

Offender profiling techniques effectiveness



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This essay will be discussing the effectiveness of offender profiling techniques. Firstly the essay will be looking into detail what offender profiling is and describing it. Secondly the essay will be looking at the comparison of the US and UK approaches and the effectiveness. Finally a conclusion will be drawn to look at the differences between the UK & US approaches.

In the criminal justice system, there is a growing demand for experts in the field of human behaviour who can assist law enforcement with solving unusual homicide cases. Law enforcement agencies often seek help from psychologists, criminologists, psychiatrists, and other professionals that specialize in human behaviour when trying to catch a suspect. Criminal profiling is in place to help detect and capture criminals, it has now become more common during many a criminal investigation. Criminal profiling has also been recognised as one of the most useful techniques in offender profiling, a technique used to help define the behaviour of an offender before they reach the height of their criminal career. This gives the Authorities a good idea of important facts of a criminal's personality; facts such as: Profession, environment in which they live and whether it is possible for them to strike again or not. Offender profiling is commonly used in crimes such as paedophilia, rape, satanic and ritualistic crime, lust and mutilation murder and as well as many other crimes. The goals of profiling are: to make assessments from the crime scene that will give the authorities an idea of how to catch the criminal.

According to The Guardian (the jigsaw man, Steven Morris 2000) ' The modern history of what came to be known as " offender profiling" began in the 40s when the US Office of Strategic Services asked William Langer, a

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psychiatrist, to draw up a profile of Adolf Hitler. After the second world war, Lionel Haward, a psychologist working for the Royal Air Force, drew up a list of characteristics which high-ranking Nazi war criminals might display. Then in the 50s, James A Brussel, a US psychiatrist, drew up what turned to be an uncannily accurate profile of a bomber who had been terrorising New York'

According to Holmes & Holmes (1996) there should be three main goals of offender profiling, these are to provide the police with basic information about the characteristics of the offender such as age, race, personality, employment and marital status, to suggest any possessions the offender may have that would associate him with the crime scene (such as souvenirs the police may want to search for) and to provide interviewing strategies and suggestions the police may use when questioning a suspect. The American approach to developing a profile of an offender has been developed from an initial sample of interviews with 36 convicted serial sexual murderers, combined with detailed information from crime scenes.

The next part of this essay it will be discussing the effectiveness of both UK & US offender profiling and discussing the comparison of both approaches. Firstly, the US approach is known as "holistic" or "top-down" approach and data from scene and from MO compared with previously known information. The FBI's Crime Scene Analysis consists of six steps, which are summarized in the section that follows.

- Profiling Inputs: a collection of all evidence, including anything found on the scene (i. e. fibers, paint chips, etc.) and anything derived from the crime scene

- Decision Process Models: evidence is arranged to locate any types of patterns, such as whether or not the crime is part of a series of crimes, what the victims have in common.
- Crime Assessment: the evidence has been organized, the crime scene is reconstructed. Investigators use patterns to determine what happened in what order, and what role each victim, weapon had in the crime.
- Criminal Profile: the combined first three steps are used to create a criminal profile incorporating the motives, physical qualities, and personality of the perpetrator. Also, the investigators use this information to decide on the best way to interview the suspects based on their personality.
- The Investigation: the profile is given to investigators on the case and to organizations that may have data leading to the identification of a suspect. The profile may be reassessed if no leads are found or if new information is learned.
- The Apprehension: this stage only occurs in about 50% of cases. When a suspect is identified, he/she is interviewed, investigated, compared to the profile. If the investigators have reason to believe that the suspect is the perpetrator, a warrant is obtained for the arrest of the individual, usually followed by a trial with expert witnesses including the forensic psychologist and other forensic experts, including those involved in the crime science analysis.

According to Jackson (1997) ' Offences most suitable for profiling involve those where the suspects behaviour at the crime scene reveal important

details about themselves. Arson and sexually motivated crimes where the criminal has demonstrated some form of psychopathy seem to offer the best chance of useful information being disclosed.' A few examples of profiling where its most effective are crime scenes revealing evidence sadistic torture, posturing of the body, ritualistic behaviour or staging. According to the F. B. I case which involve mere destruction to property, assault or murder during a commission of a robbery are generally unsuitable for profiling as the personality of the criminal is not frequently not revealed in such crime scenes. However drug related crimes lend themselves poorly to profiling because the true personality of a criminal is not recognised.

Criminal profiling exists in large part due to the work of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, a department dedicated to " developing new and innovative investigative approaches and techniques to the solution of crime by studying the offender, and his/her behaviour and motivation"

According to Brent E. Turvey, MS (1998) The advantages of the Inductive Criminal Profiling model are readily apparent. Foremost is that Inductive Profiling is a very easy tool to use, for which no specialized forensic knowledge, education, or training in the study of criminal behaviour or criminal investigation is required. Additionally, general profiles can be assembled in a relatively short period of time without any great effort or ability on the part of the profiler. The result is often a one or two page list of unqualified characteristics. These generalizations can accurately predict some of the non-distinguishing elements of individual criminal behaviour, but not with a great deal of consistency or reliability.

The next part of the essay will be discussing the UK approach of offender profiling. The UK approach to the term offender profile came well known to the police forces and the general public during the 1980's. British approach is less subjective and called "bottom up" method, or "data-driven". Data is collected and analysed to produce definite, measured, specific associations between offences and offender characteristics.

Paul Britton is a Consultant Clinical and Forensic Psychologist who founded psychological profiling in the UK. He has advised the police in over one hundred serious investigations, including some of the most high profile crimes of the past twenty five years. In his previous role as head of the UK's largest Forensic Psychology Service, he assessed and treated thousands of offenders, victims and witnesses. He sat on the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) sub-committee on offender profiling for some years, remaining an independent consultant for several more, and has liaised with worldwide agencies.

Professor David Canter was a pioneer in this nascent field, helping to guide detectives in the mid-80s to an offender who had carried out a series of serious attacks. But he saw the limitations of offender profiling- in particular, the subjective, personal opinion of a psychologist. He and a colleague coined the term investigative psychology and began trying to approach the subject from what they saw as a more scientific point of view.

The approach to offender profiling uses the setting and nature of and physical evidence at the crime scene. This builds up a relationship between the characteristics of the offence and the actual offender. This approach also

uses scientific statistics in processing evidence. Each profile is unique to the individual offender which gives the technique the name 'bottom-up'.

Offender profiling is most useful when trying to find a serial offender as police can identify the 'type' of victim, especially in rape and/or murder cases. The behaviour of the criminal is an important feature in profiling an offender examples of this are; the location of the crime, type of victim, interaction with victim and often the timing of the crime. Environmental concepts such as 'mental maps' are often used in order to develop the idea that typical rapists live in the area that they offend in. This approach to profiling aims to be more scientific, using real evidence and statistical analysis.

Canter (2000) states concerns that the F. B. I.'s typologies may be too closely focused on the behaviors of the offenders rather than on the meaning of the behaviors.

A detailed examination of the crime scene might thus be seen as an essential first step in the gathering of relevant information. While a physical examination is already carried out by forensic scientists searching for fingerprints, clothing fibres, semen samples etc., the scene can also reveal other clues to the profiler. Detailed examination of the crime scene may well provide clues as to the underlying personality of the offender. It appeared that some offences were carried out with a great deal of forward planning, while others were committed with little planning or preparation. In the latter case, a victim may have been selected at random, whereas in the former, a victim may have been targeted and observed for some time in advance of

the offence. While a detailed examination of the crime scene will be helpful to a profiler, such an examination is not always possible. For example, some recent research in the UK (Smith, 1998) has suggested that profilers tend not to be brought in at the earliest opportunity, but rather are contacted when other more traditional forms of police enquiry have failed. By this stage the crime scene will probably have been disturbed and vital clues possibly lost.

Turvey (1999) warns against using profiling as anything other than suggesting probabilities. He cites the case of Rachel Nickell, studied by Kocsis et al. (1998).

After looking at both approaches from the UK & US, they both have different approaches to offender profiling. Firstly, Boon and Davies (1992) argue that the British approach is based on 'bottom-up' data processing (an analysis of existing evidence) the aim being to identify associations between offences and offender characteristics. The American approach is 'top-up' and uses subjective conclusions drawn from both experience of crime and interview with criminals. This states that the UK approach looks at the data of a criminal and the evidence, the US approach looks at the criminal and gathers information.