

Offender profiling: article review essay

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



The article “ Offender profiling: Psychological and methodological issues of testing for behavioural consistency” by Salfati (2008) summarized the research results of various studies in the field of offender profiling with specific attention to using the concepts of offender profiling to linking serial crimes and offender consistency. The article aimed to discuss key methodological issues, mainly focusing on validity and reliability of offender profiling and its development as a field of science, in three interlinked areas of recent profiling research, which included individual differentiation, behavioral consistency, and inferences about offender characteristics.

The first key point was to discuss shortcomings in establishing the primary unit of analysis in individual differentiation. According to Salfati (2008), early classification mainly focused on establishing motivational components of criminal offenders, but motivation proved to be difficult to measure and highly susceptible to subjective interpretations. It was suggested that observable behaviors should be the primary unit of analysis because measuring behaviors improves validity and reliability in measuring motivations after establishing behavioral patterns.

Second, the issue of using frequent behavioral patterns to discriminate between individual offenders was addressed. According to the findings of previous studies, 60 percent of the sample could not be profiled because they showed that some behavioral patterns cannot be differentiated. For example, looking at activities that are not required for killing the victim are more likely going to lead to establishing a reliable profile than investigating the type of homicide because they usually reveal unique behavioral patterns.

Third, the classification of themes and classification criteria need to be addressed in future studies. While several models have already been developed, it is important to further test intrinsic and stable variables to establish models that offer higher degrees of reliability. For example, a certain percentage of cases is non-classifiable, so researching situational factors is required to understand why that percentage of cases does not show dominance.

Fourth, in exploring behavioral consistency, establishing a valid model depends on deciding how to observe the behavior. The key issue is deciding between individual behavior and psychological behavior to establish linking and consistency, and several validity issues are pointed out. For example, many researchers do not document crime linking procedures, which makes it difficult to test the validity of their statements. Furthermore, when exploring consistency, it is important to focus on stable behavioral patterns rather than observing situational behaviors that can change and depend on the situation, interaction with victims, or learning.

Finally, examining consistency with themes should be addressed in research because previous studies showed that using general homicide classification is more reliable than using single behaviors. However, despite higher reliability, the results varied depending on the criterion of stringency employed, so that findings supports the statement that clear theme allocation criteria are required and linking procedures need to be described. The article by Salfati (2008) is a meta-analysis of studies in three areas of offender profiling, so the objective was to find weaknesses in models used to study offender profiling. The meta-analysis did not include any participants,

so the conclusions are not relevant to offenders, but they can be applied in future research in the field of offender profiling. However, some studies summarized in the article provide interesting conclusions, such as classification strategies or identifying key behaviors rather than situational behaviors, which can be generalized to all offenders.

Because this meta-analysis relies on empirical studies to reach conclusions, it can be considered valid and valuable to the field of offender profiling. For example, a review of a previous study showed that some behaviors are high-frequency and are present in more than 69 percent of all crimes, so they cannot be used to differentiate between individual offenders. That supports the hypothesis that rare types of behaviors should be identified and used to differentiate among individual offenders. Each issue reported in offender profiling models is supported with findings from empirical studies that investigated criminal behavior and validity issues of scientific methods used in offender profiling, so the article provides sound evidence to support its statements.

As an assistant or student of the researcher who wrote the article, I would first have to break down some of the main suggestions made to determine the follow-up because the meta-analysis focused on three broad areas that cannot be followed-up in a single direction. It is possible to break down the article into three key points that require further investigations. In terms of individual differentiation, it was concluded that behavioral patterns should be prioritized over motivation. Second, distinguishing between key and situational variables needs to be implemented to improve the reliability of profiling. Third, it is important to create criteria for classifying dominant

themes.

It is already clear that determining motivations after behavioral patterns is a logical sequence because internal psychology is susceptible to bias while behavioral patterns can be measured and the validity of reports based on behaviors can be tested. The next logical step is to work on improved models for creating crime theme classification standards because situational variables cannot be generalized across cases, and it is already evident that profilers should focus on behavioral subgroups to avoid errors that occur when making predictions based on common behavioral patterns.

In order to improve research models, learning and maturation need to be taken in account as variables that can influence the offender's behavioral patterns over time and impact the classification of their criminal behavior. The next study should collect psychological and criminal profiles of known offenders and analyze how their behavioral patterns changed over time. By understanding the factors that affect learning and maturation in the offenders' psychology and how those factors can be correlated to changes in behavioral patterns, it will be possible to improve the reliability of studies and reports that are using dominant themes to link serial crimes and look for consistency in those crimes.

References

Salfati, C. G. (2008). Offender profiling: Psychological and methodological issues of testing for behavioural consistency. *Issues in Forensic Psychology*, (8), 68-81.