Criminal Profiling

JOHN H. WHITE and DAVID LESTER

What Profiling Does

According to former FBI profiler Robert Hazelwood (2005), a profile identifies the major personality and behavioral characteristics of an individual on the basis of a careful analysis of the crime scene. While fingerprints, blood spatter, and DNA consist of physical evidence, behavioral evidence indicates intangible motivations and emotions – such as fear, rage, sexual motivations, hate, or financial gain. The theory is that behavior discovered at the crime scene (or reported by a victim) reflects the personality of the offender and therefore identifies a *type* of offender. Hazelwood (2005) noted that a profile takes into account the totality of the crime scene and that no one characteristic alone is sufficient to describe the offender. Furthermore, a profile does not identify an individual suspect but is designed to provide investigators with a behavioral composite of the most probable offender, thereby prioritizing a list of suspects for investigation. In some cases the profile will refocus the investigation and will reduce the number of investigative hours.

The History of Profiling

The idea of developing a profile of an offender by examining his/her characteristics is not a new concept. In the 1400s, two monks wrote the *Malleus maleficarum*, which documented the typical behavioral patterns of witches (Ramsland, 2005). In 1888 London's Criminal Investigation Division asked Dr. Thomas Bond, a physician, to describe the characteristics of Jack the Ripper, a serial killer in the Whitechapel district of London (Kocsis, 2006). On the basis of wounds on the victims and behaviors committed at crime scenes, Bond gave the police probable characteristics of the perpetrator, although Jack the Ripper was never captured. Ebisike (2008) reports that Dr. Hans Gross, an Austrian judge and criminologist, first publicized the concept of profiling in 1893, when he wrote *Criminal Investigation: A Practical Textbook for Magistrates, Police Officers, and Lawyers*, where he encouraged law enforcement officers to examine how a perpetrator committed a crime in order to form a picture of the suspect. The next major profiling advance occurred in the 1940s, during World War II, when the United States Office of Strategic Services asked Dr. Walter Langer, a psychoanalyst, to profile and predict future behaviors of Adolph Hitler (DeNevi & Campbell, 2004). Langer accurately predicted that Hitler would commit suicide if he began losing the war. In 1953, Dr. Paul L. Kirk, a biochemist, advocated in two editions of his book *Crime Investigation* the formation of a criminal profile derived from crime reconstruction; this was well before the procedure came to be called "profiling." These ideas evolved into two major profiling approaches that are popular today: the FBI approach and investigative psychology.

Profiling Today

The FBI approach

Modern-day American profiling techniques began by following the general tenets of psychiatry and psychology, in that crime-scene behaviors could be compared to behaviors of previously identified offenders in order to help develop a personality profile of the current unidentified offender. Even though comparisons to other offenders may be made, each profile is independent, and there is no boilerplate profile for the same types of crimes. Howard Teten brought this concept to the FBI Academy in the 1970s, after visiting with Dr. James Brussel, a psychiatrist who had written an accurate profile of the Mad Bomber, George Matesky, in the 1940s (DeNevi & Campbell, 2004), although there is disagreement on exactly how instrumental the profile was in catching Matesky (Bartol & Bartol, 2013). To gain a deeper understanding of criminal behavior at crime scenes, FBI special agents Robert Ressler

The Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment, First Edition. Edited by Wesley G. Jennings.

DOI: 10.1002/9781118519639.wbecpx184

and John Douglas went into prisons in the late 1970s and interviewed 36 sexual murderers in order to obtain insight into the types of offenders who engage in certain behaviors – such as mutilation, necrophilia, and sadism – during their crimes.

Offender profiling through crime scene analysis

Although the FBI devised systematic steps to follow in the development of a profile – steps called the criminal profile-generating process (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1992) – the construction of a profile continues to be an "art," not a science (Hazelwood, 2005). Ressler et al. (1992) described the systematic steps in developing an offender profile through crime-scene analysis as follows. The first stage is that of the profiling inputs, in which all physical evidence is collected and analyzed. Evidence includes forensic information, victim reports if available, police and autopsy reports, and crime-scene characteristics. Stage 2 is that of the decision process model, in which the type of murder or rape (or other crime), the motive, the signs of escalation, the time spent at the crime scene, and the location are determined. Stage 3, crime assessment, is a result of information garnered in the first two stages. The crime scene is reconstructed and the questions "What happened?" and "Why did it happen?" are asked. The movements of the offender through the crime scene are assessed in a sequential fashion. Profilers determine why the victims were selected and how the offender controlled them. Signs of "staging" (purposeful behaviors performed in an attempt to lead investigators in the wrong direction) are investigated, as well as crime-scene dynamics (how the offender reacted to the environment of the crime scene, including victim resistance). The particular signs noted depend upon the crime (murder, rape, child molestation, etc.). For murder, investigators and profilers often decide whether the crime scene is more organized or more disorganized. Ressler et al. (1992, pp. 122–123) describe the characteristics of an *organized crime scene* as follows:

- offense shows indication of being planned;
- victim is a targeted stranger;
- personalizes victim;
- controlled conversation;
- crime scene reflects overall control;
- demands the victim to be submissive;
- restraints are used;
- aggressive acts are committed prior to death;
- body is hidden;
- weapon/evidence absent.

If the crime scene is more organized, then the perpetrator will probably have the following characteristics and be considered an organized offender:

- has good intelligence;
- is socially and sexually competent;
- skilled work is preferred;
- has a high birth order status;
- father's work was stable;
- inconsistent childhood discipline;
- had a controlled mood during crime;
- use of alcohol with crime;
- experienced a precipitating situation or stress;
- lives with partner;
- is mobile, with car in good condition;
- follows crime in news media;
- may change jobs or leave town.

In contrast to the organized crime scene, Ressler et al. describe a disorganized crime scene as follows:

- a spontaneous offense;
- victim or location is known to the offender;
- depersonalizes victim;
- there is minimal conversation;
- the crime scene is random and sloppy;
- there is sudden violence to victim;
- minimal use of restraints;
- sexual acts are performed after death;
- the body is left in view;
- evidence/weapon often present;
- body is left at death scene.

A disorganized crime scene is left behind by a disorganized offender who most probably has the following characteristics:

- is of average intelligence;
- is socially immature and sexually incompetent;
- has low birth order status;
- father's work was unstable;

- experienced harsh discipline in childhood;
- had an anxious mood during crime;
- minimal use of alcohol;
- experienced minimal situational stress;
- lives alone and lives/works near crime scene;
- holds minimal interest in news media.

Stage 4 of the criminal profile-generating process consists in generating a criminal profile. Information at this stage includes many characteristics of the offender – such as race, sex, age, occupation, living status, type of vehicle driven, religious beliefs, drug and alcohol use, educational history, intelligence, relationship to the victim, temperament, address, military history, and any other characteristics that seem to be salient. This information is given to the police agency in charge of the investigation. Stage 5 is the investigation, in which the police agency involved identifies the suspects. During these first five stages, profilers are constantly receiving feedback from new evidence that may affect the final profile. The last stage consists of the apprehension of the offender.

The FBI approach to profiling, especially the organized/disorganized dichotomy, has received much criticism, as many offenders demonstrate characteristics from both categories (Turvey, 2002). There has been no sound study yet to indicate the reliability of this typology.

Investigative psychology

David Canter of London believes that the FBI approach to profiling does not meet scientific rigor; therefore he developed his own style of profiling, called "investigative psychology" (Canter, 2000). There are several components to his technique that differ from the FBI approach. His approach utilizes facet theory and the associated multidimensional scaling technique, also known as "smallest space analysis" (SSA) (Ainsworth, 2001). Canter based his theoretical perspective on the interpersonal narratives of the offender.

Canter emphasized the perpetrator's life circumstances before the first crime. "A criminal is more vulnerable in his history than in his future" (Canter, 2000, p. 78). He placed more emphasis on the geographic patterns exhibited during a series of crimes than the FBI did. He also believed that criminals exhibit consistent patterns involving themes, recurring events, dominant characteristics, and identifiable structures. There are two facets to every attack. Facet 1 involves a distorted search for intimacy, and the way the offender contacts the victim is the first major theme to consider when investigating a case. The way in which a perpetrator may view his/her victim during this contact falls into one of three possible categories:

- *victim as object*: the victim is viewed as an inanimate object;
- *victim as vehicle*: the victim is made to perform certain acts;
- *victim as person*: the victim is seen as having thoughts and emotions: this is closest to a normal relationship.

Facet 2 is the degree of power and aggression the perpetrator uses on his/her victim. The violence can be:

- *total subjugation*: mutilation and savagery are inflicted;
- *murder without frenzy*: there are different variations of murder, but this type does not involve mutilation; the type of assault depends on how the perpetrator views the function of the victim;
- *source of satisfaction*: the victim satisfies the perpetrator's desires for lust, and therefore the perpetrator can demonstrate his own sexuality.

When one constructs a profile, the three levels of facet 1 are combined in various ways with the three levels of facet 2, and this results in nine different potential mixes. Canter tried to determine which of the above variables are likely to co-occur across many crime scenes, and this is reflected in a two-dimensional map.

Other types of profiling

Typologies Holmes and De Burger (1988; see also Holmes & Holmes, 1998) developed one of the first typologies of serial killers based on motivation: (i) *mission-oriented* – intent on eliminating people who are members of certain groups or categories, such as prostitutes or members of certain races or religions; (ii) *vision-oriented* – responding to voices they hear

or visions they see that tell them to kill; (iii) *hedonistic* – murdering for sexual gratification and thrills, or for personal gain or profit; and (iv) *power and control* – deriving sexual gratification from completely dominating the victim. The next step is to describe the offender characteristics for each type.

Keppel and Birnes (2003) developed a typology in which serial murderers fall into one of four categories: (i) *power reassurance* – the offender kills in an attempt to compensate for his sexual inadequacies; (ii) *power-assertive* – this killer is described as emotionally primitive. His murders result from his trying to assert his macho image and manhood; (iii) *anger retaliation* – this killer vents his anger on women for real or imagined perceptions of wrongs that have been done to him; and (iv) *anger excitation* – these offenders want to inflict pain and suffering on the victims. The suffering of the victims stimulates them and usually gratifies them sexually.

However, Bennell, Bloomfield, Emino, and Musolino (2013) argued that there is no evidence to support Keppel and Birnes's four categories, as the categories are not distinct enough to separate out the many types of serial killers, while Canter and Wentink (2004) argued that a given serial murderer can be placed into more than one of Holmes and Holmes's categories.

Geographic profiling Developed by Kim Rossmo, geographic profiling looks at the spatial activity of the offender. It is usually combined with a psychological or criminal profile that has been constructed, although a profile is not necessarily needed (Rossmo, 1997). A geographic profile has both quantitative and qualitative components. Rossmo devised the criminal geographic targeting (CGT) process, which is a computerized program that produces a three-dimensional probability distribution and creates a map called a "geophile." One aspect of this algorithm helps determine where the offender resides in relation to the crime scenes. Rossmo also describes a hunting typology in which searching for victims may take one of the following forms (Rossmo, 1997, p. 167):

1. The Tunter specifically sets out to search for a victim, basing the search from his/her residence.
2. The Poacher specifically searches for a victim but he bases the search from a site other than his/her residence. He may also commute or travel to another city during the search.
3. The Troller opportunistically encounters a victim while performing other, nonpredatory tasks.
4. The Trapper creates a situation to encounter victims within a certain location of his/her control.

Rossmo also describes victim attack methods (p. 167):

1. *The raptor* attacks a victim at the moment of encountering him/her.
2. *The stalker* follows a victim and then attacks.
3. *The ambusher* lures a victim to a particular location that is controlled by the offender.

Conclusions

The above descriptions of profiling represent the most popular profiling techniques. However, there remains a great deal of research that needs to be done to examine the reliability and validity of profiling techniques. First, with regard to the typologies, can cases be classified reliably (independently, by two or more judges) into the types? What proportion of cases remains unclassifiable? Do individuals fit consistently over time into only one type? Second, are the profiling techniques valid, that is, do the characteristics of, say, the disorganized offender fit the disorganized crime scene? To what extent does the captured offender fit the profile? Because of the lack of evidence for the reliability and validity of profiling techniques, the use of profiles in the courts is controversial and, while some states allow certain aspects of a profile to be used in testimony, other states do not (Ebisike, 2008). A good model for future research comes from studies of suicide. Reynolds and Berman (1995) had judges classify 404 cases of suicide into ten typologies, noting to what extent the judges agreed, how many cases were unclassifiable for each typology, and the degree of overlap between the different typologies. This kind of research is urgently needed for profiles of murderers (especially serial murderers), rapists, child molesters, and other criminals.

SEE ALSO: Crime Prevention; Historical Responses to Crime; Police Technology; Race and Policing.

References

Ainsworth, P. B. (2001). *Offender profiling and crime analysis.* Portland, OR: William Publishing.

Bartol, C. R., & Bartol, A. M. (2013). *Criminal and behavioral profiling.* Los Angeles: Sage.

Bennell, C., Bloomfield, S., Emino, K., & Musolino, E. (2013). Classifying sexual serial murder/murderers. *Criminal Justice & Behavior, 40,* 5–25.

Canter, D. (2000). *Unlocking the minds of serial killers and sexual predators and cracking cases.* New York: Dorset Press.

Canter, D. V., & Wentink, N. (2004). An empirical test of Holmes and Holmes's serial murder typology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 51,* 489–515.

DeNevi, D., & Campbell, J. H. (2004). *Into the minds of madmen.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Ebisike, N. (2008). *Offender profiling in the courtroom.* Westport, CT: Praeger

Hazelwood, R. R. (2005). *Sexual violence.* Lecture presented at the Violent Crime Behavior (VCB I) training, the Academy Group, Manassas, VA, June.

Holmes, R. M., & De Burger, J. (1988). *Serial murder.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Holmes, R. M., & Holmes, S. T. (1998). *Profiling violent crimes: An investigative tool* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Keppel, R. D., & Birnes, W. J. (2003). *The psychology of serial killer investigations.* Boston, MA: Academic Press.

Kocsis, R. N. (2006). *Criminal profiling: Principles and practice.* Totowa, NJ: Human Press.

Ramsland, K. (2005). *Human predators.* New York: Berkely Books.

Ressler, R. K., Burgess, A. W., & Douglas, J. E. (1992). *Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives.* New York: Lexington Books.

Reynolds, F. M. T., & Berman, A. L. (1995). An empirical typology of suicide. *Archives of Suicide Research, 1,* 97–109.

Rossmo, D. K. (1997). *Geographic profiling.* In J. L. Jacson & D. A. Bekerian (Eds.), *Offender profiling: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 159–175). New York City: Wiley.

Turvey, B. (2002). *Criminal profiling: An introduction to behavioral evidence analysis* (2nd ed.). New York: Academic Press.

Further Readings

Harris, T. (1981). *Red dragon.* New York: Putnam Publishing Corp.

Harris, T. (1988). *The silence of the lambs.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hicks, S. J., & Sales, B. D. (2006). *Criminal profiling: Developing an effective science and practice.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.