

Katarzyna Pal, MA

WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza

e-mail: katarzyna.pal@wsb.edu.pl

ORCID ID: 0009-0006-6252-7782

Cezary Tomiczek, PhD

WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza

e-mail: ctomiczek@wsb.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-4256-814X

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OFFENDER PROFILING – METHODS AND CASE STUDIES

Abstract

Offender profiling aims to identify an offender on the basis of his or her characteristics and modus operandi. It is one of the methods that support investigation most often in homicide cases. It is most effective when dealing with a serial killer. During the process of creating the offender profile, knowledge of the offender's behaviour and personality, data on the victim, information obtained during the investigation and any other relevant information relating to the case is used. By analysing the available data, the profile builder seeks to identify the personality traits of the offender. Each behaviour is the result of a factor, probably related to the past. The purpose of this article is to identify the factors that are relevant to offender profiling and how forensic profiling affects offender detection.

Key words

Homology, profiler, geographical profiling, psychological trace, serial killer

Introduction

Forensic profiling has many definitions¹. According to J. Gołębiowski, “[...] profiling is the creation of a specific description of the perpetrator of a crime, containing the characteristics of him/her”². J. Gierowski believes that it is “the pursuit of a brief, dynamic characterisation succinctly capturing the most important features of an unknown perpetrator and the manifestations of his/her behaviour”. According to W. Kopalinski, translating this term from Latin *profilare* means to outline³. On the basis of these three selected definitions, it can be concluded that forensic profiling is the development of characteristic information about the perpetrator, his/her specific features and modes of behaviour.

C. Lombroso, a criminologist, stated that on the basis of the characteristics of the perpetrators of similar crimes, the signs and impulses of the perpetrators’ behaviour can be better understood. On the basis of his research, he distinguished three criminal types, such as born criminals, criminally insane and criminoi (no specific characteristic, a general class of criminals). E. Kretschmer drew attention to the relationship between physique, personality and criminal propensity by distinguishing four types of physique linked to mental illness. Another division, which dealt with physicality and temperament, is due to W. Sheldon⁴. According to him,

on this basis it is possible to distinguish between the endomorphic type with a predisposition to put on weight; the mesomorphic with a tendency to muscularity and a good physique; the ectomorphic with a predominance of delicacy and a fine physique.

According to the biblical stories, a man is cited as the first killer and envy as the first motive. Abel made a sacrifice that pleased God, while the sacrifice of his older brother Cain was not accepted. This caused him envy and jealousy, a sense of unequal treatment, so that he killed his younger brother Abel. This is the origin of the term ‘Cain stigma’, which refers to the fact that committing another crime is easier than the first one⁵. M. Cur, in an attempt to analyse this crime, points to circumstances that should be investigated in order to find a more precise explanation of the committed act, such as who witnessed the rejection of Cain’s victim and whether the exclusion was treated as a bad opinion of the product and had a bearing on the sale of the crop.

The first criminal profile was created by T. Bond in 1888. The perpetrator whose characteristics were described is known by the pseudonym ‘Jack the Ripper’. During the Second World War, a psychological profile of A. Hitler by the psychiatrist W. Langer. In 1957, J. Brussel created a profile of the ‘Mad Bomber of New York’ and in 1964 a profile of a serial killer who was known as the ‘Boston

1 J. Gołębiowski, *Umysł przestępcy. Secrets of criminal psychological profiling*, Kraków 2021, p. 37.

2 J. K. Gierowski, *Zabójcy i ich ofiary Psychologiczne podstawy profilowania nieznanymi sprawców zabójstw*, Kraków 2002, p. 14.

3 W. Kopalinski, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Warszawa 1991, p. 414.

4 B. Lach, *Criminal profiling*, Warszawa 2014, pp. 29–30.

5 U. Cur, *Psychological profiling of unknown offenders*, Warszawa 2021, p. 24.

Strangler'. In 1972, a profile was drawn up of a serial killer whose activities took place in Silesia Z. Marchwicki⁶.

Methodological and Methodical Assumptions

The article defines the main concept of forensic profiling and outlines the history of profiling. The first profilers are also presented. One of the basic assumptions of profiling, i.e. homology and typology of offenders, is discussed. The four phases of a crime and, more specifically, the behaviour characteristic of the perpetrator in the various stages of a crime are also described. A term of great importance in profiling is also discussed, which is geographical profiling. Of particular importance to the profiler is the psychological footprint, so this term is discussed in more detail. Profiling models, the person of the profiler and his/her tasks and the practical use of profiling are presented.

Homology as one of the basic assumptions of criminal profiling

One of the basic tenets of criminal profiling is homology. The term is used to describe congruence, suitability and was introduced by Mokros and Alison in 2002. Homology assumes that offenders who commit similar crimes in similar ways share common characteristics.⁷ The best-known typology includes the division of perpetrators into organised and unorganised. This typology was

based on a study of 36 perpetrators with a predominance of serial rapists.⁸ The results showed that perpetrators behave in a mixed way at the scene of the crime, hence the questionable meaning of the typology created. Specialists from the FBI, including R.K. Ressler and J.E. Douglas, believed that according to the typology dividing perpetrators into organised and disorganised, the determination of the type of perpetrator one is dealing with is based on the analysis of the crime scene and the evidence collected. Each of these types of perpetrators is distinguished by characteristic features. Organised crime is planned and characterised by careful execution, while disorganised crime, otherwise known as disorganised crime, is characterised by haphazardness and impulsiveness. In an attempt to identify the type of offender, it is necessary to trace the offender's behaviour as it presents itself during the four phases of the offence. The first phase, called the pre-criminal phase, refers to the time before the offence was committed. It mainly concerns the offender's fantasies and the degree of their aggressiveness. The second phase is the organisation of the scene of the crime, which includes activities such as the selection of the victim, the location, the execution of the crime and the means used to carry it out. These may include scenes depicting the perpetrator's fantasies. In the third phase, the perpetrator proceeds to clean up the crime scene, i.e. dispose of the body and the evidence proving his guilt. The last phase, the post-criminal

6 Ł. Wroński, *Serial and multiple murderers. Psychological and psychogeographical profiling*, Łomianki 2016, pp. 201–202.

7 More: K. Olszak-Häussler, *Homology as a basis for criminal profiling*, "Wojskowy Przegląd Prawniczy" 2015, No 1.

8 U. Cur, *Psychological profiling...*, p. 33.

phase, draws attention to the offender's behaviour after the act. Usually there are fantasies in his mind mapping out what happened, which may prompt him to return to the scene of the crime to once again experience the emotions he experienced during the murder. R.M. Holmes has created a table containing the characteristics of the two types of perpetrators mentioned above. Disorganised perpetrators are most often socially maladjusted individuals, live alone, were psychologically abused as children, interrupted their education, had no father or a dysfunctional father, do not care about personal hygiene and order, live close to the crime scene, have a nocturnal lifestyle, leave the corpse at the crime scene and it is usually whole, attack suddenly, reduce the victim to an object, leave evidence behind, have no interest in the media or the police. Organised perpetrators usually belong to the socially adjusted, have a partner and father, were physically abused as children, are mobile, have an education, are concerned with hygiene and order, have a daytime lifestyle, if they return to the scene of the crime it is only to observe the progress of the police, move the body of their victims and usually dismember them, trick the victims and talk to them, try not to leave evidence behind, follow the media's coverage of them⁹. In practice, this division will not always apply, as an unorganised perpetrator, through his experience and learning from his mistakes, may change his *modus operandi*.

Homology does not have full support as to its assumptions despite its

great importance for profiling, and this is due to the superficial analysis in this area. Research in this area has mainly focused within cases such as arson, sexual offences, theft or robbery. House was among those involved in analysing the assumption of homology. He investigated the relationship between the varied behaviour of rapists and their varied criminal histories, but his hypothesis was not confirmed, the rapists' behaviour did not show characteristics indicative of a previous criminal record. Other results were obtained in 1998 by Davies, Wittebrood and Jackson. Their study showed that it was possible to infer the rapist's criminal past from the offender's behaviour during the crime. The results of the research only allowed for conjectures to be made, e.g.: an offender using anti-fingerprint devices was probably previously convicted of burglary, whereas if he did not use such measures it was possible that he was doing so for the first time¹⁰. Research in this area has also been carried out by Mokros and Alison, but they did not find a link between criminal behaviour and other areas such as previous criminal record, making them believe that the assumption of homology cannot form the basis of profiling as it is too simplistic.

Research on the accuracy of the homology assumption was also conducted on the basis of the crime of arson. Using a multidimensional scaling method, Center and Fritzson distinguished between four types of arson: instrumental-object, in which the target is hidden and the activity is directed at

⁹ L. Wroński, *Serial and multiple...*, pp. 42–46.

¹⁰ K. Olszak-Häussler, *Homology as a basis...*, pp. 3–4.

destruction; instrumental-personal, in which the target is also hidden and the activity is indirectly directed at the person; expressive-object, where the activity is directed at destroying the object; expressive-personal, in which the activity is directed at the person¹¹. From the results obtained, only the positive correlations between instrumental-object arson and young offenders, as well as expressive-object arson and multiple arsonists found confirmation for the homology assumption.

As can be seen from the cases described above, homology, despite being considered a basic assumption of profiling, is not thoroughly analysed, and this is due to the small number of studies that have been carried out focusing their interest in this area¹². Comparing the results of studies that have already been conducted is often difficult or impossible due to existing differences such as sample size, source material or type of crime.

Geographical profiling

An important term for offender profiling is geographic profiling, which includes methods to identify the likely place of residence of an offender. One of its developers is K. Rossmo. This method mainly draws information from statistical analyses, which include correlations between the offenders' behaviour and spatial behaviour such as the distance the offender travelled from his place of residence to the place where the crime was committed. Geographical

profiling makes it possible to prioritise particular law enforcement tasks in the absence of conclusive evidence pointing to an offender, to select a course of action and to exploit knowledge of the patterns of behaviour identified among particular types of offenders. There are two types of geographical profiling methods¹³. The first method, called centographic, involves identifying a single point considered to be the most important in the case, moving away from this location reduces the likelihood of finding the perpetrator; other methods are based on the use of specialised software that calculates the likelihood of the perpetrator inhabiting the area in question at each point on the map.

S. Mordwa defines geographic profiling as a tool that aims to help delineate important areas of search for the perpetrator, thereby reducing the group of individuals requiring attention. It has its uses in both serial and single offences. The location through which the perpetrator's movement area can be analysed can be obtained by activities such as the use of a credit card or mobile phone by the perpetrator and by using footage from a surveillance camera. K. Rossmo counts rational choice theory, routine activity theory, criminal pattern theory and concepts related to the spatial resistance function among the most important theoretical foundations of geographic profiling. The rational choice theory of R. V. Clark and M. Felson indicates that most offenders, despite the stress and time constraint,

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 5–6.

¹² Ibidem, p. 10.

¹³ M. Górski, *Basics of geographical profiling*, „Problemy współczesnej kryminalistyki” 2015, vol. XIX, pp. 35–38.

act rationally and make informed decisions; they are able to estimate the potential threat, risk as well as gain. In the routine action theory of L. E. Cohen and M. Felson, the authors focus on the rationale behind the offender's choice of place and time, and crime in their view follows the occurrence of three circumstances, which include a motivated offender, finding the right target most often encountered in the daily path of life, and the right place where the offender gains an advantage over the victim. Another theory of criminal patterns belongs to P. L. and P. J. Brantingham, who combined the two theories mentioned above with geographical space, pointed out the interactions that occur between offenders and their environment, both physical and social.¹⁴ In their theory, the Brantinghams used the term mental map, which describes an offender's daily life path consisting of paths referred to as connecting routes and the nodes to which these paths lead, i.e. the places where the offender stays to satisfy his basic needs.

Concepts related to the resistance function of space require further discussion. One of these concepts is the principle of least effort based on the model of gravity, according to which it is assumed that the criminal, guided by putting the least effort into the crime, decreases his frequency of action as he moves away from his residence, obviously maintaining the so-called buffer zone, which is in the immediate

vicinity of his residence. Based on D. Canter's and P. Larkin's theory of circles, four types of criminals are distinguished: the hunter and the angler, who in most cases commit their crime close to their residence, and the poacher and the hunter, for whom distance offers no resistance to achieving their goal. The hunter kills on purpose, the angler when the opportunity happens to him, the poacher usually operates in an area that is foreign to him, while the hunter brings his victims to places where he can take control. Another classification of offenders was created on the basis of the relationship between the offender's behaviour in the field and his place of residence. In this case, only two types of offenders were distinguished the hunter referred to as stable and the poacher referred to as mobile¹⁵. The second concept of the path-to-offence assumes that offenders, even mobile offenders, are more likely to commit crimes in close proximity to their homes.

Practical use of profiling

Criminal profiling is constantly evolving and gaining increasing notoriety¹⁶. It plays an important role in the fight against crime by helping to identify and capture the perpetrators of criminal acts, by allowing more and more knowledge about the motives and modus operandi of the perpetrators, by helping the profiler to gain experience, which has a

¹⁴ S. Mordwa, *Geographical profiling, or the use of spatial analysis for the detection of offenders*, Łódź 2019, pp. 53-55.

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 56-59.

¹⁶ A. Drózdź, *Rola profilowania kryminalnego w zapobieganiu i zwalczaniu przestępczości*, [in:] *Wybrane zagadnienia z zakresu kryminologii i psychologii kryminalistycznej*, I. Mołdoch-Mendoń, K. Maciąg (eds.), Lublin 2020, pp. 221-222.

positive impact on his/her further work and work on further criminal profiles.

Most often, an offender profile is created in cases such as murder, rape, sexual assaults of various types, violent crimes e.g.: robbery, terror, abduction. Most cases involve serial or multiple killers. This makes it easier to find the perpetrators' modus operandi and characteristic behaviour. The cases that mainly come to the profiler are considered unusual or strange, which have not been solved by standard investigative methods.

The phenomenon of serial killing in the literature finds many definitions. Homicide aims to take the victim's life in a conscious and deliberate manner, while the adjective serial indicates something repetitive. This means that serial homicide is a repeated phenomenon aimed at taking the life of the victim in a conscious, deliberate and intentional manner by the perpetrator. When talking about a recurring phenomenon, it is important to emphasise that there are a minimum of two events. One definition that deserves mention belongs to M. Lorenz Dietz, a member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Windor. In his view, a serial killer is not an exceptional person and he did not create his bad behaviour¹⁷. In his statement, the professor stressed that they should not be made into stars, because a large number of serial killers commit a crime in order to gain fame and become a historical figure, which should not be facilitated by them.

Characteristics of serial killers include the occurrence of gaps between crimes, which can range from a few hours even to several years. Another feature is the continuity of the murders, which cease as a result of the perpetrator's capture or death. In most of the cases described in the literature, a male is cited as the serial killer. However, it is important to note that there are also cases in which it is a woman who has committed repeated crimes. An example is the person of J. Weber. The woman killed defenceless children. The investigation that followed the death of her son and several other children for whom she had custody ended with the woman being acquitted. It was not until the later killings that it was possible to prove. Ms Weber was declared insane by an expert. The woman committed suicide in an inpatient facility. Another example is P. Janeso, who killed five women. She was caught thanks to the testimony of one of the women she tried to strangle. Some of the victims' clothes were found in her flat and their corpses were found in a well nearby. Ms Janeso lured the girls into the flat, where she strangled them with wire, undressed them, performed acts to satisfy her sex drive and threw the corpses into the well, and kept the victims' belongings. She was assisted in this by her mother. Both women were arrested and sentenced to death, the mother's sentence, however, was commuted to life imprisonment. The legal regulation of murder in Poland is found in the Code of Criminal Procedure in Article 148 according to which "[t]he

¹⁷ B. Grube, *The phenomenon of serial murder – the defendant's attitude before the court and the importance of law enforcement efficiency in the detection process*, "Problems of Contemporary Forensic Science" 2011, vol. XV, p. 98.

person who kills a human being shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than 8 years, to 25 years' imprisonment or to life imprisonment”.

Thanks to scientific developments, a new phenomenon has emerged called mass murder, which involves a single act of violence that takes the lives of many people at the same time, with a minimum of three victims. The perpetrators of this type of crime are usually people who are convinced that they will never be accepted in the society to which they wish to belong. They express their attacks as a form of protest in order to draw attention to themselves. Mass murder differs from serial killing firstly because of the timing of the crime, in the case of the former it is just a moment, a one-off action, while in the case of the latter there is repetition and an interval. A mass attack is unique and unpredictable, during which the perpetrator is most often killed and public and media attention is focused on portraying the pain and suffering of the victims' families¹⁸. In the case of serial killers, there are usually many publications, films or interviews.

The aforementioned serial killer nicknamed 'Jack the Ripper' in 1888 murdered five women in the space of a few months. Four of them were over the age of forty, one was twenty-five, all engaged in fornication. In the profile he created, Mr Bond indicated a sexual disorder, diagnosing the perpetrator with a resentment towards women caused by mistreatment in the past by one of them. He chose prostitutes as his victims because he followed the

theory that women are emotionally cold and take advantage of men exactly like them. His nickname 'The Ripper' finds its justification in the extremely brutal way he treated his victims. This is because he took out the female genitalia and deposited them in visible places. Unfortunately, the perpetrator was not caught and his actions fell silent after T. Bonda constructed a profile. At the time, profiling was not sufficiently developed to be able to draw more conclusions. If the case could be revisited nowadays several new assumptions would be made, e.g. the probability that it was a doctor or a person familiar with anatomy. Developments in forensic medicine would have allowed a more detailed analysis of the injuries. The perpetrator had a strong need to have control over the victim, inflicting pain was a turn-on for him and was a substitute for sexual intercourse which shows his sexual deviancy.

The case of the 'Boston Strangler' and, appearing under several names, the 'Mad Bomber' are also worth discussing in more detail. The first perpetrator raped and killed thirteen women between 1962 and 1964, at which time only the motive for the crimes was established. The women lived alone, were of different ages and did not resemble each other. A special committee was set up to find the perpetrator with J. Brussel as advisor. There were many disagreements within the team and the experts' opinions were divided. According to J. Brussel, all the murders were carried out by one person who comes from the area where the crimes were committed,

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 102–104.

knows the area very well, is married and is over thirty years old, chooses his victims at random and observes them moments before committing the crime¹⁹. The perpetrator has been caught, but not all the alleged acts have been proven.

One of the crimes to be categorised as specific concerns the desecration of a corpse. The Poznan necrophile and murderer, Edmund K. committed his first crime in 1982 and it was the theft of a corpse from a cemetery chapel. Necrophilia is a sexual disorder in which the body of a dead person is a substitute object to satisfy sexual preferences. The aforementioned Edmund K. killed three women, in each case cutting out the genitals of his victims to satisfy his sexual desire. Other crimes he committed involved insulting human corpses. The first such act took place in 1980 in Nowa Sol, where he entered a cemetery chapel and cut out a dead woman's genitals. In the case of two more victims, he dug up their graves and cut out their genital organs and breasts, taking them with him. He took the body of the last victim out of the grave and placed it in the bushes near the grave. However, in this case he cut out a flap of skin from the shoulders to the genitals from the dead woman. Edmund K. was sentenced to death. His *modus operandi* was to take the women's genitals after cutting them out. According to experts, he was not one of the mentally ill, had an elementary education, worked as a locksmith, had two children and was divorced. He had a previous conviction for robbery with a knife for which he had served a nine-year prison sentence.

The file describing the case of Edmund K. does not contain an opinion that can be considered as a profile of the perpetrator. In retrospect, with the case file at hand, creating a profile is relatively straightforward. By taking the body parts of the victims, Edmund K. clearly belongs to a disturbed person with an unsatisfied sexual urge, which he cannot experience with a living person. The perpetrator's area of operation was unrestricted, although in most cases of this type of crime these are areas within a short distance of the place of residence, more clearly areas known to the perpetrator, allowing him to move freely within it. Due to the manner in which the corpse was mutilated or the efficiency in cutting up the organs, conclusions can be drawn about the perpetrator, e.g. he/she may have been an employee of a slaughterhouse. The act of digging up graves is also not irrelevant to the case. It may lower the fear of the perpetrator or it may be indicative of his physical fitness to dig up the grave and remove the corpse from the coffin. One of the more important aspects in the case is to establish the reason for taking parts of the victims' bodies, generally defined as the satisfaction of sexual desire. In a more detailed analysis, it can be assumed that the perpetrator took the body parts to places where he felt free to store them in any way he wished.

Summary

Based on the analysis of individual cases of profiling perpetrators, it can be concluded that the process of forensic

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 21–23.

profiling contributes to solving cases especially those involving serial killers. They leave distinctive marks, known as *modus operandi*, at each crime scene, which make it possible to profile them and narrow down the suspects. Profiling is based on conjecture and analysis of the evidence and information at hand, often providing the only way to solve a case. Thus, profiling increases the detection rate of offenders. Offender profiling may on the surface appear to be an easy process. However, it requires a great deal of knowledge on the part of the profiler and the ability to spot things that no one would normally pay attention to. Adequate collection and analysis of evidence is key to constructing a profile correctly. The profiler must be able to put themselves in the offender's shoes, try to get inside their head and learn about the mechanisms that drive them without judging them. Profiling is a difficult process, but in many cases it is successful. In order to successfully profile an unknown offender, a number of basic factors need to be analysed in detail. It is necessary to determine the place and time of the incident, pay attention to the surroundings, the prevailing conditions and the possibilities offered by the environment. The victim may have been a bystander, or may have been related to the perpetrator. Identifying the relationship that existed between the two may be crucial in solving the case. Most important, however, is the accurate interpretation of the evidence and information gathered.

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About the Authors

Katarzyna Pal, the representative of the of the International Association of Security Sciences “Save the Word”. Graduate of the WSB University – Master’s degree in National Security with a specialisation in Forensic Science.

Cezary Tomiczek, Ph.D. Eng. Specialist in security. CEO of Medical Center in Wodzisław Śląski. Director of the Research Center for the Safety of the Healthcare System of the WSB University. He gained experience in the industry performing significant functions in the health care sector and in local government work. Specialist in managing, he has special achievements in safety management. Author of many articles and monographs related to safety.