
Offender Profiling

CRIMINOLOGY AND FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY:
LECTURE 7

What is it?

Offender profiling is grounded in the belief that it is possible to work out the characteristics of an offender by examining the characteristics of their offences. As Ainsworth (2001; p.7) puts it,

“profiling generally refers to the process of using all the available information about a crime, a crime scene, and a victim in order to compose a profile of the (as yet) unknown perpetrator.”

Or, “the inferring of an offender`s characteristics from the crime scene behaviour.”

- ❖ Clearly, then, there is a close relationship between profiling and 'conventional' detective work.
- ❖ However, profiling differs from conventional detection in its attempt to use information about how an offence was committed to make suggestions about the psychological characteristics of the offender.
- ❖ Profiling cannot tell police exactly who committed an offence, but it potentially can make predictions about the characteristics an offender is likely to possess.
- ❖ This can help police target their investigation more effectively and prioritise suspects once they have been identified.

How do Police typically solve cases?

- ❖ Collection and analysis of data and information from the crime scene
- ❖ Pursue different lines of enquiry
- ❖ Case construction

BUT, the `WHODUNNIT` is a little different:

- ❖ Initial response, collection and examination of the crime scene
- ❖ Information burst, Quick generation of substantial information
- ❖ Suspect development
- ❖ Suspect targeting
- ❖ Case construction

The FBI and CSA

- ❖ Data assimilation- From police reports, crime scene photographs, pathologists reports.
- ❖ Crime classification- Organised or disorganised (For FBI/CSA profiling only).
- ❖ Scene reconstruction- Generating hypotheses from crime sequence, modus operandi.
- ❖ Profile generation- Demographic characteristics, physical characteristics, behavioural habits.

Crime signature and modus operandi

Crime signature-

A crime's signature characteristics reflect things which happen during the commissioning of a crime but are idiosyncratic to the offender.

Modus operandi-

The particular way in which a person performs a task, which is applied to crime. They are not necessarily fixed, but are changed in the light of experience.

Main questions:

- ❖ Does it work?
- ❖ Is it common sense?
- ❖ If not, why not?
- ❖ What is the evidence?
- ❖ Which type do we use: FBI, Investigative, Typological or Geographical?

The main approaches to profiling (UK: bottom up)

❖ **The geographical approach – this looks at patterns in the location and timing of offences to** make judgements about links between crimes and suggestions about where offenders live and work.

❖ **Investigative psychology – this grew out of geographical profiling and uses established** psychological theories and methods of analysis to predict offender characteristics from offending behaviour.

Despite it's prevalence in the media, it is only used in the minority of cases: Copson (1994) only used in 75 cases in that year!

American (top down) approaches

This originated from the FBI in 1979, and was known as crime scene analysis. Evidence from the crime scene is compared to patterns from previous crimes in order to predict future crimes and where.

The FBI interviewed 36 serial killers and rapists including Charles Manson.

The interviews suggested that murders and rapists can be classified into different types according to motive, level of violence, likelihood of repeat offences etc.

The interview data eventually formed VICAP (violent criminal apprehension programme) to develop psychological profiles.

Reports of murders are sent to the Investigative Support Unit and added to the database.

The unit identified two different types of murders: organised and disorganised.

Compare and contrast...

How are geographical and typological offender profiling similar and different?

- ❖ Purpose
- ❖ Assumptions
- ❖ Use of categories/types
- ❖ Types of crime applicable
- ❖ Evidence base

Evaluation

- ❖ There is considerable debate about which of these approaches is the most effective way of profiling offenders and, indeed, whether psychological profiling has anything useful to offer at all.
- ❖ There is also an ongoing debate about whether offender profiling is an art or a science and the extent to which a scientific approach to offender profiling is possible.

Geographical profiling (British bottom up approach)

- ❖ Geographical profiling has much to offer the police. It is of considerable value in helping them determine how to deploy resources, allows informed judgements to be made about which crimes are linked and can contribute significantly to the task of narrowing down a list of suspects.
- ❖ It also helps prioritize an area and predict where an offender may live.
- ❖ It is based on well-established psychological principles and conducted in a scientific manner: hypotheses are developed which can be tested against evidence and modified or rejected as the evidence dictates.

Geographical profiling can be used to:

- ❖ Identify which offences are linked (e.g. carried out by the same offender or offenders) and which are not, which helps to focus investigations.
- ❖ Predict characteristics of the offender(s) (e.g. where they are likely to live; what sort of knowledge they have of an area) to target investigative efforts and prioritise suspects.
- ❖ Understand the link between offending and location; why certain places attract more crime than others and why, even in 'high crime' neighbourhoods, some addresses are repeatedly victimized and some are left alone.
- ❖ Help police/other official bodies target crime prevention resources in the right areas and in the right way.

Main geographical profiling principles

- ❖ **Distance decay**: offenders will only travel as far as they have to (if all other factors are equal)
- ❖ **Rational choice theory/ cost benefit analysis**: when deciding where to offend, weigh up pro's and con's.
- ❖ This relates to spatial behaviour and includes the **least-effort** principle where offenders are more likely to act on the first or opportunity and the idea of a **buffer zone**. It exhibits a constant tension between the offender's desire to divert attention from his home base and the desire to travel no further than necessary to commit crimes.
- ❖ **RAT(routine activity theory)**: the focus of routine activity is the study of crime as an event, highlighting its relation to space and time and emphasizing its ecological nature and the implications thereof.

More principles...

- ❖ **Mental maps:** Spatial awareness of where is easily accessible.
- ❖ **Smallest space analysis:** A statistical method (Canter 1994). See slides further along presentation.
- ❖ **Crime linkage:** (Bennell & Canter 2002).
- ❖ **RIGEL:** Rossmo (2000). An algorithm technique to analyse the spatial locations of serial crimes.
- ❖ **Marauder versus Commuter** offender (Canter 1994).

British Approach- more principles

Interpersonal Consistency

The behaviour of the offender at the time of the crime will be comparable to what they're like in every day life

Degree of violence used in serious crimes, especially rape, may reflect how the criminal treats other women in his non-criminal life

Spatial Consistency

Marauders

- Commit their crimes close to where they live or feel secure.
- Usually disorganised criminals

Commuters

- Commit their crimes away from where they usually live
- Usually organised

Application of profiling

- ❖ David Canter, a leading investigative psychologist was approached by the police to help in an investigation into a series of rapes and murders in London in the mid 1980s.
- ❖ Using the information on the crimes supplied by the police, Canter applied psychological principles to suggest where the offender was living (in the area of the first three attacks), the type of job he did (semi-skilled labour, possibly connected to the railways), the sort of social life he had (a loner with only one or two close male friends) and his history of offending.
- ❖ Canter's profile allowed the police to review their list of suspects and prioritise John Duffy for further investigation. He was placed under observation and subsequently arrested, charged, tried and convicted. Canter's profile proved to be remarkably accurate.

Marauders and commuters.

- ❖ This distinction has arisen due to Canter & Rossmo's idea of developing 'typologies'.
- ❖ Offenders are either marauders or commuters.
- ❖ Marauders move outwards changing direction each time they commit crimes. Therefore their home range and criminal range overlap.
- ❖ Commuters travel away because they are in search of a particular victim outside their home range, thus making their criminal range differ to their home range.
- ❖ Research shows, that the marauder pattern is common with serial rapists and arsonists; however, research shows that offenders can change their typology, thus questioning the usefulness of the distinction.

The railway rapist(s)

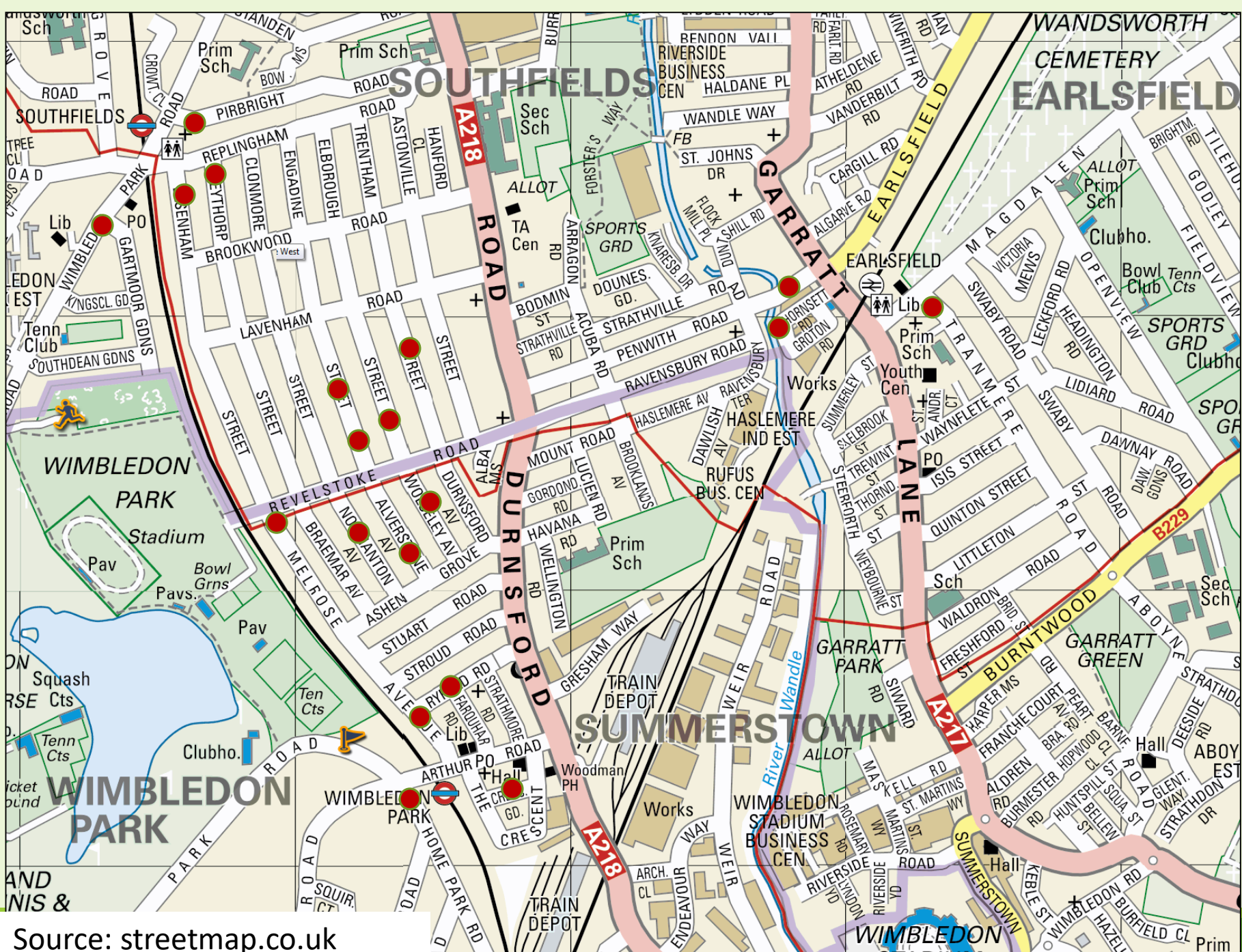
The first scientific profiling case

This is an example of the marauder/commuter distinction of Canter (1990) and also the use of mental maps of an area.

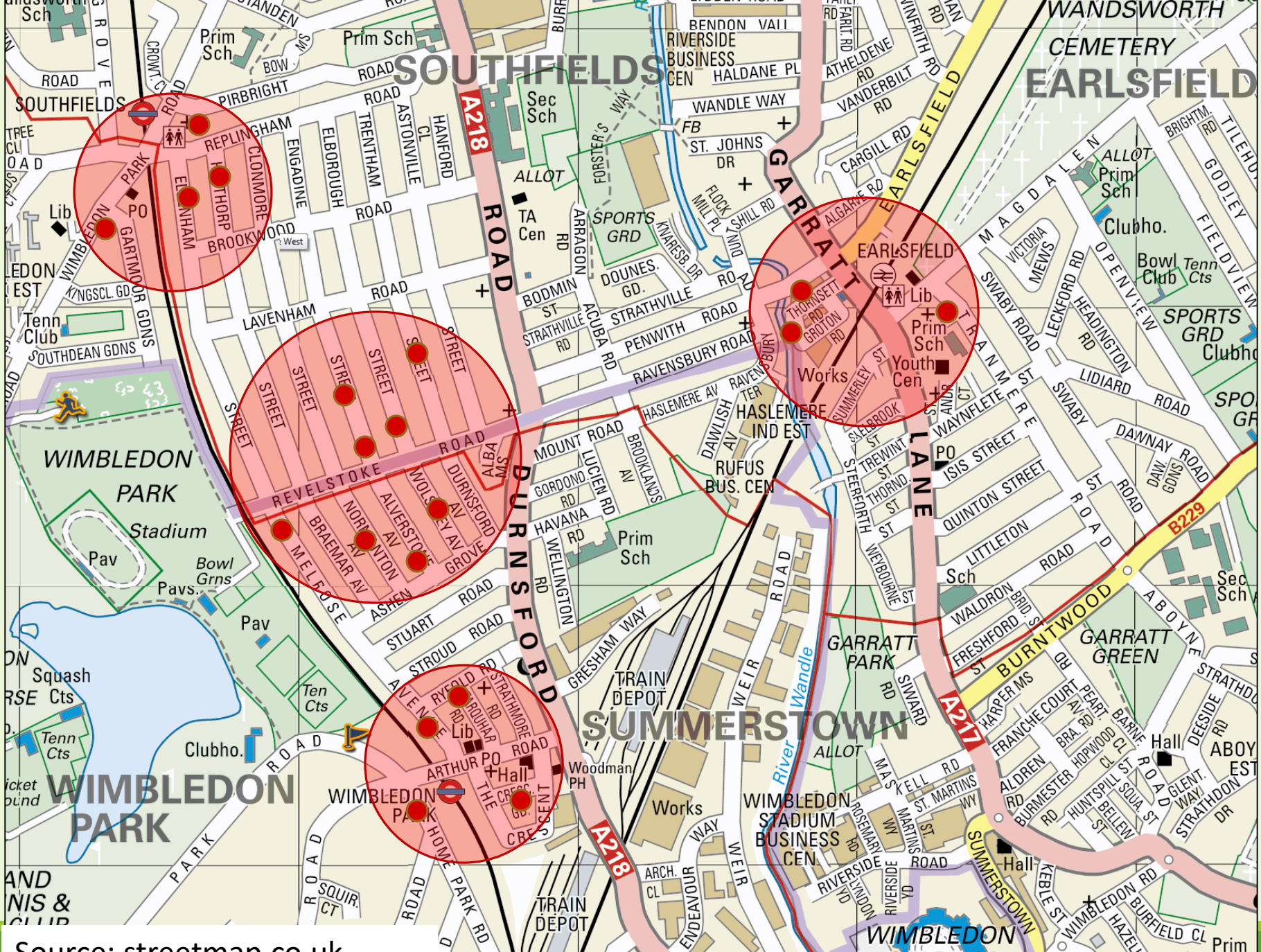
Documentary part 1

Documentary part 2

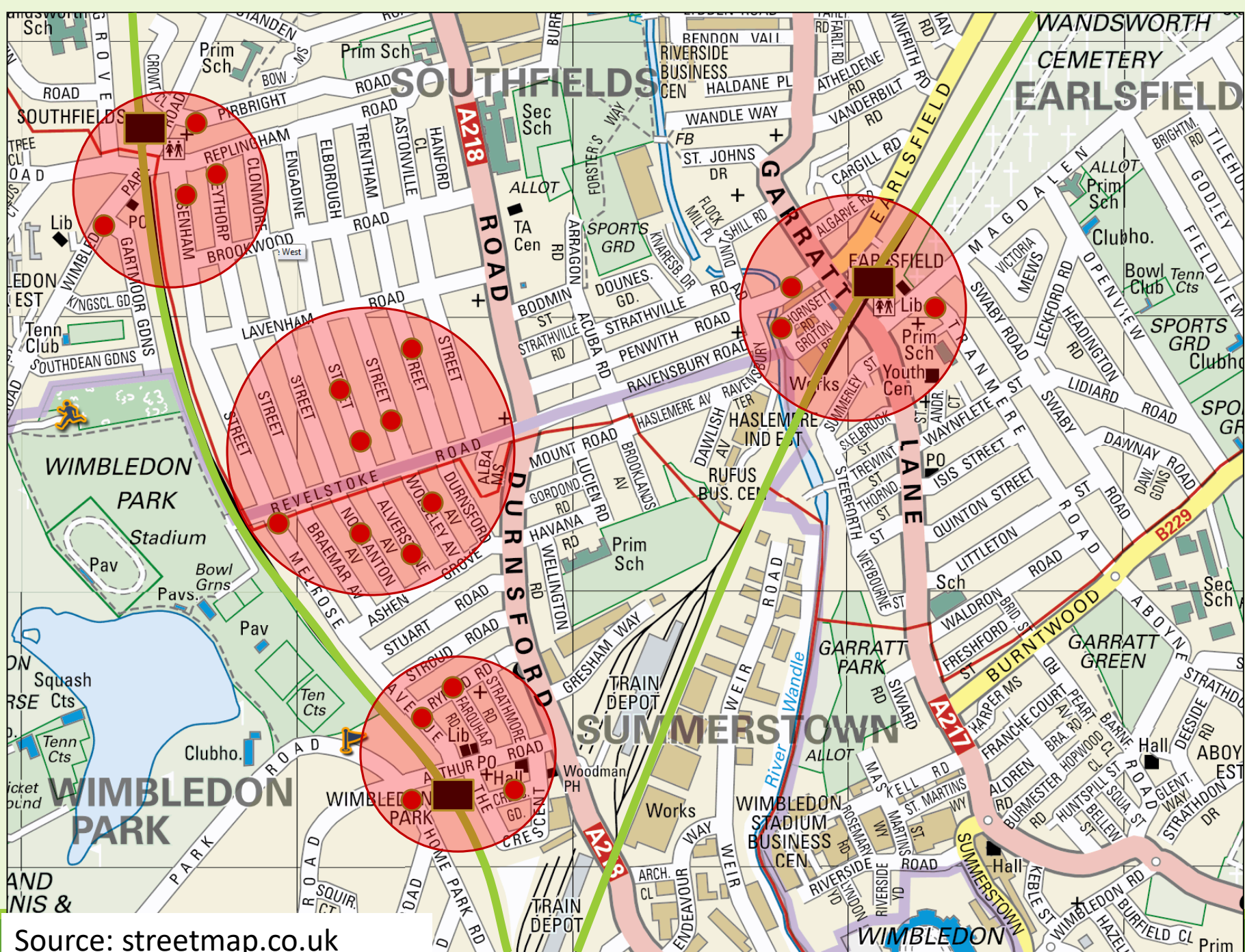
Documentary part 3



Source: streetmap.co.uk



Source: streetmap.co.uk



Source: streetmap.co.uk

Canter focuses on the marauder typology: Circle of Environmental Range (CER)

- ❖ An offender's home can be located by drawing a circle through the most geographically distant offences, the offender should live somewhere near the centre of the circle.
- ❖ This has been applied to arson, rape and murder with some success.
- ❖ However, geographical profilers need to look at the offenders motivations-these could skew the offenders journey to crime.
- ❖ Often described as the **geometry of crime, and crime pattern theory**, this incorporates the psychological principles of buffer zones, mental maps and distance decay (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981).

Circle theory of environmental range

- ❖ Based on the finding that in many cases they examined, offenders lived fairly close to where they committed their offences, Canter and Larkin (1993) put forward the circle theory of environmental range.
- ❖ Basically, this proposes that the majority of the time, if a circle is drawn that encompasses all of a series of linked crimes, the offender will be based somewhere within the circle.
- ❖ Rossmo (2000) suggests that in general, criminals offend close to their homes (or other base) and the number of offences drops off with increasing distance from the base.

David Canter:

- ❖ Canter looks for Criminal consistency: the way the crime is committed reflects everyday traits and behaviours of the offender.
- ❖ This can be both interpersonal and spatial consistency.
- ❖ Canter & heritage (1990) used interpersonal consistency to analyse the interaction between offender and rape victim which led them to propose a typology of rapists based on 3 styles.
- ❖ Spatial consistency would apply to marauders.

Evidence for CER

Godwin and Canter (1997) found that 85% of the offenders they studied lived inside the circle encompassing their offences.

Koscis and Irwin (1997) confirmed this looking at serial rapes and arson attacks in Australia.

However, Koscis and Irwin also found that the same finding did not appear to apply for burglary; roughly half of the burglars lived in the circle defined by their offences.

Snook et al., (2005) examined the offence locations of 53 serial murderers in Germany. In 63% of cases the killer lived within 6 miles of where the bodies were found.

Younger offenders travelled shorter distances and killers with higher IQ's travelled further, suggesting that experience and intelligence influence killers' attempts to disguise their crimes.

This suggests that information about the dispersal of offences may indicate some general characteristics of the offender responsible.

Routine Activity Theory:

- ❖ Originally developed in 1979 by Felson and Cohen, RAT has been extended and broadened in its approach to crime analysis.
- ❖ RAT intended to change the focus from the criminal to the crime itself and go beyond a `general` theory of crime.
- ❖ Felson saw 3 factors as necessary for explaining the crime- the target, the offender and the guardian. In its present form there are 6 key elements which help explain crime.
- ❖ In addition he summarises the theory in fifteen main points.

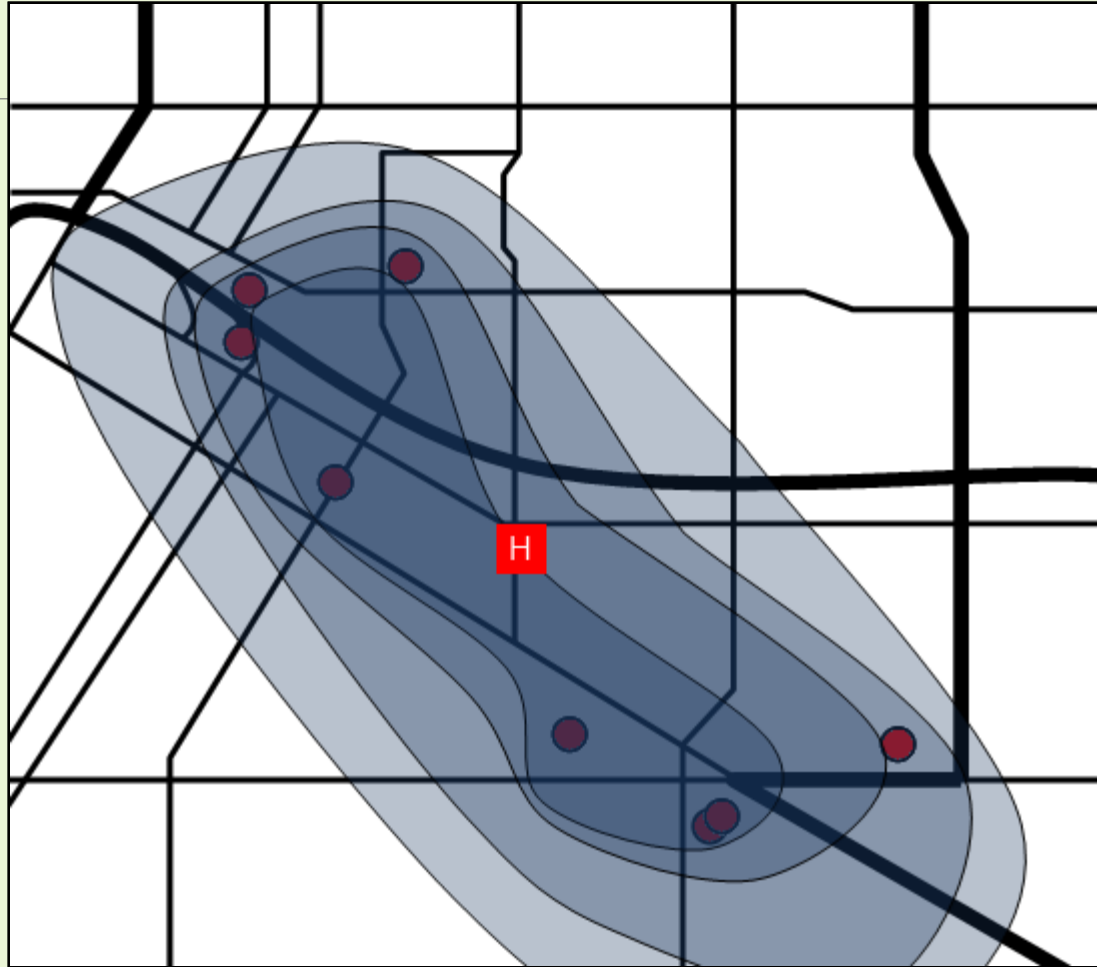
15 key points for RAT:

1. Most crime is ordinary
2. Crime feeds from ordinary routines
3. Illegal acts are subject to policy control
4. Crime begins to be understood with target, offender and guardian
5. Small slices of time and space are more important than larger units
6. Statistical relationships are strong between routine activity and crime risk
7. Strong data and software allows for greater precision
8. some people do a lot of crime, a lot of people together do a lot
9. some targets are particularly at risk
10. you do not have to think big
11. RAT approach can grow
12. RAT can be applied to cyberspace
13. RAT applies to co-offending and organised crime
14. Rat can converge with other theories
15. The principles extend beyond culture and society

An example of RAT (routine activity theory)

- ❖ Canter (2003), described a computerized system called Dragnet, which uses information about the location of offences to predict where an offender is likely to live.
- ❖ Dragnet was fed information about a number of linked rapes in Las Vegas. The map produced by Dragnet suggested probabilities that the offender responsible was based in a number of areas.
- ❖ An investigating officer was able to use his knowledge of the local area to narrow the focus of the investigation to a single apartment block, where the offender was subsequently arrested (Canter, 2003).
- ❖ Based on the work of Canter, Rossmo (2000) has his own version of DRAGNET: RIGEL, which is now used widely in serious crime analysis.

Dragnet analysis: Justin Porter's home and location of attacks



Smallest space analysis

- ❖ This has led to the identification of 3 major groups of crime based on **shared characteristics** from a crime scene:
- ❖ Instrumental opportunistic
- ❖ Instrumental cognitive
- ❖ Expressive impulsive
- ❖ Two thirds of murders can be classified into these categories with each having specific offender characteristics:
- ❖ see following chart.

Relationship between crime scene & offender characteristics

Crime theme	Crime scene chara`s	Offender chara`s
Instrumental opportunistic	Face hidden, sexual, partial undressing, manual attack, neck attacked, female, old, multiple wounds to one area, victim premises	Previous theft offences, burglary, vehicle, police notice, unemployed, familiarity of area, known to victim
Instrumental cognitive	Body transported, hidden, carefully placed, blunt instrument, face up	Armed service, prison sentence
Expressive compulsive	Slash/cut, single wound, weapon taken to and removed, limbs attacked, torso attacked, multiple wounds	Previous violent offences, public disorder, property damage, sexual offences, traffic offences, drug offences, married, females

Mental Maps

- ❖ People develop internal representations of the world they live in, especially the areas they make frequent use of.
- ❖ Mental maps do not accurately represent reality; they represent the perspective and experience of the individual. So, for example, a car driver might have a rather different mental map of Birmingham than a bus user or a pedestrian.
- ❖ Similarly, a Londoner's mental map of their city centre may be very different depending on whether they walk or use the underground.
- ❖ Because a criminal's offences are likely to be influenced by their mental map of an area, the distribution of their offences can be used to make inferences about them.
- ❖ Canter used the locations of John Duffy's attacks to predict that he would be someone with more knowledge of the railway network than a casual rail user. It turned out that Duffy was employed as a carpenter by British Rail.

Timing of offences

Ainsworth (2001) stresses that geographical information about offending becomes much more useful when it is combined with temporal information. For example, a spate of burglaries that occur between 3pm and 4pm might be carried out by teenaged offenders, since this is the time when the typical British school day finishes, and teenagers will be travelling home.

Similarly, there tend to be clusters of crime centred around universities or areas with high levels of student residence. This is what routine activity theory might predict, as university students present an opportunity for offenders.

However, the prevailing type of crime varies over the course of the year. Street robberies increase in September and October, when large numbers of new students arrive. Burglaries, however, peak at Christmas, Easter and over the summer, as this is when large numbers of student-occupied properties are left empty.

Geographical profiling: general issues

It is of considerable value in helping determine how to deploy resources, allows informed judgements to be made about which crimes are linked and can contribute significantly to the task of narrowing down a list of suspects.

It is also based on well-established psychological principles and conducted in a scientific manner: hypotheses are developed which can be tested against evidence and modified or rejected as the evidence dictates.

However, In order to work, it requires accurate data on the offences that have been committed in an area.

Additional problems can arise from inconsistencies in how the locations of crimes may be recorded by the police.

There are also problems that arise from the vast amount of data that the police might have available – it can be difficult to know what to leave out when attempting to construct a crime map.

Evaluating geographical profiling

- ❖ Not enough research, but between 1991 & 2001 Rossmo's system 'Rigel' was used to investigate 1,426 crimes.
- ❖ On average the profiler correctly identified the offenders residence within the central 5% of the offence area.
- ❖ It was most effective for arson, varying for other crimes.
- ❖ In particular, a disturbing scenario arose in relation to the influential profiler Paul Britton and the murder of Rachel Nickell.

Summary of geographical/investigative profiling

- ❖ Canter's approach is best viewed in terms of its empirical basis of consistent analysis of systematic data sets and characteristics of known offenders.
- ❖ Statistical profiling has left behind many of the flaws of FBI style profiling and can be applied to not just serial killers and severe crimes, but other crimes such as arson and fraud.
- ❖ Whilst Canter's work began as mainly statistical, new theoretical viewpoints have been embraced and it may well be a positive (cautionary) step forward.

Some last points regarding geographical and investigative profiling...

- ❖ Geographical (spatial) or environmental theories of offender profiling are varied and there are multiple versions available based on similar psychological principles such as RAT and rational choice. The complexities of these approaches are too detailed to be dealt with in this lecture.
- ❖ Investigative profiling does attempt to go beyond the geographical boundaries and uses established psychological theories and methods of analysis to predict offender characteristics from offending behaviour. Please refer to the chapter entitled 'Beyond profiling'.
- ❖ Some theorists propose an additional type of profiling referred to as clinical profiling, which uses insights from psychiatry and clinical psychology to aid investigation where an offender is thought to be suffering from a mental illness or psychological abnormality.

Back to typological offender profiling (US top down approach)

- ❖ Both typological and geographic offender profiling represent attempts to work out the characteristics of an offender/s from the characteristics of their offences.
- ❖ However, they are quite different in how they are applied to crimes and the types of information they provide about offenders.
- ❖ Unlike geographic profiling, which looks at the distribution of series of crimes, typological profiling focuses primarily on behavioural evidence obtained at the scene/s of specific crime/s. Evidence about how the offender committed the crimes is used to assign them to a particular category of offender.

Differences continued...

- ❖ Different categories of offender are believed to have different psychological characteristics. Category information is combined with other insights to build up a picture of the sort of person who committed the crime/s.
- ❖ Unlike geographical profiling, which is applied to all sorts of crime, typological profiling tends only to be used in cases of stranger murder and rape where several offences are connected.
- ❖ Typological profiling is based on law expertise, whilst geographical profiling is focused on psychological expertise.
- ❖ Typological profiling is based on qualitative information whilst geographical profiling is based on quantitative information.

Four processes to the FBI approach

Data assimilation: Investigators gather together information from multiple sources e.g. crime scene photos, police reports, pathologists' reports.

Crime scene classification: Profilers decide whether the crime scene represents an organised or disorganised offender.

Crime reconstruction: Hypotheses are generated about what happened during the crime e.g. Victim behaviour, crime sequence

Profile generation: Profilers construct a 'sketch' of the offender including demographic and physical characteristics, behavioural habits

Type of offender: organised or disorganised?

- ❖ The determination that a crime scene is organised or disorganised is based on evidence of planning on the offender's part.
- ❖ A disorganised crime scene suggests unplanned, chaotic behaviour, whereas an organised one suggests control and forethought.
- ❖ The profile eventually constructed will often go beyond the typical characteristics of organised/disorganised offenders and include information extrapolated from the crime scene about the offender's physical characteristics, employment/skill set, sexual history, age and ethnic group (which are usually similar to the victim's).

Crime scene: American Approach (Hazelwood, 1987)

ORGANISED

- Weapon brought to scene, Evidence removed, Control of victim
- Victim is often a stranger
- Unknown to victim, Socially & sexually competent, Normal to high intelligence, Angry/depressed
- Follows media coverage of the attack
- Usually living with a partner

DISORGANISED

- Weapon improvised, Evidence left at scene, Little control of victim, Possibly known to victim
- Little planning
- Minimum use of constraint
- Socially & sexually inept, Low intelligence, Severely mentally ill
- Lives alone, possibly abused in childhood
- Confused at time of attack

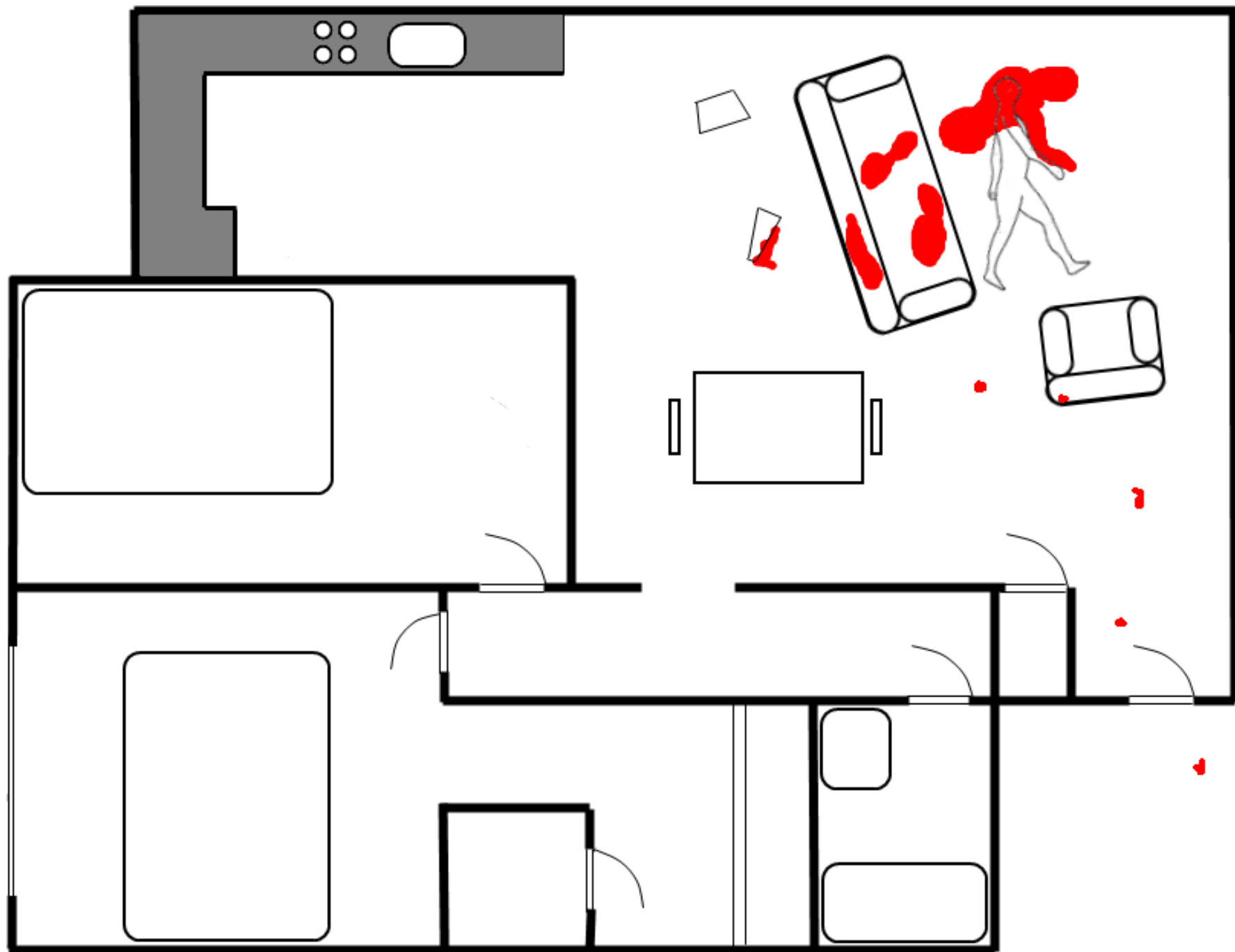
Profile these crime scenes

Use the evidence to construct a profile

- ❖ Organised or disorganised
- ❖ Behavioural evidence
- ❖ Known characteristics of serial offenders

Your profile should...

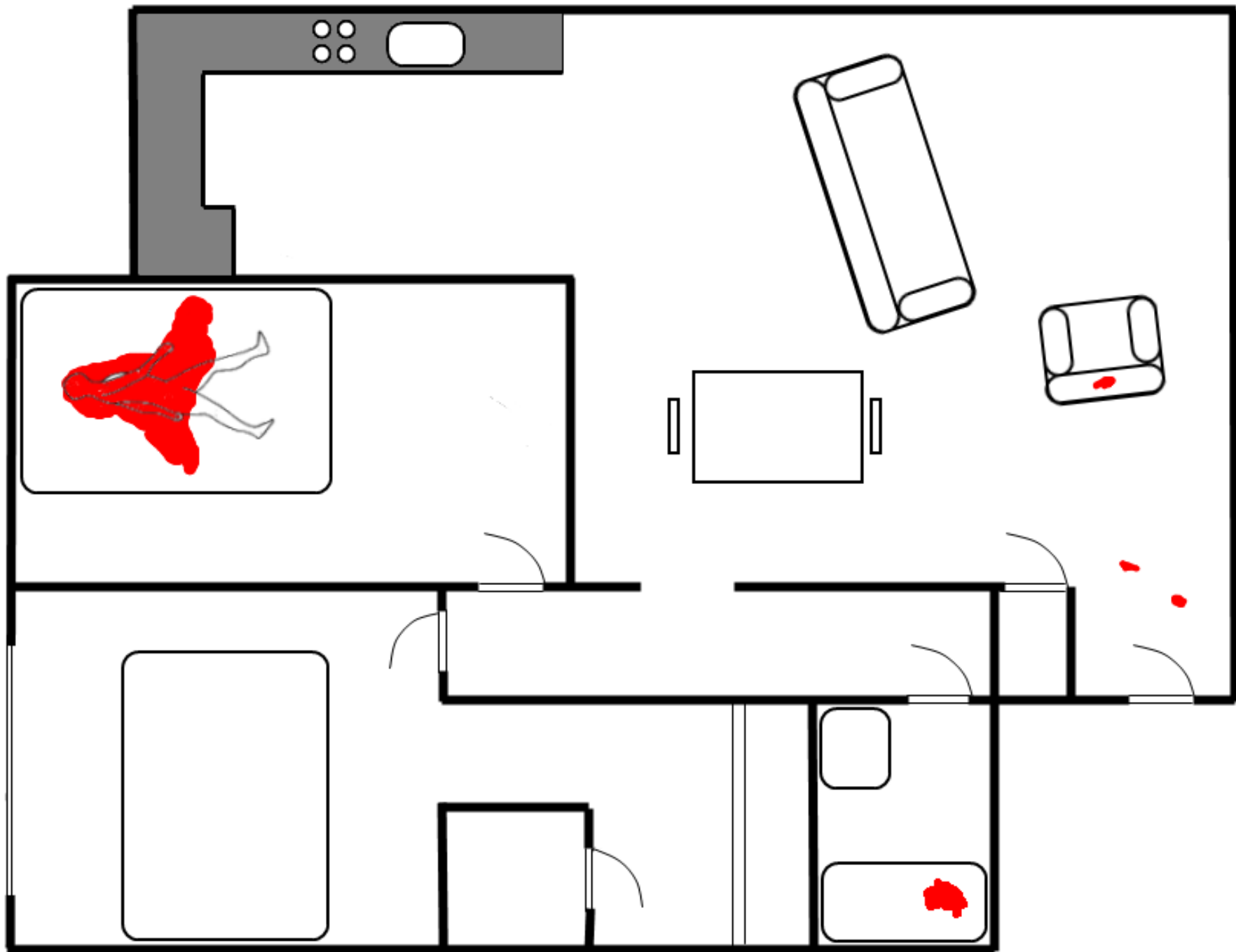
- ❖ Tell the story of the crime
- ❖ Describe the person responsible



- ❖ The victim was a Caucasian female aged 28 years. She was found partially clothed on the floor of the living area. The cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head. There was one large, deep impact area on the rear of the skull and multiple impacts to the forehead, face and shoulders.
- ❖ There were large patches of blood on the sofa and on the floor beneath the victim and extensive blood spatter on the walls and ceiling in the vicinity of the victim. There were smaller patches and smears of blood between the sofa and the front door, on the armchair and outside the front door.
- ❖ A lampshade and base were found on the floor of the living area. The contents of the flat did not appear to have been disturbed. The patio doors at the rear were open and the lock showed signs of having been forced. The front door was pushed to but not fully shut or locked.



- ❖ The victim was an Afro-caribbean woman aged 25 years. She was found fully clothed lying half on half off the bed in the larger of the two bedrooms. The cause of death was exsanguination. There were multiple stab wounds on the victim's neck, chest, forearms, hands and back. Those in the chest and neck were the deepest and most obviously fatal.
- ❖ There were large patches of blood in the living area, the kitchen and the bedroom. In the bedroom there were two large bloodstains on the bed and another on the floor beneath the victim. There were smaller patches and smears of blood in the corridor and the bedroom doorway and traces in the bathroom sink.
- ❖ Most areas of the flat appeared undisturbed although the living area was in some disarray. Cutlery was found on the floor and two half eaten plates of food on the table. All doors and windows were locked.



- ❖ The victim was a Caucasian woman aged 45 years. She was found naked on the bed in the smaller bedroom. Her wrists and ankles had been bound with industrial duct tape. The cause of death was exsanguination. There were forty five stab wounds on the victim's chest, abdomen and thighs.
- ❖ None of these were deep enough to be immediately fatal. Her throat had been deeply cut but it is not clear whether this occurred after her death. There was a large patch of blood beneath the victim, enough to have soaked right through the bedding and mattress. Small traces of blood were found near the front door, on the armchair in the living area. Dilute blood was found in the shower/bath.
- ❖ The contents of the flat appeared undisturbed, although some bedroom drawers were open. A pendant the victim was known to be wearing was not found.

Your brief...

- ❖ The body of a 21-year-old shop worker has been found hidden under some fallen leaves and bushes just off a walkway that many people use as a short-cut from the city centre to an adjacent housing estate by a young couple walking their dog early on a Saturday morning.
- ❖ The victim was last seen alive leaving her job at a shop in the city centre at 6.50pm when she said that she was going straight home. Work colleagues confirm that she often took the short-cut home. The housing estate where the victim lives houses approximately 2,000 people, mainly working class, laborers, or claiming Government Benefits. There is a high prevalence of unemployment in this area.
- ❖ There have been 3 other reported attempted attacks on women within quarter-of-a-mile of the offence in the last 2 months. All the other victims managed to escape unharmed and identified a similar looking suspect.

Pathology Department

- ❖ The pathologist report states that the young lady was killed between 6pm and 8.30pm the previous Friday. The cause of death has been identified as strangulation.
- ❖ As a result of the pattern of the bruises around the neck it seems to have been a large chain of some form. Also it is noted that there are defense wounds where the victim had attempted to struggle free.
- ❖ Further to this there is a slight bruising to the top of her thighs suggesting an attempted sexual assault; however, no bodily fluids were found and a tampon was still in place.

CID Department Memo

Officers searching the scene of the crime have found several items of interest:

- A piece of chain approximately 1.5m long thrown in bushes around 300m away from the crime scene. It appears that this chain was taken from a building site store only 25m from the crime scene.
- An open, but unused condom and wrapper were found within 5m of the crime scene.
- A receipt for 20 Cigarettes and a bottle of cider from a local 24-hour store was also found in very close proximity to the crime scene.

CID Department Memo

RE: Witness reports from Friday afternoon

Two local residents have reported that they saw a man aged between 25 and 40 looking confused and disorientated walking from the short-cut to the housing estate around 6.45pm on the Friday. The man was carrying a carrier bag and walked towards a tower block within the estate.

Compile a profile-

Include:

- ☐ Motive- organised or disorganised
- ☐ Age and Race
- ☐ Employed/unemployed
- ☐ Relationships with women
- ☐ Place of residence
- ☐ Background/personality variables

The perpetrator:

Mr. Jackson, a manual labourer lives on the local housing estate alone after a string of failed relationships with several local women. Witness statements gathered from these previous partners suggest that he verbally abused and on some occasions physically abused them. Many also mentioned the accused had problems in getting and maintaining an erection on several occasions.

An ex-foster child, Mr. Jackson, had difficulty in socialising and would often spend the evenings in his flat alone, especially during the previous 18 months whilst he was single. He grew angry towards his ex-partners, which was consequently transferred to all women.

Following further questioning he confessed to the other 3 attempted attacks.

It emerged that he had drank the bottle of cider and had seen the victim walking down the walkway in the opposite direction.

He picked up the chain from the building site and followed the victim. When behind her he pushed her onto the grass verge where he attempted to rape her but he couldn't maintain an erection.

The victim ridiculed him as a result which caused him to strangle her.

Underpinning Psychological assumptions and evidence

Cross situational consistency

Offenders will be consistent across **all of their behaviours**. Little research conducted to support this in crime, but exists in personality research.

Offender consistency hypothesis

Offenders will be consistent across all of their crimes **of the same nature**. Evidence supports the idea that behaviour generated by the individual is more consistent than behaviour generated by the environment. Studies looking at arson, burglary, robbery, murder & stranger sex are promising.

Homology assumption

Offenders displaying particular crime scene behaviours should have **similar characteristics**. Studies of rapists have yet to lend any support to this idea.

Strengths of offender profiling

As the first systematic approach to offender profiling, the FBI's approach has been enormously influential. It has been adopted by law enforcement agencies all over the world, many of whom, like the NCID Offender Profiling Unit in the Netherlands, have adapted and enhanced it.

Ainsworth (2001) suggests that offender typologies are potentially very useful in allowing offences to be linked and facilitating predictions about the timeframe of the next attack and how the series of offences is likely to develop.

FBI-inspired attempts to obtain and organise data about different types of offender have been important in challenging the stereotypes that investigators may hold about offenders and which may mislead investigations.

E.g. Clarke and Morley (1988) interviewed 41 convicted rapists responsible for over 800 offences and found that, contrary to the stereotype of an inadequate loner, they were typically very average men, living in normal family circumstances, often intelligent and in skilled employment.

Weaknesses

Critics have centred on how objective the process actually is; the scientific status of the evidence and the usefulness of the profiles it generates.

A typological approach to profiling assumes that offenders are one thing or the other and that this is stable over time. Wilson et al., (1997) suggest that neither assumption is correct: most offenders show both organised and disorganised features in their crimes and that they may shift from one to the other between crimes. This obviously limits the usefulness of such profiles.

Canter (2000) points out that the crime scene evidence on which profiles are based is often incomplete and ambiguous, which means judgements based on the evidence are necessarily speculative.

Additionally, it is up to the profiler to decide which aspects of the crime scene evidence are important in determining the profile. Consequently, different profilers may reach different conclusions from the same evidence.

There are a number of problems with the data on which the FBI's typologies were originally based. The sample of 36 offenders is very small and it is not obvious that the methods and motives of the very rare types of offender interviewed generalise to other offenders.

The data were obtained by interviewing offenders who may well have a distorted recall of their own crimes and who are known for being manipulative, raising questions about the data's validity.

Ainsworth (2001) points out that there have been few serious attempts to establish the validity of the FBI's offender types using scientifically verifiable methods.

Howitt (2009) calls the evidence base 'glaringly minimal'. The evidence that has been presented in favour of the FBI system has largely been narrative, in popular accounts of offender profiling. The obvious problem is that profilers are far more likely to report their successes than their failures, which may give a distorted view of how often profiles contribute to the successful apprehension of offenders.

How useful is offender profiling?

There remain serious questions about how useful offender profiles actually are. Police may give favourable opinions of profiles even when they are completely wrong

An analysis of offender profiles by Snook et al (2007) found that they were based on scientific argument and evidence only a minority of the time, leading to the suggestion that most profiles contain little more than common sense.

A significant problem is that it is not clear how the usefulness of a profile could objectively be measured. If a profile contains 20 statements, only 10 of which are accurate, is it a success or a failure?

A related issue is the specificity of the information in the profile. Like a newspaper horoscope, a profile could be sufficiently vague to be 'right' no matter what the offender turns out to be like, but clearly a profile that vague would contribute little to solving a case.

Ultimately, whilst most agree that profiling has the potential to assist police investigations there is little agreement about precisely how far it may be able to help.

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

Whilst walking her two-year-old son on Wimbledon Common, Rachel Nickell was stabbed 49 times (in front of her son). Profiler Paul Britton prepared a psychological profile for the police. Colin Stagg fitted the profile. However, there was **No Evidence**.

Working with Britton, a female officer went undercover and got to know Stagg in the hope of extracting evidence from him. Stagg was arrested. However, the trial showed many inconsistencies. For example, Stagg knew the location of the crime but said (incorrectly) that Rachel Nickell had been raped. These inconsistencies had been ignored by the police who were sure that the profiling had led them to the offender. The female police officer later resigned from her job.

Turvey (1999) concludes that this is an example of profiling being taken too far.

Some successes (???) of profiling...

Copson and Holloway (1997) carried out a survey with detectives from 184 cases where offender profiling had been used. It was found that the police believed that profiling had led to the identification of the offender in 2.7 per cent of cases, and helped to solve 16 per cent of cases.

Pinizzotto and Finkel (1990) asked groups of detectives, students, profilers and clinical psychologists to look at two closed police cases and to draw up profiles. One case was a sex case, and the other was a homicide. Although the profilers produced more detailed profiles and were more accurate in the sex case, the detectives were more accurate in the homicide.

Finally... a summary of FBI profiling

- ❖ Offender profiling aims to take information from a crime scene to assess the characteristics of an offender.
- ❖ It ranges from intuition to careful statistical analysis.
- ❖ All profiling assumes a form of homology.
- ❖ Police regard it favourably and regard it as useful despite contradictory findings! Statistical profiling has more evidence to support it than typological profiling.
- ❖ It is popular with the media, leading to an emphasis on profiling based approaches to crime detection.