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## The Rationale for Psychological Profiling



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Conclusion

When a particularly bizarre and sadistic crime has been discovered, an immediate question comes to mind: What kind of person would commit such an act? Most crimes of this nature defy understanding and leave one with a sense of bewilderment and astonishment.

The appropriate questions, however, are more like these: What makes someone do something like this? What makes up a personality who enjoys mutilation, necrophilia, rape, child molestation, setting fires, and other forms of perversion and pain? To address such questions, profiling reconstructs a personality sketch for evaluation.

#### ❖ PERSONALITY AND CRIME

Some understanding must come to the forefront to meet the challenge of apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators who commit crimes such as sadistic torture, rape, and other forms of violent crime, and what should be called for is personality profiling. The profile endeavors to share some understanding on the type of person who would rape, pillage, mutilate, and kill.

A personality is the sum total of what a person is. It is that person's total set of values and attitudes, the way he or she views motherhood and fatherhood, law and order, Democrats and Republicans, and all the other social, cultural, religious, and personal experiences that have ever been a part of his or her life. Each person, criminal or not, has a unique personality. Regardless of past experiences, parental background, or biology, each person relates differently, behaves differently, and possesses a different set of values and attitudes. What accounts for this difference? It is a variety of blending five personality components: biology, culture, environment, common experiences, and unique experiences.

#### ❖ BIOLOGY

There is no adamant data that suggest that an individual personality is determined solely by the biological inheritance from his or her parents, grandparents, or other ancestors. It does appear, however, that intellectually superior parents have intellectually superior children. It is also true that tall people tend to have tall children, and short people tend to have short children. The key phrase here is "tend to." There are always exceptions.

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As far as intelligence is concerned, it simply may be that intelligence is only a score on a test. Some children score higher on standardized tests because of social factors rather than simple biological inheritance. These factors include social class, educational experiences, life's rewards, personal relationships, and varied other experiences that shape and mold the personality of the individual.

## ❖ CULTURE

The culture in which a person is reared provides rules and regulations, words, ideas, customs, and beliefs for the formation of a personality. Culture provides the normative structure for the society in which a person lives.

But within each culture there are subcultures: male, female, rich, poor, criminal, and noncriminal. These subcultures have certain distinguishable characteristics that set them apart from the overall, prevailing culture. Each subculture insists on certain patterns of behavior. Each also rewards its members in its own unique fashion.

In other words, a person brought up in one part of a society will be exposed to elements of that particular society, which will differ from other parts of that society and culture because of the unique exposure to a varied set of subcultures. These exposures will have an influence on personality development.

## ❖ ENVIRONMENT

The total surroundings of a person affect the perception and behavior of that person. A person from the elite upper class, for example, will be exposed to a far different set of life experiences than will a person from the lower class. It is not only these day-to-day experiences that become an integral part of the personality, but the social class of an individual also places that person into an arena where he or she will come in contact with a far different set of experiences and opportunities than other people in other social classes could never experience.

## ❖ COMMON EXPERIENCES

All of us encounter common daily experiences: going to school, having a job, and so on. Most members of Western society have been exposed

to baseball, automobiles, marriages, and unfortunately, perhaps, divorce. These activities are part of our cultural identity. Not all of us, however, have been to the same school or have been taught by the same teacher. Not all of us have been reared in the same family, and not all our parents were happily married. Not all children are brought up by their biological parents. Some may have been reared by their grandparents, by foster parents, or others. But enough of us reared in the United States have developed a modal personality type. This personality type contains ideal values—trustworthiness, loyalty, honesty, and reverence, among others—that we have learned to hold dear and true.

#### ❖ UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

What separate each of us are not the common experiences but the unique ones. This is the element that explains our individual personalities. Consider identical twins. The biological inheritance is the same, but identical twin studies report marked personality differences (Bouchard & McGue, 1990; Eaves, Eysenck, & Martin, 1989; Keller, Bouchard, Arvey, Segal, & Dawis, 1992; Loehlin & Nichols, 1976; Tellegen et al., 1988; Vernon, Jang, K., Harris, J., & McCarthy, 1997).

The answer to the question of why identical twins are not identical in their personalities must certainly rest with unique experiences. After all, twins have the same set of parents and usually share much of their genetic makeup. The daily happenings, feedings, diaper changes, and verbal exchanges are all performed in slightly different sequences. This accounts, at least in part, for the difference in personalities.

#### ❖ NEW WAYS OF VIEWING THE PERSONALITY

The personality of a violent offender must be viewed as more than simply someone who has gone through life much the same way as others in the same society. This cannot be the case. The personality of the very violent is different in substance from the modal personality type of American society at large. Those people who commit the crimes suitable for profiling are substantially different from law-abiding citizens, as are their personalities. Theories attempt to define these differences, but no satisfactory has been discovered. Because the very violent do not share in the modal personality, and because impersonal violence is so difficult to understand, it is assumed that such perpetration of violence reflects a pathological personality condition, which is then reflected in the perpetrator's crime scene or scenes.

This is really not an extraordinary assumption. This same comment could be made about the law-abiding but neurotic person. The social and behavioral sciences have been doing this for years. Take, for example, the obsessive-compulsive personality. These people are anal retentive in all they do. This will be evident in their homes, cars, personal effects, and personal hygiene. This personality disorder will take over their daily life's activities. So it is with the very violent. When I visited Ted Bundy on death row in Florida, his cell was immaculate. His correspondence was all arranged in labeled shoe boxes against one wall of his cell. He clothing was arranged neatly, and his comb and hairbrush was side by side on a small counter next to his sink. Ted was neat and orderly. So were his crimes. He was a "five window killer," or one who exhibits all of the stages that many serial killers do (distorted thinking, the fall, negative inward response, negative outward response, and restoration). Thus, the traits of this personality will be reflected in the perpetration of his or her crime, much as it is with the obsessive-compulsive personality.

The crime scene of the very violent reflects the violent personality. If one accepts this premise, then viewing crime scenes will take on a totally fresh and unique perspective. This new perspective, however, will be evident only of the profiler knows what to look for and where to look for it.

#### ❖ ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PROFILING PROCESS

Several assumptions can be made regarding psychological profiling. These assumptions are important to consider because they deal directly with the reasons why profiles are important and the manner in which certain information can be obtained and used to formulate a creditable criminal investigation assessment. These assumptions are as follows.

#### **The Crime Scene Reflects the Personality**

The basic assumption of psychological profiling is that the crime scene reflects the personality of the offender. After all, how effective would profiling be if the crime itself were not indicative of the pathology assessment? The assessment will aid in the direction and scope of the investigation of the crime.

Not only is the manner in which the homicide victim was fatally dispatched important, but the physical and nonphysical evidence will

also lend, to some degree, an assessment of the type of personality involved in a particular murder. The amount of chaos, for example, might indicate that a disorganized personality was involved in this crime. If this is true, then we can make certain assumptions about particular social core variables of the unknown perpetrator. On the other hand, if the crime scene is "neat and clean," then other assumptions might lead us to an offender who possesses a different set of social core variables.

The focus of the attack may also indicate certain information that aids in the apprehension of an unknown offender. For example, in a Midwestern state, an elderly woman was killed in her own home. She was stabbed repeatedly and suffered multiple deep wounds to the upper legs and genital area. The profile offered an assessment of the crime itself that, in part, resulted in the arrested of a man who was considered a suspect in the beginning stages of the law enforcement investigation.

In essence, the total picture of the crime scene must be viewed and evaluated to obtain a mental image of the personality of the offender. One sadistic offender reported to us in a personal communication the following:

I had once read a pornography book in my father's garage. This book was about rape. I believe I memorized the whole book. There was one part of the book which described a rape of a young girl. I made all the girls I raped repeat the words of the girl in the book. This was the only way I could enjoy the rapes. Eventually, it was not enough to rape. The girl in the book was killed, so I had to kill.

This killer learned from an experience with violent pornography. But because of the constellation of his other experiences, combined with his family background, social and biological inheritance, and common experiences constituting his personality, he found sexual pleasure and personal satisfaction from the rapes and killings of scores of women. This killer was unable to stop his raping and killing as long as he was physically free to do so. These urges develop similarly to an addiction. This urging, compulsion, or addiction became part of the killer's personality. The manifestation of the urging became part of the crime scene, which was part of each of his crimes. Again and again, he acted out the scenario found in his father's pornography.

There is no denying that once the cycle of violence is set into motion, violence itself becomes a habit, a need that must be satisfied repeatedly thereafter. And in this general sense, we're sure it can be said that the offender is addicted to impersonal violence.

### **The Method of Operation Remains Similar**

The behavior of the perpetrator, as evidenced in the crime scene and not the offense per se, determines the degree of suitability of the case for profiling (Gerberth, 1983). The crime scene contains clues that experienced profilers determine to be signatures of the criminals. Because no two offenders are exactly alike, it is equally true that no crime scenes are exactly alike. As certainly as a psychometric test reflects psychopathology, the crime scene reflects a personality with pathology.

Many serial offenders are very aware of the nonphysical evidence that is present at a crime scene. One murderer remarked,

First of all, any investigative onlooker to my crime scene would have immediately deduced that the offender was extremely sadistic in nature. The visible markers of bondage, nature of the victims' wounds, and evidence of unhurried, systematic abuse should have indicated that these sadistic acts were not new to me. And that I had committed such brutal crimes in the past and would likely to do so again. (Authors' files)

The offender further stated that

From these points, it could have then be correctly assumed that although brutally violent, the offender was nevertheless intelligent enough to attach method to his madness, cautious and aware enough of his surroundings to make sure he proceeded unseen in the commission of his deeds. Further, because such a brutal offense was unprecedented in this location, it could have been correctly assumed that the offender was very new to the city; if he was a drifter, he was at least someone who very possibly could decide to leave town as suddenly as he arrived [which is exactly what he did].

The remarks from this killer show one dimension of personality—the conscious dimension—that profiling often neglects. This murderer and rapist illustrates by his remarks the elements within his crime scenes that truly reflect his personality. The method of operation, the MO, was repeated many times in the course of his rapes and murders.

### **The Signature Will Remain the Same**

A signature is the unique manner in which a certain offender will commit a crime. It may be the manner in which he will kill, certain

words he will use in the rape, or a certain way in which he will leave something at the crime scene.

In a Midwestern state, two elderly women were murdered. Neither was raped. They were left in a public park in full view. Their driver's license and their keys were placed on their bare stomachs. In another state, several hundred miles away, a female impersonator was killed in the same fashion, strangled and knifed, and his driver's license and his car keys were also left on his bare stomach. If we examine just the perpetrator's ideal victim type, it would appear that there are two killers. After all, why would a killer of elderly females also kill a female impersonator? However, the placement of the licenses and the keys should be considered a "signature" and an indicator of the uniqueness of the crime. This signature should alert the investigators that the crimes were committed by the same person and some sense of cooperation should exist between the various jurisdictions.

Hazelwood (1994), a retired FBI agent who spent the latter part of his career with the Behavioral Science Unit, lectures to law enforcement units across the United States about the importance of considering the signature and its influence on the profiling process.

### **The Offender Will Not Change His Personality**

As many people believe, the core of our personalities does not change fundamentally over time. We may change certain aspects of our personality, but the central core is set, and we make only minor alterations due to time, circumstance, pressure, and so on. We may want to make fundamental changes in our personalities but find it is most difficult or impossible to do so. So it is with the criminal personality. It has taken him years to be the person he now finds himself. He will not, over a short period, radically change. It is not simply a matter of not wanting to change; he is not able to change. This assumption has fundamental importance to the profiling process. The inability to change will result in the perpetrator committing a similar crime in a similar fashion. Not only will the criminal commit the same crime, but he may force the victim to act out a scenario that he has also forced previous victims to perform.

### **The Worth of the Psychological Profile**

Not all profiles are as accurate. Some are very general, missing key details, and others are too specific, detailing the manner of dress of the victim will be wearing when caught or the type of car the perpetrator



drives. Case in point: Perhaps the most accurate on record concerned the Mad Bomber, George Metesky. Dr. James Brussel, a psychiatrist, developed the profile for the Bomber case. Amazingly, he accurately predicted that when the Bomber was eventually caught, he would be wearing a double-breasted suit.

Despite the accuracy of this particular profile, there is a thought that profiling still has not proven its worth:

Nine out of ten of the profiles are vapid. They play at blind man's bluff, groping in all directions in the hope of touching a sleeve. Occasionally they do, but not firmly enough to seize it, for the behaviorists producing them must necessarily deal in generalities and types. But policemen can't arrest a type. They require hard data: names, dates, none of which the psychiatrists can offer. (Godwin, 1978, p. 2)

Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation's research on the reliability and validity of profiling shows less than a unanimous endorsement of the profiling process. In its study of 192 cases where profiling was performed, 88 cases were solved. Of that 88, in only 17% did a profile help in the identification of a suspect (FBI, 1981). The Bureau does claim, however, that its profile in the Wayne Williams case helped break Williams's composure on the witness stand (Porter, 1983).

Jenkins (1994, pp. 70-79) levels a scathing attack against the worth of the profiles offered by FBI agents/authors Douglas, Ressler, and Hazelwood. The latter agent, now retired, offered the most "inaccurate profile in the Bureau's history" in the Charlie Hatcher case, in which Hazelwood attempted to link two cases based on the MOs from New Jersey and Maine (Ganey, 1989, p. 22). Another debacle was the Clayton Hartwig profile concerning the explosive aboard the U.S. battleship *Iowa* (Jeffers, 1992, pp. 177-229). In this profile, Hazelwood and his fellow agent Richard Ault stated that Hartwig committed suicide by sabotaging a 16-inch gun that killed 47 sailors. Paul Lindsey, a former special agent with the FBI, denounced the claims made by Ressler in his autobiography, *Whoever Fights Monsters* (Jenkins, 1994, p. 71). In addition, Smith and Guillen (1990) cite a case where Douglas was brought in to offer a profile and the case is still unsolved 18 years later.

Despite the claims of the FBI concerning the validity of their profiles and huge resources available to the Bureau, there is less than agreement among those in law enforcement that profiles specifically from the Bureau or generally from others are key elements in the investigatory

process. Regardless, profiles will continue to be a part of many such investigatory efforts.

## ❖ CONCLUSION

The personality of the violent offender is a result of a special combination of factors, which include his biological inheritance, the culture, the environment, as well as common and unique experiences. Because of this unique combination, the violent personal offender will commit crimes as an outgrowth of his existing pathological conditions.

The crime scene reflects the pathology in his personality, and the personality is a part of the crime scene. The nonphysical evidence will have important ramifications for the psychological profiling process. Because the personalities of individuals, either noncriminal or criminal, remain relatively inflexible, the criminal personality will continue to commit the same or similar crimes utilizing the same or similar MOs.

Inflexibility of personality and perpetration of crimes aid the profiler in the task of developing a character sketch. Chaos and order, sexual torture or a quick kill, mutilation or not all indicate a personality that has evolved over the years. It is no easier for the violent personality to suddenly and completely change patterns of behavior than it is for the lawabiding citizen.

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