2

Interpersonal Violence and Investigative Psychology

Chapter Contents

OVERVIEW

The following chapter is a discussion of the role of psychology in the investigation of violent crime. There is a particular focus on psychological attempts at profiling. The chapter will demonstrate the problems with many of the forms of profiling that have become well-known through cinema and television, such as that by the FBI in America. However, there will also be a discussion of David Canter's approach to Investigative Psychology which is based on a method for identifying correlations between crimes.

KEY TERMS

investigative psychology offender profiling serial murder

This chapter is an exploration of the contemporary fascination with serial murder and the role of investigatory psychology or offender profiling. This discussion will centre on both the FBI approach and the British psychologists such as David Canter and Paul Briton. The aim will be to demystify the myths that the media has helped create around this topic. The chapter will represent a critique of offender profiling and will draw on the work of David Canter's approach to investigative psychology to make the case that most representations of offender profiling are false and misleading. Contrary to the media depiction, murder is

one of the most frequently cleared up crimes. This is because the victim and offender tend to be known to each other and so the investigation does not need to look too far for a suspect. However, a minority of murders are committed by someone who does not know the victim making the suspect less easily identified. It is here that offender profiling has traditionally been used.

Wanting to understand why some people do hideous things to other people is one of the overriding concerns of students taking courses in criminology. In many ways, we are asking what makes violent people different from ourselves. Why do *we* not do what *they* do? Explanations have ranged from the social to the individual, from social learning to inherited personality traits and mental disorder. Classifications have been created to distinguish one type of violent offender from another and to make sense of, often contentious, statistics that purport to show that crime is more often located in one group rather than another. Such classifications can be based on social class, age, race or gender and tend to lead to stereotypical depictions of who is and who is not a criminal. Many of the psychological studies on violence are essentially the creation of stereotypes used to categorise offenders into types.

Offender profiling and serial killers tend to be linked in the popular imagination. This is not surprising given the disproportionate amount of time that is devoted to the phenomenon by the media. Disproportionate because the offence is far less frequent than would be supposed if a survey of media representations of the offence were taken or an assessment of the impact of the offence in comparison to other forms of violence such as domestic violence or street violence. Furthermore, offender profilers have attained a mythical status out of all proportion to either their efficacy in solving crimes or their incidence in terms of how many of them there are. It is currently not a career option in the UK in the sense of there being a job titled 'offender profiler', indeed the term 'Behavioural Investigative Advisor' is replacing the term offender profiler (ACPO 2000 cited Alison et al. 2003a). Those who create profiles are more likely to be employed primarily as forensic psychologists or psychiatrists. However, Canter has argued that his version of geographical offender profiling could be used for higher volume crime like burglary, as will be discussed later in this chapter (Canter 2000). This chapter will discuss offender profiling and serial murder since typically profiles have been predominantly used for this offence. Sexual offences also tend to attract the call for profiles, but as this is the topic of another chapter this will only be briefly discussed here.

Personality disorders

Having already discussed the early theories of criminal behaviour such as phrenology and Lombroso's criminal anthropology, the following will be a

brief review of some of the theories inspired by this form of individual positivism that tends to locate the causes of criminal behaviour within the individual and relegates social factors to the periphery. Associating mental illness with serial killers is one of the most common narrative devices seen in fiction. They are often described as psychotic, psychopathic or sociopathic. However, such terms are highly contentious. The terms psychosis and neurosis are now outmoded and largely avoided in diagnosis due to their overly general descriptions. Psychosis used to refer to the most serious forms of personality disorder where the individual had largely lost touch with reality. Hence schizophrenia would be a psychosis and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) a neurosis. The problem is that within these two broad categories are a range of disorders that seemingly have very little in common with each other and have different **aetiologies**. For example PTSD and OCD clearly derive from different causes with PTSD being linked to an actual event and OCD caused by more esoteric and difficult to determine events. The point is that serial killers, on the whole, tend to be able to distinguish fantasy from reality and are not suffering from a serious neurological mental disorder. Nevertheless, some authors maintain that there is evidence that many serial killers are psychopathic (Holmes and Holmes 2002). An inability to empathise or sympathise with the suffering of other people and an inflated opinion of their own self-worth tends to characterise psychopathic individuals. Of course, as argued already, there are many people who have psychopathic characteristics but who have not engaged in serious criminal offending. So, the discovery that many serial killers are psychopathic does not by itself constitute a cause. Psychopathic personalities may just as easily rise to prominence in the movie industry or business (Blair et al. 2005). The aim of research into the mental health status of serial murderers (and other types of crime) is to identify, keep track of, and control potential offenders. Such research feeds into the risk society thesis where individuals become subsumed within one overall category and their individual differences become blurred (Hudson 2003).

Equally, there is a tendency, even a need, to pathologise the offender and treat them as different from everyone else in terms of their psychological or biological make-up. This raises two problems. The first is that the evidence for a clearly identifiable pathological problem in serial killers is ambiguous at best. The second problem is that, even if there were an internal fault of some kind, it does not help the police to catch the killer. Men who hate women rarely have 'women hater' tattooed on their forehead. This explains why work in the UK has moved towards a more pragmatic, practical form of research and away from the search for causes.

Furthermore, the media fascination with extreme violence tends to focus on the background characteristics of the offender. For the most part, this is a *post-hoc*

observation, one that is made after the offender has been arrested or convicted and serves to explain what it is about the offender that distinguishes them from non-offenders. Typically, the discussion will centre on the types of interests that the offender enjoyed, highlighting those that are felt to be sensational. Interests in the military, the occult, heavy metal music, use of pornography and martial arts are typically mentioned as being enjoyed by the offender. Such activities have been defined as sensational interests and tend to refer to activities that elicit a physiologically arousing response (Brittain 1970). Clearly, such a definition is open to interpretation; an opera can be as violent as the goriest horror film. Such definitions are social constructs based upon, usually, right-wing or religious morals. Egan has argued that such interests may be shared by many non-offending people. He argues that '[t]he diversity of "normality" is rarely appreciated by those preoccupied with the pathological' (2004: 117). The amount of media devoted to such sensational interests, from the television through to the Internet, would over-predict the amount of violent crime committed if there was a causal effect. There are simply not enough offences to validate a causal link with sensational interests. Egan notes that little research has been conducted into the relationship between sensational interests and crime, particularly from within populations convicted of violent or sexual offending (Egan 2004). Egan and his colleagues present some interesting findings that highlight the role of background and the sociality of the offenders. Sensational interests are only related to crime when the person feels alienated from other people and they do not desire conventional achievement, presumably through such means as school, work and marriage or other such close relationships. It is not the quality of the sensational interests themselves that are related to offending, but the absence of relationships and ambitions. This is a finding that casts doubt on the veracity of offender profiles based on typologies that seek to identify the typical characteristics of an offender. In the final analysis, the sensational interests of many people are not sufficient predictors of crime and may potentially lead the police to suspects seen as outsiders. As will be seen later in this chapter, such an occurrence may explain the case of the psychologist Paul Britton and his advice regarding Colin Stagg who became a suspect in the murder of Rachel Nickell in London in 1992.

Contested definitions of serial murder

Typically, this depends upon the number of murders an individual commits. Holmes and Holmes (1998) argue that the number is three, in others four, whereas one definition is as low as two (Egger 1998). Fox and Levin do not find

the distinction helpful or useful and use a far more wide-ranging definition that draws in many more female offenders (2005). Clearly, this is an important point since it determines who is regarded as a serial killer and who is not. By changing the definition to one where fewer murders constitute a case of serial murder you will increase the number of incidences of serial murder in any given country straight away. Each definition has a cooling off period between murders since this is what distinguishes this type of crime from mass murder (see Chapter 5). Obviously, there is an element of subjectivity in this. The question of how much time needs to have elapsed between murders is one that is open to interpretation. However, there is a further element in the definition that goes beyond the sheer numbers of people killed by an individual. The definition of serial killer also, implicitly, includes an evaluation of motive. The key requirement, for many authors, for a series of killings to be a case of serial murder is that they have no clear motive. Definitions including those of Holmes and Holmes (2002) and Ressler, Burgess and Douglas (1988) tend to equate serial killing with a motive that has no pecuniary or direct vengeful motivation and in the majority of cases there is a sexual component also. It is this that has lead to the perceived need to get into the mind of the serial murderer. Fox and Levin (2005), in contrast, include a range of motives that include revenge and crimes for profit. It is much easier to understand someone who kills for profit, or to seek revenge against people that have hurt or disparaged them. A gang member who shoots and kills four members of a rival gang would be a serial murderer in Fox and Levine's definition, but would not be in Holmes and Holmes' definition.

But, in the majority of definitions and the popular imagination the motivation of the serial murderer is opaque, requiring of an expert above and beyond the skills of a detective. A hit man or woman is rarely called a serial killer, or a burglar who kills three or more people during their burgling career is usually 'just' a murderer. In these cases, there is a motive, so the definition of a serial killer is someone who kills a number of people, over a period of time, for no obvious reason. Before moving on, one final problem with the definition of serial killing is that the crimes need to be linked through either modus operandi, forensic evidence or eyewitness testimony, all of which can be difficult (Woodhams, Hollin and Bull 2007).

The different styles of offender profiling

Offender profiling can be split between two distinct methodological approaches and they are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1   *The two methodological approaches to offender profiling*

	Top down	**Bottom up**
Type of approach	Comparison of crime scene with statistical research into other crimes	Getting into the mind of the offender by using empathy, using previous cases as evidence from which to make subjective comparisons
Main advocate	David Canter and Lawrence Allison	FBI, Paul Britton, Holmes and Holmes
Theoretical inclination	Quantitative, judgements based on correlations and analysis of locality of offending	Qualitative, but without reference to the social context of the interview, or a critical analysis of what is being said by the convicted offender
Method of research	Statistical comparisons of crime-scene behaviours	Interviews with captured offenders

Getting into the mind of the offender: the American approach to offender profiling

This method is based on interviewing convicted serial killers to see how they describe their offending and then to use that information to look at crime scenes to see what type of person might have committed the offences. An often heard phrase that exemplifies this method is 'getting into the mind' of the murderer. This style of offender profiling is associated with the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit in their headquarters of Quantico, Virginia, USA. In Britain, it was the psychologist Paul Britton who initially championed the idea (Britton 1997). The following is a discussion of this type of approach. Two of the most widely cited authors on this subject are Ronald and Stephen Holmes (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). It is worth spending some time looking at some of this work since it summarises the kind of work associated with the FBI, and American investigative psychology more generally.

Holmes and Holmes assert that serial killers tend to be white males, between 25 and 34, intelligent or 'street smart', charming and charismatic and interested in police work (2002: 115). Holmes and Holmes outline a typology of different types of serial killer. The first distinction is the spatial patterning of the murder locations. This tends to be either spatially concentrated or dispersed, these are termed geographically transient and geographically stable. Such a pattern can provide investigators with information about the individual involved. Widely dispersed murders can indicate that the killer has access to a vehicle and travels to confuse law enforcement agencies. Equally it could indicate the killer drives for a living or has lived in various places. A geographically stable killer tends to

live in one area for some time and kills close to home. As we will see later, this aspect of serial killing is key to the British psychologist David Canter's approach to what he terms investigative psychology. Within each of these two broad categories are more specific traits that have been collected into another typology.

The visionary serial killer

Visionary serial killers differ from other serial killers due to the fact that they seem to have lost touch with reality. Their violence is propelled by auditory hallucinations that direct the individual to kill broadly similar people, for example, women the killer believes to be involved in prostitution. It is not necessary for each victim to have been a prostitute, since the desire to kill may outstrip the availability of suitable targets, consequently the offender may settle for a women the killer believes is sexually promiscuous instead. The British serial killer Peter Sutcliffe, known as the Yorkshire Ripper, claimed to have heard voices telling him to kill prostitutes. Like many cases such as this, Sutcliffe's defence lawyers claimed a defence of insanity. In this case, the judge ruled against the defence arguing that he was sane when he killed his victims.

The mission serial killer

The mission serial killer is not psychotic, but like the vision serial killer tends to go after a certain category of people, for example, homosexuals, an ethnic group other than his or her own, women, etc. The mission serial killer is propelled not by voices but a perceived mission to eradicate the world or area of such people.

The hedonistic lust serial killer

The hedonistic serial killer's motive tends to be the eroticised nature of killing. The offender tends to spend some considerable time in planning and executing the murder, sometimes kidnapping and holding a victim for some time before killing them and then sometimes living with the victim for some time after death. Sexual pleasure is derived from the victim.

The power-control serial killer

According to the definition of this type of murderer by Holmes and Holmes there seems to be very little difference between the power-control and the

hedonistic lust killer. Whereas the hedonistic lust killer derives sexual pleasure from the victim, the power-control killer derives sexual pleasure from the act of controlling and destroying life.

Of course, such typologies are ideal types and it is rare for a serial killer to completely conform to one of these types. Indeed, the essential problem with such typologies are that they tend to create an artificially static offender who seems not to change their behaviour. An example to illustrate the problem with this is the British serial killer Dr Harold Shipman who was convicted of killing 15 elderly patients initially without any clear motive. It could be argued that since there was no evidence of auditory hallucinations but that his victims were all elderly Shipman was fulfilling a mission, but equally it seemed that he gained a sense of power and control through the activity of killing. However, his killings were ultimately discovered because he had changed his behaviour when he tried to change a victim's last will and testament to favour himself. Although interviewing serial killers in prison may reveal some interesting data, it needs to be taken into account that the offender may be producing *post-hoc* justifications, reproducing their psychiatrist's assessment or repeating the defence lawyer's argument. Both such justifications may not correspond with the original motivation. Also, the FBI approach is unsystematic in the way it collects data. It is therefore possible to take any part of a respondent's interview and make it fit whatever category you want it to fit (Seltzer 1998). Furthermore, there is little awareness of the wider social structure so that there is an overly deterministic approach that cannot explain why it is that not everyone who shares the same background goes on to kill (Gadd and Jefferson 2007).

Fox and Levine provide another typology based on motivation rather than the amount of time between killings, or the cooling off period (2005). Their typology is able to encompass both serial and mass murder incidences, but it still suffers the same inflexibility. Under the headings, power, revenge, loyalty, profit and terror, Fox and Levine's typology has the advantage of being able to include killings for profit and even religious fundamentalism, thus overcoming the criticism of Holmes and Holmes' more moralistic approach that only includes crimes under the heading of serial murder where the motivation appears to be strange or esoteric. A further complication is that the FBI has categorised so-called lust offenders into two types, disorganised asocial and organised non-social (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). Although this typology is primarily designed for when sex is a key feature of the offence, the terms have been used to include other offenders where sex is not an aspect of the offence. Indeed, it can be quite a confusing enterprise to disentangle the various typologies for offenders.

Table 2.2   *Organised versus disorganised offenders*

Organised non-social killer	Disorganised asocial killer
Planned offence	Spontaneous event
Targeted stranger	Victim unknown
Personalises victim	Depersonalises victim
Controlled conversation	Minimal conversation
Controlled crime	Chaotic crime scene
Submissive victim	Sudden violence
Restraints used	No restraints
Aggressive acts	Sex after death
Body moved	Body not moved
Weapon taken	Weapon left
Little evidence	Physical evidence

Source: Burgess et al. (1985b) cited Holmes and Holmes (2002: 81)

Table 2.3   *Perpetrator characteristics*

Organised	Disorganised
High intelligence	Below average intelligence
Socially adequate	Socially inadequate
Sexually competent	Unskilled occupation
Lives with father	Low birth-order status
High birth order	Harsh/inconsistent discipline
Controlled mood	Anxious mood during crime
Masculine image	Minimal use of alcohol during crime
Charming	Lives alone
Situational cause	Lives/works near crime scene
Geographically mobile	Minimal interest in media
Occupationally mobile	Significant behaviour change
Follows media	Nocturnal habits
Model prisoner	Poor personal hygiene
	Secret hiding places
	Usually does not date
	High-school drop-out

Source: Burgess et al. (1985a) cited in Alison, McLean and Almond (2007: 495–6).

Disorganised versus organised killers

Holmes and Holmes state that the *disorganised asocial offender* tends to be disorganised in all areas of their lives. However, in an example of the lack of research that has been undertaken to verify the veracity of offender profiles they state

that there is no evidence for this. Despite this typology being based on nothing more than speculation, they go on to note that such people would be seen as loners and weird by those who know them, that they would have had educational problems and would find getting and retaining employment difficult. The crime scene would reflect this background with the offences being unplanned, the body and weapon left where the person was killed and the crime scene reflecting the spontaneous and sudden violence. Although they add that this is only theoretical (2002: 74).

The *organised non-social offender*, by contrast, is charming, employed, may live with a partner, they are socially and sexually competent and they tend to follow the media reporting of the case. The crime scene again, theoretically, reflects the personality of the offender, with the crime being planned, the victim targeted, the body may be moved to avoid detection or confuse law enforcement agencies, the weapon will be taken, the victim may be restrained and there is very little evidence left at the scene.

As noted, one of the major shortcomings of this research is the paucity of psychological evidence. For example, Holmes and Holmes talk about the work of Eysenck and note that despite criticism of his work, there is some evidence that the personality of the offender, especially as it developed during the early years of their lives, does have an impact on offending behaviour. It is noted that many offenders report in interviews an experience in their lives that lead them to a split in their personality allowing them to function socially, and have a 'dark side' that wishes to express a sense of power over others. They state that:

> This phenomenon is called 'Fractured Identity Syndrome'. Although this theory has not been empirically validated, it is based on Freud's and Goffman's principle that behaviour in adults is based on traumatic experiences in childhood that have left a lasting mark on individuals and their personalities. (Holmes and Holmes 2002: 51)

David Canter has placed questions of validity and untested assumptions such as this at the centre of his criticism of this approach. This Freudian notion that the early period of one's life shapes our personalities has, in any case, been challenged from within psychoanalysis, in particular the work of Erik Erikson (1964) and his belief that an individual is confronted by crises throughout their lifespan and that an inability to overcome a crisis at one time in our lives can be rectified at a later stage. Other critics of this form of trait theory, such as Maruna (2000), suggest that such an approach does not explain those who may desist from crime. This is especially the case with young offenders who tend to grow out of petty crime (Rutherford 2002), but equally

it is the case for more serious offenders. Simply put, how can someone who exhibits a particular personality trait associated with crime stop committing crime? Similarly, why do people with a personality trait associated with crime never commit a criminal offence? The supposed stability of a personality, and the assumption that a particular personality is associated with criminal activity, such as Eysenck's extrovert, is deterministic and over-predicts crime amongst those who share certain characteristics. Moreover, some of the characteristics that are associated with, for example, serial murder, are never deconstructed. An asocial disorganised serial murderer is typically a white male, non-athletic, introverted, with an absent father. But, what is it about being white that propels an individual into a series of murders? Why are black males who share the same background less likely to be serial killers? Why males and not females? Clearly, one's personality is more than genetically determined, the content of that personality is made up from the cultural background of an individual and shared negative emotions are therefore expressed in different ways by different groups of people. Getting into the criminal mind, the ambition of many students of crime, is at best a waste of resources, at worst an impossibility.

Throughout Holmes and Holmes' book on profiling crime there are numerous references to the depiction of offender profiling in fiction, especially cinema. For example, they argue that 'the alert investigator must be able to get into the mind of the criminal, just as Will Graham did in *The Red Dragon* (sic)[1]', referring here to Thomas Harris' first Hannibal Lecter book (Holmes and Holmes 2002: 210). Elsewhere, the authors seem almost proud of the decidedly non-academic stance to offender profiling, for Holmes and Holmes, and for the American approach to offender profiling more generally, offender profiling is an art, not a science, that can be done by anyone (Ressler et al. 1988). A typical example of this is the following statement that also represents the main point of divergence between the American and British approach to offender profiling developed by David Canter and colleagues:

> It may be that we should return to an examination of the 'concentric zone theory' of years past to develop some theory of the relationship between criminal profiling and geography; but perhaps it is just as effective to consider our thoughts regarding our own mental maps and spatial behaviour. (Holmes and Holmes 2002: 212)

After suggesting that the Chicago School's ecological research into crime might be used, they then suggest that one's intuition might be as useful. By way of contrast, the following section discusses the British psychologist David Canter's approach.

The British approach to offender profiling:
David Canter and Investigative Psychology

The British approach is based on a method that seeks to understand the actions of the criminal through the application of quantitative scientific methodologies. It is presented as a more objective approach than its American counterpart and is associated with the work of David Canter and his colleagues at Liverpool University. Canter calls this approach Investigative Psychology (Canter 2004). Canter is concerned to base this approach on the foundation of sound psychological principles. He argues that at the core of traditional American forms of offender profiling is the making of inferences based on little evidence. For, example, a crime scene that yields little direct evidence of who committed the crime is looked at to make an inference of the characteristics of the likely perpetrator. And yet, as the examples above show, the American approach is unverifiable and seems to associate itself more firmly with fiction than psychology.

Canter's approach to offender profiling is to apply psychological principles to the investigation of crime. His particular interest stems from his background as an environmental psychologist interested in the way that people make sense of their surroundings and become familiar with the movement around their environment. Through analysing the way that different offenders move between the crime site and their home, Canter argues it is possible to make some generalisations that are helpful to investigators. Since a profile is used for crimes where there is little evidence that would help link the victim to the offender, Canter argues that psychology may help in a far wider set of crimes than the current preoccupation with high profile serial crimes like murder and rape. However, the offence could just as easily be vandalism as a murder (Canter 1984). One issue that also needs to be understood is how a series of offences are linked in the absence of a forensic link such as DNA. Behavioural consistency across crime scenes can become an important factor in linking crimes. This is where the offender carries out similar acts at each separate crime scene. Canter's suggestion is that rather than looking for individual acts, behaviour should be categorised into themes. For example, gagging and tying someone up could be seen as two different acts, but they can be combined under the theme of control. An offender may choose one or the other due to the situational factors present at the time. For example, fear that someone will hear would lead to gagging, but where the location was more remote such caution may not be necessary. This is an important finding because two murders may not be classified as being the offence of one person because the two crime scenes do not appear the same.

From specifics to themes

There are a number of questions that need to be answered in a criminal investigation so as to find links between the crime scene evidence and the offender. The first question relates to the saliency of behaviours exhibited during the crime. Saliency here refers to behaviours that are specific to that offender. So the first question that needs to be asked is, 'what are the important behavioural features of the crime that may help identify the perpetrator?' The second area that an investigation must cover is the characteristics of an offence that makes it distinct from other offences. Canter puts this question as 'what are the most appropriate ways of indicating the differences between crimes and between offenders?' In order to move beyond the categorisation of offenders and offences and provide real and tangible assistance to the police the following question must be answered: 'what inferences can be made about the characteristics of the offender that may help identify him or her?' Finally, in order to determine if the crime is one of a series it is necessary to find links and answer the question, 'are there any other crimes that are likely to have been committed by the same offender?' (Canter 2000: 28). As Canter says, all 'four questions are derivations of questions crucial to other areas of psychology. They involve concepts associated with the significant differences between one person and another and the features of one individual's behaviour that remain constant over different situations' (2000: 28). In contrast, the FBI typologies as described above tend to talk about emotions and intangible motivations that are not necessarily useful for investigators. It is difficult to identify an offender who has auditory hallucinations telling them to fulfil a mission to kill non-believers just by knocking on their door and talking to them, but easier to identify someone who is highly religious and is likely to wear religious symbols or exhibit such symbols in their home because they act out religious symbolism at the crime scene and it has been found that such activity correlates with those who are demonstrably religious.

   The most interesting element of Canter's approach is that criminal activity may well be an extreme reflection of non-criminal activity (Canter 1995). Crime scene behaviour that reflects elements of an offender's general lifestyle may be useful for investigators because it may be that people might notice such behaviour. Here, Canter makes links to a criminological theory called Routine Activities Theory (RAT) that posits the need of criminologists to focus on the crime event and the role of the victim in that event (Cohen and Felson 1979). By doing this, attention is shifted away from why some people commit crime whilst others do not and instead focus on crime prevention. For a crime to occur, there needs to be three factors coinciding in time and space. The first is a motivated offender, the second is a suitable target and finally the absence of

capable guardians able to prevent the offence taking place. Importantly, offences are associated with the routine activities of everyday life. The rhythm of movements around the environment provides moments and opportunities for the commission of a crime. For example, many homes are empty between 9 am and 5 pm as people go to work resulting in the opportunity to burgle houses without the risk of someone being at home to prevent it. The argument that crime is linked to the routine activities of everyday life links into Canter's approach because Canter is less concerned with motivations than with the crime scene themes that might practically help investigations. For example, in homicides, it was found that previous offence history is related to what happens at the crime scene. Offenders who had previously had a custodial sentence are more likely to avoid leaving forensic evidence, and more likely to move or hide the body and steal non-identifiable property (Salfati and Canter 1999). Therefore, stolen property and a body that has been moved or hidden might suggest that a search of previously imprisoned offenders local to the area would be a good place to start the search. It could be suggested that this is another example of how some forms of psychology have moved away from causation and into risk assessment as suggested in the risk society literature (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990; Feeley and Simon 1992).

Canter's contribution to geographical profiling

There is also some good evidence that offenders tend to operate within a specific locality and use that area in ways that can be analysed to locate where they may live or work. This is termed the spatial consistency of the offences. Canter utilised his background in environmental psychology when he became involved in studying crime. The main finding in Canter's work is that offenders tend to commit crimes close to home or in familiar territory. This is true of many different types of offence. With regard to serial murder, this finding has been seen in different countries (Rossmo 2000; Snook et al. 2005).

Goodwill and Alison (2005) sought to understand the spatial patterning of three different types of offender: burglars, rapists and murderers. It was found that each type of offender was drawn to commit other offences of the same type near to the location of their first offence. There are other studies that have not showed this relationship or showed only a weak connection (Snook 2004). One conceptual problem is the number of crimes that an individual offender commits. In other words, how many offences need to be committed to constitute a series? Different studies have not been able to hold this variable consistent. Snook's study looked at the movement of residential burglars and how far they travelled to commit their offences. It was found that those with access to vehicles travelled further and stole goods of a higher value than those who walked.

They also tended to be older. One of the potential conclusions to this is that those who are older had a more developed cognitive mental map of their locality. The more sociological and practical reason is only alluded to; older people are more likely to have access to a car and a car allows for more goods to be placed in it. It may also be the case that there is more planning and the use of a car means that there is a need to move further afield than those without such an easily identifiable vehicle. In other words, those who travelled were more organised than the opportunist young offender.

However, the use of data from the police of recorded offences leaves this study open to question. How is it possible to know that the first offence recorded is the first committed? The discovery that the offender may offend near to their home is not new to criminology. The police routinely use criminal statistics to more efficiently deploy police officers. A group of criminologists who called themselves left realists carried out victim surveys and came to similar conclusions. Crime was mainly intra-class and intra-race. That is, crime was committed within the same socio-economic and ethnic group. Offender and victim were similar. Rather than psychological principles to do with location familiarity, these criminologists posited a more sociological account (Lea and Young 1993/1984). Relative deprivation was the major cause of crime, and for that to exist there needed to be some similarity. Relative deprivation is as much an emotion as an objective entity, in contrast to absolute poverty which can be more easily measured (Webber 2007a). Consequently, it could account for violence as a result of frustration and acquisitive crime for gain (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). But, it represents another place where a similar finding from within psychology has an echo in sociological criminology and the reason for the finding reflects the focus of the discipline trying to explain the behaviour.

Racial profiling

One of the more controversial aspects of the application of psychology to crime and justice is the racial profiling of suspected terrorists. At places of heightened risk of terrorist attack, such as airports, police and customs officials have begun engaging in what is essentially a procedure for making stop and searches more efficient by targeting those groups of people more likely to be involved in terrorist activity. Stop and search has moved from the usual suspects (particular individuals known to be involved in crime) to the usual categories (groups, usually certain races, deemed to be potentially involved in crime) (Young 1999). The justification that it is more efficient to use limited resources on the most

likely suspects, as opposed to stopping and searching a random sample of the population at an airport, is deemed by many involved in law enforcement a suitable justification for the potential infringement of an individual's civil liberties. What such a tactic has achieved is to shift the burden of suspicion onto entire groups of people, such as dark skinned men, and therefore suspicion onto a majority of innocent people. It is possible to see the problem with such tactics when one looks at the variety of people who have engaged in terrorist activity since the most vivid of the attacks in New York in 2001. From people born overseas to those born in the country they attack; from the disenfranchised and easily manipulated to professional doctors and teachers; and in the Middle East, women as well as men. This brings us back to the problem of categorisation, although useful in many contexts, it also has the potential to mask a variety of differences, and in so doing, create stereotypes that short-circuit the very real need to understand such behaviours at all levels of analysis, the individual, group, local, national and international.

Critique of profiles

The first and most damning criticism is that of Holmes and Holmes who say that a 'tremendous amount of interest surrounds the field of profiling. But we must remember that it is only one tool and by itself has never solved a murder case despite the statements made by some' (2002: 3). One of the problems of the idea of a profile is that it is a static and inflexible approach that may only have relevance for early stages in an investigation. As shown in Box 2.1 on page 49, a profile is similar to a snapshot of someone that may not reflect the way they look years, months or even weeks later. As police investigations develop, offenders can change their modus operandi in response to what the police do. This is particularly the case in high profile cases which may attract publicity. Similarly, there is evidence that when a serial killing is being investigated and reported in the media the residents in the area in which the murders are taking place show an increased fear level and take more protective measures, such as carrying pepper spray. In one study, fear of crime rose by 56 per cent due to the activity of a serial killer and the taking of protective measures rose by 46 per cent (Lee and DeHart 2007). Also, many studies are based on data from convicted offenders. Those who are caught may not correspond to those who are not caught. This is particularly true of the FBI approach.

A British study by Alison, Smith and Morgan (2003b) presented police officers with a 'bogus' offender profile designed to be deliberately ambiguous but based on a real murder and a description of the characteristics of an offender. The respondents were split into two groups and each were asked to rate the

accuracy of the offender profile to the offender. One group was presented with a description of the convicted offender and the other group were presented with a description of a fabricated offender designed to have characteristics the opposite to that of the real offender. For example, the real offender was a 19 year old man and the fabricated offender was 38. This study demonstrated that police officers would treat an offender profile as an accurate description of an offender regardless of the characteristics of the offender.

In order to see if the same outcome would happen with a real offender profile the study used a real FBI offender profile and included other forensic professionals working in the criminal justice system, such as solicitors and psychologists. As before, the respondents were split into two groups with one presented with a description of the real offender and the other a fabricated offender. The majority of the police officers said that the profile would be a useful tool for an investigation and just over half of the forensic professionals thought it would be useful. Despite the different characteristics of the offenders the majority of the respondents felt that the profile was accurate. A useful analogy as to why profiles may be seen as accurate even when they contain ambiguous statements that could apply to many people are horoscopes. A horoscope is written as if for the reader alone yet that star sign is shared by approximately one-twelfth of the world's population. Ambiguous statements are assigned meaning such that the predictions are given personal relevance. For example, being told that your finances will be boosted could be finding a small amount of money in the street or getting a pay rise at work. Both are very different but both could be interpreted as fulfilling the prediction. Alison et al. argued that this was the result of a phenomenon that has been called the Barnum effect (Furnham and Schofield 1987). This is where ambiguous or false information is interpreted as accurate. In the example of a real offender profile below, it is clear that the statements could be interpreted in a number of ways. For example, what exactly does someone of average appearance look like? Could it not be argued that it is covering every eventuality to say that the offender may be unemployed, but his occupation will be blue collar or skilled? Whoever is caught, the author of such a profile could claim a high level of accuracy despite the ambiguity of such statements.

In a related study, Alison et al. (2003a) analysed 21 profiles used in major criminal investigations and found that 80 per cent of the claims made in these studies was unsubstantiated and 31 per cent were not falsifiable. In other words, the majority of the claims made could not be verified after the suspect had been caught because they referred to emotions, thoughts, feelings and other such factors that are subjective and personal to the offender. A falsifiable claim related to a point of fact that could be verified such as the age of the offender. Consequently Alison et al. found that nearly one-third of the claims were ambiguous statements. Ambiguous statements and statements

that can be interpreted in two different ways, 'multiple outs', mean that the success of the statements are higher. An ambiguous statement in the profile in Box 2.1 would be: 'The murderer will not look out of context in the area'. This statement is clearly ambiguous since it can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Statements that would be multiple outs are the following: 'His occupation will be blue collar or skilled'. The profiler cannot be wrong once the offender has been apprehended since if they are a car mechanic then they are blue collar and could be described by some as skilled, whilst if an accountant is arrested then they are usually defined as skilled and the profiler is shown to be correct. In Box 2.1 the profilers give themselves even more potential for success with the following statement: 'He will not have a military history and may be unemployed'. Only the first statement is falsifiable since if the offender has been in the military then the profiler can be proved wrong, whereas the second statement when combined with the other statement about occupation means that every eventuality is covered from unemployed to skilled. Alison et al. argue that statements should be supported with evidence from research in order that they can be verified. Failure to do this can have serious consequences for the investigation.

 In the murder investigation of Rachel Nickell on Wimbledon Common in London in 1992 a psychologist, Paul Britton, guided the police in an operation to extract a confession from a suspect, a local man called Colin Stagg. The operation involved a female police officer going undercover to befriend Stagg and attempt to extract a confession from him. Britton's involvement in the operation was highly criticised after the case against Stagg was thrown out of court and the Judge described the honey-trap operation as reprehensible. It took eight years from the original complaint in 1994 by Stagg's solicitor to the hearing by the British Psychological Society, which then collapsed after the delay was deemed too long. In consequence of such cases the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has called for more evaluation of profiles in order to attain greater accountability and effectiveness (Alison et al. 2003b). In December 2008, Robert Napper pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of Rachel Nickell on the grounds of diminished responsibility. A year after Nickell's murder, Napper murdered another women and her 4 year old daughter. In a study of investigations of murder and rape cases by Gudjonsson and Copson (1997) they found that a profiler helped to provide a second opinion rather than provided any major breakthrough. As Canter maintains, this can also mean that the police follow the wrong lead as happened in the Nickell murder. In this case, the wrong man was suspected whilst the real murderer killed again. As already noted, Holmes and Holmes assert that profiles on their own have never solved a murder. Copson (1995) further states that where a profile was used it was deemed useful in only 16 per cent of the cases, and lead to an identification of the offender in less than 3 per cent of the cases.

Box 2.1   Example of a genuine offender profile

Douglas, J., Ressler, R., Burgess, A. and Hartman, C. (1986) 'Criminal profiling from crime scene analysis', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 4(4): 401–21.

The offender will be a white male between 25 and 35, or the same general age as the victim and of average appearance.
The murderer will not look out of context in the area.
He will be of average intelligence and will be a secondary school (High school) or University (College) drop-out.
He will not have a military history and may be unemployed.
His occupation will be blue collar or skilled.
Alcohol or drugs will not assume a major role.
The suspect will have difficulty maintaining any kind of personal relationships with women.
If he dates, he will date women younger than himself, as he would have to dominate and control in the relationships.
He will be sexually inexperienced, sexually inadequate and never married.
He will have a pornography collection.
The subject will have sadistic tendencies.
The sexual acts show controlled aggression, but rage or hatred of women was obviously present.
The murderer was not reacting to rejection from women as much as to morbid curiosity.
There will have been a reason for the killer to be at the crime.
He could be employed in the immediate area, be in the immediate area on business or reside in the immediate area.
Although the offender might have preferred his victim conscious, he had to render her unconscious because he did not want to get caught.
He did not want the woman screaming for help.
The murderer's infliction of sexual sadistic acts on an inanimate body suggests he was disorganised.
He probably will be a very confused person, possibly with previous mental problems.
If he had carried out such acts on a living victim, he would have a very different type of personality. The fact that he inflicted acts upon a dead or unconscious person indicated his inability to function with a live or conscious person.
The crime scene reflects that the killer felt justified in his actions and that he felt no remorse. He was not subtle. He left the victim in a provocative, humiliating position, exactly the way he wanted her to be found.

(In Alison et al. 2003b: 195)

What do the police do?

A further problem when trying to determine the characteristics of the individual responsible for any type of crime is that they may change their behaviour based

on what the police are doing, if it is well publicised, but also in response to changes in the law. The police often hold information back regarding the details of a crime so that they can use it in an interview when the suspect is in custody. They also do this so that information that could prejudice the case is not in the public domain, making jury selection difficult. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to do this in high profile cases leading to possible changes in the offender's behaviour. Moreover, when laws are passed with harsher penalties then the chances of a rape turning into murder increase. If the penalty for rape is increased then the risk to the offender is increased so it may make more sense to kill the victim to avoid eyewitness testimony against the offender.

There is a common-sense notion that the police are crime fighters using their coercive authority to catch criminals. Some early studies supported this (Skolnick 1966). However, many studies have demonstrated that the majority of police work is about the maintenance of order rather than law enforcement (Reiner 2000). Similarly, we are presented with media fictions of police investigations that many people take to be representations of real police work. The image of the insightful detective solving crimes that baffle everyone involved is a common dramatic device. Most murders are solved, but not through the application of insightful intelligence, rather the murderer tends to be known to the victim and so is fairly easy to identify. Where that is not the case, the police rely on information from the public. Knocking on doors and gathering knowledge is the key investigatory tool used by the police (De Lint 2003). In this respect, the police act as amplifiers of the crime, talking to the media and making appeals on television in order to get more information from the public. It could be argued, then, that the finding that offenders tend to commit crimes close to where they live is one that the police already employ through their door-to-door enquiries. A more focused search is all that would be required to enact this finding in practice.

Nevertheless, the British police have recently set up what might be described as an equivalent organisation to the American FBI. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is an organisation that is not part of any single police force, but instead acts like an umbrella organisation providing assistance and advice to police investigations. The aim is to centralise the tools for investigation and collation of crime data. Specifically designed for this purpose was the setting up of the Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS) in 1998. Its role was to spot emerging patterns in murders and serious sexual assaults so as to identify potential serial killers or rapists. Every force has an officer in the intelligence department assigned the role of passing all crime files to SCAS for the purposes of comparison with other similar crimes. Entered into a database developed by the Canadian Mounted Police called the Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS), crime scene activity is coded and compared to data already entered to find potential matches both in terms of behaviour and forensic evidence such as DNA evidence. This is a career that is increasingly open to psychologists,

termed assistant crime analysts; the role requires the coding of information not unlike that in many psychological experiments. This is then turned into a report for the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) with salient points to help the investigation. It is worth pointing out that there are very few people employed in geographical profiling; as of 2008 there were only four people doing this job.

One of the main problems with the data upon which investigative psychologists must base their conclusions is that the police require that the research is in the service of their work. Not, in itself, an unfair position to take, but it remains unclear as to what impact this has on research that is critical of police practice. As the following demonstrates, the police can withhold permission to publish research findings.

- *Benefit to the Police Service*

It is vital that NCPE Operations assesses the benefit of the research to the service in terms of its operational relevance, against the cost implications and the sensitivity of the data. The research must provide 'added value' for the police service as a whole. This, together with managing access to NCPE Operations data, will be discussed further in section three of this paper.

- *Publication*

It must be made clear that access to data is for specific undertakings only. Any findings derived from it remain the property of NCPE Operations and can only be published, presented or otherwise placed in the public domain with NCPE Operations' explicit written permission.

(Internet Reference 1)

Moreover, there are very real legal and ethical issues with the use of police data. Not least the fact that confidentiality of both victims and offenders needs to be treated carefully, but also that any data that is not handled carefully may be rendered legally problematic for current investigations. Furthermore, there also needs to be awareness that a case can be reopened and challenged a long time after the original investigation through legal appeals. Finally, almost all profiles are based on data provided by the police to agencies like the FBI or the NPIA. Consequently, their accuracy is based on the initial accuracy of the police data collection. The computer program that links crimes together, essentially the tool that provides the initial suggestion that individual crimes may be part of a series, is dependent for its accuracy on a multitude of individual police officers collecting information. Information lost, distorted or ignored at any point in this chain will result in an end result that is less than accurate. Since most information comes from the public, and the public may not trust the police, a further distorting filter is placed in the chain. As Strangeland argues with regard to computer profiling models, the outcome of the program is only as good as the data that is put into it (Strangeland 2005). In one

case of serial rape, for example, a system that is used to provide a geographic profile of the likely home base of the offender was wrong due to a series of errors. For example, the hypothesised home base was a choice between two distinct areas, a northern and southern sector. With a fifty-fifty choice, the wrong area was chosen. With regard to the offender's choice of transport, it was hypothesised that he would walk, when he used a car. The wrong choice of home base is perhaps the most significant, since there were only two choices and such errors could potentially mislead the investigation and waste time. Such profiling techniques as discussed in this chapter are clearly problematic, and police may need to trust in the basics of their job rather more than they trust offender profiles.

Serial killer as celebrity: popular representations of serial murder

Peter Sutcliff, Harold Shipman, David Berkowitz, Ted Bundy. The unifying outcome of each of these serial killers is that they became celebrities (Jenks 2003: 181). Each came from different backgrounds, were educated to varying levels and were parented consistently and inconsistently. The thrill of murder, the power it gave them and the potential fame at the killing spree's conclusion are the only unifying links between the killers. They cannot be linked by psychological variables such as introversion, extroversion, psychopathy, frustration, and so on.

One serial killer has even published a book. The Moors Murderer Ian Brady who, with Myra Hindley, kidnapped and killed four children between 1963 and 1964, wrote a book called *The Gates of Janus* (2001). The book reads very much like the kind of book that is prevalent in many bookshops in the 'true crimes' section. However, it is presented as a critique of the kinds of book that Holmes and Holmes, or Fox and Levine write. It attempts to undermine the whole apparatus of psychology by claiming that it is not possible to get inside the head of a criminal. Mainly because we are all to a certain extent criminal. Brady challenges those in power to take the same tests that are given to those in captivity to see if they would also score highly on tests of psychopathy, or if an EEG brain scan would reveal the same pattern as is sometimes ascribed to a killer or rapist. It makes for chilling reading since this is a man universally reviled who presents the case against the possibility of a science that could capture him. Essentially, those who are captured are lazy, losers or unlucky. It is not some psychological expert who tends to catch them. In many ways, then, Brady draws the same conclusion as some of the academics referred to in this book. He also makes for disturbing reading when he discusses the fascination that people have for killers like him. As can be seen in the following quotation, the

public derive pleasure from reading about people like him. He also suggests that the public are complicit in the crimes committed by men such as him.

> The plain and perhaps regrettable fact is that it is part of the eternal human psyche and cycle for the normal individual to derive cathartic satisfaction and enjoyment from savouring the crimes of others, and from luxuriously dreaming of personally committing them. (Brady 2001: 41)

However, it says more about Brady that he thinks people are dreaming about doing the things that he did.

Conclusion

The serial killer industry is a massive money-maker. From the academics and the students they teach at one end to the filmmakers and novelists at the other, the fascination is real. Unfortunately, it is the sensational and gory aspect of the crime that becomes the media focus. The thousands of people unlawfully killed everyday due to faults in cars, workplace negligence and speeding or drunk drivers rarely get a mention. Yet, the rare cases of serial murder make the headlines.

Summary

- The psychological research into investigating such crimes has tended to mimic the sensationalist accounts of the entertainment media.
- The American FBI approach to profiling is based on interviewing incarcerated criminals. The result is profiles that some have argued lack scientific rigour and do not help the police.
- The work of David Canter and colleagues has put forward an approach they term Investigative Psychology. This term reflects the need for psychology to respond to the requirements of policing. The aim is to focus investigations by looking at themes and not attempt to get into the mind of the killer, as in the FBI approach.
- Until Canter and his colleagues, there was very little psychology employed at all in offender profiling.
- The job of profiling is not one that matches the media representations and there are not that many opportunities to work in the area. Currently, in the UK there are only five full-time Behavioural Investigation Advisers (BIA) and 30 part-time BIAs. These people tend to be academic researchers located in universities and are brought in to provide assistance when needed. Rather, what is needed is a change in perspective as to what the psychological and sociological realities of research in this area actually entails.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1 Is research into offender profiling worth the effort given the low success rate? How might it be improved?

2 Is it possible to get into the mind of a serial killer?

3 Is David Canter correct to say that trying to get into the mind of a serial killer does not help police catch them?

4 To what extent is Canter's investigative psychology an extension of the more common use of criminal statistics to more efficiently deploy the police?

5 Critically analyse the example of a real profile in Box 2.1 on page 49. What inconsistencies are there and how helpful would it be for the police in practice? Why might the police feel pressure to rely on such a tool?

FURTHER READING AND USEFUL WEBSITES

Peter Ainsworth's book *Offender Profiling and Crime Scene Analysis* (2001) is good for a more in-depth discussion of this topic.

The following is a good critique of the American style of profiling: L. Alison, M.D. Smith and K. Morgan (2003) 'Interpreting the accuracy of offender profiles', *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 9(2): 185–95.

For an example of the kind of research that the FBI produce then the following website has links to relevant publications:

http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/leb.htm

Also useful for looking at how the British police are using scientific methods, including psychology, is the following website for the National Policing Improvement Agency:

http://www.npia.police.uk/

Also, for information of UK government policy:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Note

1 The book is actually title *Red Dragon*, not *The Red Dragon*