

Criminal Profiling

R J Morton and W D Lord, Serial Killer Unit,
FBI Academy, Quantico, VA, USA

Introduction

Dr. James A. Brussel, a New York psychiatrist, was one of the first practitioners of criminal profiling. For a 16-year period during the 1940s and 1950s, New York City was terrorized by the “Mad Bomber,” who set off 37 bombs in the New York area. The police contacted Dr. Brussel for an analysis of the case. Dr. Brussel concluded that the individual would be a heavy-set man, foreign-born, a Roman Catholic, and living with a sibling. He further stated that when the police located the man, he would be wearing a buttoned double-breasted suit. In 1957, George Metesky was arrested by the police for the bombings. Metesky was a heavy-set, foreign-born, Roman Catholic, who lived with his sister. When he answered the door, he was wearing a double-breasted suit, buttoned.

In the 1970s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began providing criminal profiling based upon a multidisciplinary approach of investigative experience, psychology, crime scene expertise, and forensics. Special Agent Howard Teten was a member of the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit (BSU), who developed and taught a course titled Applied Criminology (profiling). Teten co-taught this course with a fellow agent, Pat Mullany, who was also an instructor at BSU. Together, they began to receive requests from police investigators to review and conduct profiles on current, ongoing cases. Their analyses met with many positive results. The success of Teten and Mullany led to the creation of the FBI’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) and put the process of criminal profiling into common practice.

The process of criminal profiling continues to evolve, and the purpose of this article is to provide a historical view of the process, outline the changes that have occurred, and to present the process as it now exists.

History

The process of profiling has its origins in “psychological profiling” and criminal case-study descriptions originally published by forensically inclined psychologists and psychiatrists seeking to further the understanding of the criminal mind. Early profiling work also involved the psychiatric and psychological assessments of individuals for strategic purposes, such as the psychiatric assessment of Adolf Hitler during World War II. Historically, psychiatrists and psychologists wrote psychological profiles of criminals as diagnostic formulations. Early profiling efforts were disseminated among mental-health professionals to foster discussion and debate on a broad diversity of theoretical issues. These “profiling” orientations practiced by mental-health professionals often lacked overt practical law-enforcement application.

In the 1970s, “psychological profiling,” sometimes referred to as “criminal or behavioral profiling,” was systematically implemented as an investigative technique by the BSU. The FBI’s approach to profiling differed markedly from the methodology employed by mental-health professionals. Rather than conducting a clinically based construct of a known offender as a means of gaining insight, detailed examinations of the behavior(s) evidenced in the interactions between offenders and victims, and displayed at the scenes of crimes served as the basis of analysis and prediction. The FBI approach to criminal profiling was predicated on the belief that criminal behavior, as evidenced in victim–offender interactions and crime scene activities, reflected offender personality traits and that such traits could be identified and categorized. FBI profiling began as an informal analysis, but gradually transitioned into a formal service as the practical law-enforcement value of behaviorally based crime analyses became evident. With time, research involving the interviews of incarcerated offenders, coupled with the standardization of analytical protocols and training methodologies, served to formalize the profiling process.

Early FBI criminal profiling efforts focused primarily on ascribing behavioral and personality characteristics to unknown offenders in serious violent crimes and serial offenses. Central to this approach was the concept of an organized/disorganized behavioral dichotomy. This continuum was based on recognized differences in a spectrum of behavioral characteristics indicative of varying degrees of criminal sophistication. Organized offenders planned their offenses, would target a victim who was a stranger, and were very evidence-conscious. Disorganized offenders tended to commit spontaneous offenses, were acquainted with the victim, and left physical evidence at the crime scene.

Through analysis of the crime scene, profilers could utilize crime scene characteristics to ascertain personality traits of either organized or disorganized offenders. Organized offenders were described as very intelligent, with better than average IQ scores, high birth-order status in their family, socially and sexually competent, worked in a skilled profession, were in a controlled mood during the commission of their crime, used alcohol during the crime, were very mobile, and followed the crime in the news media.

Disorganized offenders were described as of average intelligence, had minimal birth-order status, were socially immature, sexually incompetent, had poor work history, were in an anxious mood during the crime, did not consume alcohol during the crime, lived near the crime scene, and had minimal interest in the news media.

This system was limited, however, because of the inherent problems of a simple two-category classification model. Human behavior is much more variable than an “either/or” choice of organized behavior/disorganized behavior. Behavior falls along a continuum between the two poles and usually displays descriptive characteristics of both organized and disorganized offenders.

Criminal Profiling

Criminal profiling analysis has evolved, with time, into a broader investigative adaptation of applied clinical psychology, psychiatry, and behavioral science. This process is defined by the FBI as criminal investigative analysis (CIA). CIA is an investigative, forensic, and behaviorally based investigative tool utilized to assist law enforcement in the solution of unsolved crimes. It employs psychological concepts and principles in the assessment of offender behavior and personality characteristics. Case analyses are routinely conducted by teams of behaviorally trained, experienced violent-crime investigators in consort with a cadre of expert consultants including psychologists, psychiatrists, forensic pathologists, crime laboratory scientists, linguists, and other specialists.

CIA is a comprehensive method of reviewing and assessing the facts of a criminal act, or series of criminal acts, by personnel who have extensive investigative experience, specialized academic training, and have participated in research involving violent

offenders. CIA entails an in-depth, multidisciplinary review of submitted case materials from investigative, forensic, and behavioral perspectives and often includes an analysis of the offender's behavior and interaction with his/her victim(s), as exhibited during the commission of a crime, or as evidenced in the crime scene. The goal of CIA is to narrow the investigative focus thereby enhancing investigative resource management, and timely case resolution. Additionally, CIA seeks to provide information of lead value to criminal investigators and to offer analyses and explanations of violent criminal behavior that exceed the ordinary professional and life experiences of investigators, attorneys, mental-health practitioners, and the courts. CIA should be viewed as a process of reviewing crime(s) from behavioral, investigative, and forensic perspectives.

The Process of CIA

CIA involves both deductive and inductive logic based on a detailed knowledge of case facts, behavioral and criminological research, empirical analyses, clinical psychology, and criminal investigative experience. The CIA process is, in many respects, comparable to the process of clinical diagnosis. Both involve the gathering of objective facts, reliance on previously tested data, a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, and the practical experience and insight of professional practitioners.

Deductive reasoning is defined by Webster's Dictionary as a learning process where a conclusion logically follows from a stated premise. Deduction can be described as inferring a conclusion based upon general information and applying it to a specific incident. The use of deductive reasoning in the CIA process consists of utilizing empirical studies identifying the characteristics of certain populations of violent offenders to make predictions relevant to the specific case being reviewed.

Inductive reasoning was first put forth in the seventeenth century by Bacon, who defined it as reasoning that moved from the specific to the general. Inductive reasoning is the process by which specific information is utilized to make predictions concerning general trends or populations. The use of inductive reasoning in the CIA process consists of identifying factors in a specific case and applying those factors to an entire population of violent offenders to explain common behavior.

It is a common myth that CIA can only be conducted using either inductive or deductive reasoning; however, it is the practice of the FBI's NCAVC to utilize both, as well as other processes in the consultative process.

Case facts represent the single most important element utilized in CIA. These include crime scene characteristics, crime scene interaction between the victim and the offender, neighborhood demographics, neighborhood crime rates, neighborhood criminal activity trends, media coverage of the crime(s), victimology, forensic results, and investigative results.

Research through interviews with incarcerated violent offenders provides glimpses into the offender's method of operation (MO), victim selection criteria, potential pool of victims, offender view of law enforcement efforts, and possible offender motivation.

Research utilizing empirical studies provides statistical models of offender behavior by examining large populations of violent offenders to identify common characteristics or behaviors, including MO, victim selection criteria, disposal scenarios, and postoffense behavior.

Clinical psychology provides insight into the mental disorders that are common to violent offenders including psychopathy, psychosis, and paraphilias which encompass a variety of sexual deviations. Knowledge of these disorders can be beneficial in explaining apparent bizarre behavior exhibited at a crime scene.

Extensive case experience in violent crime investigations, and in particular experience in CIA, exposes the agent/investigator to a plethora of repetitive, unusual, and bizarre cases, and provides a broad base of knowledge concerning these types of crimes. Experience in criminal investigations is also essential in the CIA process as it is an investigative tool. It is extremely important to be able to apply the results of CIA investigatively, to generate leads or focus an investigation towards a certain type of offender.

Present Status of CIA

CIA is increasing in its popularity and utilization within the law enforcement and criminal justice community in the USA and elsewhere. This is due, in part, to its continuing success as an investigative tool and also to the zealous attention it receives in the news and entertainment media and the popular press.

CIA currently encompasses a broad array of behaviorally based services provided to law enforcement and criminal justice professionals. Utilization of the CIA process allows a variety of analyses to be conducted, including crime analysis, behavioral characteristics of unknown offenders, personality assessment, interview techniques, investigative and media strategies, search warrant assistance, prosecutorial and trial strategies, and expert testimony.

Crime Analysis

Crime analysis is the interpretation and opinion resulting from the assessment of a crime and/or crime scene, generally incorporating information relating to the offender's motivation, sophistication, and actions, as well as the sequence of events and their relationship to other criminal acts.

Behavioral Characteristics

Behavioral characteristics of an unknown offender can be determined by analyzing the way a crime was committed. Criminal investigative analysts can often identify the major personality and behavioral characteristics of an individual. Generally, the person's basic patterns of behavior, exhibited in the commission of a crime, will also be present in that person's lifestyle. Thus, a criminal investigative analyst may be able to determine the type of person who committed the crime and his/her possible motive(s). Some, but not necessarily all, of the following areas may be addressed in a typical "profile": age, gender, race, intelligence level, lifestyle, work habits, marital status, social adjustment, personality characteristics, location of residence in relation to the crime, sexual adjustment, and perversions. Ascribing behavioral and personality characteristics to unknown offenders, inherent in classical criminal profiling, represents only one facet of the current CIA process.

Personality Assessment

Personality assessment evaluations are done to identify an individual's strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities from a law enforcement viewpoint. Because each request is unique, the assessment process requires detailed submission of data about the person targeted and demands extensive review and consultation by the analyst. The availability of this material is considered essential in constructing appropriate interview strategies. This type of assessment is appropriate in lieu of a "profile" when a suspect has been identified.

Interview Techniques

Interview techniques combine a general assessment of a person with an analysis of the crime and the behavior exhibited therein. Suggestions are made as how best to interview an individual, particularly when the investigating agency may only have one opportunity for a successful interview. Suggestions on the most appropriate type of interviewer, desired approach, and/or the best environment in which to conduct the interview may be included.

Investigative Strategy

Certain investigative suggestions and strategies may be offered, based on a review of the entire case, focusing particularly on an evaluation of the crime scene and an assessment of the offender. These proactive suggestions are based upon years of experience in reviewing these types of cases and expertise in crime scenes, forensic techniques, and investigations.

Media Strategy

Media strategies are carefully crafted, with attention given to how information can be delivered to the public in an effort to gain cooperation and address issues that impact the investigative process. Extreme care in the use of language and text must be considered to avoid challenging an offender to commit another offense.

Search Warrant Assistance

Search warrant assistance can be particularly beneficial to support affidavits. Research and experience have shown that specific types of offenders commonly possess certain behavioral and personality traits, and based upon these behaviors, may retain specific instrumentalities of the crime. This articulable information is proffered to the court to support the affidavit. A list of specific items that offenders may possess or keep from victims is provided.

Prosecutive/Trial Strategy

At the request of the investigative agency or prosecuting attorney, recommendations may be offered concerning crime analysis, crime motivation, overall prosecution theme development, possible cross-examination techniques for offenders and/or witnesses, and considerations regarding jury selection.

Expert Testimony

Criminal investigative analysts have qualified and provided testimony as experts in the areas of crime scene analysis, violent criminal behavior, and assessment of dangerousness. Each of these services, however, is targeted at enhancing the court's and jury's understanding of offenders, their MO, motivation for committing offenses, and future dangerousness to the public.

Future of CIA

CIA continues to evolve, particularly in its incorporation of empirical research and scientifically sound hypothesis testing. While recent research points to the reliability and validity of the CIA process, empirically based studies remain scant. Rigorous statistical

testing of well-defined, scientifically sound hypotheses could significantly enhance the predictive value and reliability of the criminal investigative process. Additionally, empirical studies would provide a clearer estimation of behavioral variability and methodological errors rates, and ultimately assist in refinement of the process.

The continued union of research-based actuarial information and seasoned investigative experience will serve to increase the future accuracy and applicability of CIA. Alternative offender and offense classification systems, based on differing diagnostic, motivational, and definitional criteria, have been developed by criminologists, sociologists, and clinical psychologists in an effort to advance the value and applicability of the profiling process. The multitude of potential classification schemes underscores the complexity of human criminal behavior, the lack of uniformity in definitions, and the need for empirically based research.

Geographic Profiling

Another application of behavioral science and technology to the law enforcement arena is geographic profiling. Geographic profiling examines the spatial behavior of offenders and seeks to identify significant locations (places of work, residences, etc.) based on the spatial patterns evident in serial and repetitive crimes. Geographic profiling serves as an adjunct to classical behavioral profiling and the CIA process. Geographic profiling is centered in the behavioral theory of psychological comfort zones and the ecological construct of home range. Each posits that offenders will initially commit their crimes in close proximity to areas of familiarity and perceived safety, namely, near residences or places of work, recreation, and entertainment. With experience and success, offenders expand their geographic sphere of criminal activity. Geographic profiling theory also considers both physical and psychological barriers as factors in an offender's decision-making process.

Geographic profiling may serve to narrow investigative focus and enhance law-enforcement resource management by identifying potential areas of offender familiarity and victim encounter. Geographic profiling can provide valuable insights in repetitive offense mapping, and the development of crime prevention

strategies. Geographic profiling, however, is limited in scope due to the need for a large number of repetitive offenses in order to make accurate assessments.

Further Reading

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