of the manner in which the popular media

reports on the statements and arguments of the afore-mentioned professionals, as well as general lack of clarity on aspects such as definitions and psychological/investigative tensions. Thus the two systems of academia and popular media become interlinked often with problematic consequences for their “creations”.

In the absence of frequent productivity in the research and academic field with regards to serial murder, there is little evidence or support with which to challenge popular misperceptions, especially when voiced by “experts”, or to stem the sensationalism with which this topic may be covered. Hence, it would seem that an encouragement of valid and reliable productivity in this area is advantageous.

1.2.2 Limited available research on serial murder in South Africa

Despite a period of awakened interest in serial murder as a research topic in South Africa in the mid-nineties running through to the early part of the year 2000, there has been a tapering off of formal research into the area (possibly due to less media focus on serial murder that has also taken place during this period). Serial murder as a type of crime continues to sustain itself in South Africa, however, and, in the absence of a large volume of available local research, much still has to be done to understand South African serial murder, especially in light of its significant difference from international serial murder in areas such as offence, offender and victim characteristics (Hodgskiss, 2003). Consequently, this study’s exploration of South African understandings of serial murder would be useful in developing the existing pool of South African research on the topic of serial murder, and making novel contributions from a systemic perspective.

1.2.3 The novelty of the systemic perspective

Many approaches have been made to understand serial murder by theoretical contributions on the causes of serial murder (Jenkins, 1994; Meloy, 1988; Norris, 1988); geographical profiling techniques (Canter, 1994, 2000; Rossmo, 1995, 1997); and typologies (Holmes, 1990; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler, 1985; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1988). These will be discussed in further detail in chapter three. However, none of the above has attempted to understand serial murder from a systemic perspective, specifically with respect to the family system of each individual. Some theories on serial murder (Keeney & Heide, 2000; Ressler et al., 1988; Sears, 1991) have made reference to “dysfunctional” families in this context.

The dysfunctional family type has served as a means of attributing responsibility for the serial murder behaviour to experiences of abuse (sexual, physical or emotional) in the family settings of the individuals concerned. However, no prior study has attempted to directly interview members of the families of individuals who commit serial murder to elicit their interpretation of this behaviour; to understand the individual who committed serial murder as he sees himself in relation to his family; and to see the role of serial murder within such a system.

Family plays a big part in most of South Africa’s diverse cultures. Across the majority of cultures that make up South Africa’s ethnic demographic, the family system is an important source of support (financial, emotional or practical) for individual members. In terms of the form of South African families, the 1996 South African census demonstrated that the nuclear family is the most prominent household type (23, 89%) across all ethnic categories (Ziehl, 2001), with groups who traditionally displayed a more extended family form moving

increasingly towards the nuclear family form with greater urbanization and employment or financial opportunities (Amoateng, 1997; Moller, 1998).

Locally and internationally, the researcher is aware of no research that focuses on the family systems of individuals who commit serial murder, or which has interviewed family members of such individuals. The novel approach afforded by a family systems theory to serial murder would resist interpreting the phenomenon within the framework of linear causality, and as such, would provide unique input points at which change could be initiated at a systemic level to bring about changes in the behaviour of individuals who commit serial murder. In the literature, rehabilitation is frequently negated as an option for individuals who commit serial murder (Pistorius, 1996; Ressler, 1997). However, this has largely been based on linear notions of causality. Family systems' approaches, with their emphasis on "circular causality" (Bateson, 1979), would be of particular use to those groups and individuals who could play a role in effecting change in individuals who commit serial murder such as prison warders, psychologists, as well as family members.

Additionally, an individual can be recognized as a system within such a theoretical paradigm (Guttman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) in the absence of other members of the family system of which he/she is a member. Although a social systems approach addresses family or groups of people, the individual in and part of the system is still recognized as a system: in itself as well as part of a specific group or family. This aspect will be discussed again in Chapter 4.

1.2.4 Applications to correctional and investigative systems

Locally and internationally, there is little research that has been conducted with actual offenders. Consequently, a research study that could add to the limited pool of research that

has managed to interview offenders directly would be advantageous, specifically with regards to understanding criminal behaviour.

This study of serial murder from the family perspective in South Africa may also assist with police investigations and the use of techniques such as offender profiling. By attending to the particular way in which serial murder exists in the South African context, police work can benefit from greater accuracy and consequently efficiency in the apprehension of individuals who commit serial murder in this country.

An exploration of a South African understanding of serial murder from a family perspective could reflect the degree to which the application of overseas theories to the above areas is applicable or not. The family systems approach to understanding serial murder adopted in this study might also illuminate certain patterns in family systems that increase the probability of serial murder occurring within a family system, and allow for proactive, preventative interventions based thereon, or even assist investigators by providing patterns of family behaviours they can look for in families of potential suspects in a serial murder investigation.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the above discussion on the motivations for the current study, the purpose of this study is to:

- investigate serial murder from a systemic point of view with the aim of increasing local understandings of serial murder.

1.4 RESEARCH FOCUS AND DESIGN

In order to achieve the above ends, the following question is proposed as focus of the study:

- “How does the family system of a person who commits serial murder function?”

That is, what is the family structure, who are the people in the family system and how do they maintain the family system.

1.4.1 Research design

The research design will be exploratory and qualitative in nature, adopting a case study method to thoroughly investigate specific examples of individuals who have committed serial murder in South Africa and their particular family systems. Data will be analysed by means of a content analysis in line with the theoretical framework of family systems theory and interpreted with reference to the research focus above. It is hoped that this study will yield novel and useful findings about serial murder in South Africa, as well as the utility of the family systems approach in understanding such phenomena.

1.5 A NOTE ON THE PATHOLOGICAL MODEL

The so-called pathological model is not addressed in this study and seems to be overlooked. Models based solely on individual psychopathology (i.e. those focusing on intrapsychic factors or internal pathologies of an individual) seem to be a preferred way of

trying to understand crime in general. Many studies have already attempted to explore crime as well as serial murder specifically in a similar manner (see Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Pinto & Wilson, 1990). However, for this study, pathology is defined from a systemic theoretical point of view, as explained by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967). To these authors, it is essential to take into account interpsychic factors that play an important role towards the understanding of human behaviour. This needs to be applied in research; therefore the theoretical aim of this thesis is to study serial murder from an interpersonal, systemic perspective.

1.6 RESEARCH OUTLINE

The introductory part of the thesis will be followed by a discussion of the literature on serial murder; a review of the body of theoretical work on serial murder; as well as theories of family systems. The methodology chapter will discuss the research design and epistemology that will guide the study, as well as the research method, data collection techniques, sampling strategies and methods of analysis. This will be followed by the results for the cases used; a discussion of the results; and finally, a conclusion that will include an assessment of the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for possible future studies.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly outlined the topic of the current study, namely serial murder in South Africa. The motivation and focus for the current study has also been provided, together with an outline of the proposed study procedure and thesis outlay.

To summarise, this study will attempt to investigate the topic of serial murder in South Africa from the perspective of family systems theory. It is hoped that this study will thereby develop an understanding of serial murder from a systemic perspective that may contribute a novel perspective on the subject and hopefully allow for better management of individuals who commit serial murder, and the prevalence of this type of criminal behaviour in larger society.

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

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

2.1 DEFINING SERIAL MURDER

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

2.1.1 Mass and spree murder

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

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

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

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

2.1.2 Serial murder

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- These victims are usually strangers.
- The murders take place at different times.
- The murders are not necessarily committed at the same location
- There is usually a cooling-off period between murders.
- The motive for serial murder is intrinsic and consists of an irresistible compulsion, fuelled by fantasy that may lead to torture and/or sexual abuse, mutilation and necrophilia.

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

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

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

- a person who is motivated to kill,

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.3 Differences and similarities of definitions

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

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

- **Quantity of murders.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Motive.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Sexuality and lust murder.**

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

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

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

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

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

- **Number of perpetrators.**

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

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

- **Gender.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Victim/offender relationship.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.4 Concluding remarks on definitions

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

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

The choice of the term “serial” is of interest in that it reflected a need to create a distinct crime category as opposed to viewing a number of linked murders as a result of a compulsion or addiction on the part of the individual/s concerned, which would have been more in line with a psychological or medical model as opposed to a legal-investigative model. Consequently, when psychological concepts such as “emotional cooling off period” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000), “motives...that originate within the individual” (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988) and statements such as “motive is intrinsic; an irresistible compulsion, fuelled by

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.5 Definition of serial murder for the purposes of this study

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SERIAL MURDER

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

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

2.2.1 History of serial murder: international

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2.2 History of serial murder: South Africa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 2.1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Muti murder**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 WAYS OF CATEGORIZING SERIAL MURDER

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

2.3.1 Topological classification schemes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 2.2 (Adapted from Ressler & Schachtman, 1992)

Disorganised/Organised Typology

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

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

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

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

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

- **The visionary type.**

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

- **The missionary type.**

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

- **The hedonist type.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 2.3

Holmes and DeBurger Typology of Serial Murder

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

(Adapted from Holmes & DeBurger, 1988)

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

Leibman (1989) differentiates between ego-syntonic, ego-dystonic and psychotic serial murderers. Within this classification, the ego-syntonic type sees the act of murder as congruous with his/her beliefs and consequently does not experience conflict with his ego functioning or negotiation of reality. The ego-dystonic type experiences considerable conflict with regards to his/her actions of murder, which is not congruous with his/her beliefs. Consequently he/she will disassociate him/herself with the murder on a conscious level. Finally, the psychotic type is thought to murder due to a mental illness or symptoms such as hallucinations. As a result, the actions of such a type are not perceived to be based in reality.

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

Such a classification scheme may work towards enriching psychological understandings of individuals who commit murder/serial murder, and possibly methods for rehabilitation in terms of psychodynamic psychotherapy, but is not *prima facie* useful in terms of crime scene interpretation for investigative purposes. Additionally, the use of the term ego-dystonic/syntonic to refer to individuals is problematic - it would probably be more useful to refer to their relationship with the act of killing/murder as either ego-dystonic/syntonic. Finally, the literature indicates that psychosis is rarely found in individuals who commit serial murder (Meloy, 2000).

2.3.2 Geographical classification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.3 Concluding remarks on classification schemes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 & Wishaw, 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 interpsychic 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 Shachtman (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 Hodgkiss (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.

4. FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Discussion will now turn to the concept of the family. Firstly, the author will examine definitions of the family, as they have appeared in dictionaries, contemporary sources and the South African literature. The author will then discuss family systems theory and elaborate upon the aspects of this theoretical approach that will be utilized to interpret the data in the current study. Finally, the author will provide a summarized version of the definitions and theoretical perspectives that will be used to inform the present study.

4.1 DEFINITION OF “THE FAMILY”

Arriving at a solid and universally applicable definition of the family is the subject of much debate, given the proliferation of family structures that have emerged in the greater part of the last century (Bell & Vogel, 1968). The author consulted three dictionary sources for definitions of the family and will now discuss these in further detail.

4.1.1 Dictionary definitions

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2005), *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2004) and the *Penguin Concise English Dictionary* (1992) were consulted for definitions of the family. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2005) defines family in three possible ways, namely, as

- “the collective body of persons who live in one house, and under one head or manager; a household, including parents, children, and servants, and, as the case may be, lodgers or boarders” (p. 541),

- “the group comprising a husband and wife and their dependent children, constituting a fundamental unit in the organization of society” (p. 541), and
- “those who descend from one common progenitor” (p. 541).

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2004) defines the family as:

- “members of a household, parents, children, servants, etc” (p. 436),
- “set of parents and children, or of relations, living together or not” (p. 436), and
- “all descendants of common ancestor, house or lineage” (p. 436).

The *Penguin Concise English Dictionary* (1992) defines the family as:

- “a household, including dependants and servants” (p. 278)
- “a group of parents and children” (p. 278), and
- “a group of persons interrelated by blood and marriage” (p. 278).

The three dictionary sources of definitions of the family, when examined together, all appear to have three common types of definitions for the family. Additionally, all three sources appear to argue strongly towards a conception of the family that is very similar to notions of the nuclear family (discussed below).

On examining the types of definitions in each source, the following three types of definitions would appear to emerge across the sources. The first type seems to focus on the family as a household; the second type appears to define a family more in terms of the roles that this group is expected to play in society such as “organizational” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, 2005) and in terms of fixed roles of parents and children; and the third type seems to focus on blood lineage, or ancestry as definitional criteria for a family.

These types will now be discussed in terms of their suitability to contemporary notions of family, as well as to the present study.

- **Family as household.**

The first type of definition makes allowance for servants, lodgers and boarders, in addition to traditional family members such as father, mother and children. This is useful in that frequently a person's psychological conception of family may not refer member-for-member to one's biological family, in that many of the above non-biological household members may play integral parts in helping the biological family function as an organizational unit in society, as stipulated by the second definition. Additionally, if one looks at the roles within a family such as father or mother, individuals who are not necessarily the biological parents of the individuals concerned may perform these.

However, as will be demonstrated below, the first type seems to be referring more to a household than a family. It is important to distinguish a household which refers to a spatial category where a group of people, or one person, is bound to a particular place from a family which entails blood and marriage ties (Muncie & Sapsford, 1995). These two terms cannot be used interchangeably because a family may form part of a household, but that household may not be exclusive to that family. For example, a family may rent a room to a lodger, or a member of the extended family may come and stay for a while.

A single family may also be spread over two households. For example, a husband may leave a family temporarily to go and work elsewhere, in which case he would reside at another household for a while. The first type would appear to be more suited to censuses and household surveys, where the household is the primary focus for data collection (Nam, 2004).

- **The family in terms of the function or role of its members.**

The second type introduces an important facet of the family, namely that the family performs certain functions in society, however, these functions may not be exclusively limited to the organization of society, as stated in the definition. The family may also provide emotional

support for its members, or act as a refuge from the pressures of society (Muncie & Sapsford, 1995). This definition also seems to be too narrow as it excludes extended family members such as grandparents and aunts or uncles.

The definition seems to be referring to what has come to signify the “nuclear family”. The term nuclear family is laden with a number of normative assumptions, and has been mostly used to refer to a family type that consists of a married man and woman and their offspring (Murdock, 1968). This is distinguished from an extended family, which refers to two nuclear families affiliated through the extension of a parent-child relationship rather than that of husband-wife (Murdock, 1968). Unfortunately, studies that have limited their study of the family to the nuclear family have often missed out on the considerable impact that extended generations frequently have on the phenomenon of interest (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

- **Family as ancestry or blood lineage.**

The third type of definition would appear to define membership of a family in terms of common genetic links. This is also a bit exclusive in the sense that it would omit cases where families consist of adopted members or fostered members, as well as cases where individuals have remarried and formed a new family unit with their children from the previous marriages.

4.1.2 Summary of dictionary definitions

It would seem that the above definitions, on their own, are unsuitable as criteria for what constitutes as a family, especially with the emergence of alternative family types such as single parenting, same sex parenting, cohabitation, fostering and extended family and kin networks (Murdock, 1968).

However, the three types above are of use in the sense that they do capture a number of common themes in general understandings of “family”, such as genetic or blood links, a common household and nuclear formation (father, mother and children). For this reason, the gestalt of the three definitions can be utilized with flexibility and awareness of the variations that may occur on this theme (such as those outlined above), as well as variations occurring on each definitional strand (such as a family with members living in two households). In other words, if used together with contemporary theoretical information concerning recent developments and alterations to notions of family, the gestalt of the three types can be of use in the present study, especially due to the fact that many of the individuals in the study sample grew up at a time when alternative family types were not recognized as prolifically in society.

Contemporary views and definitions of the family will now be examined, after a brief cautionary note about the temporal development of “the family”. Studies that focus upon the family have to also be aware that this grouping may change over time. For example, a family member may pass away, members may remarry or new members may be added via adoption or pregnancy. For this reason, definitions of family should allow for changes over time and be aware of their impact upon family organization (e.g. AIDS households headed by a child “parent”).

4.1.3 Contemporary view and definitions of the family

More contemporarily, that is, with the advent and progression of the twentieth century, the traditional family structure has undergone a number of changes. Some of these changes have been outlined by Ravanera and Rajulton (2000) and include the following:

- an increase in cohabitation with children;
- an increase in the amount of children that leave their home later;

- a change in the household division of labour, with females facing; responsibility as breadwinner and executor of household duties;
- changing family values which have seen cohabitation and divorce becoming more socially acceptable; as well as
- a reduction in the emphasis placed on marriage and an increase in preference for egalitarian spousal relationships and parent-child relationships.

Such changes have necessitated a re-examination and revision of traditional ways of defining the family.

The emergence of post-modernism has also influenced contemporary understanding and definition of the family (Hossfeld, 1991). With its emphasis on multiplicity and pluralism, as well as post-traditionalism, the concept of the family has been made more flexible with regard to the ways in which such a unit is understood and defined (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). Contemporary definitions of the family are more interpretative and tend to refrain from viewing the family as an objectively knowable entity, but rather view it as a complex, contingent lived reality between members (Bernardes, 1997; Morgan, 1996).

Some examples of contemporary definitions of the family include:

- the family as a discursive construction with relationships constituted and maintained through routine dialogue and communication (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990);
- the family as an interactional process as opposed to a structure or set of social ties (Morgan, 1996, 1999); and
- the family as a system of negotiated intimacies (Gillies, 2003).

Family types have also been defined in terms of individualism and collectivism (Corder, 2001). Collectivism refers to a position encompassing co-operation and central planning, as well as a commitment to the values, norms or mores of a system or society (Hofstede, 1994).

Collectivist families are those families in which there is an emphasis on co-operation, resources are pooled, and social commitments (such as attendance at weddings and other family ceremonies) are of great importance (Corder, 2001). In these families, for example, members of the family who are employed would support unemployed members.

Individualism refers to a position encompassing independent thought and action, as well as the predominance of the rights of the individual within the social system. Individualistic families may consequently be understood as those families where loyalty to the family is secondary to the advancement of the individual members (Corder, 2001).

In collectivist families, Corder (2001) has argued that children will be influenced more greatly by others and their actions judged in a social environment where transgression signifies humiliation. In individualistic families, he argues that the independence of children is encouraged and transgression results in guilt. Consequently, persons growing up in these two types of families may develop different attitudes both towards their society and social setting as well as the systems of which they are members. Importantly, families may not fall into either extreme completely, but may position themselves at points along an individualistic/collectivist continuum (Corder, 2001).

4.1.4 Summary of contemporary definitions of the family

Such definitions are both advantageous and disadvantageous. In terms of their advantages, contemporary definitions allow for greater flexibility in terms of membership of the family unit. By avoiding references to household, conjugal relationships, or blood ties, these definitions avoid many of the problems discussed above with respect to the dictionary definitions, by not excluding many alternative family types that have emerged with the post-modern age.

Additionally, these contemporary definitions allow for the psychological perception and interpretation of an individual to play a greater role in defining the family unit of which he is a member. In other words, rather than a top-down prescription which states that the individual's family must consist of his biological parents and siblings or household, regardless of whether the individual himself felt any familial ties to these people, these definitions allow the individual to define his family for himself. This is of particular usefulness in South Africa, where many individuals are raised by individuals other than their biological kin, or distantly related family members, or where households have lost both parents to AIDS and the eldest child takes on the role of head of the household.

However, these definitions are still very broad and do not seem to illuminate clearly enough how (or whether) a family is different from other types of social groupings such as a workplace or sports-team, for example. Minuchin (1974) seems to accept this fact: "the theory of family therapy is predicated on the fact that man is not an isolate. He is an acting and reacting member of social groups" (p.2). Intuitively, it would seem that the family as a social grouping is different to the workplace, however these definitions do not go far enough in drawing distinctions between the different kinds of groups.

Finally, the South African literature was reviewed with respect to current definitions of the family in South Africa. The following definition was obtained from the South African Government's Department of Social Development and will be used to inform the present study (discussed further below).

4.1.5 A South African definition of the family

The South African Government's Department of Social Development (2003) defines the family in the following manner in its *Baseline Document for the Development of a National Policy for Families*:

- “as extended, multi-generational, nuclear or consisting of one or more parents and children, and single parent with children, recombined families with step-parents and step-children, or gay families” (p.24);
- “social units governed by family rules” (p.24);
- “individuals who either by contract and/or agreement, by descent and/or adoption, have psychological/emotional ties with each other and function as a unit within a social and/or economic system, not necessarily living together intimately” (p.24).

The first part of this definition seems to be more about family types, than providing a definition that can be applied to a group to thereby identify such a group as a family. In this way, it excludes family types such as unmarried, cohabiting individuals or families with adopted children. It is advantageous in that it includes many modern, alternative family types such as gay families, but doesn't specify that marriage is necessary.

The second part of the definition makes more progress in terms of providing a more practical, applicable definition. However, it is too broad and could refer to an organised crime syndicate, for example, where none of the members of this group are related to each other in the more traditional sense of family. Additionally, little further information is provided with regard to what constitutes the “family rule”.

The third part of the definition appears to be the most useful in terms of capturing what the family signifies and being applicable in terms of identifying such groups in wider society. This definition captures the psychological aspect and subjective perception of family (as

discussed above) by including psychological and emotional ties, as well as allowing the notion of family to extend beyond the household, by including members who may live elsewhere but who are still psychologically or emotionally linked to the family group. The definition also refrains from excluding any alternative family types, by acknowledging that families may emerge as a result of factors other than blood lineage or common genetic material (such as legal unions, or adoption).

A number of definitions for the family have been discussed above, largely with respect to dictionary and contemporary definitions of the family. The author's will now propose a definition of the family that will inform the present study.

4.1.6 Conceptualisation of the family for this study

Given the different ways of understanding the family outlined above, the study will attempt to use a combination of the two main approaches, namely, contemporary and more modern notions. While this study chooses will focus primarily on the immediate blood relatives of the individual concerned, specifically those with whom he has grown up, and secondarily on the extended family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, or significant others who may have performed roles usually associated with nuclear or extended family members, it will also allow for flexibility with respect to alternative family types and changes over time as well as the individual's own definition of what he considers to constitute his family. Hence, a family in this study is defined as:

- the group of individuals biologically related or otherwise, with whom one is involved in intimate, interactional relationship/s over time; and
- whom one subjectively recognizes as playing a significant role in this regard.

Extended family will refer to all those family members, related to the individual concerned, who do not fit into the category above. That is, those individuals to whom the individual is related or with whom that individual has interacted with on a basis that is not as intimate as the above.

This study will also investigate any attempts to begin a family of procreation (inclusive of alternative types such as gay couplings) by the individuals concerned. Prior to examining some of the core aspects of family system's theory, as well as discussing both how a symptom is understood within the family system, the author will shortly discuss the family system's relationship with other systems and the influence of society and culture.

4.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY

The family does not exist in isolation, but rather is situated within particular social and cultural contextual settings – the supra-system (Bateson, 1979). Such contexts play an influential role in shaping the way in which a family perceives itself, as well as the form it may take (Connell, 1987). The socio-cultural context, in particular, frequently influences perceptions of what is acceptable with regards to how that family should function in that system (Dallos, 1995; Muncie & Sapsford, 1995). For example, if the socio-cultural context is dominated by conservative values, the traditional nuclear family may be perceived as the norm and as a result, any non-traditional forms, such as single parent or same-sex caregiver families, might be blamed for moral decay, increased crime, unemployment and drug-taking in society.

Muncie and Sapsford (1995) state that families are frequently shock absorbers of change in society. They argue that families absorb socio-cultural changes in various areas such as gender roles, intergenerational relationships, racial attitudes, politics, economics and science,

and as a result, may develop new family forms, relationships or functions. Within a systems framework, one could argue that families with particularly rigid interactions and who cling strongly to stability or homeostasis, might struggle to deal with changes in the socio-cultural milieu. As a result, one might expect these kinds of families to start to exhibit some degree of symptomatic behaviour.

Prior to commencing with the discussion of the theoretical background and conceptual framework that will guide the study, a short cursory discussion on the role of context will be conducted with an aim to illustrate the contextual issues that the author has utilized as part of her guiding frame of reference in the analysis of the data. The main areas discussed are the post-modern family, the role of deviance and the interaction of the family system with larger contextual systems.

4.2.1 The post-modern family

Sociologists such as Shorter (1975), Gergen (1991) and Hossfeld (1991) have detailed influences on the family unit of one such socio-cultural change and its influence on the relationship between family systems and the context in which they are situated: namely, the change from a modern to a post-modern society.

The modern (or post-industrial) family resembles the nuclear family unit and evolved in response to the needs of an industrial society (Parsons, 1956). The modern family exhibited some of the following characteristics:

- it consisted of definite sex role distinctions, with the man or husband as breadwinner and woman or wife as caretaker of the household;
- it acted as a lynch-pin of social cohesion; and

- it functioned as a fundamental building block of order and moral health in society, frequently reflecting the normative views of the particular society.

With the advent of post-modernism, Hossfeld (1991) states that many varieties of other family types (such as single parent families and same sex parent families) were ushered in. Shorter (1975) argues that these emerged out of:

- the economic liberation of women;
- the lack of faith in the previously established order due to the disillusionment in human progress; and,
- the influence of the electronic media, which reflects and legitimates family diversity.

The post-modern family has also become more permeable, specifically with regard to the last point, where the media has brought the global village with its multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives, into the family living room. As a result, the boundaries between the family and other systems are more blurred (Shorter, 1975).

Gergen (1991) has elaborated on this point, labeling the post-modern family as the “saturated family” on account of the degree to which family members are exposed to different views, personalities and relationships. He argues that the post-modern family is more vulnerable to fragmentation and chaos due to this saturation, and that the home, no longer the refuge it symbolized in the modern age, becomes a site of confrontation between different views, ages, genders and ideologies.

Other sociologists such as Denick (1989) and Gillies (2003) adopt a more positive view. Denick (1989) argues that such variation (or saturation) encourages a child growing up in a post-modern family to become more flexible in terms of being able to adapt to different spheres and information, as part of his or her socialization process and individualization or identity formation. Gillies (2003) states that a post-modern family reflects post-traditionalism,

balancing individuality with love and intimacy and economic obligation with an emphasis on relationship together with intimacy and love.

The possible influence of socio-cultural changes on the family, as discussed above, will be an important consideration in the current study. Many of the individuals in the sample, together with their families, lived through a period of considerable social change in South Africa, both in terms of transitions from modern to post-modern trends, as well as the political transformations during, towards and after Apartheid.

Amoateng (1997) in his research on changes in the composition of the South African family from 1994 to 2001, has documented that contemporary South Africa is composed of two main family types, namely, the extended (mostly among African and Coloured racial groups) and nuclear (mostly among White and Asian racial groups) family types.

Additionally, he has documented an increase in cohabitation (and lower marriage rates) and female-headed households amongst families in South Africa. Additionally, the African family has traditionally placed considerable importance on descent lineages within the larger kinship network together with the nuclear family (Caldwell, Caldwell, Ankrah, Anarfi, Agyeman, Awusabo-Asare & Orubuloye, 1993). Consequently, the conceptualization of the family for the present study will take the above into account during the analysis and interpretation of the data.

4.2.2 The family and deviance

Another area that has been examined with respect to the relationship between the family and larger context, is that of deviance.

Hoffman (1981) states that deviance serves three purposes for social systems, namely:

- to promote cohesion;
- to keep an outmoded group functioning long after it should have collapsed; and
- to mediate where people are in conflict.

Deviance may occur at the level of the family, where a member who displays deviant behaviour serves to unite the family or keep the family from extinction, and/or at the level of society where a certain type of deviant behaviour may serve to achieve one or all of the aims outlined above by Hoffman (1981) for the society in question. This work is of particular interest in studies such as the present one that focuses on deviant or anti-social behaviour such as serial murder.

4.2.3 The family and larger systems

Finally, families have rules for interaction within larger systems. Involvement with representatives of such systems may be an attempt to fill voids left by cut-off members, divert attention from internal strife, or to support family myths (Imber-Black, 1988). For example, if the eldest sister of a family is the member to whom others go for advice or to talk about their problems, and she leaves, the family may then enlist the help of a psychologist or counselor when future problems arise, if no other member assumes that role within the family system.

The theoretical background of the study, namely family systems theory, will now be outlined, followed by a more detailed description of the conceptual framework that will be derived from family systems theory to guide the analysis and interpretation of the data.

4.3 FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Family systems theory developed from the application of systemic theory, pioneered by individuals such as Bateson (1979) and Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland (1956) to the family. This took place largely in the 1950's when the psychotherapeutic community working with families began looking for alternatives to the predominant psychoanalytic approaches that dominated practice (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991).

Family systems theory also developed from the considerable body of research that was being done during the 1950's time on the families of schizophrenic individuals, by individuals such as Gregory Bateson and Don Jackson at the Palo Alto Veterans Administration Hospital (Vorster, 2003). Their pioneering paper, together with Jay Haley and John Weakland, titled the "Theory of Schizophrenia", ascribed the source of the thought disorder in the patient to the form of communication exchanged between family members (Bateson *et al.*, 1956). This ushered in a new approach to working with families by applying the new science of cybernetics, or the regulation of self in a social or biological system, to the description of family pathology, and, later on, to devising methods of treatment (Guerin, 1976).

A system can largely be understood as consisting of a number of interconnected elements which mutually and continually influence each other (Dallos, 1995). Given this definition, it is evident how systemic theory could be applied to the family. The family is an organic unit that is made up of interconnected individuals who perform various tasks and fulfill various roles in relation to each other (Muncie & Sapsford, 1995). Consequently, the principles of a system should apply equally to the family, as to other systems. Within a systemic paradigm, the family may be defined as consisting of a number of interrelated members, whose behaviour (together with emotions, actions, thoughts, and beliefs) mutually influences each

other, together with the family as a whole. This view of the family provides pragmatic avenues of change, as well as new ways of understanding pathology and processes in a family, and individual members.

From a systems theoretical point of view, Guttman (1991) sees the family as:

- a cybernetic system (a system of interconnected parts, and as a system that governs itself through feedback);
- a homeostatic system (that is, that negative feedback maintains homeostasis in a system by reducing any deviation that results from the introduction of new information); and
- a rule-governed system (that the mechanisms maintaining homeostasis operate according to certain rules that condition or ‘set’ the range within which a given behaviour can vary)

This section will now look at aspects of family systems theory. It will first examine some core aspects of family systems theory, as outlined in Watzlawick, Beaven and Jackson (1967) and Bowen (1978), as well as Minuchin (1974) with respect to the structural organization of families, hierarchies within family systems and power. The discussion will then examine the genogram as a means of understanding and conceptualizing family systems, the role of the symptom in families, as well as the family’s position within other larger systems and society.

4.3.1 Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson’s theory of communication and interaction

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) describe objects of interactional systems as “persons-communicating-with-other-persons” (p. 120). An interactional system consists of ‘two or more communicants in the process of, or at the level of, defining the nature of their relationship’ (p. 121). They distinguish between two types of systems:

- open systems, and
- closed systems (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

Open systems exchange materials and information with the environment, whereas closed systems do not permit the introduction of any novel stimuli from outside of the system.

Systems exhibit the following properties:

- wholeness,
- feedback, and
- equifinality (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

- **Wholeness.**

The property of wholeness means that every part of a system is related to other parts so that a change in one part results in a change in the total system. Consequently, a system is not summative, but emerges from a combination of elements, and can be viewed as a gestalt of such elements, as opposed to a cumulative, linear aggregation of its various parts. As a result, parts are not unilaterally related, but rather demonstrate circularity with respect to the manner in which they interact. For example, the consequences of A's actions towards B are not limited solely to B, but rather impact on the way that B then reacts to A, and so on.

Applying this principle to family systems, wholeness means that a change in one member of the family, will affect the other members, as well as the family as a unit (Kilpatrick & Holland, 1999). For example, the departure of the eldest son of a family of four, may result in the other sibling having to assume additional responsibilities, and depression over the loss of a child from the household and anxiety over aging in the parents, together with the family having to redefine itself as a unit of three and potentially have to accommodate extension in the form of a new spouse and children from the eldest son who has now moved onto the next phase of his life.

A corollary to the principle of wholeness is circular or cybernetic causality, which will be discussed now.

- **Circular or cybernetic causality.**

Circular causality refers to the fact that, due to the principles of wholeness (where a change in one member of a system impacts upon the behaviour of other members) as well as homeostasis (or keeping levels of system activity within an acceptable range, discussed below), each member's behaviour in a system is maintained by the actions of the other/s. In other words, each person within a family is seen as influencing the other, and their responses, in turn, influence the first person, whose response influences the others, and so on.

Over time, many of these interactions, or circularities (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967), may become more regular and repetitive, giving the impression that they serve as possible rules that are necessary for the functioning of the family (Jackson, 1957). For example, a father may shout at his son on account of his son's behaviour at school, to which the son may react by increasing aggressive behaviour at school as a way of getting back at his father. This then makes the father increase his disciplining of his son, which in turn may result in increased aggressive behaviour at school.

- **Feedback.**

Feedback is related to the principle of homeostasis. It means that part of the output of a system is fed back into that system as an input to modify system activity (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). For example, many of the systems on the human body operate according to feedback mechanisms and monitor if levels of hormones, excretory products, or neurotransmitters are at optimal levels. Feedback also operates in human systems, and especially families, where it serves to regulate processes and interaction within the family unit and between members.

Feedback usually occurs in relation to a system norm or set level (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). The system then decides on how to proceed as a result of how feedback input relates to the system norm, and the type of reaction it wants to achieve, that is, to amplify or reduce deviation from the norm. An example of such a norm in families may be rules around acceptable behaviour, within each individual has to operate. A system tends to calibrate itself around a norm so as to achieve constancy within a defined range. This principle has often been likened to a thermostat, in which there is a lower and higher limit within which the thermostat functions and adjusts itself to achieve the desired norm.

Consequently, there are two types of feedback (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). Positive feedback or escalation (Bateson, 1979; Jackson, 1957) results in an amplification of output deviation from a system norm, whereas negative feedback or stability results in the opposite, namely a reduction of output deviation from a system norm. In a human system, positive feedback usually results in change, whereas negative feedback tends towards stability or homeostasis. In the above example, an individual who deviated from a family norm may be disciplined or sanctioned so that he/she came back into line with the system norm, thus maintaining homeostasis.

This can frequently be seen in the case of families who seek help for a member displaying behavioural problems, and yet appear to frequently jeopardize attempts to bring about change in such a member. Such families and relationships can be seen as particularly rigid closed systems, where change is resisted on account of the threat posed to homeostasis and stability of the family unit (Jackson, 1957).

A system that is constantly threatening to exceed homeostatic limits frequently engages in “runs” (Hoffman, 1981). Normally, when a plateau is exceeded, a deviation-amplifying process sets in and destroys the system. However, less drastic runs frequently delay this process due to the fact that the imbalance in the nuclear family may be trying to correct an

imbalance in the larger kin system or other systems (Hoffman, 1981). As a result, the family pathology is stabilized. Should the stabilizing member leave, or other systems undergo certain changes, this process may break down.

Both stability and escalation are necessary for a family to function as a viable social unit: escalation or an open system, allows for adaptability to novel circumstances while stability allows a family to maintain a certain degree of constancy in the face of such change (Dallos, 1995). Either process, at its extreme, threatens the survival of the family: an overly rigid closed system not being able to adapt to changes, while a highly unstable, open system risking the fragmentation or dissolution of the family unit.

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) were not the only theorists to view the family as a system that tends towards homeostasis. Both Jackson (1957) and Haley (1970) have also advanced this notion in the sense that they claim that the family system attempts to maintain equilibrium (Hoffman, 1981).

- **Reflexivity.**

Reflexivity refers to a system's capacity to monitor and reflect on its own actions. This operates in accordance with feedback. Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) argue that because a system can store and keep a record of previous adaptations and feedback patterns, a pattern of redundancies (although complex) within the system can be recognized and predictability is possible. As a result, family systems can begin to form rules or expectations concerning types of situations or challenges and ways of dealing with them, by grouping together past experiences of similar feedback patterns and responses.

- **Equifinality.**

The property of equifinality means that any alterations in state after a period of time in a system are not determined so much by initial conditions as by the nature of the process and system parameters (Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). In other words, the same results in two systems may spring from different origins because of differences in parameters, interactions within the system, and informational exchanges with other systems. In closed systems, where there are no exchanges outside of the system, results may be determined by initial conditions. In open systems however, where this exchange does occur, equifinality is possible, both with respect to the above and its opposite, that is, different results from the same origins. For example, serial murder has often been problematically linked to nature or nurture explanations due to the fact that many individuals who commit serial murder have siblings who do not go on to commit such crimes. However, if serial murder is understood within the context of the family system, it becomes less problematic to understand how this may be possible.

- **Types of interaction.**

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) describe two main types of interaction:

- symmetrical, and
- complementary.

In symmetrical interactions, the partners involved mirror each other's behaviour. In this way, each partner attempts to use his/her turn to minimize the extent to which the other partner may be one up on him/her, and thereby minimize any difference between the two. In this way, symmetrical relationships are based on equality but may become quite competitive (in order to prevent either partner from getting too far ahead of the other).

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) have likened symmetrical interactions to a seesaw, where if one partner goes up a bit, the other adjusts to meet the movement. Symmetrical interactions and relationships may escalate into “runaways” where the stability of the relationship is lost and a quarrel or fight takes place. This may also lead to escalation, where the intensity of the behavioural responses increases with each adjustment in each partner.

In complementary interactions, one partner’s behaviour complements the other, and the pair are usually arranged in a one-up and one-down position (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). Who occupies which position may vary with each interaction between two partners, however, frequently complementary relationships will have one partner set in the one-up position and the other in the one –down position. For example, in a married couple, there may be one partner who is dominant or assertive, while the other is more submissive or passive.

Conflict may take place when one of the partners (frequently the partner in the one-down position) attempts to take the opposite position. Alternatively, one partner may want to change their position but be prohibited from doing so by a powerful partner or circumstantial factors which may lead to frustration and despair as well as self-estrangement, depression and acting out on the part of the dissatisfied partner.

- **Pathological communication.**

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) see behavioural, emotional and psychological problems as an outcome of sustained pathological communication between individuals. With the concept “pathological” they mean ways of communication of which the effects and the process of these effects are ineffective. They argue that human beings cannot avoid communicating, for, even by choosing not to communicate with someone, they are, in fact, communicating a certain statement to that someone (namely, “I don’t want to communicate with you”). Given this condition, namely the impossibility of not communicating, and if an individual cannot

leave the field in which such interaction takes place, the following options may be available to the person, namely:

- rejecting communication;
- accepting communication;
- disqualifying communication; or
- manifesting a symptom as communication (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

Rejecting communication may involve informing the individual directly that one has no desire to communicate with them, for example, by telling them so or leaving the room.

Accepting communication involves responding and starting an interaction with the person concerned, for example, by replying to their statement. Disqualifying communication involves disqualifying the communication of either oneself or the other person, and is frequently found in situations where the individual concerned does not want to communicate but is obligated to do so. Disqualification may be achieved by contradicting oneself, inconsistencies, subject switches, tangentializations, incomplete sentences, misunderstandings, literal interpretations of metaphors or metaphorical interpretations of the literal (as found frequently in people suffering from schizophrenia). Consequently, “crazy” communication may not be exclusively an indicator of mental illness, but rather, may be viewed as an indication of an individual who may be reacting to an absurd or untenable communication context, or both (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

Lastly, communicating by means of a symptom involves non-verbally communicating certain information to one’s family or others. This differs from intentional feigning of an illness to avoid communicating or interacting with others. Here, when a symptom develops, the individual with the symptom is convinced that he or she is suffering from that particular problem or illness. In this way, the individual avoids the reproach of significant others as well as his or her own guilt. For example, one may become violently ill or suffer an upset stomach

before an important public speech or examination, or start to experience psychotic symptoms such as hearing voices.

The last two aspects of pathological communication are particularly relevant for the current study, in as much as they will be applied to understanding how serial murder may be a means of communicating certain information to the family of individuals who engage in this criminal behaviour. This theory is also useful to examine how communication in general takes place in the families of these individuals and if any common patterns emerge.

Ways of communicating do not only have implications for specific behavioural, emotional or psychological behaviour but also for the way in which an individual defines him/herself in relation to others (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). This will now be discussed with respect to the communication options outlined above, namely with respect to how rejecting, accepting or disqualifying communication, or communicating a symptom, are related to the way one defines oneself.

- **Definitions of self and other.**

When individuals communicate and interact with one another, one person, A, for example, will periodically indicate “This is how I see myself”, and the reaction of the other individual, B, will have implications (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). These reactions have been grouped into three types, mainly:

- confirmation;
- rejection; and
- disconfirmation (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

If B chooses to confirm A’s statement, then communication is generally promoted. If B chooses to reject A’s statement, then A may experience the rejection as painful and the relationship may be strained for a while. However, given that B’s rejection involves a degree

of recognition of what is being rejected, namely A's self, rejection does not involve a negation of the reality of A.

In contrast with rejection, which involves a negation of A's statement, disconfirmation, involves a negation of the source of the statement, namely, A. For example, A makes a statement indicating, "This is A". Should B disconfirm A's perception of themselves, this may result in A assuming that B does not understand or love them, while B may remain totally oblivious to A's dissatisfaction and assume that A feels understood. This may result in an alienation of A.

Alternatively, B might disconfirm A's self perception but A may not register that his/her message has not gotten through. As a result, a vicious circle ensues in which A may be confused at how their behaviour continually does not achieve the ends that he or she intends. As a result, this individual may be perpetually mystified leading to despair and frustration and a sense that life does not make sense.

As indicated in the examples above, disconfirmation may result in persistent vicious circles, with great potential for pathological behavioural outcomes in the individuals concerned. This has been researched by individuals such as Laing (1961, 1965), who found that such communication is frequently found in families of individuals suffering from schizophrenia. This has been explored largely within the framework of the double bind (Hoffman, 1981; Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). This refers to an instance of pathological communication where an overt demand at one level is covertly nullified or contradicted at another level (Hoffman, 1981).

Individuals caught in such communication patterns frequently have to find ways of communicating that satisfy the paradox, and consequently, appear to make no sense to other individuals outside of the paradox, as in the case of a person suffering from schizophrenia (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1978). A frequently used example of a

paradoxical communication such as the double bind is the command, “Be spontaneous!” (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). In this case, a person cannot obey the command without contradicting him or herself.

Haley (1970) argues that in a family where double bind communications are used frequently, there is a perpetual struggle for control. As a result, the members use disqualifications of meaning to control the behaviour of the other members and/or to prevent their behaviour from being controlled. Disqualifications may range from pretending one has not understood what another member has said, ignoring another member’s communication or changing the subject to taking the literal as metaphoric and vice versa, as is often exhibited by individuals with schizophrenia (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967).

This aspect of Watzlawick *et al.*’s (1967) theory will also be utilized in the study to investigate how definitions of self have been negotiated in the families of individuals who commit serial murder and how this may have impacted upon the behaviour of the individual concerned.

- **Punctuation.**

Punctuation refers to the process whereby people develop a set of self-fulfilling perceptions or beliefs about their relationships that interlock to produce repetitive patterns (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). This process serves as a means to explain and predict, construct and maintain each other’s behaviour, another means by which to ensure the stability of the system.

Punctuation is how we frame our reality. For individuals in a system, it is nearly impossible to place oneself outside the system to observe the full cycle of interaction. Consequently, punctuation is a means by which the individuals attempts to define a cause-effect or beginning and end to his communication, due to the influence of linear thinking.

Once again, utilizing the example of the father and son, the father may perceive his son to be a “rebel without a cause” whereas the son may perceive the father to be pedantic and disciplinarian. On an occasion where the son stays out past his curfew, the father may reprimand him, confirming the son’s perception of his father. The son may then react by shouting at his father and protesting against his strong discipline, thereby confirming the father’s perception of his son as rebellious. This may then escalate his disciplining behaviour, which would confirm the son’s perceptions further.

4.3.2 Summary of Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson’s view

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) focus upon the nature of communication in the context of an interactional system between two or more people. They demonstrate how the nature of this communication can impact upon the nature of the system as well as individuals who function within such a system.

They classify two types of systems, namely open and closed systems, based on the degree of interaction and exchange systems undertake with other systems or elements. Further, they attribute three properties to open systems, namely, wholeness, feedback and equifinality. Feedback may be positive or negative, and operates in relation to system norms or relationship rules.

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) also discuss various aspects of communication and types of relationships between persons in a system. These include symmetrical and complimentary relationships. In symmetrical relationships, the individuals involved aim to equalize differences between the two of them, whereas complementary relationships involve maximization of difference. As discussed, both of these types may have pathological outcomes when taken to their extremes.

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) also discuss different types of response to situations in which one cannot avoid communicating. These are rejection, acceptance, disqualification and manifestation of a symptom.

Watzlawick *et al.* (1967) additionally address how perceptions of self and other may be negotiated in the context of interactions between two people in a system. These include confirmation, rejection and disconfirmation. Pathological outcomes may result in individuals caught up in vicious circles that are generated by incongruent or problematic communication that takes place about self and other.

4.3.3 Bowen's family theory

Bowen (1978) emphasises the family as an emotional system. He argues that the intense emotional interdependency in families makes interactions in families more predictable than in other groups, and that this interaction crystallizes in particular patterns through time. These patterns may be repeated in subsequent generations. Bowen's family theory (1978) has a number of basic concepts. These are:

- differentiation of self;
- triangles;
- nuclear family emotional system;
- family projection process;
- emotional cut off;
- multigenerational transmission process;
- sibling position; and
- emotional process in society (Hall, 1981).

These will now be dealt with separately.

- **Differentiation of self.**

This refers to the extent to which an individual is embedded in the emotional matrix of the family (Bowen, 1978). An individual that has a better differentiated self, will be able to have a more established notion of self, and make decisions independently of the family matrix of which that person is a member. Less differentiated individuals will be more fused to the identity of the family and depend on the common self of the family unit for direction and beliefs.

Bowen (1978) holds that families generally tend towards fusion. However, the greater flexibility that a particular family has, will enable its members to be sufficiently differentiated. Differentiation, taken to its pathological extreme, will result in isolation or cut-offs, but ideally, should allow for direct meaningful contact with one's family's emotional system but also being sufficiently outside to be objective about one's self and others.

Bowen (1978) also speaks of a *hard-core self* which refers to those parts of one's self that are non-negotiable with others or one's firmest held convictions and beliefs; as well as a *pseudo-self*, which refers to opinions of others that are absorbed as one's own despite having no personal commitment to the beliefs underlying these opinions. With increased differentiation, more use is made of one's hard-core self.

- **Triangles.**

To discuss this aspect of Bowen's theory, Ackerman (1984) will be made use of to supplement Bowen's theoretical discussion. The family as a system can be distinguished by its parts together with their relationships, and behaves as a whole, not as an aggregate (Ackerman, 1984). These relationships between members are often easier to understand when broken up into groups of threes, or triads. Depending on the number of members in the

family, there may be any number of these triads in operation at any one time. For example, in a family of three, there will be one triad; in a family of four, there may be up to four triads at any one time; and in a family of five, up to nine triads.

The relationship of any two entities in a triad, is largely conditional upon the state of the third, with the sum of the quantity of interaction of the three relationships that comprise a triad, remaining constant. For example, if A, B and C are members of a triad, if A increases interaction with B and C, then the interaction between B and C will decrease.

In a balanced triad, all three members have the same amount of interaction and take responsibility for their actions in the context of the relationship (Ackerman, 1984). Additionally, in a balanced triad, relationships between all three members are positive, or at times, there may be one positive relationship or coalition between two members who are both in conflict with a third (Hoffman, 1981).

An unbalanced triad occurs when all three relationships are negative or when there is one negative relationship, or conflict between two members, and two positive relationships, that is between each of the two who are in conflict, and a third member (Hoffman, 1981).

Balance or homeostasis does not necessarily imply harmony or health, but refers rather to the leveling out of positive and negative relationships in the triad (Hoffman, 1981). Additionally, as long as triads are relatively flexible they may stand a better chance of resisting pathological outcomes. As soon as triads are rigid with respect to the organization of their members and the coalitions within them, they are more likely to become pathological (Hoffman, 1981).

This can be illustrated by means of an example of a person suffering from schizophrenia. Such an individual is frequently situated within a closed, rigid family system where interactions are limited in number and set in quality (Selvini-Palazzoli *et al.*, 1978). Additionally, in line with the “double bind” theory of schizophrenia (Bateson *et al.*, 1956;

Searles, 1959; Sluzki & Veron, 1971), the person suffering from schizophrenia is usually the subject of a paradox, where communication at a digital or verbal level is negated at an analogue or non-verbal level.

This double bind is usually the result of a “game” that is being played out between the parents of the person suffering from schizophrenia, in which both partners covertly vie for control over the spousal relationship (Haley, 1959; Selvini-Palazzoli *et al.*, 1978). This is undertaken covertly as a result of the family system not being able to tolerate the breakdown of the spousal relationship, the loss of a spouse or change in general due to its closed and rigid nature as a system. Due to the contradictory messages received by the person suffering from schizophrenia, this person then attempts to behave in a manner that disobeys neither level of the message, resulting in the symptomatic behaviour associated with schizophrenia, and thus maintaining homeostasis in the closed system.

Processes within a triad may include progressive segregation, centralization, and triangulation (Ackerman, 1984). Progressive segregation refers to the process whereby parts that are interdependent differentiate so as to become more independent of one another (Ackerman, 1984). For example, in a family, as children grow older, they may find work and become less dependent on their parents for financial support. Consequently, the family may still be interdependent for emotional support, but more independent with respect to material provision.

Taken to its extreme form, progressive segregation may result in insulation. In a triad, this may be the result of one member being distanced/distancing to the point of being cut off, thereby losing relatedness to the other two members and becoming autonomous. Signs of insulation may include withdrawal and inability to relate to others on the part of the insulated member, as well as attempts by any of the other members to act in anticipation of, or to prevent, the response of the insulated member to any other person (Ackerman, 1984).

Centralization refers to the process whereby functions are assigned in a hierarchical manner so that the system becomes unified and efficient, and small changes in the large or dominant parts may result in larger changes in other parts (Ackerman, 1984). For example, in a family, the primary breadwinner (father or mother) may be assigned the function of providing for the family, with supplementary support from any other members who may be earning money.

Just as insulation would be the extreme end-point of progressive segregation, fusion is the extreme outcome of centralization. Fusion, within a triad, results in one member engulfing or overwhelming another member, with personal boundaries being blurred (Ackerman, 1984). A fused relationship between two members will frequently result in the exclusion of the other member (as well as many other outsiders) and is often based on a need in one member to aggrandize himself at the expense of the other. As a result, a fused relationship results in two members behaving almost as a single individual with one behaving exclusively for the other.

In systems, such as the family, both centralization and segregation are necessary for successful integration of members and efficient and effective functioning. It is important for a family to be united in common goals, and yet for members to be sufficiently differentiated in order to effectively achieve such goals, by performing diverse functions. Loss of differentiation results in a closed system and fusion, whereas loss of centralization results in fragmentation and isolation. Within triads also, fusion and insulation accompany each other, so that in cases where two members are fused, the third member will be insulated, and so forth.

It is important to remember that fusion and insulation, while properties of the system, or triad, are not properties of the individual concerned. For example, an insulated member within a family may be very involved in his/her community. In fact, individuals who insulate

themselves from their family of origin, frequently try to make a whole family out of another individual (Ackerman, 1984).

Triangulation (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974) refers to the process in a triad where one individual stands in relation to two other in such a way as to be the focus of the relationship. The two latter members generally relate only by communicating about the third party and thus avoid direct, personal exchanges, which may result in open conflict as a result (Ackerman, 1984). For example, a mother and father may attempt to avoid relating to one another by becoming overly involved with a child. Triangulation can be observed every time a member of a family speaks on behalf of another, or about one member to another, or is involved in the middle of a conflict between two other members.

Bowen (1978) viewed triangulation as the basic building block of an emotional system, operating as safety valve for when emotional tension in a two-person system exceeded a certain level. In a two-person relationship, the tendencies of progressive segregation and centralization frequently result in power struggles, where greater interaction usually implies that increased centralization with one partner increasingly burdened, and the other humiliated while decreased interaction may result in the loss of the relationship. Consequently, the solution to this dilemma frequently involves the addition of a third member, or development of a triad, where distancing and closure of the dyad is prevented.

Frequently, however, such triads develop into triangulation patterns with barricading or incomplete personal communication between two members, and pseudo-responsibility (see below) with respect to the third party. An example of this process may be evident in a marriage when the decision to have a child is made to prevent the collapse of the dyadic relationship. The married couple can then avoid directly confronting each other about issues and concern themselves with the child. Ackerman (1984) argues that whereas fusion or

insulation often signals the demise of a family, triangulation is a means whereby to keep the system going, albeit not necessarily by “healthy” means.

Ackerman (1984) has identified three patterns of triangulation, namely:

- focused triangulation;
- triangulation with an intermediary; and
- shifting triangles.

Focused triangulation occurs when the third member is ignored as an independent member of the triad, and responsibility for that member is taken by the remaining two, such as in the example above.

Triangulation with an intermediary occurs when the third member is utilized as a go-between for the other two members. For example, parents communicate via a child in the case of a separation or divorce proceedings. Scapegoating is also an example of this type of triangulation, and involves one member being labeled as the “black sheep” of the family and consequently assuming responsibility for all the faults within such a system. This member consequently acts as a means for the other two to avoid self-blame as well as preventing more dangerous warfare between more powerful family members.

Shifting triangles involve intense open conflict, with frequent interruptions, so that different members occupy different positions within a triangulation at different times. For example, two parents triangulate around a child. When forced to confront one another, and their conflict is out in the open, the child may jump to the defence of the mother, and shift the triangle so that she and her father avoid direct conflict, and triangulate around the mother, and so forth.

Triangulation also involves the processes of pseudo-responsibility and barricading. Pseudo-responsibility refers the process whereby a member appears to take responsibility for another, but is actually using the other member for his or her own requirements, such as either

avoiding conflict with another member (such as in focused triangulation). The third member of a triangulated relationship is always in a pseudo-responsible relationship to the other two. An extreme form of pseudo-responsibility is fusion, where one member takes complete responsibility for the other.

Barricading refers to when communications between two members are not complete. This is usually the case between the two members of the triangulated triad who assume pseudoresponsibility with regard to the third member.

A consequence of triangles is a tendency to repeat behaviour patterns automatically, especially in stressful situations. For example, if a mother involves her mother in a triangle when experiencing tension with her child, this pattern will be repeated each time a stressful situation with the child occurs. Additionally, triangles may be multigenerational, both in their spread across the family system (that is, a triangle may involve members from different generations), and in the sense that triangling patterns can be passed on from one generation to the next. For example, if a parent was allied with his same sexed parent, against the parent of the opposite sex, this pattern may be repeated with his children in the subsequent generation.

Although many theorists have conceptualized types of triangles, this discussion will focus on the classifications as proposed by Minuchin (1974). Minuchin conceptualized four types of rigid triads that could lead to pathology, namely:

- triangulation;
- parent-child coalition;
- detouring-attacking; and
- detouring-supportive.

Triangulation has been discussed above and refers to a situation, for example, where two parents in overt conflict try to get the child's support against the other. A parent-child coalition triad refers to a triad where a coalition already is in place between one parent and a

child, and both are in conflict with the other parent. A detouring-attacking triad involves a coalition between the two parents who then scapegoat the child. The conflict with the child frequently serves as a means to keep the parents united, and usually manifests behavioural problems as symptoms.

In a similar vein, a detouring-supportive triad also serves to keep parents together by focusing on the child. However, in this instance, all relationships are positive as the parents focus on the child as an object of concern or to be protected. In this triad, the child will often manifest psychosomatic symptoms. For example, a detouring-attacking triad would have the parents uniting to discipline the child, whereas a detouring-supportive triad would have the parents uniting to look after a sick child. In both triads, the parents are avoiding dealing with the real issues in their relationship (which may result in open conflict) by focusing on the child, or detour.

- **Nuclear family emotional system.**

This refers to the inner core family processes as opposed to multigenerational processes (Hall, 1981). Going back to differentiation, the level of differentiation of the spouses generally determines the family level of differentiation. As will be discussed later, differentiation level tends to be perpetuated across generations due to the fact that an individual usually chooses a spouse having a similar level of differentiation. The lower the level of differentiation in a family, the more fused such a family will be, and as a result, this type of family will exhibit a greater degree of reactivity and tight interdependence between members, which restricts behavioural options.

Generally, an overload of anxiety between spouses is dealt with via

- marital conflict;
- dysfunction of a spouse; or

- projection to a child/children (Hall, 1981).

Symptoms normally develop in a family member when only one strategy is used. Marital conflict is usually the result of excessive fusion, where neither spouse will give in (Bowen, 1978). Dysfunction of a spouse usually occurs where there is a great degree of fusion and one spouse sacrifices their pseudo-self to the other, who then assumes a higher functioning level (Hall, 1981). Consequently, the couple operates in accordance with one common self, largely dictated by one of the spouses.

The adaptive spouse, who has given up their pseudo-self, generally will start to develop symptomatic behaviour such as physical or emotional illness, social acting out (such as alcohol abuse and promiscuity), as a result of having to bear the full load of anxiety of undifferentiation on their own. The dominant spouse is usually unaware of the problems of the adaptive spouse. The dysfunction, however, serves to absorb the undifferentiation or anxiety present in the couple. Consequently, the dysfunction is perpetuated, the other spouse gains strength, and marital conflict or projection to the children, is prevented. Projection to the child or children will be dealt with in the following section.

- **Family projection process.**

Family projection is a means for dealing with surplus undifferentiation in the nuclear family system (Hall, 1981). The level of differentiation of each spouse will influence the degree of fusion in his or her relationship (as discussed above). Should such fusion within the spousal relationship be inadequate to deal with the amount of undifferentiation present, then this residual undifferentiation will remain in the family system, and is usually projected onto a child or children, who absorb this. Family projection is usually accompanied by some marital conflict and dysfunction of a spouse. For example, in a relationship between a mother and child, a mother may reduce her own anxiety levels by projecting it onto the child, and seeing

the child as a problem or needing help or protection. The reader is reminded that Bowen's interpretation and use of the term "projection" does not correspond to psychodynamic conceptualizations and use of the same term. Rather, Bowen's projection signifies a manner in which the system attempts to distribute anxiety and intense emotional processes that may arise from enmeshed relationships along other avenues as a means of preserving homeostasis.

Factors influencing the selection of a child include the sibling position of the parents and the intensity of the parents' dependency on their own parents (that is, the level of differentiation of the parents). The child most trapped is the one who is the most emotionally attached to their parents (Bowen, 1978). This may be manifested as overt closeness or intense repulsion. Popular choices for children include children in the oldest, youngest or only child positions.

- **Emotional cut-off.**

Emotional cut-off is a means of dealing with intense fusion in the family system and signifies an attempt to achieve independence or prevent an annihilation of the self (Bowen, 1978).

However, cut-offs generally do not result in greater differentiation but rather result in a gain in pseudo-self and a greater degree of fusion in other relationships.

A precondition for emotional cut-offs is a high level of anxiety in the self or family system (Hall, 1981). Triangles may result in emotional cut-offs where a distanced third person loses contact with the other two. The duration of the emotional cut-off is an indication of the investment of feelings each party has in continuing the distancing. Extreme forms of emotional cut-offs include psychotic symptoms, where the individual suffering these symptoms cuts him/herself off emotionally from the family system and invests these emotions 'outside' of the system, in fantasy (Selvini-Palazzoli *et al.*, 1978) as well as the most extreme form of emotional cut-off, namely, death (premature, suicide or from symptoms).

Emotional cut-offs may be multi-generational (Hall, 1981). When emotional cut-offs exist between parents and grandparents, children are more likely to be cut-off in their relationships as an interpersonal strategy (Haley, 1970).

- **Multigenerational transmission process and sibling position.**

As mentioned above, levels of differentiation, triangles, and emotional cut-offs patterns of behaviour may be transmitted between members of different generations of the same family (Bowen, 1978). Sibling position in a family system tends to influence vulnerability to projection and multigenerational transmission processes (Hall, 1981; Tolman, 1951). As mentioned, oldest, youngest and only children tend to be targets for projection. These positions do not necessarily have to be the chronological positions, but rather the functioning sibling positions. For example, the object of projection is often treated as the youngest, and the child concerned will behave accordingly, or in families where there are large gaps between siblings, the siblings may function as only children.

- **Emotional process in society.**

Bowen (1978) does not exclude the impact of social influence on family processes. In society, he argues that emotional processes move either towards extinction or towards adaptation. If togetherness in society predominates, then differentiation is impeded, and a society tends to stagnate, like a closed system. A society which is largely fused, and characterized by high anxiety levels will manifest “symptoms” such as high crime rates, violence and high rates of divorce, for example (Bowen, 1978).

When differentiation predominates, society generally improves and develops constructively, similar to an open system (Bowen, 1978). The level of anxiety in society (as with the family) generally determines the degree of differentiation in society, which in turn

influences family units (Bowen, 1978). In other words, the process is cyclic in nature. The greater the amount of anxiety in society, the greater the degree of togetherness or fusion, the greater the degree of problem behaviour, which results in societal regression and, over time, societal extinction. Well-differentiated and flexible families are better suited to withstand external impairment influences in society, while fused and brittle families may collapse or explode in response to additional stress from outside (Hall, 1981).

4.3.4 Summary of Bowen's family theory

Bowen (1978) views families as complex emotional systems with patterns of behaviour that are repeated and consequently, predictable. These repetitive patterns are particularly evident during times of stress.

The self emerges out of family interaction. The family tends towards fusion and a common self. Families may take a number of possible positions along a continuum of flexibility and rigidity. Flexible families respond better to stress and allow for greater differentiation of self in their members. Rigid families tend more towards fusion and do not respond as well to stress. The more fused a family is, the higher the level of anxiety within such a system.

Bowen's theory enables one to see how individual functioning and self-determination is a product of family processes, and one's emotional relationship with the family system. It also shows how behaviour may also be influenced by patterns that have been transmitted across generations, as well as in response to emotional processes in society.

4.3.5 The symptom in the family system

Within a systemic paradigm, a problem would be defined as any process that threatens the stability of the system. A system consequently develops its own solutions (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1987). For example, a family may be growing apart, so, in order to unite the members, the system may produce a solution in the form of a family member who develops a symptom. As a result, the family members will rally around and unite in the cause of the affected member. Further, on examining the history of the afore-mentioned problem or symptom, one might see that it often appears during crisis moments in family life; thus, the problem or symptom helps to restore stability. Symptomatic behaviour consequently may balance or unbalance the system, and not necessarily, by definition, signify pathology for the family concerned (Hoffman, 1981).

Consequently, within family systems theory, pathology in an individual member is secondary to what the presence of such pathology signifies for the system, that is the family, and the function it performs within such a system.

Minuchin (1974) argues that a symptom in a child, frequently indicates the presence or absence of stress in parents. He states that the executive dyad of the nuclear family (which is frequently the parents) may undergo a change or crisis, which exceeds the couple's usual coping mechanisms, and involve the child as a result. The child may then manifest symptomatic behaviour, and if the child is overwhelmed, the involvement may move onto another level, such as other members of the nuclear family, the extended family, or other systems in wider society.

In the case of a child whose problems keep the parents together, the marriage often seems uneven, with one partner appearing to have more power than the other, that is in a complimentary relationship. The couples may also be intensely clinging, intensely avoiding

conflict and/or have children who are disturbed. The child's behaviour influences the balance of power between parents, so that his behaviour may provoke the more powerful or one-up partner, but will be such that only the one-down partner is able to deal with it.

As a result, this couple functions according to what has been termed a "homeostatic seesaw" (Hoffman, 1981, p. 132). If the seesaw is too uneven, the parent/child may develop a symptom; if the seesaw is too even, the couple may split; and if the child's symptom disappears (Hoffman, 1981), a symptom may develop in another part of the system, such as with one of the parents or another child. With such a lot "invested" in a symptom, the system may resist any attempts to "cure" the symptom.

4.3.6 The individual in a family systems approach

It would appear that individual and systemic psychologies have generally been perceived as mutually exclusive. However, many theorists (Haley, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) have challenged this on the basis that a family system can be reflected in the psychology of the individual and vice versa, due to the circular nature of the impact that these two units of understanding have upon one another. Haley (1978) argues that "the smallest unit [of the family system] could be considered to be the individual" (p. 147). Kerr and Bowen (1988) challenge traditional notions of the psychology of the individual by advocating the placement of such a psychology within the larger systemic context of the family system. Consequently, an individual (although representing only one unit within the family system) can be understood as part of a network of interlinking relationships between members of a family system. It follows that the role that such an individual has performed within such a system and the relationships of which he has been a part will impact upon his psychology and that it

is possible to understand an individual by understanding the family system of which he is a part.

In discussing the place of the individual in a systemic point of view, Nardone and Watzlawick (1993) state that if you observe the behaviour of individuals from the systemic and cybernetic point of view, personal entities can be viewed as “not standing on their own and having their own ‘determined’ evolutive and behavioural scheme, but...interacting inside a system of relationships or a context characterized by a continuous and mutual exchange of information between single entities that influence one another” (p. 36). Similarly, McClendon and Kadis (1990) stress an important point. They base their assumption (from Miller, 1969) on their view of general systems theory (GST). Although every unit is made up of smaller units and the larger unit is more than the sum of its parts, the application of GST seems to focus entirely on the larger unit with the assumption that significant change in the family unit will necessarily result in change in the individual. They believe while this may be so, it misses an important point:

The family is made up of individuals and each person brings his or her own personal history to the party, perceives and interprets events in the context of his or her own personal history, makes decisions about him/herself and the world, and finally acts on the basis of this personalized processing (p. 137).

The authors quote several studies confirming their point: “that it may not be enough to focus on the system without attending to the individuals who compromise the system” (p. 137).

Following from the above, Kerr and Bowen (1988) state that the evaluation and treatment of families in systemically-oriented psychotherapy can involve any number of members, as

long as the therapist approaches the conceptualization, evaluation and treatment of the issues at hand from a systems perspective (i.e., he or she punctuates the issue hand in a systemic manner). Methods of evaluation include interviews with family members (Kerr & Bowen, 1978) and genograms (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). With regards to the latter, McGoldrick and Gerson specify that although interviews with clients and different members of the family may increase the reliability of information obtained, such a scenario is not always feasible and the interview can then be used with one member (usually the client). In such a case, Guttman (1991) points out that information obtained is as useful, and can be analysed by client and therapist to elicit adaptive and maladaptive patterns across generations. Beyers (personal communication, 2006) points to the caution with which an individual perspective in family psychotherapy and research should be approached but also argues that to exclude individual perspectives when additional family members are unavailable is to undermine the utility and value of an individual's perceptions, beliefs and knowledge of his own family and to diminish the scope of family and social research. The responsibility lies with the researcher in terms of carefully listening with openness to the individual's story about his family system, weighing and evaluating the manner of communication and personal involvement; of how the individual recalls his history; how the interactions between family members are described and communicated; and be aware of his own role in the process of research.

4.4 KEY FAMILY SYSTEM CONCEPTS FOR THIS STUDY

Prior discussion has included an elaboration on the definition of the family that will be used in this study as well as an overview of family systemic theory. Whereas the former will be utilized as a means by which to select the unit of analysis for this particular study (that is, the family system), the latter will be used to interpret the findings of the analysis. In terms of

achieving the latter, it is necessary to narrow down family systems theory to those theoretical elements that the researcher feels are of particular importance in understanding and interpreting family systems. These are:

- emotional processes;
- multigenerational patterns of structure and function; and
- patterns of relationship.

In line with the spirit of reflexivity that characterizes qualitative research, other researchers may have chosen to focus on other aspects of family systems theory, which would have influenced the results of the study in turn. Perhaps this may provide inspiration for future research where other aspects could be used and the results compared. This will be discussed further in chapter 6 however and the different elements selected for this study will now be elaborated upon further.

4.4.1 Emotional processes

Emotional processes form a significant component of family systems, specifically in terms of the manner in which members that are part of such a system encounter emotional processes as part of their relationships with other members, and ways of dealing with such emotional content and process are established at both individual and systemic level.

Emotional processes in the context of serial murder appear to have been dealt with in two predominant ways. On the one hand, serial murder has been portrayed as an act involving aggressive and violent emotional processes (Douglas & Olshaker, 2000; Holmes & De Burger, 1988; Ressler, 1997); while on the other, individuals who commit serial murder have frequently been portrayed as unemotional or detached from the affective component of their acts (Holmes & Holmes, 1996; Meloy, 2000). In this way, the author intends to investigate

the manner in which emotional processes have been negotiated within the family system of an individual who commits serial murder in order to make further sense of the above. This is also imported by the notion of the family as a homeostatic and cybernetic system (Guttman, 1991). Emotional processes interconnect the parts of the system; it also governs the system through feedback. Furthermore, emotional reactions (or not) within the family maintain homeostasis and reduce any deviation that results from the introduction of new information making it difficult to introduce “new” or other emotions into the system.

In terms of emotional processes, Bowen’s concept of differentiation as well as his discussion of the role that anxiety and stress play in the family system will be used. It will be of particular interest to see the manner in which the spousal sub-system of family systems deals with anxiety, specifically the impact that this has on the marital relationship, dysfunctions or symptoms in spouses or involvement/projection onto the child subsystem.

An examination of this aspect of family systems becomes important when one considers proposed classifications of individuals who commit serial murder that have been based on an individual’s ability to manage their emotions. For example, in terms of Eysenck and Eysenck (1977) who proposed classifying criminals into extroverts or thrill-seekers who actively seek out emotional stimulation, and introverts with little overt emotional expression or affectivity. Additionally, Hickey (2006) has also included suggestions in his work on serial murder that this type of criminal behaviour may result from an inability to control and manage internal emotion states such as anger, hurt, fear and anxiety which results in the externalization of these feelings onto outsiders.

Additionally, individuals such as Leyton (2001) have argued that serial murder frequently represents an attempt on the part of the individual who commits serial murder to assert himself and to be recognized as an important and distinct individual in society. By using Bowen’s concept of differentiation together with Ackerman’s (1984) concepts of fusion and

isolation, this study may illuminate interesting developments with regard to the manner and extent to which individuals who commit serial murder are a part of their family system.

4.4.2 Multigenerational patterns

The author has also chosen to focus on multigenerational patterns with regards to the family systems of individuals who commit serial murder mainly due to the large role attributed to multigenerational patterns by theorists such as Bowen (1978) and Minuchin (1974) in the perpetuation and escalation of faulty coping strategies and problem solving attempts within a family system. In this way, across generations the family system may develop ways of preserving homeostasis that ultimately may compromise the ability of certain individual members to function optimally. Consequently, the author intends to investigate the role of serial murder behaviour in an individual member within a family system may represent repetition of relationship and other patterns from previous generations, which may serve as a means to maintain homeostasis or perform other system functions.

In terms of Bowen, it will be of interest to see how levels of differentiation are transmitted through the extended family system as well as how stress and anxiety have been managed across generations. The effects of projection across generations will also be examined together with an investigation of repeated patterns of emotional processes in the family system and their impact on the system.

Sibling position and its effect on the family system (especially where sibling constellations are repeated in some manner) will be included in an investigation on multigenerational patterns also. Given that serial murder has frequently been linked to physical, sexual and other types of abuse during the early developmental period by individuals such as Cleary and Luxenburg (1993), and Hazelwood and Warren (1989), it will

be interesting to see what forms an inability to deal with stress and anxiety at other levels of the family system have taken; whether some of these forms include abuse; and whether some of these incidences reflect patterns that have been repeated in other parts and levels of the system.

Minuchin (1974) will lend a more structural interpretation to examination of multigenerational patterns. In this way, the study will examine the manner in which the family system is divided into sub systems, as well as the manner in which these subsystems interact and organize themselves with regards to membership rules and the way in which individual members adopt certain roles within different subsystems. The way in which boundaries are structured around family systems and subsystems will also be of interest with respect to the degree of flexibility or rigidity which characterizes these boundaries, and thereby mediates intra- and inter-system interaction (that is, how much do subsystems interact with each other, and how much does the family interact with outsiders).

As discussed in the literature review (see chapter 3), serial murder has been argued as being the result of the isolation of the individual member who commits serial murder, as well as the entire family system, from other systems or individuals (Hickey, 2006; Ressler *et al.*, 1988). In this way, it will be interesting to examine the extent to which rules and boundaries of sub-systems and the entire family system have influenced interaction between systems and consequently, the behaviour of individual members or sub-systems.

4.4.3 Relationship patterns

Serial murder involves an event between people, who usually do not know one another, and yet become connected by virtue of the criminal act that transpires between them.

Individuals who commit murder have often been thought to have a particular view of

interpersonal relationships and other people, which may necessitate, facilitate or contribute in some way to their serial murder behaviour (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Egger, 1990; Labuschagne, 2001; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Pistorius, 1996). Consequently, the author has chosen to focus upon relationship patterns within family systems of individuals who commit serial murder as the final component of her conceptualization of the family system for the current study. In this sense, she intends to examine how relationship patterns within the family system occur as well as the particular relationships within the family system in which the individual who commits serial murder has been involved, and whether some of these patterns are repeated in (or impact upon) the serial murder behaviour of the individual concerned.

Both Ackerman (1984) and Bowen (1978) ascribe the primary importance of the triad as the fundamental unit of relationships in family systems. Consequently, relationships within the family systems of individuals who commit serial murder will be examined with respect to their arrangement into triangles or triads, and the subsequent influence of these arrangements on the organization and functioning of the family system. In order to achieve this, Bowen's concept of triads, together with the more structural or hierarchical view of Minuchin (1974) in terms of his triads will be used in order to tap both the emotional processing implications (via Bowen) as well as the organizational or subsystem and boundary implications (via Minuchin).

Given the role of power that has frequently been mentioned with respect to serial murder (Prentky, Burgess & Carter, 1986; Ressler *et al.*, 1988), the aspects of family systems theory that deal with relationships in terms of hierarchy and power will be of particular interest in terms of interpreting the family systems of such individuals. The approaches used will thus include Watzlawick *et al.*'s (1967) concepts of symmetrical and complementary relationships, as well as Minuchin's (1974) concepts of hierarchy, coalitions and alliances in family systems.

The theoretical conceptualization above (namely, emotional process, multigenerational patterns and relationship patterns) is illustrated in the diagram (Figure 1 below). As can be seen, emotional processes within the nuclear family, as well as in extended family systems and larger external systems impact upon each other, as well as on individual members. Bowen's theory will be used to interpret these processes in the current study.

In addition to emotional processes, there are also multigenerational factors and processes that may impact upon the nuclear family. These can be seen in the arrows going from extended to nuclear family systems. Additionally, these arrows are bi-directional indicating that activity within the nuclear family system will in turn impact upon extended family systems. For example, if an eldest son refuses to follow in the footsteps of his father, this will have repercussions for the relationship of the son's nuclear family with the extended paternal family system. In order to understand this multigenerational activity, Bowen and Minuchin's theory will be used here.

Finally, the relationships between members within family systems as well as between systems can be seen in the diagram. Firstly, there are bi-directional arrows between members of the nuclear family depicting the relationships between these members. These will be interpreted via Watzlawick's theory as well as Bowen, Minuchin and Ackerman's theories of triangulation. Secondly, there are bi-directional arrows between both nuclear and extended family systems and the larger social milieu (as well as other external systems). The extent to which these arrows are able to operate and the predominant direction along which activity will flow (that is, from the family system outwards or from the outside in towards the family system) will vary from one family system to another.

4.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Family definitions have historically focused on the nuclear family and excluded alternative family types such as single parents and same-sex unions, as well as the manner in which families may change over time.

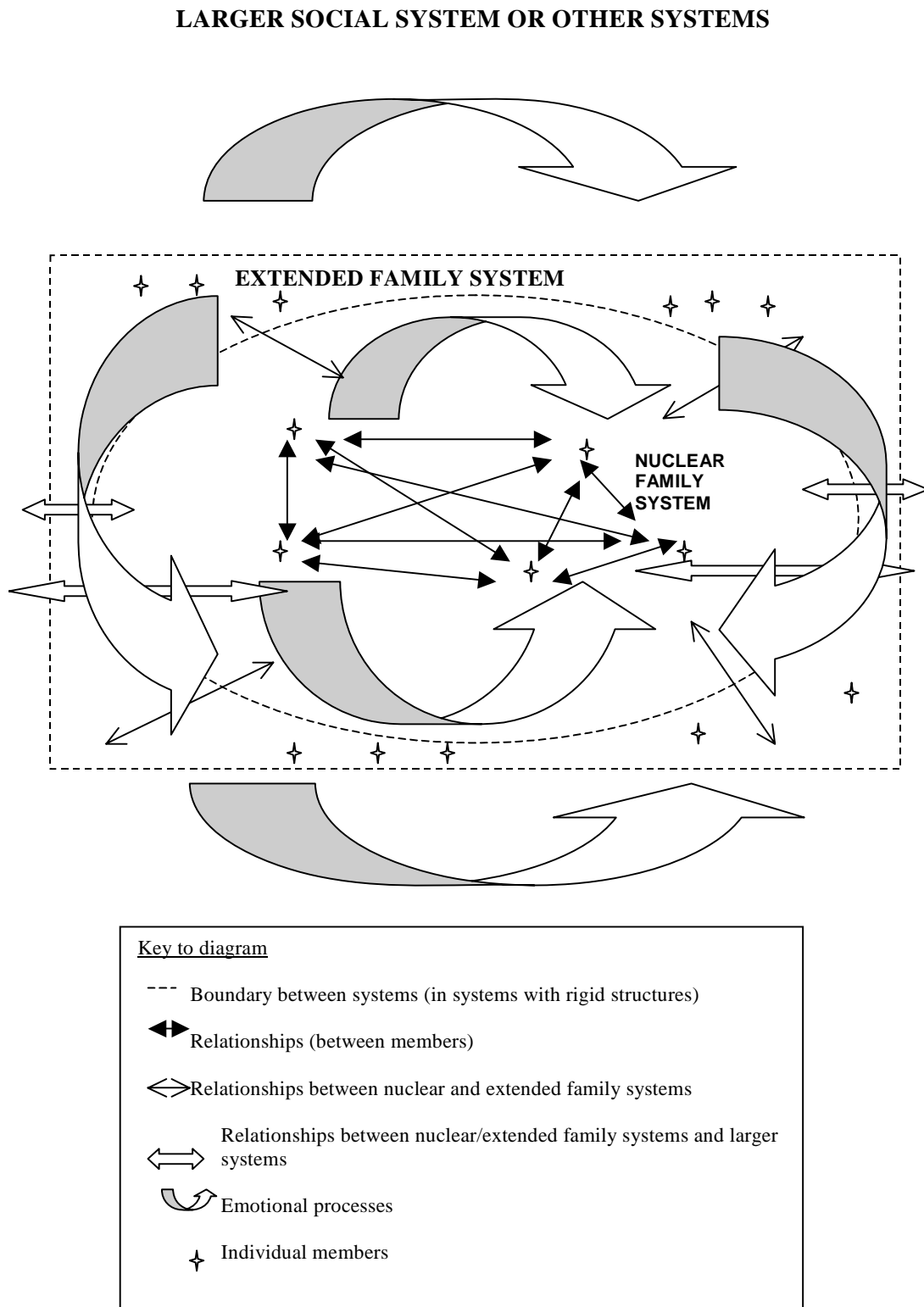
This study has chosen to interpret the concept of family more holistically, in terms of the nuclear and extended family, as well as allowing for variations along alternative lines.

Family systems theory applies the theory of cybernetics to the family, and examines how processes and outcomes within the family context occur in line with the principles of systemic theory. Within such a paradigm, the family can be viewed as consisting of a number of inter-related members, whose actions and behaviour influence the other members in the family as well as the family system as a whole.

The principles and concepts of family systems will be used to interpret the data in the current study and applied to understand the role that serial murder plays in the family system, specifically with reference to a conceptual framework that focuses upon emotional processes, multigenerational and relationship patterns in family systems. These different aspects are not mutually exclusive but rather influence each other in a circular manner.

The following chapter will examine the methodology for the current study, including aspects such as research design, data collection techniques, sampling strategies and methods of data analysis for the current study.

Figure 1. Diagrammatic Representation of a Family System



5. METHOD OF RESEARCH

Previous chapters have discussed the body of theoretical work on serial murder. The approach used to interpret the current findings, namely family systems theory, has also been discussed. In Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was spelt out, namely: to investigate serial murder from a systemic point of view. To achieve the above, the following question was proposed as focus:

- “How does the family system of a person who commits serial murder function?”

That is, what is the family structure, who are the people in the family system and how do they maintain the family system.

This chapter explains the methodology, research design, procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis and data integration of the study.

5.1 METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research has been understood as “the interpretive study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994, p.2). Qualitative research focuses on the meaning of experience, actions and events as they are interpreted through the eyes of certain researchers, participants and cultures or groups, and is sensitive to the particular contextual nuances of the study topic (Harre & Secord, 1972) as well as the impact that the relationship between researcher and the participant/s and context has on interpretation of the study topic. *Quantitative* research focuses on measuring, manipulating

and specifying relationships between certain variables in order to test causal hypotheses (Henwood, 1996).

Parker (1992) describes the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of three “methodological horrors” (Woolgar, 1988). These are indexicality, inconcludability and reflexivity.

In terms of *indexicality*, an explanation is always tied to a particular context, and will change as the context changes. This is viewed as problematic in quantitative research and is addressed via reliability and validity. Qualitative research does not view this as a problem and instead it into the research process by focusing on specificity with respect to the topic of study. The qualitative researcher does not and cannot generalize his findings, but provides an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs.

In the current study, the researcher focuses specifically on serial murder in the South African context and acknowledges that this phenomenon is subject to change as the South African political and socio-economic and cultural climate changes, or as policing initiatives targeting individuals who commit this crime become more sophisticated and accurate. Consequently, the current research is framed by specific contextual parameters, and findings will be interpreted with reference to those parameters.

In terms of *inconcludability*, an account can always be added to, and as more is added to it, so it will mutate. Quantitative research deals with this “problem” by having a representative sample size; however, in qualitative research, the inconcludable nature of research is accepted and therefore, methods such as single case studies are acceptable. In fact, much qualitative research treats each study as if it was a case study and aims to provide an in-depth examination of the different meanings at work within a different context.

As will be discussed further, this study will focus on case studies of individuals who have committed serial murder in South Africa and will attempt to develop an understanding of

these individuals and their family systems. The researcher acknowledges the sample size and findings that will be generated are by no means complete; and that these findings may be contradicted, elaborated or supplemented by other research on the same topic, or with the same individuals, for example. Yet, understanding and knowledge about serial murder within the context of family may shed light on aspects such as interpersonal familial patterns, emotional processes within the family and family structures.

Finally, *reflexivity* refers to the researcher's awareness of his own subjectivity in terms of the way that a topic is conceptualized, and findings are interpreted. The way in which a researcher characterizes a phenomenon will change how it operates for him and that will change the way that that phenomenon is perceived. Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity as quantitative research attempts to do, qualitative research includes the researcher's subjectivity as a resource in the research process.

In this study, the researcher has chosen to define the concepts under investigation in a certain way – see definitions of serial murder (Chapter 2) and family (Chapter 4). It is understood that these definitions impact upon the cases selected for analysis and data collection and that another researcher may have chosen different definitions, and obtained different findings possibly as a result. Additionally, the conceptual framework for family systems theory devised by the researcher will also impact upon the analysis of the data and findings generated, and will be kept in mind throughout the analysis and assessment of findings.

5.1.1 Evaluating qualitative research

As opposed to quantitative research, which focuses on validity and reliability to evaluate the strength and generalizability of a study, quantitative research has its own set of criteria by which a study can be evaluated.

These criteria are:

- credibility;
- transferability;
- dependability; and
- confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Credibility requires that the researcher must demonstrate that the study was conducted in such a manner that the subject was accurately identified and described.

Transferability refers to the question, how applicable or transferable are the findings to another setting or group of people? The burden of demonstrating transferability lies with the investigator who would make that transfer rather than the original investigator.

Dependability refers to the degree to which one can be sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context. In order to satisfy this criterion, the researcher has to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself rather than being brought about by the researcher's own prejudices. This study will be evaluated by the researcher in relation to these four criteria, and this evaluation will be included in Chapter 8.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is exploratory in nature. Exploratory or descriptive research does not concern itself directly with causal explanations but rather details empirical observations made by the researcher (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Consequently, the researcher does not specify research hypotheses prior to the study but rather generates findings that may be used in other

studies in ways that may or may not be causal. Exploratory research is frequently used when the topic under study is novel; when little research is available on the topic of interest; when a researcher wishes to test out methods or approaches that may be formalized in a future study; or when the researcher wishes to generate findings that may be tested in a more formal manner in another study (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991).

As discussed previously, although serial murder has not been researched extensively in South Africa, a few studies (Du Plessis, 1998; Hodgskiss, 2003; Hook, 2003; Pistorius, 1996; Labuschagne, 2001) have been conducted. Additionally, no prior study has assessed the role of serial murder within a family systems theoretical approach. Therefore, the topic of serial murder in South Africa is suited to an exploratory research design, which will be adopted for the current study, and which hopefully will yield findings that can be tested further in future research.

5.3 SAMPLING

Given the usual small population targeted by qualitative research, in this case individuals who have committed serial murder and are currently incarcerated in prisons in South Africa, the sampling strategy is a non-probability purposive sampling strategy. Non-probability sampling does not involve random sampling and consequently is limited with respect to how well it can be said to be representative of a particular population (Trochim, 2002). Given that qualitative research does not require representativeness in as strict a sense as quantitative research, and that the sample population is limited, non-probability sampling is suitable for this study.

There are two types of non-probability sampling, namely accidental and purposive sampling. This study will use a purposive sampling strategy. According to Trochim (2002)

purposive sampling is ideal when the researcher is seeking a certain predefined group; when a targeted sample is needed quickly; and where proportionality is not a primary sampling concern. The current study meets the first and third criteria, namely:

- individuals who have committed serial murder constitute a certain predefined group; and
- proportionality is not of primary importance given the small population size.

According to the various types of purposive sampling strategies proposed by Patton (1990), the strategy adopted by this study can be further classified as a criterion-based purposive sampling strategy. This means that cases are selected on the basis of meeting some criterion – in this case, the generic definition of serial murder discussed in chapter two. Patton also states that this sampling strategy allows for quality assurance in purposive sampling.

The selected sample for this study consists of individuals who are currently serving sentences in various prisons in South Africa. A case consists of instances of serial murder behaviour and the family systems of which they are a part. It was important to select cases from similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds (namely, White, Afrikaans-speaking) as opposed to others (such as Black and speaking an African language) due to the researcher's objective of obtaining a thorough, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within a family system. In order to do this, the researcher selects the sample according to those with which she feels that she could communicate most adequately without potential contamination or influences that may have resulted due to lack of familiarity with linguistic practices. The introduction of a translator may also affect the system's response and may dilute the investigation further. Future research may possibly aim at extending the realm of cultural backgrounds with regards to serial murder.

Two individuals who meet the criteria for an offence of serial murder are chosen. A brief description of each and their family follows:

5.3.1 Case study one: Mr X and family

Mr X is a White, Afrikaans male in his early forties who is currently incarcerated in a prison in South Africa. He was convicted on five counts of murder, seven counts of rape and one count of attempted rape. His victims were all females, of various ages and ethnicities and he committed his crimes over a period of two years. His immediate family consists of a mother and father and no siblings. The mother and father are pensioners and are of the same ethnic background as Mr X. Mr X's mother still works in the catering industry whilst his father is retired.

5.3.2 Case study two: Mr Y and family

Mr Y is a White, Afrikaans male in his late forties who is also currently incarcerated in a prison in South Africa. He was convicted of three counts of murder, three counts of robbery and one count of attempted murder. His victims were all White males, of various ages and he committed his crimes over a period of ten months. Mr Y's family is estranged and both his mother and father are deceased. After extensive unsuccessful attempts to contact other members of Mr Y's family, it is decided to proceed and document the family of Mr Y via interviews conducted with him: the way he experiences his family.

The reasons to proceed with Mr Y, without having had any available support for the research from his family members are follows:

- He was one of only a few who fulfills the basic cultural criteria, namely from Afrikaans background and origin.
- He was from the White ethnic group.
- He is of male gender.
- He fulfills the criteria set for the definition of serial murder.
- From a theoretical point of view as explained in Chapter 4, the individual is still important in family theory. The individual can still be interviewed and evaluated especially where the genogram is applied as instrument to identify repetitions, adaptive and maladaptive interactional patterns across generations (Guttman, 1991). Given that the genogram information may lead to a decrease in reliability (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985) the ethical responsibility now rests fully on the shoulders of the researcher to allow for this limitation. In effect, it means that the researcher should apply his/her clinical skills to the full. She should listen carefully, but with openness, weighing and evaluating the person's manner of communication, interpersonal style and involvement (Beyers, personal communication, 2006).

For both cases, the family system in each instance is defined in line with the operational definition of family in chapter 4, namely, as those individuals included by Mr X and Mr Y in their conceptualization of their "family". Where these individual are alive and give consent, interviews are conducted with them as outlined below. Alternatively, the individual's own description of their family and relationships within the family system is accepted, as with Mr Y.

5.4 DATA COLLECTION

This study uses four sources of data collection, namely:

- clinical observations of the participant/s;
- interviews with
 - individuals who have committed serial murder;
 - their family members; as well as
 - prison staff, investigating officers and/or other professionals involved in the cases of these individuals;
- genograms of the families of individuals who have committed serial murder; and
- archival records in the form of
 - police case files for the individuals concerned;
 - psychological reports or evaluations;
 - newspaper reports; and
 - recorded television interviews.

These four sources will now be discussed in further detail.

5.4.1 Clinical observations

Clinical observation refers to the direct observation of an individual in order to learn more about that individual's behaviour and, more specifically, their mental health or psychological functioning (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Aspects of the individual that are focused upon may include appearance, body size, hygiene, eye contact, attention and concentration, speech and language, mood, thinking process, memory, ability to interact with others, problem-solving strategies, and repetitive behaviours such as tics. The context in which clinical observation

can take place ranges from more formal settings such as the psychiatric ward of a general hospital to less formal contexts such as casual conversation in a non-psychiatric setting.

This study uses clinical observations of the individuals interviewed (participants and their family members). These observations provide information regarding the behaviour of the individuals interviewed and their interaction with their immediate surroundings (including kinetic aspects such as tone of voice, posture, body language, and use of affect) as an additional data source.

5.4.2 Interviews

The interview used in this particular research study is a qualitative one. In line with the research design, the purpose of the interview method is exploratory as opposed to hypothesis testing and aims to elicit and explore the family and individuals who have committed serial murder. The intention is to allow the data and themes to emerge relatively unrestricted from the interviewees. The researcher conducts all the interviews personally and makes use of interpreters/translators where necessary. The potential influence of such a device on the narratives and themes drawn is noted and included in analysis. Informed consent and confidentiality are ensured.

The interviews are semi-structured and consist of open-ended questions about the family system. The interviews are structured only in the sense that the interviewer will keep the focus on serial murder, the family system, the views of family members about the occurrences and feelings towards the incarcerated member, and the subject's views or perceptions of his own family. The basic format of the interview follows the interviewee's interpretations, explanations, and sense/meaning-making of the topic (Breakwell, 1995). Effort is made to interpret and clarify meanings expressed by the interviewee throughout the interview so as to

ensure the quality of analysis. Sensitivity to the emotional well being of the interviewee is practiced throughout the interview process and is used to inform interview questions.

The semi-structured interviews are open ended, which means that the researcher listens carefully and proceeds by reacting to the cues given by the participant (Kvale, 1996). The researcher's actions are based on her own manner of communicating, the messages of meta-communication, and could be explained in a simple way as the constant phrasing of questions in her mind, such as:

- what is happening in the interview between researcher and participant?
- under what circumstances is it happening (what and where)?
- how does it happen?
- why does it happen?
- how is what is happening connected to what follows?
- how and with what can the researcher behave to intervene without contamination of the research process?

5.4.3 Genograms

The genogram is “a format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationships over at least three generations” (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985, p.1). It provides an effective graphical representation of family patterns, which enables the researcher to view how problems within the family or affecting individual members may be related to these patterns across the system. A genogram is a flexible assessment instrument and can be used for research purposes, as well as a clinical tool to inform therapeutic interventions (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

The genogram has traditionally been paired with Bowenian family systems theory but is not exclusive to it (Mauzey & Erdman, 1995). Within this framework, the genogram assists with formulating hypotheses about family systems and designing interventions into them. Additional clinical benefits of the genogram include organizing data in a graphical way; engaging a family in sessions; teaching systemic ideas; clarifying family patterns and characteristics; and developing intellectual understanding of issues in family systems (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985; Wachtel, 1982). Consequently, it would appear that the genogram is useful as both a clinical intervention and tool for working with family systems, as well as from a research-oriented perspective in terms of understanding and representing family systems.

Most traditional approaches to genogram construction focus upon the basic structure of the family; demographic information; and relationships. However, it is possible to expand creatively on these bases (Mauzey & Erdman, 1995). Additionally, the genogram has been shown to have considerable usefulness in terms of developing cross-cultural understandings of family systems, as well as validity for application to multi-cultural groupings in studies conducted in South Africa (Marchetti-Mercer & Cleaver, 2000).

This study makes use of the genogram method to organize and interpret data gathered on the family systems of individuals who commit serial murder. The decision to use a genogram is based on its proven utility in organizing data related to family systems; graphically representing such systems and illuminating relationships between members; fit with theoretical approaches utilized for the current study (such as that of Bowen (1978)); and its proven cross-cultural suitability and applicability, especially given the multicultural composition of current South African society.

The standardised method for compiling a genogram as outlined in McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) is used. The standardized method consists of three steps, mainly:

- mapping the family structure;
- recording family information; and
- showing family relationships (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

These will now be elaborated upon in turn.

- **Mapping the family structure.**

The graphic depiction of family relationship and structure involves constructing a map of how different family members are related (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). This map consists of figures, lines and symbols, representing people and their relationship to each other. The main information represented on the map includes marriages, deaths, divorce or separation, adoption or fostering of children, twins and households.

- **Recording family information.**

The family structure can be considered the “skeleton of the genogram” (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). Once compiled, further family information is added, namely:

- demographic information;
- functioning information; and
- critical family events.

Demographic information includes dates of birth and death, ages, locations, occupations and educational level. Functional information refers to the medical, behavioural and emotional functioning of family members. Critical family events refer to important events that may have impacted upon family functioning or the functioning of the individual concerned. These include transitions, migrations, failures and successes, demographic events such as births and deaths, and loss of job, for example.

McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) stress the importance of including housekeepers, extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, foster children and adopted children in the analysis of families for clinical or research purposes. They also state that ethnic groups may vary considerably in the structuring of their family trees and that for this reason godparents and other kinship networks should not be ignored in terms of the role that they might play for a particular family group. Stack (1974) states that when a close friend is especially important to a family, this individual may become a member of the informal extended kinship network and that he or she should be included in any analysis of the family.

- **Showing family relationships.**

The final step of creating the genogram involves delineating the relationships between family members. This process is largely inferential and is based on information gathered from family members as well as observation of the family members.

The definition of family discussed in chapter 4 will be used to designate the group of individuals that would be used to construct the genogram for each case. The genogram for each family system is compiled from interviews with, and direct observation of family members as well as the primary research participants in the study, and will go back three generations to the grandparents of the individuals concerned. Due to the fact that the index individuals are incarcerated, and as a result of strict Department of Correctional Services access regulations, it will not be possible to observe the interaction between them and their family members.

Analysis and interpretation of the genogram data takes according to the following categories, namely:

- Category one: Family structure, with respect to
 - household composition;

- sibling constellation; and
- unusual family configurations;
- Category two: Life cycle fit;
- Category three: Pattern repetition across generations, with respect to
 - patterns of functioning;
 - patterns of relationships; and
 - repeated structural patterns;
- Category four: Life events and family functioning, with respect to
 - the coincidences of life events;
 - the impact of life changes, transitions and traumas;
 - anniversary reactions; and
 - social, economic and political events;
- Category five: Relational patterns and triangles; and
- Category six: Family balance and imbalance, with respect to
 - the family structure;
 - roles;
 - levels and style of functioning; and
 - resources (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

5.4.4 Archival data and other records

Archives are the “ongoing, continuous records of a society” (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991, p. 354). Archival records may include actuarial records of births, deaths, and marriages; political and judicial records; other government records (such as crime reports, and police

case files); the mass media; sales records; industrial and institutional records; and various other written documents.

This study uses archival records in the form of police records, and case files in order to select participants and psychological reports together with documentation in the form of newspaper reports as well as video interview footage as part of the data analysis.

It is hoped that by using multiple sources of data, the study will obtain a rich and complex interpretation of the topic of interest (Patton, 1990), and satisfy the criterion of credibility. By using interviews with individuals who have committed serial murder and their families, together with reports from psychologists who assessed them, and direct observation of family interaction, the consistency of the overall impression of the family system can be established and any contradictions can be included in the analysis and/or explored by accessing other sources of data, which may become available as the process of evidence enquiry develops.

To be able to review the drafts of participants, all information gathered is put together and assessments and analyses conducted with the aim of possibly determining if any new or additional information is needed. Additionally, the participants are asked to confirm the researcher's understanding of their beliefs, ideas and perceptions as expressed during interviews and in this way, key informants are allowed to review the information collected in the study and relative consistency in understandings between the researcher and participants is ensured, thus attempting to fulfill the criterion of reflexivity.

5.5 PROCEDURE

The procedure followed by the research study consists of the following steps, namely:

- review literature;

- choose approach and design;
- research media for possible cases;
- identify possible cases;
- get permission from University of Pretoria and Department of Correctional Services;
- review case files and other archival data; speak to experts;
- approach subjects for permission;
- interview individuals who have committed serial murder;
- interview family, prison staff and other professionals;
- compile genogram;
- examine data in light of theoretical approach (Family systems theory); and
- compile results.

All interviewees are briefed before interviews. Briefing consists of defining the situation for the subject, describing the purpose of the interview as well as allowing for any questions on the part of the interviewee. This includes a semi-formal social introduction, the sharing with the participant the aims of the research, as well as ethical and confidentiality issues. This also includes the participants' permission or willingness to participate. Confidentiality is stressed and anonymity guaranteed with regards to interview data, collection and publication of the research.

A statement is made that participation will possibly contribute to the understanding of violence in general and more specifically to serial murder. Initial questions in the interviews are unstructured and open-ended, aimed at developing a sense of rapport with participants. Later, more focused, semi-structured questions are introduced in order to gather information about the family, using circular questions and the genogram to further generate questions and

information for clarity. In addition to the above, some structured questions are also included to obtain biographical and chronological data about the family.

Debriefing after the interview(s) consists of summarizing the main points of the interview and allowing for feedback from the interviewee. Such feedback may go towards verification in later stages.

The above examples of how the interviews are to be introduced may differ depending on the immediate meta-communications and interactional/interpersonal cues in the researcher's relationship with the interviewee (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). The processes and interactions during the interviews are also described and analyzed.

The researcher conducts between three and five interviews of approximately two to three hours with each individual who has committed serial murder, and approximately one interview of one to two hours with family members. The idea is to continue until some form of saturation of information is reached before interview(s) are terminated.

Interviews with prison psychologists are used for both Mr X and Mr Y (approximately one interview of one hour each); in the case of Mr X, the psychiatrist who assessed him for competency to stand trial is also interviewed (one interview of approximately one hour); and with Mr Y, his cell-mate, Mr Z, is also interviewed (approximately five interviews of two hours each). These interviews are unstructured and are integrated into total data analysis, together with primary interviews (with participants and family members), as supplementary data sources. These interviews consist of semi-structured questions concerning the interviewees' perspectives on the individual concerned; the topic of serial murder and their impressions of the families of these individuals where is contact with these individuals.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to safeguard the privacy of the family members interviewed, names of people and places are withheld in line with ethical considerations concerning confidentiality. This is done in spite of the fact that the details of the crimes committed, as well as identity of the individuals sampled for the case studies, are public record. Many of the family members interviewed have avoided public attention due to the sensitive nature of the crimes committed by a member of their family, and their wishes with regards to privacy in this respect are observed.

Additionally, all individuals interviewed are offered the opportunity for debriefing after every interview if they experienced stress or trauma as a result of recounting painful or other experiences. Informed consent is obtained from all individuals interviewed.

Permission to conduct the study is granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, and the Department of Correctional Services, after carefully scrutinizing the nature and conditions of the research.

5.7 DATA ANALYSIS

After data is collected via the various methods discussed above, analysis takes place in two ways, namely:

- a case study method; and
- content analysis.

5.7.1 Discussion of the case study method

The case study method selected for this study is a multiple case study exploratory research design, as described by Yin (1994). A case study approach is selected due to the fact that the author desires an in-depth, rich, descriptive conceptualization of the participant and the family system of the participant concerned. On account of the fact that the study does not wish to make any causal attributions about the phenomenon in question, namely serial murder, it is not necessary to use an experimental design with control groups or a quasi-experimental design (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1981). The case study approach is also amenable to the epistemology and theoretical framework of the study.

- **Yin's criteria for defining a case study.**

Yin (1994) has two main criteria for defining a case study, namely that the study must consist of “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13); and that “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

Serial murder is a contemporary phenomenon, especially in South Africa, where, as discussed in the literature review, it has been particularly prolific over the last ten years (Pistorius, 1996). It is the opinion of the author that serial murder is frequently linked to the context in which it is situated, which, for the purposes of this study, is the family, as well as broader social, cultural and political contexts, to a lesser degree. Additionally, in accordance with Yin's second principle, it is often difficult to draw definite lines between serial murder as a behaviour of one particular individual (as well as serial murder as a cultural phenomenon),

and the context in which this behaviour takes place. This can be seen in the numerous theories discussed in the chapter 3 that attribute serial murder to an individual's upbringing in a "dysfunctional family". Consequently, it would appear that Yin's (1994) two definitional criteria are satisfied, and that a case study methodology is appropriate for this study, and the topic of serial murder.

- **The unit of analysis.**

The unit of analysis is defined by establishing:

- what constitutes a case;
- the time boundaries of a case; and by
- distinguishing what is inside a case from what is outside (Yin, 1994).

A case in this study refers to an individual who has committed serial murder and meets sampling criteria, together with the available family members of this individual. This is because the author intends to study the role played by the family in contributing towards serial murder behaviour in the participant concerned. Family is defined according to the definition in chapter 4 (see p.133).

This study uses the two cases discussed above, taking into account that there are not many individuals incarcerated for serial murder in South Africa.

The time boundaries of the cases that are used in this study consist of the amount of time necessary to establish rapport with the participant concerned as well as their family, and the time necessary to complete enough interviews to reach saturation with the participants and their families.

5.7.2 Content analysis

This study uses a content analysis method to analyze the data collected. Content analysis is a technique whereby messages (in the form of written or oral statements) are studied via being exposed to criteria of selection (Holsti, 1968), after which statements are made about such messages with regard to frequency, grouping or other interpretative frameworks. As a technique, content analysis has been interpreted as both quantitative and qualitative in nature (Smith, 1975). Content analysis involves a consideration of what to count, the nature of levels and units of analysis and how to use coding frames or categories (Berg, 1995; Franzosi, 2004).

It is thought that seven major elements in messages can be counted in content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Berg, 1983; Merton, 1968; Selltitz, Jahoda, Deutsch & Cook, 1959). These are words or terms; themes; characters; paragraphs; items; concepts; and semantics. These elements can be considered types of units of analysis that are then organized in terms of coding frames (Berg, 1995). Coding frames or categories are used to sort cases or units of analysis into some specified special class according to certain criteria. Franzosi (2004) states that coding categories for content analysis have a number of properties, namely:

- the design of coding categories follows the theoretical interest of the researcher;
- coding categories are abstract, general and highly aggregated;
- since the coding categories follow the theoretical interest of the researcher, a researcher with different interests with respect to the texts used or subject matter may choose different categories;

- coder discretion plays a role in trying to fit concrete text into abstract coding categories and thus there may be ‘contamination’ of the measurement which needs to be addressed in terms of reflexivity;
- links and connections between categories are not specified, that is, causal statements are not usually made; and
- coded output bears little relationship to the original text.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to the content analysis method used. The unit of analysis for this study consists of themes that emerge from the collected data (namely, interviews, clinical observations, genograms and archival records) for each case study, and coding proceeds on the basis of theoretical classes based on the family systems conceptual framework discussed in chapter 4 (see p. 167), such as emotional process, multigenerational patterns and relationship patterns. These coding frames or categories are further structured with respect to their various constituent elements (as specified by the conceptual framework in chapter 4).

Therefore, emotional process are further subdivided into differentiation within the family system and differentiation in the social milieu, and themes coded on the basis of how they fit into the various categories. A similar procedure is repeated with multigenerational processes (in terms of Bowen’s projection and Minuchin’s sub-system or structural approach) as well as with relationship patterns (in terms of triangulation and triads, as well as interactions and hierarchies).

5.8 DATA INTEGRATION

Data collected and analysed as outlined above is integrated in order to explore the topic of serial murder as outlined in the research focus, namely: “How does the family system of a

person who commits serial murder function?" That is, what is the family structure, who are the people in the family system and how do they maintain the family system.

After data analysis, there should be an awareness of possible meta-patterns in the family system of each case, which illuminate the connections or relationships between the serial murder pattern of behaviour of one of the members of the family system and other patterns of behaviour in the family system.

5.9 CONCLUSION

This study investigates the role that serial murder plays within the family system via an exploratory qualitative research design. The various criteria for evaluating such a study have been outlined and will be referred to again in chapter 8, when assessing the limitations of the current study.

Importantly, analysis of data first examines each case individually, and then explores the patterns that emerge across cases. In this way, findings may reveal patterns that can be elaborated upon in future research by the addition of other cases or testing of particular patterns. The following chapter will examine the results of the current study.

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