

Offender-profiling today: an overview

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Introduction

Generally speaking, criminals are caught by police for one or more of the following reasons: they confess to the crime; another criminal gives the police useful information about a crime: they are arrested red-handed; chased and caught by police; an eyewitness describes them; forensic evidence (that is, fingerprints, footprints, DNA etc.) at the crime scene or their handwriting is linked to them; or, finally, because the police link a number of crimes committed by the same offender.

Partly due to urbanization, the work of police detectives all over the world is becoming increasingly more difficult, calling for more sophisticated techniques as criminals become even more adept. Films such as *Silence of the Lambs*, television series like *Cracker* in the UK, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *CSI: Miami* or *Profiler*, and popular books like *The Real Cracker* by Stephen Cook (2001), *The Jigsaw Man* and *Picking Up the Pieces* by Paul Britton (1998, 2001) have popularised criminal profiling. In addition, the last two decades or so some well-known retired FBI profilers (for example, Roger Depue, John Douglas, Roy Hazelwood, Robert Ressler) have published their own books about some of their experiences in helping law-enforcement agencies catch serial killers.

The different terms are used to refer to profiling of offenders in the context of police investigation include: 'psychological profiling', 'criminal personality profiling', 'crime scene analysis', 'diagnostic evaluation', 'criminal investigative analysis', 'crime-linking', 'crime action profiling', and 'geographical profiling'. According to Bartol and Bartol (2004), psychological profiling was used by the Office of State-

gic Services (OSS) during World War II, having been predated by the fictional detective character Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle towards the end of the nineteenth century. A very important point about 'psychological profiling' is made in the preface to their book, *Profiling Violent Crimes: An investigative tool*, by Holmes and Holmes (2002) who remind us that by the term 'psychological profiling' they mean 'sociopsychological profiling' because 'a thorough profile is more than a personality sketch' – inter alia, it encompasses such sociodemographic data as age, race, gender, occupation and education.

A definition of profiling that is widely accepted was put forward by Douglaset *al.* (1986), namely 'a technique for identifying the major personality and behavioural characteristics of an individual based upon an analysis of the crimes he or she has committed' (p. 143). Attempts have also been made to identify the qualities of successful profilers. The work of Kocsis and his coworkers (see Kocsiset *al.*, 2000, 2002; Kocsis, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) supports the view put forward by FBI profilers Hazelwood *et al.* (1995) that successful profilers have an appreciation of the criminal mind and especially logical minds. However, a Canadian study by Bennellet *al.* (2008) had 36 subjects aged 19–54 years complete a mock profile exercise and the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal – Form S. They found no correlation between subjects' critical thinking score and their profile accuracy. Bearing in mind limitations of laboratory-based studies, as Bennellet *al.* (2008) stress, future researchers need to consider more carefully how profiling occurs in real-life settings (p. 154). Let us next take a look at 'diagnostic evaluation' before considering profiling based on sophisticated quantitative analysis, including geographical profiling.¹

Diagnostic Evaluation

This is a clinical perspective on profiling offenders whereby a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist, for example, 'relate or diagnose possible psychopathologies indicative of the behaviours evident in a crime

¹ For detailed treatment see Ainsworth, 2001; Holmes and Holmes, 2002; Jackson and Bekerian, 1997; Rainbow, 2011; Kapardis, 2014, pp. 364-372.

and from this [to] extrapolate some understanding of the probable offender' (Kocsis 2009: 216). Two known early examples of the involvement of a ' profiler' to assist the police with an investigation was police surgeon Thomas Bond's attempts to profile serial killer 'Jack the Ripper' in Whitechapel in the East End of London in the 1880s and in 1956 in New York City when psychoanalytic psychiatrist James A. Brussel came up with a list of characteristics of the person likely to be the 'mad bomber' – (middle-aged, heavy, single, living with a sibling and wearing a buttoned-up double-breasted suit) – on the basis of a crime scene examination and letters written by the bomber (see Brussel, 1968). When a number of years later the 'mad bomber', George Metksy, was arrested by the police, he fitted Brussel's description to the last detail. Of course, in this context we should not forget fictional characters such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot.

The concept of psychological profiling in terms of diagnostic evaluation was expanded in the 1970s as a result of research into a number of serial violent offenders, including serial killers, by members of the Behavioral Sciences Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Their aim was to be able to infer the primary motive and the personality of the person likely to have committed one or more crimes from a detailed examination of the crime scene and all the information available about the victim, the crime/s, the forensic evidence and autopsy reports; in other words, to provide the investigators with a description of some important demographic characteristics, including lifestyle, the type of personality of the likely culprit and whether the crime was one of a series of crimes by the same offender, thus assisting in the apprehension and questioning of the offender (Hazelwood and Douglas, 1980). The Unit's research focus, which laid the foundation of offender profiling, was on the crimes, motivations, personalities and behaviours of 32 serial killers (almost exclusively sexual) they interviewed in prison, on the assumption that every offender commits a crime in a certain way and leaves his signature at the scene of the crime. The methodology used combined low-level quantitative analy-

sis and utilised the Unit's own collective experience over the years with constructing offender profiling.

On the basis of that work, a database was constructed that allowed the FBI researchers to propose a typology of such offenders into 'organised' and 'disorganised' and, for rapists, 'selfish' and 'unselfish' etc. An 'organised' killer shows planning of the crime/s and control at the scene of the crime, leaving very useful clues behind as to his demographic characteristics, personality and motive. An organised murderer would thus be expected to be intelligent (but a likely underachiever), with good interpersonal skills, sexually competent, living with a partner and appearing 'normal, but harbouring an antisocial or psychopathic personality, who has probably been experiencing anger at about the time of the killing, been depressed, and follows media accounts of his murders (Ainsworth, 2001:101) and may well return to the scene of the crime. By contrast, a disorganised murderer is a totally disorganised individual as far as his appearance, lifestyle and psychological state are concerned. Profilers also advise police investigators on how to question the suspects when they arrest them. According to Holmes and Holmes (2002), during the interview an organised murderer should be confronted directly, while a disorganised one will be more likely to respond to police questioning if the interrogator empathises with him, establishing a positive personal relationship (pp. 75–6).

Diagnostic evaluation, also known to earlier researchers as 'FBI psychological profiling', and 'crime scene analysis', has been criticised for: being based on weak social science methodology (Howitt, 2002:199); relying largely on the individual profiler's intuition and, consequently, not being objective, let alone 'scientific' (Ainsworth, 2001:102); and, finally, that two profilers using the same crime scene analysis data will often produce different profiles. Impressive examples such as Brussel's profile of the 'mad bomber' in the 1950's referred to above should not make the reader overlook the fact that profiling offenders using the diagnostic evaluation method is largely subjective and falls short of the professionalism required in the critical environment of a major crime

investigation (Rainbow 2011: 1).

The criticisms levelled against *diagnostic evaluation* as an offender profiling method must be weighed against its occasional contributions, in bringing to justice serious criminals who terrorise whole communities. Also, we should not forget that an offender profile is but one of the tools available to police detectives tasked with the investigation of a serious crime or series of crimes. As Stevens (1997) reminds us: 'Crime is not solved by magic. Crime is solved by hard work and determination on the part of highly skilled and professional police officers, often working with equally professional colleagues in the scientific, medical and legal fields' (p. 77). It has been shown time and time again that a highly skilled and experienced profiler can assist police investigators immensely in catching serious offenders. At the same time, the police can be sent on a wild goose chase by an inaccurate profile. The risk of a misleading psychological profile is reduced if the expert concerned is well-versed in personality theories which alone cannot produce psychological profiles but can facilitate the profile production process (Boon, 1997:59). Rejecting intuition as a basis for profiling, other criminal analysts have utilised but, also, developed, statistical techniques (for example, smallest space analysis) for analysing offence, offender, victim and situational characteristics, what Howitt (2002) terms 'statistical/actuarial' profiling with its emphasis on empirically-based classifications and linkages between them. In fact, a number of computerised databases on offences and offenders have been established such as *Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS)*, one of the most recognised and internationally used (Grubinet *al.*, 2001). Let us next consider statistical/ actuarial profiling.

Criminal Investigative Analysis (Cia)/Statistical/Actuarial Profiling

In a study of serial homicide in Italy by Santtila *et al.* (2008), Mokken scaling and discriminant function analysis were used to analyse data from court files and media reports in order to investigate the behavioural crime link using observable crime features (offence and victim characteristics) of a total of 116 homicides committed by 23 individual

offenders between 1970 and 2000. Santtila *et al.* reported 62.9 per cent classification accuracy of the cases, showing the potential usefulness of such crime analysis to police investigators. Statistical profiling has been applied to a broader range of offences than psychological profiling. The study of 'criminal actions from an objective, often statistical viewpoint rather than one based on personal intuition and clinical experience' (Canter and Alison, 2000:1) has been applied, for example, to burglaries, armed robbery, arson and theft at work. Salfati and Canter (1998) examined the relationship between murder crime scenes and the characteristics of the murderer in their study of a sample of 82 homicides in England in which a single offender attacked a stranger. Canter and Alison (2000:7) have argued that such statistical offender profiling can be seen as a natural part of 'investigative psychology'.

For a number of years a lot of the research in this area was carried out at the Centre for Investigative Psychology at Liverpool University in England under the guidance of David Canter, known to many for his contribution to police investigators in the case of Peter Duffy, the 'railway murderer', who in the 1980s carried out a series of terrifying rape and murder attacks on women in London and the Home Counties. As a result of the Duffy case, the Home Office established a sub-committee on offender profiling chaired by John Stevens (Stevens, 1997:87). Drawing on early empirical work by the present author, let us next consider the example of armed robbers and their characteristics that could be of use to armed robbery squad detectives.

Case Study Example: Profiling Armed Robbers

In an effort to develop a typology of armed robbers, the present author in the late 1980s analysed police and prison file data pertaining to 100 inmates serving sentences for armed robbery in Victoria, Australia (Kapardis, 1989). In addition, lengthy face-to-face interviews were carried out with all the inmates themselves to probe their thinking and decision-making processes before, during and after the robbery. The main aim was to examine possible associations between the type and number of offenders involved, the type of target, weapons used and in-

juries to the victim. Qualitative data analysis supplements results obtained from quantitative data analysis and can thus yield a profile that is more useful to the police. Summarising the results of the study, it was found that: two-thirds were aged 25 years or less and, having left school by the time they were 15 years old (78 per cent), most (66 per cent) were first convicted at 16 or younger, with 71 per cent being sent to a youth training centre upon conviction; the majority (80 per cent) were tattooed and three-quarters possessed no employment skills; the majority (63 per cent) did very little planning, if at all, before committing an armed robbery and, especially, if three or more offenders were involved. Also, while in 82 per cent of the robberies there were no physical injuries to victims, a victim was most likely to sustain injuries if the crime was committed by a gang of three who were more likely than lone or pairs of armed robbers to have been drinking before and to attack 'soft' targets at night armed with weapons, and to use their weapons. Finally, the majority only travelled around three miles (5 km) from their place of residence to attack a target. Following release of some of the study's findings to the media, the present author was pleasantly surprised when the following morning he received a telephone call in his [then] university office by the then Officer-in Charge of the Armed Robbery Squad in Melbourne, a very experienced 'no-nonsense' detective inspector, who expressed great interest about the profile constructed and subsequently utilised it operationally. Using the same research method to analyse characteristics of 320 homicides, the present author also produced a profile of the homicide offender in Melbourne, Australia (see Kapardis and Cole, 1988).

Crime Action Profiling (CAP)

Crime action profiling is very similar to CIA but uses such statistical techniques as multidimensional scaling (MDS) to develop models 'in which crime behaviours are correlated with various offender characteristics and thus operate as mechanisms by which the perpetrators of future crimes may be profiled' (Kocsis 2009: 220).

Investigative Psychology (IP)

Investigative psychology (IP), like CAP, is a research-based approach to profiling offenders which has, largely under the aegis of David Canter, evolved into a specialised discipline. IP researchers are interested in patterns of criminal behaviour more broadly. They aim to aid criminal investigators deal with a range of crimes, not to infer offender motivations (see Canter, 1995)

Geographical Profiling

No offender profile would be complete, of course, if it did not include important features of the offender's environment, his movements in time and space. The interest in the ecology of crime can be traced to the Chicago School (see Shaw and McKay (1942) which emphasised the fact that crime (in their case it was delinquency) was concentrated in some areas of the city, a finding that led them to postulate 'social disorganisation' as a cause of delinquency. It is widely accepted that most offenders, including serial killers (see Canter, 1994, 1995), do not travel very far from their place of residence to commit their crimes and detailed mapping of crime locations, patterns and trends, a method known as 'crime mapping' which uses a computerised technique known as 'geographical information system' (GIS) and can provide police investigators with very useful information about suspects. The reader should note in this context that there is *geographical profiling* (that is, spatial movement analysis of a single serial offender) and *geographical mapping* (that is, special patterns analysis pertaining to a number of offenders over a period of time).

The main idea behind *geographical profiling* is to offer investigators probability estimates where a suspect's residence might be. A computer program known as *Criminal Geographic Targeting*, developed by Rossmo (1995) analyses the special characteristics of an offender's crimes to produce a topographic map, assigning probabilities to different locations where the suspect may be residing or have his base for offending. Drawing on Rossmo (1997), a geographic profile can be used in combination with a psychological profile to help investigators have

a fairly good idea who they should be looking for. Of course, not all types of offenders or offence types can be geographically profiled. While the three-dimensional analysis of locations and movements is the result of a computerised quantitative analysis, how one reconstructs and interprets the offender's mental map is subjective (p. 161).

Geographical profiling also enables the production of hunting typology for predatory criminals, breaking the serial killer hunting process into two components, namely: (a) the search for a suitable victim, and (b) the method of attack. Rossmo (1997:167) identified four victim search methods: *hunter* (goes in search of a victim), *poacher* (searches for a victim away from the area he normally frequents), *troller* (while doing something unrelated, encounters a victim and, availing himself of the opportunity presented, attacks the victim) and, finally, *trapper* (puts himself in a situation where he comes across victims over whom he has control). He also identifies three methods of victim attack: *raptor* (comes across a victim and right away attacks her), *stalker* (follows the victim and then attacks) and, finally, *ambusher* (entices a victim to a location the offender controls such as his car, flat, shop).

Having a geographic profile, the police can decide which investigative strategies to use in order to be more effective and efficient. The reader should note that the notion of a 'mental map' is of significance both in Rossmo's geographic profiling as well as in Canter's work on rapes and homicide. Ainsworth (2001:127) defines 'mental maps' as 'internal representations of the external world, and are unique to each individual.' Based on their work on the locations of offenders' crimes, Canter and his co-workers (see Canter and Larkin, 1993) proposed the *Circle Theory of Environmental Range* according to which, especially serial rapists and homicide offenders, the majority of offenders live within a circle, a radius that encompasses their offences.

The Racial Profiling Controversy

In the United States in the 1970s and 1980s the police focus on drugs saw the phenomenon of law-enforcement agencies using a racist drug-courier profile. The issue of differential police stop and search for no

apparent reason other than a citizen's race or ethnicity resulted in class actions (see *Wilkins v. Maryland State Police*(1993)² where research evidence was presented documenting police discrimination against African-Americans. Researchers in various parts of the United States have reported similar findings, for example, in San Diego California (Dvorak, 2000),³ New Jersey and New York (Ramirez *et al.*, 2000),⁴ and North Carolina (Tomaskovic-Devey *et al.*, 2006). Differential police suspicion in traffic stops has also been documented for male as opposed to female drivers, for example, in Miami-Dade County, Florida (Smith, Makarios and Alpert, 2006). In fact, according to Buerger and Farrell (2002), the singling out of minorities for unwanted attention by the police has a long history in the United States.

Racial profiling became so widespread that by the late 1990s it was popularly known as 'driving while black' as police services across the country used racial or ethnic features disproportionately in deciding whom to stop and search for unknown crimes (Harris, 2005). Miller *et al.* (2008:162) remind their readers that when police tactics are decided on the basis of racist criteria, police risk extreme forms of public resentment, pointing out that such practices can be illegal in international law (Harris, 2002, 2005) and are of doubtful effectiveness as a crime-fighting strategy (Harris, 2002, 2005; Miller *et al.*, 2007). Some progress was made in the United States that reduced the incidence of racial profiling as legislation introduced in many states made the tactic illegal and/or a legal requirement was introduced across the country for systematic collection of police ethnic data. However, racial profiling has enjoyed increasing support since 9/11 (Amnesty International USA 2004).

Recent Developments in Offender Profiling

Today, profiling has moved to a more evidence-based approach,

² *Wilkins v. Maryland State Police*, Civil Action No. CEB-93-483 (D.Md. 1993), cited by Bartol & Bartol, 2004:479.

³ Cited by Bartol & Bartol, 2004.

⁴ Cited by Bartol & Bartol, 2004.

and into mainstream forensic psychology. Furthermore, profiling in the United Kingdom has become a recognised profession, *Behavioural Investigative Adviser* (BIA) (Rainbow 2011ab) and the discipline that has emerged is termed Behavioural Investigative Advice. The term 'BIA' has replaced 'offender profiler' and the working conditions, professional and ethical standards of BIAs are now regulated at a national level by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The working conditions list a number of minimum requirements concerning report content, and detail the criteria on the basis of which reports are evaluated. A BIA with ACPO Approved status agrees to have his/her work audited annually by a suitably qualified independent panel. A BIA's role is:

to provide the investigating officer with an additional perspective and decision support through a serious crime investigation; [it is] an additional 'tool in the box' rather than any magical panacea (Rainbow & Gregory 2011: 20).

Finally, the work of BIAs is greatly assisted by systematic structured electronic databases pertaining to offender characteristics, such as CASMIRC and ViCAP in the United States and VISOR in the United Kingdom.

Discussion And Conclusions

The evidence base for offender profiling is 'remarkably limited' (Crighton 2010: 152, 153), and 'Efforts to look at the accuracy of profilers empirically have yielded mixed results'. According to Kocsis (2009: 226), the evidence addressing the utility of criminal profiling in assisting with crime detection is, not surprisingly perhaps, as scant as the evidence for the accuracy of profiles. Also, while research evidence supporting the notion of behavioural consistency that is fundamental to profiling has been reported, the same cannot, unfortunately, be said for notions of homology (the degree of correspondence between criminals' crime scene actions and their background characteristics). Nevertheless, the professionalisation of profiling has no doubt added to the contribution such specialists can make to police investigations of crime.

The different profiling techniques described draw on a variety of disciplines, including personality theory, criminology, environmental psychology and geography. However, as Bekerian and Jackson (1997: 209) rightly point out, such techniques are so diverse that there is the danger of the field of offender profiling fragmenting due to differences in methodological frameworks, differences between individual profilers and differences in culture (for example, between the UK and the United States). Such fragmentation would impact adversely on the accessibility of application of offender profiling. At the same time, it could also be argued that within offender profiling there are opposing factions that are also so described in textbooks: inductive vs deductive, clinical vs statistical or practitioner vs academic approaches. This separation into factions is understandable in view of the ill-formed forensic field internationally and, also, the relatively short history of offender profiling and how it has evolved in different countries with different police cultures and policing traditions. However, as Alison *et al.* (2004) have argued, the separation into different factions is both unrepresentative and unnecessarily divisive and, consequently, it undermines the potential contribution of behavioural sciences to an important part of police work – criminal investigation. Adopting a pragmatist's stance, Alison *et al.* maintain that what is called for is a more productive and synergistic dialogue between exponents of the different approaches to offender profiling. The present author is of the view that if well-known profilers espousing different methods work jointly to provide answers to the same questions and they strive to produce hybrid profiling methods, it would be one way of avoiding offender profiling fragmentation.

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