SERIAL MURDER IN SOUTH AFRICA: ASKING DIFFERENT QUESTIONS
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ABSTRACT
This theoretical paper explores some prevailing discourses surrounding serial murder and that the existing debates surrounding serial murder, which adopted a singular theoretical focus, have offered one dimensional conceptualisations of the phenomenon. This singular focus has also permeated through to offender profiling practices which have been found to have limited empirical value. Within this discourse the argument is made that a clearer, integrated understanding of the personality development of serial murderers as well as the influence of the situational and environmental context on individual behaviour would be more consistent with contemporary conceptualisations of personality and behaviour. A psychosocial perspective is discussed which approaches the individual and exhibits behavioural patterns as being a product of both internal psychological processes and multiple situational, contextual, and environmental points of connection.

Keywords: Serial murders theoretical conceptualisation; offender profiling practices.

INTRODUCTION
The idea of an individual murdering several people seemingly without any discernible motive has always fascinated society. Multiple murder is not a twentieth century phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that has occurred throughout previous centuries (Labuschagne, 2001:1). Locusta was a professional killer in A.D. Rome and was the first to be publicly identified as a multiple murderer. She had killed, amongst others, Emperor Claudius by poisoning him (Newton, 2000:286). One of the earliest recorded serial murderers was committed in the fifteenth century. The perpetrator was a rich French nobleman, Gilles De Rais (born in 1404), also known as the Bestial Baron. He claimed to have made a pact with the devil, which required him to kill several hundred young children, drink their blood and engage in necrophilic acts with their corpses (Harrower, 1998:41). Serial murder, in its contemporary form, came to prominence ever since Jack the Ripper in 1888 captured the public’s imagination in London (Turvey, 2008:630). Other accounts of serial murder, some fictional, some based on real murderers, fuel an insatiable public’s appetite for tales of gruesome murder (Hinch & Hepburn, 1998:1-2). The numerous books, motion pictures, television series and documentaries depicting fictional characters such as Hannibal Lecter, attest to this growing fascination. Although these fictional characters and their behaviours might seem farfetched, sometimes their actions are mirrored in reality. This fascination resulted in the phenomenon of serial murder being characterised by a small amount of scientific knowledge and an excess of popular media driven theorising (Mitchell, 1997; Wright & Hensley, 2003:71-72). This article will engage with some of the prevailing discourses on serial murder and examine the need for a more integrated approach on serial murder and the individual offenders.

SERIAL MURDER
The majority of academic literature, writing and empirical research on serial murder is either grounded in or conducted to contribute to the general practice of offender profiling. Various authors at different times have produced varying depictions of serial murder which span a

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wide variety of theoretical spectrums (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:145-146). The literature surrounding serial murder is characterised by a couple of themes, first and foremost serial murderers are generally presented in public and scholarly discourse as mysterious and their behaviours and actions incomprehensible (Haggerty, 2009:169).

The second prominent theme generally revolves around the definition of what constitutes serial murder. Despite the increased research attention on serial murder, empirical understandings of the phenomenon is often times impeded by the variety of definitions put forward and each one often postulating specific predisposed notions of the serial murder (Bartels & Parsons, 2009; Ferguson, White, Cherry, Lorenz & Bhimani, 2003:288).

**Defining serial murder**

Constructing and determining an acceptable and reliable definition of serial murder is a difficult proposition. Serial murder share several characteristics with other multiple murder such as spree and mass murder. Mass murder can be defined as the murder of three or more victims during a single instance at a specific time (Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Keeney & Heide, 1995:300; Levin & Fox, 1991; Leyton, 1986:18-30). Spree murder in contrast, involves two or more victims murdered individually in different locations within a period of hours or days. The victims although killed at different locations and times can be seen as a continuation of a single event (Hickey, 2013:28-29). Spree and mass murderers share similarities with serial murder with regard to multiple victims and separateness of place. However, although multiple murder victims separated over time can be seen as a core element to serial murder, serial murder is different in that each murder is an individual event generally committed at different locations with a cooling-off period in between each murder (Bartol & Bartol, 2005:338).

Establishing a reliable definition of the phenomenon of serial murder would allow for the standardisation of not only incidence statistics but also how criminal justice systems and the general public view the phenomenon of serial murder (Ferguson et al., 2003:288-289). The collection of definitions utilised and put forward by various researchers generally reflect the dominant individual understanding of serial murder by the individual researchers. Conventionally, the majority of definitions hold that a serial murderer is an individual who has murdered three or more victims who were unknown to him or her and there is also generally a ‘cooling-off’ period between each incident (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess & Ressler, 2013:437-438; Haggerty, 2009:170). This definition does, however, not include any reference to the motivation of the murderer. Various other authors have expanded on the ‘base-line’ definition such as Eggar (1984:351), who postulated that the motive for the murderers is not for material gain but rather for control or dominance. The victim holds a symbolic value for the serial murderer and the serial murderers spends a great amount of time fantasising about the crimes.

Other researchers such as Hickey (2013:30) argue that serial murder definitions should be more inclusive and not too restrictive with regards to the behavioural focus which will be employed to classify the individual murderers. Previous authors do not give an explicit definition, but rather list several behavioural characteristics which would be indicative of a serial murderer. Holmes and De Burger (1988:18-19), characterised a serial murderer as an individual who has committed repetitive one-on-one homicides. The victims are generally strangers to the perpetrator and the motivation for the murderers are intrinsic in nature. Recent definitions have expanded on the focus of serial murder to encapsulate intrinsic motivations which could ultimately lead to torture, abuse, mutilation and several other aberrant behaviours (Pistorius, 2000; Restler & Shachtman, 1993:25). Knight (2006:1191; 2007:23-24) also posits that the sexual nature of the crime might not be explicit, but it is routed in the individual pathological and destructive fantasies of the perpetrator. The
definitions discussed in the preceding section are in no way inclusive of all the varying definitions proposed by various authors. The various restrictions of the definitions are indicative of the difficulty of constructing a definition of serial murder which is inclusive of all the numerous variances and still able to differentiate serial murder from other forms of homicide. It does illustrate and highlight the fact that serial murder is a complex phenomenon and it is characterised by numerous interrelated factors ranging from neurobiological, to social, environmental, and psychological elements (Knight, 2006:1192). The various operational definitions are also indicative of the various theories put forward in an attempt to explain or examine the aetiology of serial murder.

**Perspectives on serial murder**

The existing body of knowledge on serial murder is based on research that has focussed on singular aspects of serial murder and the individual offender. These aspects include exploring the social environments of serial murderers or focusing on the phenomenon from a psychological paradigm. Simon (1996:19-25), located the underlying psychology of serial murder as grounded in an intense sense of self-loathing where the act of controlling and killing provides a momentary relief for the individual. Palermo and Kocsis (2005:58) argue that serial murderers have specific cognitive maps where they view the world as hostile and subsequently are incapable or averse to interact with others. Their rationalisation is characterised by narcissistic and isolative thought patterns where their actions and behaviours revolve around gratifying an inherent need for stimulation to relive a constant state of inner tension.

Other research has focused on developing behavioural models and methods for classifying serial murderers (Godwin, 2000:138; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1992:69). The trauma control model proposed by Hickey (2013:148) incorporated predisposition factors such as trauma events with facilitating factors such as low self-esteem and growing fantasies which could influence the serial murder process. Other classifications classify serial killers into categories which were intended to highlight the possible motivations behind the actions of serial murderers (Miller, 2014:5-6). A widely utilised typology is the one proposed by Holmes and De Burger (1988) and Holmes and Holmes (1998). The authors developed six ‘descriptors’ which talk to the possible motivations as well as types of serial murderers. Initially serial murderers can be distinguished by their special or geographic mobility as either geographically stable – residing in an area and hunting for potential victims in the same area – or geographically transient – traveling to areas other than where they reside to commit their crimes (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The visionary type of killer is an individual who claims to kill in response to voices or visions, which order them to murder a person or specific category of persons (Holmes & De Burger, 1988). The mission oriented type, are individuals who believe they have been given the task to eliminate a certain group of individuals from society. The motivation for the ‘mission’ is central to their personality and expects to gain a sense of fulfilment in achieving the goal of eliminating those whom are deemed are beneath them (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The hedonistic type derives pleasure from inflicting pain and each homicidal act is carried out with the objective of gaining pleasure. The reward of experiencing pleasure serves as a reinforcement to continue with the behaviour (Holmes & De Burger, 1988). The power-control type can be described as an individual whose behaviour centres on the need for power and dominance. The motivation to kill is intrinsic to the individual’s personality and is based on a need for feeling in control of another human being’s life (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The comfort killer is unlike the hedonistic or power-control type murderers for ‘creature comfort’ reasons. The anticipated gains are usually money or material rewards that can be gained from the murder (Holmes & Holmes, 1998).
The organised-disorganised typology has also been widely applied during serial murder investigations (Ressler et al., 1992:70). The organised serial murder can be described as a methodical killer who carefully plans the murder. This type of offender typically exhibits above average interpersonal-skills which he employs in acquiring his intended victims. The organised offender also has a murder kit, which generally contains objects such as a weapon of choice, rope, or duct tape or any items the killer feels could be useful when committing the crime. The crime scene left by the organised offender is indicative of control and a well-planned murder (Ressler et al., 1992:71). The disorganised type can be described as a loner who is withdrawn and cowardly and also socially inadequate and ineffective, seldom marries and usually lives alone with a parent and in close proximity to the crime scene. This type of killer is also average or below average intelligence and the actual murders are often described as impulsive and spontaneous. The crime scene left behind by the disorganised serial murderer reflects the actions of someone whose motivation stems from sudden and uncontrollable urges (Ressler et al., 1992:72).

Although the examples listed above, do not constitute all the various models and typologies on serial murder, the models have been criticised as suffering under empirical scrutiny and lack empirical support for the various categories (Ainsworth, 2001:98). In an attempt to address some of the criticisms, new studies have been undertaking to provide more methodologically and empirically based classifications systems. New thematic based categorisations such as the one developed by Salfati and Bateman (2005), have moved towards verifying thematic classifications of crime scene behaviours through the use of empirical studies and incorporate multiple factors with regard to the classification. The study established that the objective of the homicide can be determined through knowledge of the behavioural themes – instrumental and expressive aggression – exhibited by the offender. The instrumental theme comprises of behaviours where the offender aims to gain something from the attack, the victim is simply viewed as a medium through which a specific desire can be satisfied (Salfati, 2003:493; Salfati & Bateman, 2005:126). The expressive theme is characterised by behaviours indicating that the offender intended to explicitly harm the victim. Each victim is the target and all the behaviours are an extreme attack on the individual (Salfati, 2003:494; Salfati & Bateman, 2005:129). The thematic behavioural classification incorporates psychologically grounded aspects, however, the differentiation is still general in nature and the influence of situational contexts is not fully addressed.

Serial murder research in South Africa
In the South African context, research has also been undertaken into the phenomenon of serial murder and has produced varying interpretations as to the origin and understanding of the phenomenon. Several authors have contributed to the body of research and the first was conducted by Pistorius (1996). The focus of the research was on the development of serial murder motivation, specifically focussing on the psychosexual development of the individual. Labuschagne (1998, 2001) conducted research on serial murder from an interactional perspective where serial murder was conceptualised as communication or an interaction between individuals. The research also engaged with how the individual’s intelligence and personality could be reflected during such interpersonal interactions between the perpetrators and the victim. Barkhuizen (2006), examined the development of serial murder through an intrapsychic, object relations approach, locating the genesis of serial murder behaviour in the early development of the individuals, characterised by traumatic and abusive childhoods.

Del Fabbro (2006) examined serial murder from a family systems perspective focussing on the family system and its influence on development of the serial murderer. Hodgskiss’ (2004) approach to serial murder was orientated more towards a behavioural examination of serial murder and examining to what extent international typologies were
applicable within the South African context. He also examined the thematic nature of the offences. Although not exhaustive, the listed research does illustrate that various researchers have produced a plethora of studies in an attempt to explain the aetiology of serial murder and delineate the behavioural characteristics. The studies covered a wide range of theoretical perspectives incorporating various social and psychological factors as playing significant roles in possibly contributing to the actions of serial murderers. Such individualised focuses have resulted in an emphasis on singular individual elements, in essence always locating the aetiology almost always within the individual (Grover & Soothill, 1999).

CRIMINAL PROFILING
Criminal profiling, which has become common practice during serial murder investigations, has also been grounded for the most part within single theoretical paradigms and in most cases rely on trait based models which have been found to be fundamentally flawed (Alison, Bennell, Mokros & Ormerod, 2002:115-116). Profiling as it is currently practiced, has come under increased scrutiny with respect to the validity and reliability of the inferences produced with regard to offender characteristics. The majority of the criticisms levelled against criminal profiling are grounded in the lack of empirical evidence in support of the profiling approaches, typologies and theoretical underpinnings (Devery, 2010:394; Pinizzotto, & Finkel, 1990:215-218). Profiling can be divided into two distinct approaches – directly inferring the offender characteristics from observable behaviour at crime scenes and relating the observed criminal behaviour to underlying psychological constructs. The correlation between offender background characteristics and offence behaviour has been found to be tenuous and there is little empirical evidence to substantiate such relationships (Doan & Snook, 2008; Mokros & Alison, 2002:26). For example, Canter and Wentink (2004) examined the organised/disorganised typology and found that it did not reveal distinct behavioural subsets which made any correlation problematic.

Linking criminal behaviour to psychological constructs has also been criticised for relying on single factors such as behavioural trait based typologies, which for the most part are context free psychological constructs which are static and overly simplistic (Snook et al., 2008:1259; Snook, Eastwood, Gendreau, Goggin & Cullen, 2007:438). Classifying crimes into mutually exclusive typological based models or classification models, assumes a sameness in the behaviour as it relates to behavioural motivations (Doan & Snook, 2008:63). Many notable typologies such as the organised/disorganised typology developed by the FBI and the Holmes and De Burger (1985) typology which classify serial killers into four categories, although useful, suffer under empirical tests of reliability and validity (Salfati, & Bateman, 2005:130). New thematic based categorisations (for example Salfati & Bateman, 2005) have moved towards verifying thematic classifications through the use of empirical studies and incorporate multiple factors with regards to the classification. These models have made great strides in addressing the validity and reliability issue relating to profiling.

The thematic behavioural classification also incorporates psychologically grounded aspect, however, the differentiation is still general in nature and the influence of situational contexts is not really addressed. The implication is that situational contexts within which the individual finds himself or herself are ignored specifically with regards to the criminal actions (Snook et al., 2008:1259-1262). The impact of the interaction between both the individual and the situation has been increasingly recognised by researchers (Mischel, Mendoza-Denton & Shoda, 2002:51). Personality development literature has indicated that situational and contextual factors also have a significant impact on the development of individuals. This is especially relevant to criminal behaviour as the impact of the social, cultural and environmental context within which perpetrators function are often overlooked (Alison et al., 2002; Haggerty, 2009; Mokros & Alison, 2002; Snook et al., 2008:1258).
AIM OF THE ARTICLE
The research conducted by Hodgskiss (2004:68), emphasised the need for a more integrated approach to serial murder, focussing on the influence of the social, cultural, and environmental factors on the development of serial murder. Similarly, recent literature on criminal profiling has also indicated that offender profiling in its current configuration relies on outmoded trait based understandings of behaviour which have been found to not be viable (Alison et al., 2002; Kocsis, & Palermo, 2013:5-7). The assertion is made that developing a clearer integrated understanding of all the social and internal elements and environmental and situational factors which impact on the development of serial murderer will not only allow for a richer more cohesive understanding of the individuals, but will also allow for a more integrated profile construction process. Such an integrated approach could also assist behavioural profiling processes in moving away from a linear ‘if…then’ orientation to a more dynamic model where multiple points of interface (individual and situation) are integrated.

PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE
Criminology has been criticised that, as a discipline, it has systematically ignored the individual offender, along with all his/her complexities in favour for more holistic explanations which in many cases were developed to serve broader needs such as the crime control industries or political campaigns (Young, 2011:25). This has resulted in the criminal perpetrator being viewed as a sort of ‘stick figure’, a generic representation presented as either over-socialised or a rational actor (Maruna, & Matravers, 2007:430). This has created a void in which the individual offender has subsequently ceased to be of any interest for criminologists. Thus the subjective understanding of the individual offender has been for the most part untouched and the criminal behaviour exhibited inadequately explained (Cohen, 2012; Maruna, & Matravers, 2007:431).

The indifference towards explaining the implicit and explicit causes of criminal behaviour and acts committed by individual perpetrators has left a void with regards to an adequate understanding of the individual criminal subject (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:147). Subsequently, there has been attempts to fill this void by psychology’s re-engagement with criminological discourse and to a large extent by journalism. However, the explanations put forward by both psychology and investigative journalism is not without their own pitfalls and shortcomings. Psychology has favoured the laboratory setting for the majority of their studies which is problematic in that criminal behaviour does not lend itself to studies within a controlled environment (Jones, 2013:10-12). Criminology in contrast has adopted a position where conscious attempts are made to separate the complexities of individual offenders from the actual crimes. This resulted in a hypothesised criminological subject who is viewed as calculating and deprived of feelings and motivations and anger and rage and simply committing crime as the opportunity presents (Hayward & Young, 2004:263-264). This representation is, however, a very ‘simplistic’ narrative of the criminological subject, which leaves very little room for psychological theorising with regards to the nature and understanding of criminal behaviour (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:147-148; Jones, 2013:12).

There has been a renewed interest in recent times to engage with psychosocial approaches in an attempt to establish more detailed conceptualisations of perpetrators (Brown, 2003:422-424). It is agreed that human beings actively engage with and shape the world that they live in they are not simply interested onlookers (Shaffer, 2009). Human behaviour is not simply a result of cognisance, but it is rather an integrated interplay between reason and emotion (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:148). Human development is a conflictual process where reason and cognition are often in conflict with emotions which are grounded in intrinsic needs and drives (Maddi, 1996; Shaffer, 2009:69). Human development is also
characterised by several unavoidable life experiences which impact on the development of individuals, most notably those interactions and experiences in early development (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:149; Schultz & Schultz, 2013:4-8). These interactions and experiences are inevitably characterised by the high levels of anxiety and frustration which have to be addressed through various differing mechanism which for the most part function on an unconscious level (Schultz & Schultz, 2013:27). Human beings, however, do not simply function within a social vacuum. Individuals form part of and interact on several levels within integrated physical and social environments (Shaffer, 2009:78). These environmental systems can include a multitude of settings ranging from immediate settings such as family to broader settings which can include cultural and broad ideological expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1992:115). These environments can and do interact with the individual and other settings to influence individual development (Shaffer, 2009:28).

The influences of the social setting on the individuals are also mediated by the various role players that the individual encounters, for example the mother and father (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:151). There is a continual integration and reconceptualisation of events that happened and events that are occurring, which results in an unavoidable interaction between conscious reasoning, the interaction with the immediate and social environment, and the unconscious motivations inherent in all individuals (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:151-152; Maruna, & Matravers, 2007:431-432; Shaffer, 2009:29-31). This in essence means that whether the development of the individual occurs in degrees or more abruptly, no development occurs within a social vacuum and that the social environment also plays a significant role (Goldsmith, Buss & Lemery, 1997:894-895; Shaffer, 2009:27).

Individuals function within various social systems all of which are interconnected and simultaneously influence and are influenced by these social settings. These social settings impact on the identity formation of individuals and are subsequently responsible for shaping the identity of the individuals within these settings (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:153; Shaffer, 2009:33). The psychosocial thus should be conceptualised as an interconnected entity but care should be taken not to collapse the two core elements (intra-psychic and social) into a diminished concept (Carrington & Hogg, 2002:154; Gadd & Jefferson, 2007:3-4). The interrelatedness of the social contexts and the psychic processes highlight the need to view the individual as a product of their individual psychological processes and the shared social contexts with which they interact (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007:15; Maruna, & Matravers, 2007:433).

**PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON SERIAL MURDER**

As illustrated above, numerous studies have produced information which have attempted to explain and describe the characteristics of serial killers. All of the various researchers have contributed in some way to conceptualise serial murder. However, due to the complex nature and interplay of social, physiological, environmental, and psychological factors on individual development, the various perspectives have maintained a singular focus on certain aspects and necessarily ignored the others (Knight, 2007:23-24). This has led to a tendency of focussing on a single factor aetiology, which for the most part ignores the broader social context in which not only the murders but also development of the individuals occurs (Haggerty, 2009:169-170). This propensity has also permeated the serial murder research landscape within the South African context.

One such research project which attempted to focus on the personality development of the serial murderer from a psychosocial perspective (De Wet, 2006) did show some initial promise. De Wet (2006), proposed that generating a clearer conceptualisation of the personality development of the serial murder will result in a clearer understanding of the behavioural patterns exhibited by serial offenders. The study attempted to incorporate the
social and intra-psychic processes in the development of the personality structure of the serial murderer. The research was one of the few attempts to actively incorporate both the social and environmental factors into the intra-psychic and personality development of serial murderers. The study did show initial potential in that although it located the aetiology of the serial murder at the intra-psychic level, it did introduce an integrated approach encompassing the social and environmental context. The research also highlighted the fact that individuals interpret the meanings of given circumstances in distinguishing ways which could be used to link the subsequent behavioural patterns to underlying psychological processes. The research did, however, have some limitations as it only incorporated two individual case studies and although it introduced an integrated approach to the personality development the majority of the focus was still on an intra-psychic level. It also attempted to make general statements, which although theoretically plausible were derived from limited data (two case studies).

Case study based research has generally been criticised for a lack of generalisability of individual cases and that the qualitative process is biased by the implicit assumptions and prejudices of the researcher (Diefenbach, 2008:886). Given the complex and integrated nature of a psychosocial approach, a case study based methodology is the most appropriate method of examining individual complexities. Case studies can provide detailed descriptions of specific events and elements which are essential before the ‘whole’ can be adequately explained. The study also did not clearly conceptualise the psychosocial perspective and the potential influence and interaction of the contextual and environmental systems on individual development. The research, however, did highlight that an integrated conceptualisation, which creates a broader theoretical account of the processes which give rise to the underlying motivational elements which contribute to such behaviour is possible. Such an integrated approach could also address the theoretical issues inherent in profiling and behavioural analysis and specifically contribute to a cleared and better conceptualised individual criminal offender.

INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSION
The reliance on singular aspects towards conceptualising and explaining serial offence behaviour by both the dominant academic discourse and criminal profiling models has proven to have limited explanatory value. The various discourses and classification models are also for the most part static in that the role of the situation and the context has been neglected (Cassar, Ward & Thakker, 2003:76-79). The assertion, postulated in this article, is that an orientation which integrates the underlying psychological processes as well as the situational and contextual characteristics will provide a more rounded and dynamic understanding of the individual perpetrators. Observable behaviour is seen as the product of the interplay between psychological, situational and contextual attributes as well as the system of cognitive and emotional components (Crabbe, Decoene & Vertommen, 2008:99). A more situational and contextual characterisation of individuals would lead to the identification of specific person variables which could be conceptualised as the behavioural signatures of the individual personality and provide insight into the underlying dynamics (Mischel, 2004:4-5; Mischel et al., 2002:51-52; Shoda, Mischel & Wright, 1994:674-675).

Serial murder has been shown to be a complex phenomenon characterised by complex situational, contextual and psychological elements. It would benefit greatly from an integrated analysis framework which encompasses multiple levels of analysis and explanation. A psychosocial perspective begins with the understanding that individuals are simultaneously the product of their individual psychological functioning and a shared social environment (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007:15-17). The approach looks at the individual as a product of both the internal psychological developmental process as well as the myriad social relationships the individual is exposed to within the environmental context (Frosh,
The resultant behaviour can thus be viewed as representations not only of the total experiences of the individual, but also indicators as to the personality system and as dependant on the individual and the specific situation that he or she is in. Such an approach would be more in line with contemporary views on personality and behaviour in that understanding the psychological situation which elicits specific personality processes and the cognitions and affects experienced during such processes will reveal the individual functioning (Mokros & Alison, 2002:25-27; Shoda et al., 1994:657). Such an integrated view will also account for much of the prevalent criticisms on offender profiling.

LIST OF REFERENCES


