

# NEAT, PLAUSIBLE, AND WRONG: EXAMINING THE LIMITATIONS OF TYPOLOGIES IN THE STUDY AND INVESTIGATION OF SERIAL MURDER

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## Abstract

*'The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown'* (Lovecraft, 1927: 23).

This thesis questions the accepted use of typologies in an official capacity. To examine if typologies are of practical use in the study of serial homicide, potential implications of their use are critically discussed in five contexts, those of prevention, investigation, profiling, utilisation in court, and with respect to societal contentment. It is concluded that due to the inherent ambiguity of typological thinking and the inability of categorisation to characterise human behaviours, the use of such methods does more to impede understanding than it does to improve it. Rather, such pursuits are borne out of a very human desire to understand, and hence control the uncontrollable.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

More than any other crime, serial murder is evocative of the darkest side of human life and Western civilization continues to hold a macabre fascination with the serial killer. This captivation, one that prompts the production of scores of books, films and music on the subject, stems from a fear of what cannot be understood, explained, or rationalized by civilized people; the serial killer has slipped through the net of society, beholden to nothing but his or her vices. There has always been a great deal of attention given to serial murder from law enforcement to the medicolegal community, academia, and the general public (Morton *et al.*, 2010) yet despite its sensationalism and notoriety, the crime eludes comprehension. Such crimes challenge the understanding of the law enforcement officials tasked with confronting it, and the general public forced to come to terms with its visceral nature, captivating and repulsing us in equal measure: ‘Chilling, ultimate, and full of menace with the dark suspicion that nobody is safe until the killer is apprehended; murder calls out like no other crime’ (Keppel & Birnes, 2003: xxix).

Whilst interest in serial murder has led to a substantial body of academic work on the subject, there is still much to understand, with the public’s knowledge concerning serial murder being built on the foundation of Hollywood productions (NGAVC, 2008). This “‘Hollywood effect’”, of gracing personal opinion with dramatic illustration and thereby giving that opinion apparent authority’ is nothing but a false platform, an agent for increased confusion and erroneous assumptions about the true dynamics of serial murder (Canter & Youngs, 2003: 172). This thesis works incrementally to dispel some of the erroneous assumptions that have become commonly accepted but are incapable of standing ground in the face of academic scrutiny. By combining a critical analysis of applied typological thinking with a selection of illustrative case studies, the thesis aims to examine the possible dangers of relying on typologies for any official or influential purpose. Those involved in the study of serial murder frequently employ the use of typologies to divide the concept into homogenous sub-classes and though researchers aim to improve understanding through the creation of these typologies, such methods often leave the reader with more questions than answers. By using the work of a variety of criminologists, investigative psychologists and other social scientists it is demonstrated that the ‘fluid, endlessly adaptable and complex nuances of human behaviour’ reduced and refined to token phrases, explained away with artificial definitions and slipped into neat categories, is wrought with issues (Alison & Eyre, 2009: 63).

Through consideration of the canon of criminological literature on serial murder this thesis creates a framework through which the proposed critique may be understood, and situated within the discourse on serial murder in criminology. Work by Fox and Levin (2005) provides an introduction to the subject matter to show that whilst the prevalence of serial murder is impossible to determine with any precision, fear of victimisation has increased, warranting the increase in research dedicated to this topic. This is followed by discussion of the artificial definitions recently employed to categorise the phenomenon of multiple murder into three distinct subtypes of serial, mass, and spree, incorporating critical analysis concerning what such arguably ambiguous and subjective distinctions may contribute to our understanding of the subject. In order to provide a theoretical grounding on which to build understanding, the lack of consensus between academics concerning the use of typologies will be explored. Here, opposing arguments upheld by Sorochinski and Salfati (2010) and Canter *et al.* (2004) will provide an overview of the disputes that splinter the academic world. The thesis then demonstrates how the consistency hypothesis as applied by the former

researcher may not be affirmed with empirical support and that the veritable potpourri of information at variance with itself conjures questions of its validity.

By engaging in a critical discussion of the two foremost influential classification systems of serial murder it is argued that despite such enthusiastic adoption, particularly of the organised/disorganised dichotomy, the ideological use of such strict classification systems to explain the nuances of human behaviours is fundamentally flawed. Often considered as a baseline for the multitude of later variations, the widely influential organised/disorganised dichotomy by Ressler *et al.* (1986) and the latest version from Holmes & Holmes (2010) can clearly be seen to encompass the range of issues prevalent throughout typological thinking. Further to this, an evaluation of typologies across the five key stages of the subject allows for consideration of the utility, purpose, and appropriateness of their presence as a knowledge pool. These five areas are depicted as follows: the quintessential prevention of serial murder; investigation, detection, and crime scene analysis; offender profiling; use of typologies in a court setting, the legal implications; societal contentment.

The cultural specificity of typologies to date is discussed as an additional issue and one rarely considered in this subject. Through an application of Blagg's (1997) work on restorative justice it is argued that the study of serial murder necessitates greater efforts towards cross-cultural comparisons as a presumption of transferability may be suppressing progress in this area. The omission of variables for hypothesised self-serving purposes suffers the same shortfalls as the lack of cross-cultural study incurs, preventing the application of insights to all serial killers alike and further damaging future study.

In order to reach a conclusion, the symbolic origins of the term 'serial killer' are considered as the impact of previous research has intertwined popular culture with academic authority, leaving even the phenomenon itself open to misconception. Having shown the limitations of typological thinking, the theory of behavioural consistency as put forth by Salfati and Bateman (2005) is subsequently applied as whilst their use cannot be condoned, an application and focus towards a low level theory of behavioural consistency is recommended as a future direction. Overall, it is acknowledged that whilst truths may be gleaned from typological study, this method should not be employed as anything other than a medium from which to redirect future study.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

There is a clear responsibility for criminologists to contribute to the understanding of serial murder through research, as Fox and Levin (2005: 157) note, 'the fear and suffering provoked by serial murderers is extraordinary, warranting an attempt to understand who these offenders are and why they kill'. Whilst interest in serial murder has led to an increasingly large body of academic work on the subject (Dowden, 2005), there is still much to learn, therefore, this dissertation has been conducted in the format of a literature review defined by Champion as 'a preliminary examination of materials available as resources to bolster one's ideas about and explanations for events' (2006: 591). Through the use of existing data in the form of books, journals, websites and documentaries it has been possible to build a unique platform on which to base this project.

Primary research has not been pursued for a number of reasons including the limited time and funding available, though most crucially is the issue of accessibility to relevant research participants. The practicality of conducting primary research with either offenders convicted of serial murder, or specialist practitioners working within the field is fraught both with ethical concerns and does not easily lend itself to the restraints of an undergraduate research study. Gaining access to research participants is a complication faced by the majority of researchers, however, particularly so with regards to the study of serial murder; access may be denied by penal institutions, subjects may be uncooperative and as Hinch (1998: 5) notes, 'Even when they agree to be interviewed, many may be unwillingly or unable to talk freely about their crimes'. Additionally, the aim of this dissertation is to examine the utility of pre-existing typologies used to interpret serial murder, therefore, although primary research may have been able to offer some unique and interesting insights in this instance, literary analysis was considered to be the most appropriate method for the compilation of this report.

Utilising secondary sources as opposed to conducting primary research has a number of notable advantages as Riedel observes, 'many of the phenomena of interest to crime researchers are so difficult to observe directly that secondary data are the only practical source of data' (2000: 4). This is particularly the case for original crime scene details, access to which can be obtained through books at the convenience of the literary researcher. One such example is Wilson and Wilson's (1995) text which provides detailed yet concise accounts of the movements of a vast number of serial murderers; information which would not otherwise be readily available.

Primary research techniques can be reinvented to correspond to literary analysis, as is the case with 'snowball sampling' whereby further research participants are discovered through the initial parties involved (Bryman, 2008) thus the sample builds upon itself until an appropriate amount of data has been gathered. The utility of a bibliography is extensive if used in this way to locate information beyond that which was initially found and this approach was of particular benefit in finding journals as Dowden (2005) notes that it is rare for researchers in this area to contribute multiple articles, therefore, those articles available are spread across a wide range of journals.

The Internet is a valuable vehicle for research as it makes information easily accessible, inter-linked and usually cost-free, whilst also facilitating access to international research sources (Noaks & Wincup, 2004). This is of particular benefit when researching an issue such as serial murder as a substantial body of literature is based with America via the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit or leading commentators such as Holmes and Holmes (2010).

However, the credibility of Internet sources is an issue which must be closely monitored by the researcher as in theory anyone can publish on the Internet thus it is imperative for anyone conducting research to carefully vet their findings before using an Internet resource for academic purposes.

A significant proportion of available information on serial murder stems from academic commentators who draw on their own experience and interviews to make conclusions. This can be problematic because any information provided by the serial killer is retrospective whilst Hickey (1997: 231) notes that 'Hindsight can easily distort reality and mold it to the psychological needs of the offender'. This issue is heightened further insofar as the data available may have been collected for purposes other than those being studied by the literary researcher (Champion, 2006; Riedel, 2000) thus the data will not be specifically designed to address the newly proposed question. As such, researchers will have to 'refashion tools' in order to interpret the available information (Riedel, 2000: 7) and therefore, whilst in-depth practitioner knowledge is a vital part of this subject, such material must be treated with caution when employed to address means other than those originally intended.

It should be acknowledged that any methodological approach to a complex and emotive issue such as serial murder is likely to invoke some difficulties when attempting to offer reliable and representative outcomes. In this instance, however, literary analysis has enabled the allocated research time to be spent both collating and *analysing* a substantive volume of existing data, potentially adding further validity to the conclusions reached in this research. Therefore, any limitations or disadvantages from the exclusion of primary research have been outweighed by the strengths of utilising secondary resources for the completion of this report.

## **Chapter Three: Serial Murder: Definitions and Divides**

### Defining Serial Murder

Serial killing is not a new phenomenon and instances of multiple homicides have been documented throughout history. Howard (2010) presents the case of Liu Pengli, king of the Jidong (pre-Buddhist China) in 144 BC, who persistently murdered large groups of slaves for sport. It is reported that by the end of his reign, he was responsible for the murders of at least 100 people. Holmes and Holmes (2010) present a number of examples of those who have killed in a persistent, consecutive fashion but were not termed serial killers, including 'Billy the Kid', who allegedly totalled 21 victims during his brief life from 1859 to 1881, and a number of mob figures based in large cities in the United States. These acts are seen to be fundamentally and characteristically similar to acts of multiple murder committed today despite not being viewed as incidents of serial murder at the time. As affirmed by Jenkins (2009: 4), 'the social and rhetorical construction of multiple homicide is thus a continuing cultural process'; what has changed is the interest from academics, media and public alike in the terminology used to describe and prescript the characteristics of such actions.

The recent growth in interest in the subject of serial murder has academics questioning whether we are 'in the throes of an epidemic' (Fox & Levin, 2005: 31). However, due to the incalculable number of unsolved or undetected cases, it is not possible to determine with any precision the prevalence or incidence of serial murder (Simons, 2001; Fox & Levin, 2005). Calculating long-term trends is also next to impossible due to disparities in reporting and improvements in detection, as well as changes in definition that profoundly affect the classification of multiple homicide (Fox & Levin, 2005). As a result, there is much discrepancy amongst academics as to the total number of serial killers present in the population at any one time. O'Reilly-Fleming (1996) is amongst those who are of the opinion that serial killers represent the minority few, totalling approximately ten in operation in the United States at any one time and accounting for an estimated 100 victims each year. Contrary to this, Holmes and DeBurger (1988) estimate a much higher figure of 350 unidentified serial killers active in the country, and Norris (1988) writes that the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimate as many as 500.

The present terminology used to distinguish a category of serial murder from other types of multicide was not made available until Robert Ressler, special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), first coined the term 'serial killer' in the mid 1970s (Seltzer, 1998). Less than a decade later, and following the growing interest in the subject of multiple murder, the FBI's Behavioral Sciences Unit was responsible for the creation of a trichotomy of multiple murder (Fox & Levin, 2005). This divided the committal of several murders into three distinct subtypes – serial, mass and spree (ibid) – and remains the most widely accepted contemporary view of multiple murder (Gresswell & Hollin, 1994). Serial murder is defined in the Crime Classification Manual by Douglas and Ressler *et al.* (2006: 20) as 'three or more separate events in three or more separate locations with an emotional cooling-off period between homicides'. Mass murder has been defined by the FBI as 'homicides involving the murder of four or more victims in a single episode' (Fox & Levin, 2005: 17) and the final distinguishing category, spree murder, is defined as 'killing at two or more locations with no emotional cooling-off period between murders... [and are] all the result of a single event, which can be of a short or long duration' (Douglas *et al.*, 2006: 20). The validity of the spree murder category, specifically in reference to the notion of a 'cooling-off period', has been central to recent discussion. Attendees of the Serial Murder Symposium, hosted in 2005 by the FBI with the aim of pooling the collective knowledge of respected experts in the field,

voiced concerns that such a concept created arbitrary guidelines and enhanced confusion (NGAVC, 2008). Fox and Levin (2005) also noted this issue in reference to the use of the spree category as a third wheel category, most often used to identify cases which do not tidily rest in either the mass or serial murder categories.

Until the creation of the trichotomy no sub categorisations of multiple murder were ever applied within law enforcement or academia. The artificial categorisation of serial murder, mass murder, and spree murder as separate subtypes, merely predicated on the timescale of attacks, has been the subject of much discrepancy amongst academics and has often been described as a red herring, a ‘meaningless distraction [rather] than a helpful distinction’ (Fox & Levin, 2005: 18). The case of Daniel Harold Rolling, also known as ‘The Gainesville Ripper’ (Holmes & Holmes, 2010), is a useful illustrator of the issues created by arguably unnecessary classification systems. In 1990, Rolling was responsible for the sadistic murder of five college students over a period of three days on a university campus in Gainesville, Florida (Fox & Levin, 2005). However, Rolling was also responsible for a triple homicide the previous year in Shreveport, Louisiana (ibid). By virtue of the definitions provided above, Rolling’s crimes could be considered to have characteristics of mass, spree, and serial killing – dependant, as Fox and Levin (2005) note, only on the point of reference.

Not only does such ambiguity render the distinction problematic in terms of distinguishing the type of killer, but the definitions provided by the FBI are not universally, or even academically accepted as fixed descriptions. Individual academics often impose their own interpretation of these definitions throughout their research, providing different thresholds in terms of the number of victims, the motivation of the killer, and the temporal separation necessary to qualify as one type (NGAVC, 2008). As a result, ‘studies which purport to examine incidents of serial murder may focus on differing populations of offenders, depending upon the definition of serial murder employed’ (Ferguson *et al.*, 2003: 292). Holmes and Holmes (1998: 18) for example, specify the criteria for serial murder as ‘the killing of three or more people over a period of more than 30 days, with a significant cooling-off period between the killings’. In comparison with the definition provided by the Ressler *et al.* (2006), this definition makes no specification of a change of location, but does require a thirty day minimum period of murderous behaviour, potentially impacting the acknowledged offender population. Furthermore, at an FBI conference in 2005 there were discussions as to whether or not the definition of serial murder should be altered and the threshold lowered to include those crimes with two or more separate events (Douglas *et al.*, 2006), indicating that the classification is very much still a work in progress.

Sorochinski and Salfati (2010), when considering the significant amount of research dedicated to the importance of time intervals between offences of murder, find it questionable that despite such a distinction being described as central to formulating the definition for serial murder, at no point is either the length or the significance of such an interval ever clearly delineated. To make matters worse, McKenzie (1995) notes a number of occasions when authors continue to use several of the terms interchangeably; with this in mind, it is appropriate to question what such a distinction, ambiguous as it is, contributes to the understanding of multiple murder.

#### Arguments Concerning the Use of Typologies

It remains the case that there are many different classification systems employed by academicians, members of law enforcement groups, and members of the mental health community to identify, analyse and assess serial murderers (Morton *et al.*, 2010) yet ‘while



there has been significant, independent work conducted by a variety of experts to identify and analyze the many issues related to serial murder, there have been few efforts to reach a consensus... regarding these matters' (NGAVC, 2008: vii). Available literature concerning itself with a discussion of serial murder can be split into two competing arguments. The first of these is demonstrated by Sorochinski and Salfati (2010: 110) who apply the consistency hypothesis, as outlined by Canter (1994), to argue that 'since people in general are not found to behave at random, it is reasonable to expect some degree of consistency in offenders' behaviours as well'. This is a plausible argument until scrutiny is applied: firstly, the study of serial murder inherently deals with those most rogue from the values of society; their inconsistency follows by default. Secondly, evidence to support a high degree of consistency across a series of offender behaviours must be examined before the prediction can be awarded any empirical value.

The use of typologies and classification systems to organise offenders and their behaviours into subgroups is a commonplace occurrence within this subject and although, as argued by Fox and Levin (2005), a heterogeneous phenomenon such as serial murder may necessitate a breakdown of information in order to formulate understanding, such a system as is currently employed is contentious at best. This is the other side of the divide: Canter *et al.* (2004: 296) argue that such classification undermines existing understanding of serial murder as 'human beings rarely fall into distinct types and therefore any approach that seeks to use a template for defining the characteristics of a distinct type is not likely to find much empirical support'. All classification systems, it may be argued, are bound by the subjectivity of the creator and his, or her, knowledge pool and opinions. Additionally, Alison and Eyre (2009: 63) argue that typologies have an unadvisable tendency to provide only a 'terribly restricted menu of choice' from which to consider the complexities inherent in human behaviour.

Unfortunately even if one were to discount the issue of restriction, the existence of so many varieties of classification systems is counterintuitive: the provision of manifold answers lessens the likelihood that any one of them is *right*. Such is the desire of many academics to be the one to propose the definitive *neat* answer to the problem of sorting – and hence understanding – those who commit multiple homicides, that the waters of understanding are made ever murkier by the multiplicity of conflicting theories. Palermo (2002: 384) argues that the abundance of classification systems 'makes one question whether criminal profiling may differ on the basis of the methodology used and on the culture, pertinent knowledge, and possible prejudicial attitudes on the part of various researchers'. Typologies in this instance may be regarded as no more than an academic exercise and little more than conjecture.

## **Chapter Four: The Utility of Typologies**

### Classification Issues

Anyone intending to draw on typologies for any academic or investigative purpose should be aware of two assumptions that are invariably made (Canter & Wentink, 2004). Firstly, that the co-occurrence of characteristics specific to each type will happen frequently enough to separate that type from the next and secondly, that the characteristics specific to one type will not with any frequency co-occur with the specified and distinct characteristics of any other type (ibid).

There exist a large number of classifications that claim to identify types of serial murderer: some claim to depict causation, others to facilitate diagnostic analysis (Hickey, 2006). It is said that, dependent upon the authority read, there exist somewhere between two and eleven types of serial murderer (Megargee & Bohn, 1979). Such disparity is intrinsic to this discussion. What follows here is a discussion of two influential typologies followed by a critical analysis of the purpose of classifications, both initially proposed by the individual researcher(s) and later interpreted by others. These are considered across five settings: prevention; investigation, detection, and crime scene analysis; offender profiling; use of typologies in a court setting, the legal implications; societal contentment.

Possibly the most widely cited classification system for serial murder is that which was put forth by Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman and D'Agostino (1986) titled 'The Organized/Disorganized Dichotomy'. This dichotomy was initially designed to facilitate the elicitation of recognisable patterns within serial sexual murders (Ressler *et al.*, 1986) though it was later used to differentiate between all sexual homicides and also occurrences of arson (Canter *et al.*, 2004). Ressler *et al.* (1986: 291) claim that 'facets of the criminal's personality are evident in his offense. Like a fingerprint, the crime scene can be used to aid in identifying the murderer'. It is by analysing this 'fingerprint' that they propose to be able to place the offender into one of two categories: organised or disorganised. It is proposed that each one of these categories describes characteristics indicative of both the offender's lifestyle and of his crimes (Canter *et al.*, 2004), and Ressler *et al.* (1986) affirm that they are able to establish crime scene differences and identify characteristics that could be used to compile a criminal profile. According to Ressler *et al.* (1986: 291), 'An organized murderer is one who appears to plan his murders and who displays control... The disorganized murderer is less apt to plan, and his crime scenes display haphazard... behavior'. Crime scene characteristics of an organised offender are depicted as planned: the researchers postulate that the organised offender is likely to supply and remove a weapon for committal of the offence, display control of the victim in the form of restraint, and commit acts of a sexual nature with the live victim. Conversely, the crime scene of the disorganised offender will present minimal evidence of organisational or planning behaviours, minimal evidence of the use of restraints on the victim, and maximum evidence of disorder, including evidence such as blood or fingerprints and a discarded murder weapon. In addition, the disorganised offender is more likely than the organised to position or keep the body of the victim and perform acts of a sexual nature on the body of the deceased. According to Ressler *et al.* (1986) these idiosyncrasies will be prevalent across 'organised' and 'disorganised' crime scenes.

In terms of identifying the offender as an individual Ressler *et al.* (1986) provide a number of profile characteristics, a selection of which are listed below:

Organised offenders are said to be of average to high intelligence, skilled in their profession, socially competent, under stress and be harbouring feelings of anger or depression at the time of the offence, and are likely to be avid followers of crime events in the media (ibid).

In contrast, it is said that disorganised offenders are likely to be of low birth order, below average intelligence, socially incompetent, battling feelings of fear and confusion at the time of the murder, have prior knowledge of or contact with the victim, and live alone (ibid).

Regarded by some as ‘seminal in the field’ (Palermo, 2002: 384), the dichotomy has been the basis for numerous further modes of classification. Widely accepted as a conceptual tool by law enforcement officials, particularly in the United States, its influence can be seen across broad variety of areas including both investigative and court settings, offender profiling, and theoretical understanding (Canter *et al.*, 2004; Ressler *et al.*, 1986). However, despite its extensive adoption there exist a number of uncomfortable discrepancies within the organised/disorganised framework which pose a serious concern, and issues relating to its validity and reliability have been consistently noted by those in academia (Holmes & Holmes, 2010; Canter *et al.*, 2004; Fox & Levin, 2005). Most apparent is the limited, and self-serving, data sample comprising only 36 consenting individuals. The opportunity sample of offenders is of particular concern as the data gathered cannot be said to be reflective of any wider audience. Furthermore, the data gathering process did not rely merely on crime scene characteristics but also took the form of interviews. Any information gathered through this method is therefore subjective and open to manipulation not only by the researchers but also, and particularly, by the interviewees.

The organised/disorganised dichotomy has been wholly disputed by Canter *et al.* (2004) whose research found that not only are ambiguities existent throughout but that fundamentally, organised and disorganised are not in fact two opposing categories in any dichotomous sense. The researchers tested the dichotomy using ‘the multidimensional scaling of the co-occurrence of 39 aspects of serial killings’ to conclude that the results revealed ‘no distinct subsets of offense characteristics reflecting the dichotomy’ (Canter *et al.*, 2004: 293). The organised/disorganised dichotomy therefore fails to meet both the requirements provided by Canter and Wentink (2004) and outlined at the beginning of this chapter: even Ressler *et al.* (1986: 293) openly admit that ‘there are no situations where the organised and disorganised offenders are mutually exclusive’. Lastly, the study possesses elements indicative of a self-fulfilling prophecy as the researchers’ intentions were never to test the discriminatory power of their dichotomy, least of all on a sample that was not drawn up specifically as a tool to illustrate their dichotomy: it is, for all intents and purposes, a ‘reification of a concept rather than an empirical validation of it’ (Canter *et al.*, 2004: 296).

Holmes and Holmes (2010), in the third edition of their work, classify serial murderers in accordance with the killers’ anticipated gains and basic motivation as well as background characteristics, crime scene evidence and spatial behaviours of offenders. It is argued that the locus of motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic to the personality of the killer in question and anticipated gains are either psychological or material. On the basis of these conclusions Holmes and Holmes (2010) identify four types of serial murderer: visionary, mission, hedonistic (subcategorised into lust, thrill, and comfort), and power/control. The visionary serial killer is one who has suffered a break with reality, ‘is psychotic... experiences visions and hears voices’ (Holmes & Holmes, 2010: 45). The mission serial killer ‘kills “undesirable” people... Whomever the killer defines as such... is not psychotic and is geographically stable’ (ibid). The hedonistic serial killer of the lust or thrill type kills because

he finds enjoyment in the act with sex often playing an important factor. The hedonistic serial killer, under the comfort heading, is a category predominantly for females who kill for reasons of creature comfort. And lastly, the power/control serial killer is depicted as killing 'because he enjoys the feel of controlling the entire future, the destiny of his victims' (ibid).

Using this system Holmes and Holmes (2010) proffer the ability to effectively categorise offenders according to their crime scene behaviours and claim to be able to draw inferences about the personality of the killer at large. However, not unlike the organised/disorganised dichotomy, there is little empirical support or validation for the typology put forth by Holmes and Holmes (2010). Whilst the researchers utilised both case material and a selection of their own interviews with such offenders, 'they give no systematic account of exactly how that material was utilized to devise their system of classification' (Canter & Wentink, 2004: 5). Furthermore, the typology openly acknowledges failures such as the lack of validity within the organised/disorganised dichotomy, yet elements of the work by Ressler *et al.* (1986) can clearly be seen throughout their classification system. The visionary serial killer is often described as disorganised and the power/control serial killer as organised both in their crime scenes and mindsets.

In the same way that Ressler *et al.* (1986) recognised that the categories of organised and disorganised could not be said to be mutually exclusive, Holmes and Holmes (2010) acknowledge that there will be instances in which offenders will exhibit behaviours and perceivable characteristics that could be applied to more than one category. Unfortunately there is an absence of operational definitions and instructions as to how to proceed if and when this overlap occurs, and it occurs arguably more frequently than it should, which makes effective differentiation unreliable. This has been noted as being of particular concern in reference to the power/control category, for which numerous overlapping crime scene characteristics have been identified (Fox & Levin, 2005; Canter & Wentink, 2004; Ferguson *et al.*, 2003). Ferguson *et al.* (2003) argue that it is possible to find elements of power in almost any crime setting, and therefore to include it as a motive for serial murder is unwise, as it is not a reach to argue that the vast majority, if not the entirety, of criminals act out of a desire to express power. For Canter and Wentink (2004), upon empirical examination of the typology in question, power/control appeared to encompass elements which consistently co-occurred with numerous other characteristics. In other words, the variables included under the definition for power/control provided by Holmes and Holmes (2010) appeared central to all aspects of serial killing, and were not solely confined to the power/control category.

### Applications of Typologies

These criticisms cast a new light on the utility of typologies. However, numerous sets of such information are still widely used and disseminated across society. In respect of this, possible contributions of such systems, both in general terms and specific to the typologies discussed will now be considered.

### Prevention

By their nature, classifications are reactive: to make its case, the development of a system of classification must rely upon past crimes. This method, though unavoidable for the development of the aforementioned, suffers from the inherent problem that any classifications will be an essentially self-selecting database, making inferences based solely on those captured. Sorochinski and Salfati (2010) discuss the possibility that solved homicide series carry higher consistency thereby enabling their resolution, whereas the unsolved remain so due to lower consistency across offending behaviours. As a result, any conclusions drawn

from past data invoke numerous questions as to their generalisability. Ferguson *et al.* suggest that any psychological disturbance that can be seen as prevalent amongst serial murderers may also not be considered a common trait:

‘if psychological disturbance is noted in serial murderers who are apprehended, this may be because their psychological disturbance is the cause of their apprehension, rather than their pattern of homicides. Thus, apprehended serial murderers represent an essentially self-selecting sample who are not representative of serial murderers as a group’ (2003: 289).

Serial murder typologies are fundamentally nonsensical in the prevention of serial homicide: despite claims to the contrary, it would appear that typologies such as those provided by Ressler *et al.* (1986) and Holmes and Holmes (2010) are only capable of providing accurate insight when furnished with the offender, the victim, and the crime scene to analyse. The infamous case of ‘Jack the Ripper’ provides the perfect example of this deficiency. ‘Jack the Ripper’, responsible for the murders of at least five female prostitutes in the Whitechapel area of London in the year 1888, remains unidentified. Holmes and Holmes (2010) have speculated that if ‘Jack the Ripper’s’ victim selection was a product of his distaste towards prostitutes and his ambition to rid the area of undesirable people then his actions emulate those of a mission-type serial killer. However, if his victim selection was a product of ease and accessibility this cannot be said to be the case. Ferguson *et al.* (2003: 290) note a discernible risk that researchers or investigators may confound the aspect of motive by projecting motives which may be inaccurate onto a murder, yet without the inclusion of motive, typologies provide no more than a summary of crime scene variables. There have been countless attempts at profiling ‘Jack the Ripper’ over the years, all suffering from the same issues. In this way it can be seen that without access to both the crime and the criminal, researchers can only speculate as to the appropriate categorisation.

#### Investigation, Detection, and Crime Scene Analysis

Serial murder presents police with the unenviable task of ‘finding a criminal when there is no known connection between him and his victim’ (Canter, 1994: 4). With limited resources and increasing demands being placed on their time, typologies and profiles are being ‘seized on’ by law enforcement officials desperate for answers (*ibid*). However, typologies of serial murder are reliant on the assumption that the offenders’ behaviour will remain static over the entirety of their offending and be distinguishable from other crimes of the same nature. Unfortunately, this can rarely be said to be the case: whilst the majority of studies have focussed on individual detectable behaviours at crime scene level, this is unlikely to provide an accurate image of a single perpetrator. The idea of a criminal *fingerprint*, or calling card is well used in fiction literature, yet this is misleading. Sorochinski and Salfati (2010: 114) note that homicide is effectively ‘an interaction between the offender and the victim... how the victim responds during the assault can have a direct impact on the offender’s actions, and thus the manner in which the murder unfolds’. Hickey (2006) identifies a wide range of variables, such as loss of control, which can affect the details of a crime and sequentially the crime scene with which investigators are left – the salient influence of victim participation encounters earlier support from von Hentig (1948: 384) who wrote that ‘In a sense the victim shapes and molds the criminal... To know one we must be acquainted with the complementary partner’. Such are the short comings of serial murder typologies that the victim as an influential factor is often overlooked with grievous consequences: by focussing too intently on easily influenced variables it is possible to miss other variables of equal or greater importance.

Furthermore, offenders have the potential to be in control of the shadow they cast: given that the majority of classification systems rely on an element of motivation to type an offender,

such an application is open to exploitation. This can be seen in the case of David Berkowitz, who shot and killed six women in vehicles with their male partners in the years 1976 and 1977 (Holmes & Holmes, 2010). At trial Berkowitz claimed to have been possessed by demons, confessing to having received instructions as to how and when to commit the murders through his neighbour's dog, earning him the self-imposed title the 'Son of Sam' (ibid). However, it is reported that later in 1994 during a personal interview with Robert Ressler, former profiler for the FBI and co-creator of the organised/disorganised dichotomy, Berkowitz recanted his previous story claiming instead that he committed the murders out of a desire to prevent the creation of illegitimate children such as himself (ibid). Had the typology provided by Holmes and Holmes (2010) been utilised and imposed on Berkowitz's initial confession, the 'Son of Sam' would have been classified as a visionary killer on account of his psychotic experiences of voices and visions. However, were we to take Berkowitz's second and altered confession as truth then Berkowitz would qualify as a mission killer. In addition to the above confessions, Berkowitz at one time also stated that he experienced a sexual thrill when committing the murders (ibid). This case illustrates the dangers of assigning such fluid and interchangeable categories to an offender on the basis of perceived motivation after the fact.

The case of Richard Kuklinski delineates the dangers of assigning a category to an offender based on crime scene characteristics only, without a recognisable perpetrator. Richard Kuklinski was personally responsible, by his own admission, for the murders of more than 100 people, and was finally convicted in 1998 after a 30 year career of contract killing (America Undercover, 1992). As a professional hit man, Kuklinski had no discernible pattern: his methods were wide ranging, from cyanide poisoning to strangulation to shooting and were designed with deliberation to deceive law enforcement (ibid). Kuklinski often abstained for months or even years between murders (ibid) and the absence of a discernible pattern made his crimes notoriously difficult to profile (Holmes & Holmes, 2010). The application of any theory reliant upon consistency or reading crime scene details to find a common offender would undoubtedly fail in such a case and may therefore provide no insight, speculative or otherwise, as to the nature of the offender. Indeed, Kuklinski was only eventually apprehended following a series of mistakes on his behalf and extensive investigative and undercover work by police authorities. Such a case highlights the ever present question of the utility of typological thinking if these methods can so easily be circumvented by the offender at such a high price.

Finally, typologies lack the scope for recognition of progression on the part of the killer, focussing on the offender as an unchanging entity and often assuming that the way in which an offender commits their crimes will remain the same *ad infinitum*. What they fail to recognise is that a serial killer was not always a serial killer, and therefore will not emerge *fully formed*. It is therefore counterintuitive to assume that any offender may be reliably classified under the same type for the entirety of his series. Offenders may mature or change in any element of their crime for a number of reasons (Canter & Youngs, 2003). These may be either outside their control, as discussed in the context of victim participation, or within their control as a development of their fantasy or preference, or they may evolve to further evade capture (Grubin *et al.*, 2001). In addition, with the committal of each new offence the perpetrator becomes more experienced and possibly more confident in his or her crimes, further increasing the likelihood of change across the series (Canter & Youngs, 2003). Some studies, to their credit, recognise this and therefore base their knowledge on the third offence, or first three offences in any homicide series (Salfati & Bateman, 2005). This too is inadequate, however, when taking into account factors outside an offender's control as

previously discussed - in fact, the only way to precisely account for an offender's behaviours by observing a crime scene is if the killer were only to kill in a blank white room.

### Offender Profiling

Criminal profiling is defined by Muller (2000: 235) as 'the process of using available information about a crime and crime scene to compose a psychological portrait of the unknown perpetrator of the crime' with the aim to 'deduce enough about the behavioural, personality, and physical characteristics of the perpetrator to catch him' (Muller, 2000: 236). Such techniques are applied most commonly to suspected serial offenders and are then used to assist the criminal justice system not only by providing a range of psychological and social assessments of the suspected offenders and crime scene behaviours but also to advocate appropriate interview strategies based on the presumed psyche of the offender (Holmes & Holmes, 1996).

The information used for the purposes of profiling is understandably much the same as that used for typing an offender, including analysis of the details of a crime scene, offender victim interaction and the geographic pattern of offending behaviours (Muller, 2000). It is for this reason that it is important to consider the application of profiling, as it is therefore also subject to a number of the same critiques. Criminal profiling is alternately claimed to be either science or art by those who practice it (ibid), but current profiling techniques lack any substantial empirical support with which to back any of the claims made by profilers, and therefore cannot be considered as anything more than an 'imprecise craft' (Fox & Levin, 2005: 147). Even when an intended objective for profiling is limited, as it most often is, to providing only rough indicators with the intent of narrowing the range of suspects (Fox & Levin, 2005) or as a last resort when all other measures have been exhausted (Holmes & Holmes, 1996), profiling does not by any means guarantee success.

The application of a theory developed by Egger (1984) serves to highlight a critical issue regarding the profiling of the serial murderer. 'Linkage blindness' is the term Egger (1984) uses to describe the inability of investigators to sometimes connect serial homicides that are separated by time and space but committed by a single offender, particularly when the offender crosses jurisdictional boundaries to commit murders (Egger, 1984; Fox & Levin, 2005). Egger's linkage blindness can be applied to profiling: the provision of unsubstantiated claims as to the characteristics of a suspected offender may effectively blinker an investigator by encouraging a focus of attention on only those characteristics specifically mentioned either by the profiler or by the academic authority with whom the investigator is either familiar or reliant upon. Borgeson and Kuehnle (2012: 11) recognise that 'inaccurate leads cost investigators valuable time'. A reliance on typological and classification techniques as previously discussed could have potentially devastating consequences for an investigation: thus, overinvesting in an unsubstantiated hypothesis could afford offenders the gift of time to continue their heinous acts (ibid).

The case of Robert Napper provides an appropriate example of the negative consequences of relying too heavily on profiling techniques. Robert Napper, also commonly referred to as 'The Green Chain Rapist', is a British serial killer who was active in the years 1992 and 1993. Though thought to be responsible for dozens more attacks and rapes in years prior (Alison & Eyre, 2009), Napper was eventually convicted for the murders of Samantha Bisset and her four-year-old daughter Jazmine in 1995, and the manslaughter of Rachel Nickell, on grounds of diminished responsibility, in 2008 (Edwards & Rayner, 2008). Firstly, it is interesting to note that the violent attacks committed by Robert Napper fit no existing

geographic pattern. Before escalating to murder, Nappers' offending took place near his home in his local area (Alison & Eyre, 2009). At the time when Nappers' offending culminated in the double murder of Samantha Bisset and Jazmine, they too resided in his immediate area. However, when Napper attacked and killed Rachel Nickell she lived twelve miles away from his home, contradicting any estimated distances that professionals have concocted with reference to the distance perpetrators are likely to travel to offend (ibid). It is most likely therefore that the attacks would have been ruled separate on the basis of the absence of discernible geographic similarities, despite being committed by the same single perpetrator. Secondly, and most crucially, the murder of Rachel Nickell coincided with a rising interest in the field of profiling and its potential as an investigative tool (Alison & Rainbow, 2011). Myths asserting the utility of profiling were perpetuated through an abundance of media fiction, and found their way into professional circles (ibid). Though the focus of profiling activity had previously been within the FBI, it was at this point in 1992 that some individuals began offering the same services to the British police. Paul Britton, one such individual, was heavily involved in the investigation into the murder of Rachel Nickell with the result that an innocent man, Colin Stagg, was falsely accused and targeted relentlessly, based to a great extent on the profile Britton provided to the police. Britton's infamous claim that based on hearing the details of a suspect's sexuality he would 'know immediately that he was likely to have killed Rachel Nickell, without him mentioning it' (Britton, 1997: 250) borders on claiming powers of telepathy, not of scientific expertise (Alison & Rainbow, 2011; Alison & Eyre, 2009). This claim illustrates the dangers of placing too much faith in methods unsubstantiated by science, and undoubtedly contributed to the failure, for more than ten years, to identify Robert Napper as the real killer of Rachel Nickell. Whilst undoubtedly the most shocking due to the impeded investigation, this is not the only case where profiles have gone awry and resulted in inaccurate portrayals. In the case of Ted Bundy, whose murderous activities left in excess of 36 victims spanning four states (Holmes & Holmes, 2010), professionals have made many errors in their attempts to decipher his 'ideal' victim type (Sears, 1991; Rule, 1980; Holmes & Holmes, 2010). Numerous speculations have been made that Bundy may have been driven by a desire to kill his mother and that his victims were an indirect way for him to achieve this aim (Abrahamsen, 1973). Others have suggested that Bundy's actions were a reaction to the relationship between Bundy and a once fiancée Diane Edwards. Sears (1991) suggests that Bundy chose his victims because they resembled Diana Edwards, however research has shown a wide discrepancy in the physical appearance of his victims and a personal interview with Holmes (Holmes & Holmes, 2010: 60), suggested that physical appearance had no effect on the likelihood of victimisation: 'His only criterion was their availability'.

#### Use of Typologies in a Court Setting, the Legal Implications

It would not be beyond reason to argue that as long as ambiguity exists, classifications should not be used in any legal, prescriptive, or other influential or official capacity. Despite this, such methods continue to be used both as an investigative measure and to examine offender characteristics post-conviction - there is, however, very little discussion in literature as to the use of typologies for the purposes of sentencing. Courts, both in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, reserve accepted standards for admissibility of evidence as set out by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Frye v. United States* (1923). According to Canter *et al.* (2004) the organised/disorganised dichotomy may be drawn on during court proceedings but will not be used in the same way as it would be as an academic exercise. Typologies may be used in court in two ways existing either in the form of a character report or to argue similarity between crimes (Canter *et al.*, 2004). The dichotomy under these circumstances would serve only to provide 'a loose framework for encapsulating what the investigator considers to be



salient aspects of the crime scene' (Canter *et al.*, 2004: 305). However, despite the hypothetical allowance, typological information is rarely considered to be admissible, failing to meet the standards for reception which include acceptance and support from the scientific community, empirical testing, subjection to standards and controls, and the establishment of a known potential error rate (*ibid.*).

The legitimacy and utility of typologies as elements in a court setting is called into question simply by their absence. It is clear that typologies are not widely accepted as empirically valid within the scientific community, nor do they serve to adequately discriminate between offence behaviours in such a way that the similarities across crime scenes can be quantifiably linked to a single perpetrator. There is a danger that overreliance on typologies during the investigative stages could negatively impact on a case once it reaches the courts. It is a well known fact that all other information gathering protocols during an investigation have to stand up to the legal values of the courts: DNA evidence must not be contaminated; warrants must be issued before a property is searched. This begs the question, if typologies are utilised throughout the investigation process, but are not considered to be adequately methodological and scientific, and as such cannot be accepted in a courtroom, should they be accepted as common practice in an investigation?

### Societal Contentment

Fox and Levin (2005: 101) observe that 'whenever the background of an infamous serial killer is examined, journalists and behavioural scientists tend to search for clues in the killer's childhood'. Many have, as an example, emphasised, elaborated and embellished upon Theodore Bundy's angst over his illegitimacy as 'an answer to his puzzling crimes' (*ibid.*). With each new occurrence, the media holds the public in a state of fear: the killer, much unlike Hollywood portrayals of monstrous creatures who attack in the night, could resemble just about anyone (Simons, 2001). According to Fox and Levin (2005: 25), typologies provide 'a basic framework for understanding and making sense of seemingly senseless crimes': without definitions, serial killers become increasingly perplexing for both society and law enforcement officials (Simons, 2001).

Media coverage provides high profile visibility of the most harrowing cases, glorifying acts of murder (Simons, 2001). Whether publication effectively desensitises readers or grips them in fear, the reality is much the same: serial killers achieve their desire. Simons echoes this sentiment: 'By amplifying their crime, society feeds their demand for power and control' (2001: 354). Information presented by academics, though without intending to glorify such actions, may still have the same effect and this dissertation is no exception. Through mere discussion of the phenomenon we encourage the amplification of its existence in the public imagination. Fox and Levin (2005) in their discussions of classification are careful to distinguish between the analysis of crime scene details for a purpose and the glorification of the criminal responsible. However Lonnie Kidd, 1992 author of the book *Becoming a successful mass murderer or serial killer: The complete handbook*, was not so delicate in his approach. His book is often misconstrued as an instruction manual for potential killers, exuding elements of reverence. Nevertheless, the use of artificial distinctions creates a sense of order amongst the chaos. It is stipulated here that the rational mind creates such distinctions in an attempt to explain or justify the irrational mind, in order that society may feel able to hold some element of control, and experience comfort from that control. As previously stated, the sensational nature of serial murder warrants attempts to understand how, and why, such acts that defy the foundations of humanity occur. Categorisations,

despite their visible flaws and idealistic notions, may claim their utility in assisting a process of rationalisation which is central to the public understanding of violent crimes.

## **Chapter Five: Alternative Considerations: The Limits of Applied Typologies**

### Cultural Specificity

Serial murder is not an issue unique to the United States of America, however the majority of efforts to improve understanding have stemmed from this country. The United Kingdom looks to America for much of its knowledge on the subject, including, for example, the adoption of the organised/disorganised dichotomy. In this way, the transferability of information is presumed, however, this cannot unequivocally be said to be the case and the comments put forth by Blagg (1997), though in reference to the unorthodox application of restorative justice measures across cultures, have credence here. Blagg (1997: 10) argues it should not be assumed that different cultures 'manifest similar mechanisms for ensuring adherence to accepted standards of behaviour'. As can be seen with many other types of crime, it is more than possible that cultural dynamics may play a significant role in the creation of serial murderers. Unfortunately there is a serious lack of cross cultural comparisons to address this issue which means that any understanding that academics have accomplished to date is culturally limited (Hinch, 1998). The presumption of transferability with regards to the abundance of information provided by academics residing in America may negatively impact on the quality and applicability of information to the issue in the United Kingdom and other countries. Americanised research may be reflecting culturally specific traits, not universal truths, with the result that when applied to other cultures in other countries this may effectively 'denude them of their indigenous histories' allowing potentially critical aspects to be overlooked (Blagg, 1997: 483).

Research should endeavour to expand across cultures, allowing for a critical analysis of possible disparities across similar *and* diverse countries. Through a systematic study of the prevalence of serial murder, an observation of cultural dynamics, and the criminal justice approach to addressing the issue, there exists the potential for improved awareness. Though cross-cultural study is undoubtedly impeded by problems including discrepancies in definitions and reporting patterns and inaccessible data, more effort must be made to overcome this barrier (Hinch, 1998). If disparities were found, such analysis could then be used to ascertain why this is evident and which possible cultural dynamics could have a positive effect in other countries. If not, this may also prove useful as it would lessen the degree to which cultural specificity is an issue in this area.

### Exclusion of Important Variables

Typologies of serial murder have often been criticised for omitting information as Waller and Deal (2010: 5) argue that typologies 'focus on particular aspects of serial murder to the exclusion of others'. Not only does this produce problems in terms of a variance in definitions but, for example, the tendency of many typologies to exclude female serial killers from the study of multiple murder fails to allow for an examination of socio-cultural and socio-structural factors (Hinch, 1998). Hickey (2006: 32) argues that 'to say a serial killer murdered as a result of greed, hatred, or fantasy may easily obscure other important variables'. This, as has been argued previously in this dissertation with regards to offender profiling, portrays similar elements to that of Egger's (1984) linkage blindness. By focussing too heavily on one artificial and arguably frivolous element it is possible that other vital variables may be overlooked. There are those definitions of serial murder which neglect to incorporate those offenders with extrinsic motivations and Hinch (1998) argues that an exclusion of these offenders may impede further research into the idea that serial murder may be a product of other variables such as socio-structure. Holmes and DeBurger (1988) exclude

those offenders who profit financially from their crimes, specifying professional contract killers as possessing an extrinsic motivation which does not qualify for that of a serial killer who should possess *intrinsic* motivations. However, Gresswell and Hollin (1994) point out that their inclusion of a hedonistic-comfort killer category defies this distinction as the category implies an extrinsic motivation. It should be noted that this category remains present in the updated version of this typology in Holmes and Holmes (2010), however, the researchers have recently reconfigured their views to consider professional killers as ‘serial’ murderers. Nevertheless, exclusion based on extrinsic motivation is an issue as this exclusion is ideological, based on preconceived beliefs that serial killers are intrinsically motivated (Hinch, 1988) and a by-product of speculation and subjectivity on the part of the individual researcher or research team. It is argued here that without further quantifiable study, an exclusion of any murderous activity that occurs with repetition is unjustifiable and may be damaging to further study on and around the subject.

As a sub point to the exclusion of variables key to understanding the aetiology of serial killing, all typologies are subject to a degree of circular reasoning and essentially self-fulfilling. The researcher or creator will have set out to create a typology of serial murder and inherent in their aim is the assumption that this can be achieved. This has been seen to be the case in reference to the organised/disorganised dichotomy, where the terms ‘organised’ and ‘disorganised’ already existed and were simply reformatted to create a typology designed to reflect the terms (Canter *et al.*, 2004). More often than not characteristics of offenders are made to fit *after the fact*, explaining the exclusion of variables which do not reflect the ideological compilation. As argued by Ferguson *et al.* (2003: 288) this ‘may result in a form of both empirical myopia, as well as investigative blockage, as serial homicides that do not fit the stereotype are discounted’. Methodologically, circular reasoning is also an issue as researchers may inadvertently contaminate any data collected through communication with serial killers. By imposing their own criteria and interests on the research, information may become tainted for future users (Hinch, 1998).

#### ‘Serial Killer’

In 1972 Robert Ressler and John Douglas conducted a number of interviews with several high profile serial killers including Ted Bundy (FBI, 2010). Designed to ‘gain insight into their modus operandi, motivations, and backgrounds’ from which to draw profiles for future investigations, these interviews are the principle source of information that forms the foundations for current understanding (FBI, 2010). It is often postulated in popular media that Ressler coined the term ‘serial killer’ in response to the crimes of Ted Bundy and although this claim remains unfounded in literature, both the killer and the term did surface at a similar time.

It is considered here that in the years that have followed, the term ‘serial killer’ has become a homogenous category in and of itself rather than merely an epithet for a person's actions as the term intrinsically implies numerous connotations caught up in the symbolic origin of the phrase. The name ‘Ted Bundy’ has found a place in national vocabulary (Simpson, 2000) and perceptions of serial killers are visibly skewed towards infamous names and faces with whom the term is most commonly associated. In this way, rather than the term ‘serial killer’ holding accuracy because of the actions it is intended to describe, a ‘serial killer’ is a social entity, a product of the influences that originally necessitated the coining of the term and the names of ‘Ted Bundy’ or ‘David Berkowitz’ begin to hold ideological significance beyond their actual importance (Jenkins, 2009).

It is assumed the phenomenon is so obvious that the term used to describe it goes almost entirely unquestioned (Heide, 1994). It is suggested here that even the term 'serial killer' may incur unintentional and subconscious assumptions about the demographic characteristics of the offender pool as within the study of serial killing there has been forged an inextricable and interactive link to the popular fiction culture (Jenkins, 2009; Tithecott, 1997). Jenkins (2002) draws on a further claim as to the origins of the term stating that Ressler purportedly created the label in response to the film 'serials' (ibid). Whilst this claim is disputed it nevertheless 'explicitly locates the origin of the serial murder concept in popular culture' (Jenkins, 2002: 15).

### Conclusions

Classification systems for serial murder, as discussed in this dissertation with reference to two highly influential typologies, provide little insight beyond that of speculation, unsubstantiated by science and should, therefore, not be used in any official capacity due to the potentially adverse consequences for the investigation and those involved. The close relationship between categories and overlap of numerous crime scene or offender characteristics produces impending inaccuracies, leaving no basis for a conclusive argument.

The majority of the instruction a typology of offending is able to proffer is either nonsensical without the offender, victim, and crime scene to analyse, or results in the convolution of commonsensical elements. In the case of the organised/disorganised dichotomy, if the serial murderer leaves the weapon or an abundance of forensic evidence at the crime scene this is construed as evidence that the murderer is 'disorganised' (Ressler *et al.*, 1986). However this, and arguably the majority of similarities between offences, could be observed by the naked eye of most as anyone who leaves such evidence at the crime scene surely was not entirely organised in the committal of the crime and perhaps this element need not be overcomplicated or confined to a category which then muddies the waters with speculation as to birth order or social competence. In terms of advances that typological thinking could provide to an investigation, the lack of scope for progression on the part of the suspected killer is a further hindrance. The view of an offender as a fixed entity is restrictive as there is evidence to suggest that offenders will alter their actions across their series to suit their needs, be those in the context of motivation or to deceive law enforcement officials in pursuit (Canter & Youngs, 2003; Grubin *et al.*, 2001).

The resulting conclusion from the information presented is that existing modes of murder classification may not offer the easy solution the police are looking for as 'an alternative to waiting for a criminal to make a mistake' (Canter, 1994: 4) or as an alternative to extensive detective work, thus, such an approach may well be beyond the bounds of possibility. Artificial distinctions between serial, mass, and spree murder as well as further subdivisions have, for the most part, left more questions than they provide answers for both academics and officials, though they may find their utility in societal contentment through affording the public a sense of order and rationale. The ability to interpret crime scene behaviours and turn them into a list of suspects would no doubt be an invaluable asset to policing, but this does not mean it is possible to date. Future prevention of serial murder through the utilisation of typologies, as suggested by McKenzie (1995) and Simons (2001), may not be achieved as such an aim would require an element of foresight and prediction nonexistent for any type of criminality, and the risk of false positive prediction for a category so uncommon and extreme as serial murder is significant (Fox & Levin, 2005). This is not to say, however, that research into serial murder should be considered wasted labour. If crimes can be reliably classified to provide a strong link between the crime scene features and the offender, in a way that is

responsible and able to stand up to empirical testing, such methods may prove their worth. However, considering the complexity of human behaviours as they are understood, it is unlikely that this process may ever be considered a scientific certainty.

## **Chapter Six: Future Directions**

*‘Explanations exist; they have existed for all time; there is always a well-known solution to every human problem – neat, plausible, and wrong’ (Mencken, 1921: 158)*

This dissertation has highlighted the limited use of typologies in approaching the subject of serial murder, shown that such classifications may be said to undermine existing understanding of serial murder, and discussed the abundance of critique offered on this style of thinking. It is the aim of this thesis to offer a constructive opinion and highlight future pathways for the progression of understanding.

Hickey (2006: 32) states that ‘We erroneously assume that if we stare long and intently enough at a perceived motivation for homicidal behavior we will be able to comprehend the dynamics of its etiology’. Our understanding of the phenomenon of serial murder is still limited and without extensive further research, typologies cannot be said to provide any empirically valid or substantiated insight. At present, the recognition that fully understanding human behaviours may prove impossible is essential to all aspects of this research (Brooks & Church, 2011), and as such, any and all research into this subject must be looked upon as a ‘working hypothesis’ (Palermo, 2002: 384).

Nevertheless, there may be some truth to be found in the threads of classification systems. Behavioural consistency, as discussed by Salfati and Bateman (2005), provides some engaging insights: by looking at pools of behaviours rather than individual idiographic behaviours the researchers were able to establish elements of relative consistency in the aggression displayed by serial offenders. Though it could be argued that the randomness of human action may stop such a theory reaching scientific validation, this idea, if employed on a low level, points to the possibility that there may be signposts to follow, or strands to be connected across offences. Such a prognosis may be understood with the following analogy: the artist Picasso is famous for his ‘Blue Period’ from 1901-1904 where his paintings were characteristically sombre in shades of blue and green, and the transition to his ‘Rose Period’ from 1904-1906, whereby his style was reformatted with cheerful shades of orange and pink. Though characteristically contradistinctive, the different elements and themes displayed in his work also hold some elements in common making it possible to discern that they were ostensibly the product of the same person. For investigators of serial murder, the same applies: underlying themes may be visible to the trained and knowledgeable naked eye without any further applications.

The idea of commonality across offences is the underpinning of all typological thinking, but is obscured by the desire of researchers to develop it further. As such, at least for the moment, it would appear that the utility of typological thinking has reached an impasse. This thesis argues that this is as far as subjective ideals of serial murder criminality may go: without quantitative assessment, the development of scientifically informed typologies is unachievable. The study of behavioural consistency across a series, if conducted in a way that is open to peer review and critical appraisal, could provide insights for other types of criminality such as repeat burglary or arson. However, this research would need to be conducted in a manner such that results were not expected, or even anticipated, as findings of visibly quantifiable behavioural consistency are not a certainty, and expectations have the potential to affect the outcome of research to suit the researchers’ preconceptions.

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