

Criminal Personality Profiling and Crime Scene Assessment

A Contemporary Investigative Tool to
Assist Law Enforcement Public Safety

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Within the justice system, there appears to be a growing demand for experts in the field of behavioral science who can help law enforcement solve bizarre and unusual cases. There are multiple factors and antecedent events that are involved in a violent crime. These factors and events include the intent, the plan, the type of criminal, the type of victim, the crime scene, and the pre-mortem and postmortem interval. The manner in which a violent crime is performed expresses the psychological pattern, makeup, and expression of the individual performing it. Criminal investigative analysis, or criminal personality profiling, examines and identifies the subtle habits, psychological traits, and personality variables associated with criminal activity. These variables and traits are used to develop personality and behavioral descriptors of an offender who often commits heinous crimes such as serial homicide, sex crimes leading to criminal homicide, arson, bombings, ritualistic crimes that include torture, child abduction, kidnapping, child molestation, and bank robbery.

Criminal investigative analysis, or profiling, is currently neither a widely accepted law enforcement practice nor a widespread investigative process, but there is some evidence to support its usage in the investigation of certain types of crime. Furthermore, profiling as a science or as an art is not meant to be a law enforcement panacea or even a replacement for conventional and traditional investigative police work. However, law enforcement agencies are beginning to realize the benefits of this technique as a viable investigative tool. This article briefly highlights the subject, concepts, and elements of the criminal psychological profiling process. To the student of



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and to the professional in criminology, crime sciences, criminal justice, sociology, and psychology who has a strong penchant for studying violent crime, this article will serve as a valuable source of information. To the investigator who deals with cases in which the "typical or usual internal motives" of killing are absent, this article provides additional insight as a tool essential to the successful resolution of a case (Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986; Holmes, 1996).

This article provides the basic principles to form an understanding of the development of a criminal-psychological personality profile. The article is neither a clinical prescription to a ready-made cookbook nor a boilerplate method for profiling. It is also not a step-by-step how-to for making the reader into an instant crime investigative analyst or profiler. However, the author believes that with the proper education in victimology, criminology, biology, pathology, anatomy, and the behavioral sciences, and additional training in the techniques of criminal investigation, a person interested in conducting thorough criminal and psychological profiles will have a firm basis to do so effectively and professionally (Ault & Reese, 1980; Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986; Holmes, 1996; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

Criminal personality profiling or criminal investigative analysis is the science of reconstructing a picture or portrait of the type of crime and the criminal involved through an examination of the evidence founded during the examination of the crime scene (Ault & Reese, 1980; Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986; Geberth, 1996). The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) definition of criminal profiling is "an investigative technique by which to identify the major personality and behavioral characteristics of the offender based upon analysis of the crime(s) he or she has committed" (Douglas, 1986; Teten, personal communication, 1996). This does not give the investigator the identity of the criminal, but it does identify the type of offender who is likely to have committed the crime. The concept of profiling is that once an investigator has an idea of what type of person he or she is searching for, he or she will be more attentive to individuals who fit that profile. Although it is not considered by many as a hard science, criminal profiling, as a contemporary and scientifically-based (empirical) investigative tool, has proven to be an extremely valuable asset to law enforcement because it carries the hope of bringing an unidentified criminal to justice (Ault & Reese, 1980; Davis, 1993; Douglas, 1986; Holmes, 1996; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1985).

PROFILING AS A CONTEMPORARY INVESTIGATIVE TOOL

Profiling is the identification of specific characteristics of an individual committing a particular crime by a thorough systematic observational

process and an analysis of the crime scene, the victim, the forensic evidence, and the known facts of the crime. The profiling technique has been used by behavioral scientists and criminologists to examine criminal behavior, and to evaluate as well as possibly predict the future actions of criminals (Davis, 1996a).

The FBI is the premier agency in the United States involved in the usage of criminal investigative analysis or psychological profiling. The FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) and Behavioral Sciences Investigative Support Service Unit (BSISSU) have been assisting the law enforcement community in building criminal profiles from unsolved crimes since about 1972. In addition, the FBI also provides training in profiling to various agencies when requested (Davis, 1995; Douglas, 1986; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988). Although initially viewed with disdain by old-style investigators during its early stages of development and refinement, profiling has proven time and time again to be a valuable investigative tool in the arsenal of today's modern law enforcement cadre. As more and more personnel become trained and experienced in the application of the investigative technique of criminal profiling, more agencies will believe in its use. In addition, as the number of unsolved crimes continues to grow, so too will the need for more personnel to be trained in this technique to solve what the author calls "psychological crimes" (Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986).

Contemporary scientific investigative techniques like psychological profiling are here to stay. The investigator needs to become familiar with this tool to increase his or her effectiveness in solving what have become known as stranger-to-stranger crimes, recreational crimes, motiveless crimes, and psychologically based violent offenses (Ault & Reese, 1980; Teten, 1996).

THE CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING PROCESS

Experience in the investigation of crime is typically brought into each new crime scene investigation. Statistics based on data from reported crimes are reviewed and used to build a profile of the offender.

The investigator goes through the following steps or phases in the profiling process:

- The evaluation of the crime and the criminal act or acts itself
- Comprehensive evaluation of the specifics of the crime scene(s)
- Comprehensive analysis of the victim
- Evaluation of preliminary police reports
- Evaluation of the medical examiner's autopsy protocol
- Development of a profile with critical offender characteristics

- Investigative suggestions predicated on the construction of the profile
- Possible apprehension of the suspect (Davis, 1995; Holmes, 1996; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988)

The investigator collects the evidence, analyzes the known information, examines the crime scene, reconstructs the activities of the offender, formulates a theory, builds a profile, and tests it against the known information. The generated feedback further refines the profile. The resulting profile identifies the type of individual to look for, but it does not provide the exact identity (Davis, 1993; Douglas, 1986; Hickey, 1995; Holmes, 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING AND INVESTIGATIVE APPLICATIONS

Profiling has proven to be effective in hostage negotiation situations in which a personality assessment of the hostage taker was needed. The probable reaction of the offender when exposed to certain actions by law enforcement can be predicted, and the appropriate actions can then be taken to safeguard the lives of the hostages. In this type of situation, the police can obtain information through verbal exchanges with the hostage taker and through conversations with personal associates and family members (Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Holmes, 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

One of the more interesting applications of profiling is in threat communication, in which individuals writing anonymous letters and making real or implied written threats are identified. A "threat dictionary" can be composed through psycholinguistic techniques as each word of the anonymous letter is classified by computer into a specific category. When the words of the letter are compared in this manner to other letters or ordinary speech, investigators are able to determine if the speaker also wrote the threatening letter. The background and psychology of the offender can also be determined in this fashion (Davis, 1993; Douglas, 1986).

Profiling has been used in the identification of serial rapists and arsonists. With rapists, it has been determined that certain behavior is usually reflective of a type of personality, and by examining this behavior, the investigator can identify the type of individual involved and narrow down the search. The FBI's *Uniform Crime Report* (UCR) (1995) has shown that arsonists have common characteristics. Knowledge of particular arsonists' methods can aid the investigator in predicting the behavior of the arsonist and in developing techniques and strategies for interviewing suspects (Ault & Reese, 1980; Douglas, 1986).

A major challenge faced by law enforcement agencies today is the growing number of bizarre, unsolved homicides. They often involve sex-related elements with bizarre or unusual motives. Referred to as "lust murders" (Ault & Reese, 1980; Geberth, 1996), these crimes often include mutilation of the victim, severe beating, torture, and sexually explicit positioning of the body. Building a psychological profile has enabled investigators to narrow down the investigation to those individuals that closely resemble the picture developed by the profile.

APPLIED CRIME SCENE CRIMINOLOGY

A typical profile includes as much data as can be compiled on the perpetrator from evidence left at the scene, including possible age, race, gender, economic status, marital status, intellectual and educational level, occupation, lifestyle, arrest history, and location of resident in relation to the crime scene. Ultimately, the crime and the crime scene (indoor or outdoor) is classified in order to assist the investigator. This is an opportunity to build a working deductive and inductive analytical model for the criminal profile, and establish an investigative scientific hypothesis that includes the criminal behavioral assessment and analysis process, fact pattern from criminalistic trace evidence, victimology, medical examiner or coroner postmortem and investigative field reports, geographic or geospatial profile from forensic mapping and crime analysis, method of operation (MO), any outstanding or salient personality or character traits and patterns, and any potential criminal signature (Davis, 1995; Hickey, 1995; Holmes, 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Rossmo, 1998).

The crime is classified as sex related, nonsexual, or unknown. Any crime with evidence, in any part of the crime scene, of some type of sexual component is classified as sex related. A sex-related crime can be determined from the victim's attire; lack of clothing; exposure of genitalia; body positioning; sexual injury; or evidence of sexual activity on, in, or near the body. In addition, evidence of substitute sexual activity or sadistic fantasy can be evidence of sexual activity (Ault & Reese, 1980; Douglas, 1986; Geberth, 1996).

The classification of the crime scene is a critical aspect in the development of every profile. The crime scene is classified by the amount of planning and predetermination by the offender and the degree of control that the offender exercised over the victim. The offender's pattern of behavior is determined by the crime scene, particularly in sex-related offenses (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

The crime scene has several types of classifications such as organized, disorganized, mixed, and atypical. Only the organized and disorganized types will be discussed more elaborately here.

THE ORGANIZED CRIME SCENE

An organized crime scene indicates planning, premeditation, and a conscious effort to avoid detection. Examples of this can be found in the offender's selection of isolated areas for commission of his acts, the transportation of the victim from one area to another, and the lack of weapons at the scene. This individual is typically well aware of what he is doing and makes every effort during the commission of this crime to avoid leaving evidence that would enable law enforcement agencies to make an identification and subsequent apprehension (Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Hickey, 1995; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Yochelson & Samenow, 1977).

THE DISORGANIZED CRIME SCENE

A disorganized crime scene indicates actions that are spontaneous and an assault that is typically frenzied. The victim is typically selected at random, and the crime scene itself is usually the location of the encounter. This is frequently indicated by the use of materials at hand for the commission of the crime; these assaults can be a blitz or a hurried attack, and they often result in a disarrayed crime scene (Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986; Hickey, 1995; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

THE MIXED CRIME SCENE

The mixed crime scene has attributes of both organized and disorganized crime scenes. This could indicate the presence of two offenders in the crime, or it could indicate that one offender had planned the crime and then abandoned the plan due to unforeseen circumstances, or it could indicate that an offender had staged the outcome (made it look like something else). General inconsistencies in the crime are part of the scene (Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Hickey, 1995; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Ressler & Douglas, 1985).

THE ATYPICAL CRIME SCENE

The atypical crime scene applies to crime scenes that cannot be classified based on the immediately available data. Decomposed remains usually fall into this classification (Davis, 1996b).

COMPUTERIZED DATABASE, FORENSIC MAPPING, AND GEOSPATIAL TRACKING SYSTEMS

The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC), the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP Program), and some states like Washington as well as some provinces in Canada (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System, or ViCLAS) have embarked on the development of a computerized statistical database (Homicide Information Tracking [HITS] System) to enable law enforcement agencies to quickly identify a criminal profile or a serial trend in behavior. This database is built through the study of known methods used by offenders and through the detailed questioning of offenders, which hopes to explain why the offenders committed specific parts of their crimes (Ault & Reese, 1980; Porter, 1983; Rossmo, 1998).

The FBI's efforts have identified significant differences in crime scenes of organized and disorganized offenders. In addition, they also identified background differences found between them. The four following areas were noted to be dissimilar between organized and disorganized offenders: (a) the offender's action during the crime, (b) the victim characteristics, (c) the use of vehicles during the crime, and (d) the type of evidence left at the scene (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988, 1992).

The following bulleted points show the crime scene characteristics of organized and disorganized murderers that have been identified from the FBI's sexual offender study (Ault & Reese, 1980; Ressler & Douglas, 1985):

Crime Scene Characteristics of Organized Offenders

- Planned offense
- Victim is a targeted stranger
- Personalizes victim
- Controlled conversation
- Crime scene reflects control
- Demands submissive victim
- Restraints used
- Aggressive acts committed antemortem
- Body hidden
- Weapon and evidence are absent
- Transports victim or body

(Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988, p. 123)

Crime Scene Characteristics of Disorganized Offenders

- Spontaneous offense
- Victim and location known
- Depersonalizes victim

- Minimal conversation
- Crime scene is random and sloppy
- Sudden violence committed on victim
- Minimal use of restraints
- Performance of sexual acts postmortem
- Body left in view
- Evidence and weapon are present
- Body left at death scene

(Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988, p. 123)

The following bulleted points show the profile characteristics of organized and disorganized murderers that have been identified from the FBI's sexual offender study (Ault & Reese, 1980; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Ressler & Douglas, 1985).

Profile Characteristics of Organized Offenders

- Average to above-average intelligence
- Socially competent
- Skilled work preferred
- Sexually competent
- High birth order
- Father's work is stable
- Inconsistent childhood discipline
- Controlled mood during the crime
- Use of alcohol with the crime
- Precipitating situational stress
- Living with a partner
- Mobility (have a car in good condition)
- Follows crime in news media
- May change jobs or leave town

(Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988, p. 122)

Profile Characteristics of Disorganized Offenders

- Below-average intelligence
- Socially inadequate
- Unskilled work
- Sexually incompetent
- Low birth order
- Father's work is unstable
- Harsh discipline as a child
- Anxious during crime

- Minimal use of alcohol
- Minimal situational stress
- Living alone
- Lives or works near crime scene
- Minimal interest in news media
- Significant behavior change

(Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988, p. 122)

By identifying the existing variables that aid in building a criminal profile and by differentiating between the types of offenders, it is possible to develop a working hypothesis and perform test profiles that can be used to determine the accuracy of the established findings. This process eventually aids in faster identification of offenders (Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

CONSTRUCTING THE CRIMINAL PROFILE

The actual criminal profile should include (but is not limited to) the following information:

- Race
- Gender
- Age range
- Marital status
- General employment
- Reaction to questioning by police
- Degree of sexual maturity
- Whether the individual might strike again
- Possibility that he or she has committed a similar offense in the past
- Possible police record

(Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Holmes, 1989;
Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988;
Ressler & Douglas, 1985)

The quality of the profile is dependent on the quality of the crime scene examination and the accuracy of victim or witness interviews. A skilled analyst typically needs the following information:

- Complete photographs of the crime scene, including the victim
- The autopsy report and the results of any lab tests
- A report of the details of the incident, including the time
- The location, the weapon used, and a reconstruction of the sequence of events

- A detailed interview of the victim or any witnesses
- Background information on the victim

(Davis, 1996a; Douglas, 1986;
Holmes, 1989;
Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988)

The following background information is needed on the victim:

- Occupation
- Residence
- Reputation at work and in the neighborhood
- Physical description, including dress at the time of the incident
- Marital status, including children and close family members

(Davis, 1996b; Douglas, 1986; Hickey, 1995;
Holmes, 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988;
Ressler & Douglas, 1985)

CONCLUSION

Criminal investigative analysis or criminal personality profiling is quickly growing as a viable investigative tool in solving serial crimes, recreational crimes, stranger-to-stranger crimes, questionable or equivocal death cases, or sexually related homicide cases. In addition, profiling techniques are providing results in cases involving arson, bank robbery, hostage taking, child abduction, and child molestation.

Profiling is not an investigative panacea, and its use is not intended to replace good detective work. However, when it is used in conjunction with conventional investigative and forensic approaches to solving crimes, profiling can add significantly to a case workup and pick up where other investigative methods leave off.

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