

## **Criminal Profiling: the reality behind the myth**

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### **Abstract**

In contemporary criminology, with the advent of Criminal Profiling, criminal investigative procedure has changed dramatically. Various theories and methodologies of criminal profiling have been proposed e.g., FBI's Crime Scene Analysis, Brent Turvey's Behavioral Evidence Analysis, Canter's Profiling Technique etc. It is certain that in near future, Criminal Profiling will play a decisive role in modern criminal investigation.

**Key words** : criminal profiling, crime, behaviour, victim

### **Introduction**

Criminal profiling is the method of identifying the perpetrator of a crime based on analysis of the nature of offence and the manner in which it was committed. It is also known as offender profiling, criminal personality profiling, criminological profiling, behavioral profiling or criminal investigative analysis(FBI). Various aspects of the criminal's personality makeup are determined from his or her activities before, during and after the crime. The information is combined with other relevant details and physical evidence, and then compared with the characteristics of known personality types and mental abnormalities to develop a practical working description of the offender. While this does not directly identify the offender, it is very helpful in narrowing down suspects. For example, a profile based on a crime scene may provide information that may include the perpetrator's personality, sex, age, ethnic background and possible physical features e.g., disfigurements, or height and weight. Criminal profiling also specifies the way in which the crime is committed, also known as "Method of operation"(1). The latter includes what the victims have in common(in case of serial offender), the weapon used, the degree of hostility, the presence of any torture or sexual molestation. Analysing all these aspects of the crime scene, an investigator can determine the motives of the criminal which in turn leads to a description of the criminal's personality.

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The origin of criminal profiling can be traced back to as early as the Middle Ages. Jacob Fries, Cesara Lombroso, Alphonse Bertillon, Hans Gross and several others realized the potential of profiling in the 1800s although their research is generally considered to be prejudiced, reflecting the biases of their time. During the 1880s, Thomas Bond, a medical doctor established the personality profile of “Jack the Ripper”. In 1888, he noted the sexual nature of the murders coupled with the elements of apparent misogyny and rage. Walter C. Langer (1943) developed the profile of Adolf Hitler. He described Hitler to be meticulous, conventional who viewed himself as a standard-bearer and trendsetter. The profile also pointed out Hitler’s Oedipus complex, his coprolagnia and urolagnia, and his strong affinity for sadism. James A. Brussel (1956) described the profile of the serial bomber who terrorised the New York City by planting bombs in various public places. Howard Teten (1972), a FBI Instructor, designed a method for analysing unknown offenders in unsolved cases. His principle was based on the behavioral manifestations at the crime scene for evidence of mental disorders and other personality traits, thus aiding the detectives’ reasoning. He also suggested that profiling has its roots in the writing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his fictional character Sherlock Holmes. In 1974, Robert D. Keppel used new methods of psychological profiling to catch notorious serial killers Ted Bundy and the Green River killer. David Canter (1986), a psychologist and criminologist from the University of Surrey composed British crime’s first offender profile in ‘Railway Killer’ case.

## Discussion

Criminal profiling appears to be more appropriate for certain types of offence than others. Currently the most common crimes for which it is used are murder and more serious sexual offences, especially where it appears that there is a series of connected crimes. Researches in criminology have given rise to several theories and various methods of criminal profiling. Some of the best known methodologies are :

**Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Crime Scene Analysis** (2) consists of 6 steps :-

1. Profiling Inputs – Collection of all evidence including anything found on the scene(e.g., fibres, paint chips) and anything derived from the crime scene(e.g., photographs, investigator notes, measurements).
2. Decision Process Models – Evidence is arranged to locate any type of patterns, such as whether or not the crime is part of a series of crimes, what the victims have in common etc.
3. Crime Assessment – Now that the evidence has been organised, the crime scene is reconstructed in order.
4. Criminal Profile – The combined first 3 steps are used to create a criminal profile incorporating the motives, physical qualities and personality of the offender.
5. The Investigation – The profile is given to the investigator of the case and to organisations that may have data leading to the identification of a suspect.
6. The Apprehension – When a suspect is identified, he/she is interviewed, investigated and compared to the profile. If the investigator is sure that the suspect is the perpetrator, the whole mystery is unveiled.

FBI's Crime Scene Analysis classifies offenders into two distinct categories : *Organised* and *Disorganised*. In the former, offences are carried out with a great deal of forward planning and the victim may have been targeted and observed for some time in advance of the offence. In the latter, offences are committed with little planning or preparation and the victim may have been selected at random. FBI's method also classifies behaviour of a rapist in 4 different types : power-reassurance, power-assertive, anger-retaliatory and anger-excitement.

**Rossmo** (1997) analysed the process of how serial killers find a victim into 2 phases (3) : The *first phase* is the 'victim search method' of which there are 4 possibilities.

1. Hunter – offenders who set out specifically to find a particular type of victim close to their own home.
2. Poacher – offenders who set out specifically to find a particular type of victim but away from their homes.
3. Troller – involves an opportunistic encounter with a victim while doing something else.
4. Trapper – offenders who work in a particular job to allow them the opportunity to encounter victims within their control.

The *second phase* is the 'victim attack method' which can be subdivided into 3 types.

1. Raptor – attacks the victim on meeting.
2. Stalker – follows victim, then attacks him/her.
3. Ambusher – attacks only when victim is in situation controlled by the offender e.g., in the offender's home.

**Brent Turvey's Behavioral Evidence Analysis(BEA)** consists of analysing the crime in 4 different steps.

The *first step*, Equivocal Forensic Analysis calls for analysing physical evidence including interviews, investigator and autopsy report; photographs and videos of the crime scene, autopsy and living victims.

The *second step*, Victimology, requires the investigator to create a profile of the victim which in turn can give clues to the identity of the criminal.

The *third step*, Crime Scene Characteristics, involves the determination of a number of factors relevant to the location of the crime scene, where this crime scene is placed relative to other related crime scenes, and how the offender approached the victim.

The *final step*, Offender Characteristics, is the result of analysis of the first 3 steps and a rough 'character sketch' is created by combining the knowledge gleaned from analysing the different parts of the crime scene.

### **Canter's Profiling Technique(4)**

While David Canter's approach shares some similarities with that of FBI, he has tried to place his approach within accepted psychological frameworks. Canter has labeled his approach 'Investigative Psychology' and believes that as a branch of applied psychology, it goes beyond what is traditionally thought of as offender profiling. He tried to understand firstly the type of crime in which any particular individual will be likely to become involved and also the way in which the crime will be carried out. Secondly, Canter tried to understand the way in which an individual offender's behaviour while committing a crime mirrors their behaviour in everyday life. His research has led him to believe that there are subsets of interrelated activities that occur when a crime is being committed. He also believes that a criminal's action at the scene of crime will reveal something about his background.

Canter has identified 5 important characteristics that he believes can help in investigations. These are residential location, criminal biography, domestic/social characteristics, personal characteristics and occupational/educational history. He believes that during commission of a crime, vital clues are left behind and the distinctive personality of the offender shows through in some way.

FBI's method of criminal profiling has been put to criticism in recent years(5). It is suggested that interviews with criminals are unreliable as the criminals can be manipulative and they are often disturbed sensation seekers.

Other criticisms of the FBI's approach are :

1. The samples of serious offenders interviewed in order to draw up the classification system are quite small.
2. The crime classifications for murderers and rapists were crude and not very helpful in terms of detection.
3. Details of the development and efficiency of the methods were not published.

Boon and Davies(1992) described FBI's method as a 'top down' approach. The crime under investigation is viewed in the light of the law enforcer's previous experience of criminal behaviour. Canter's method is more 'bottom up' in its approach. Seemingly insignificant clues to behaviour are built up to give a broad description of the main characteristics of the offender.

Other controversies regarding criminal profiling is that sometimes investigators may find an early suspect who appears to fit the profile and ignore or foreclose other leads. Conversely, false negative cases may also occur when investigators are blinded by an erroneous aspect of a profile and clear a suspect who is actually guilty.

Unfortunately, no attempt has been made in our country as yet to establish profile of an offender for early solving of a crime.

### **Conclusion**

In modern criminology, criminal profiling is generally considered the 'third wave' of investigative science : the first wave is the study of clues, the second wave study of crime itself; the third

wave is the study of the abnormal psyche of the criminal. It is certain that in near future, with more development of criminal psychology, criminal profiling will play a leading role in modern and scientific criminal investigation.

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