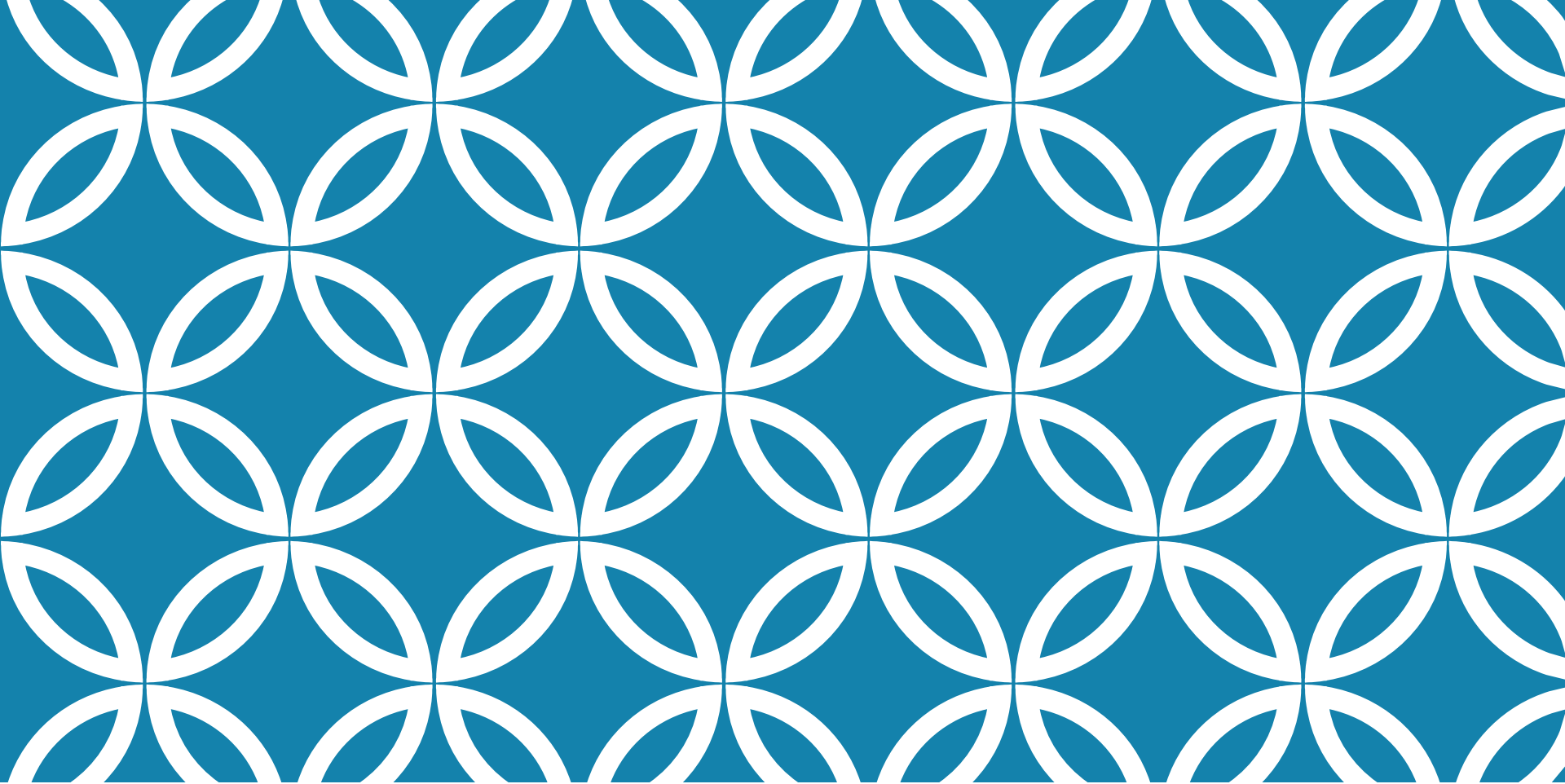




OFFENDER PROFILING

Forensic psychology and
the criminal mind

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 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 `Offender Profile` 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.

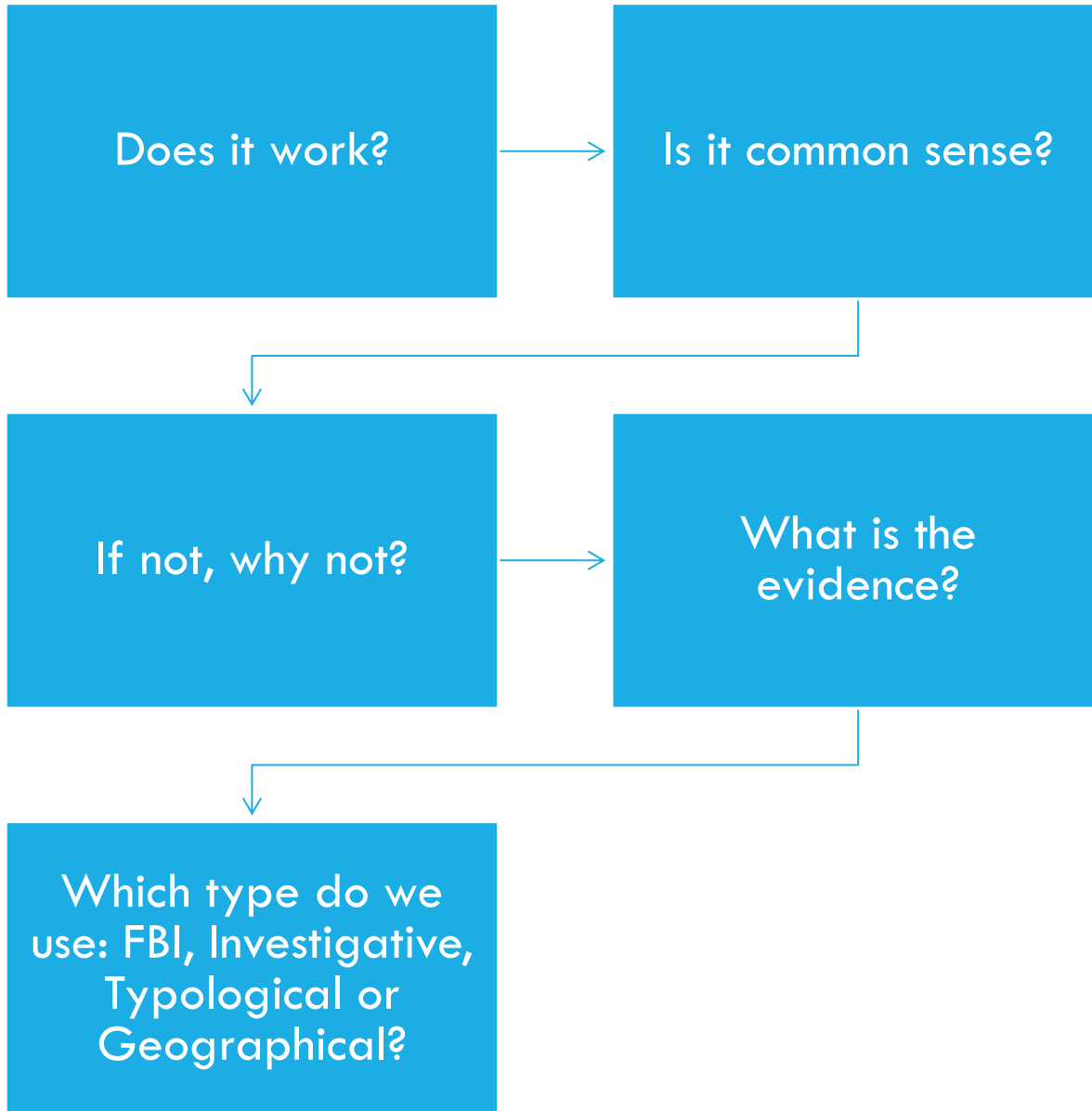
CRIME SIGNATURE AND MODUS OPERANDI

Crime signature-

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

Modus operandi-

The 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.



**OFFENDER
PROFILING –**

**MAIN
QUESTIONS:**

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.

AMERICAN (TOP DOWN) APPROACHES

This originated from the FBI in 1979 - crime scene analysis. Evidence from the crime scene is compared to patterns from previous crimes 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) and which are not, which helps to focus investigations.

Predict characteristics of the offender(s) to target investigative efforts and prioritise suspects.

Understand the link between offending and location; why certain places attract more crime than others and why, some addresses are repeatedly victimised and some are left alone.

Help police/other official bodies target crime prevention resources in the right areas and in the right way.

SOME OF THE MAIN GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILING PRINCIPLES

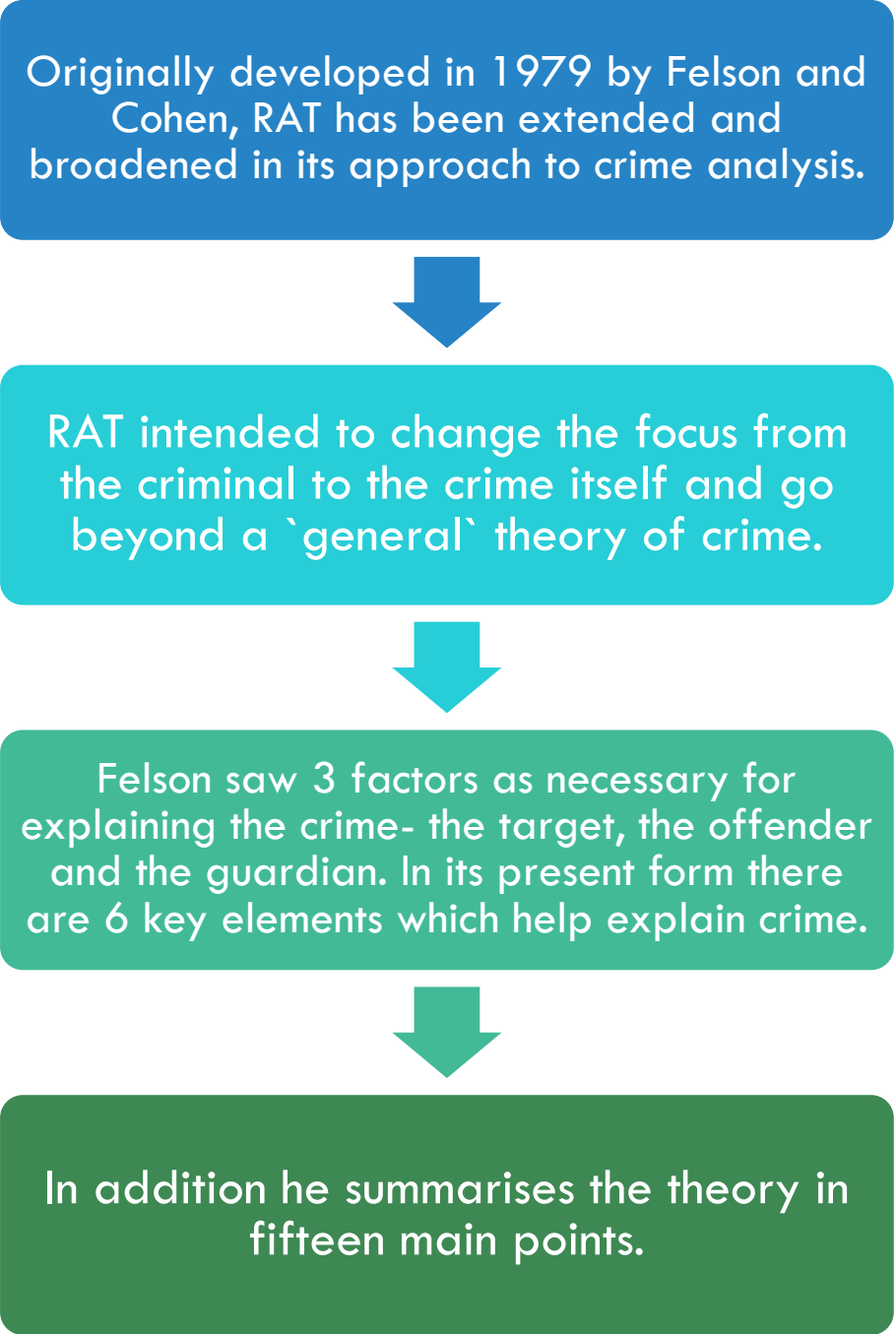
Distance decay: offenders will only travel as far as they have to (if all other factors are equal)

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 opportunity and the idea of a **buffer zone**. It exhibits a constant tension between the offender's desire to divert attention from their 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.

Originally developed in 1979 by Felson and Cohen, RAT has been extended and broadened in its approach to crime analysis.



```
graph TD; A[Originally developed in 1979 by Felson and Cohen, RAT has been extended and broadened in its approach to crime analysis.] --> B[RAT intended to change the focus from the criminal to the crime itself and go beyond a 'general' theory of crime.]; B --> C[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.]; C --> D[In addition he summarises the theory in fifteen main points.];
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In addition he summarises the theory in fifteen main points.

ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY:

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

RAT - LOOKS AT HOW EVERYDAY ROUTINES AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CRIME.

Motivated Offender: Someone who has the inclination or desire to commit a crime.

Suitable Target: A person, object, or property that is appealing and accessible to the offender (such as cash, portable electronics, or an empty house).

Absence of a Capable Guardian: The lack of people or security measures (such as police, security guards, neighbours, alarm systems, or CCTV) able to prevent the act.

Later expansions of the theory introduced the **crime triangle**, which adds additional layers to how we look at crime prevention:

For the Target: Handlers who can influence or control potential offenders (e.g., parents or peers).

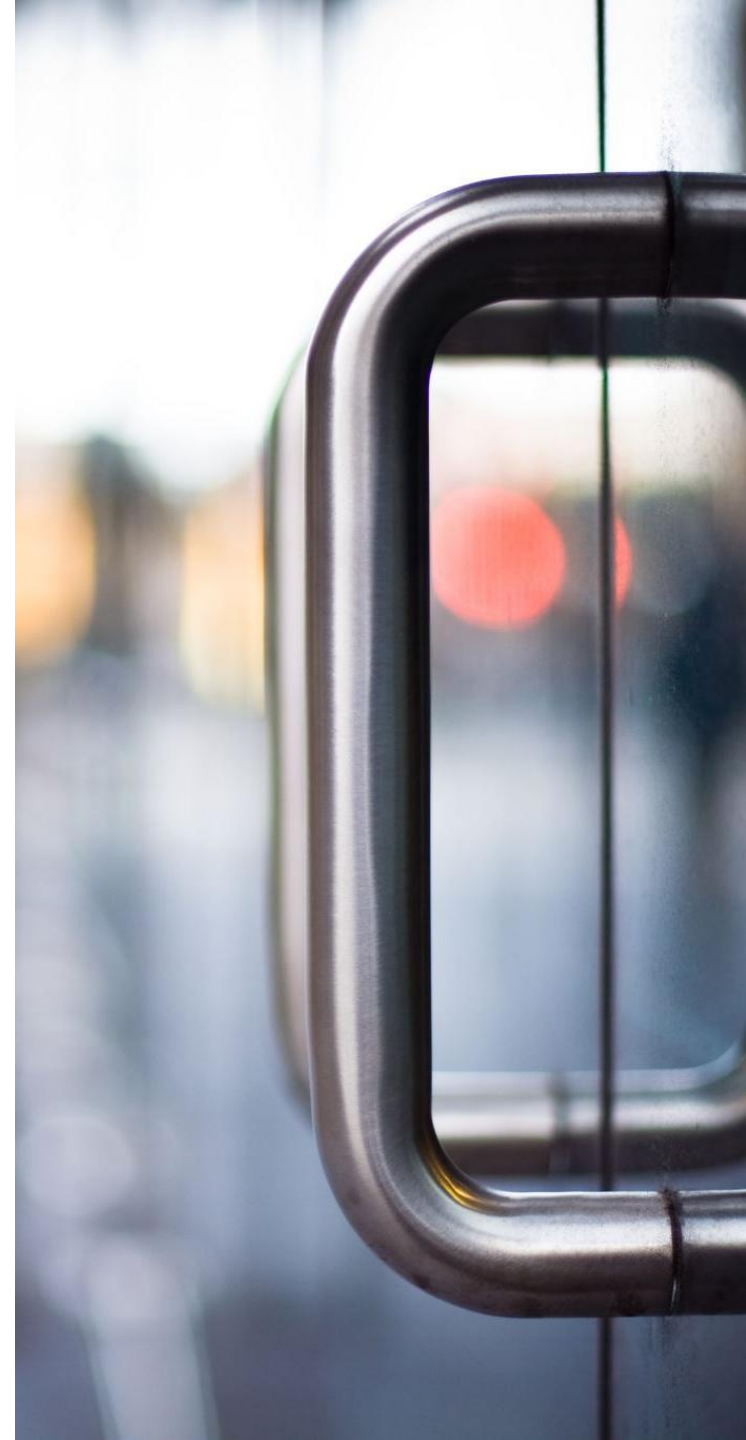
For the Location: Place managers who are responsible for monitoring and maintaining safety in a specific area.

RAT — REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

Situational Crime Prevention: Police and urban planners use the theory to design safer spaces, increase lighting, install surveillance cameras, or deploy patrols to disrupt the convergence of the three elements.

Hot Spot Analysis: By mapping out where daily routines intersect (such as busy transit hubs, shopping centres, or unsupervised parking lots), authorities can predict and reduce high-risk crime zones.

Everyday Behaviour Changes: Leaving homes empty during work hours or carrying high-value items in public increases vulnerability to opportunistic theft.



COMPARING RAT AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY (RCT)

Rational choice theory and routine activity theory are closely related opportunity frameworks in criminology, but they focus on different aspects of a criminal event.

While rational choice theory explains **how an offender decides** by weighing costs and benefits, routine activity theory explains **how environmental and lifestyle patterns create the opportunity** for that crime to happen in time and space.

Differences:

Level of Analysis: RAT looks at aggregate crime rates and broad social shifts. RCT looks inside the individual's mind at the specific crime-event choices.

Assumption About Motivation: RAT treats the motivation to commit a crime as a given, focusing on whether the physical environment permits. RCT evaluates how incentives, perceived rewards, and the fear of apprehension shape or deter that motivation.

Scope of Decision-Making: RCT incorporates **bounded rationality**, acknowledging that offenders might act on imperfect information, strong emotions, or altered states, whereas RAT remains strictly structural and environmental.

COMPARISON CONTINUED

Feature	Routine Activity Theory	Rational Choice Theory
Primary Focus	Macro-level opportunity structures and spatial/temporal convergence	Micro-level decision-making and cognitive processes of the offender
Key Question	What daily patterns bring a target, guardian, and offender together?	How does the offender calculate risks, costs, and rewards?
View of Offender	Assumes motivated offenders are a constant presence in society	Views the offender as an active, purposive decision-maker
Main Architects	Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979)	Derek Cornish and Ronald Clarke (1986/1987)

MORE PRINCIPLES OF OP...

- ❖ **Mental maps:** Spatial awareness of where is easily accessible (see next slide).

- ❖ **Crime linkage:** (Bennell & Canter 2002). The purpose of crime linkage is to:
 - **Connecting unsolved cases** that may be related.
 - **Identifying serial offenders.**
 - **Prioritizing suspects** based on behavioural consistency.
 - **Understanding offender behaviour patterns** (e.g., escalation, comfort zones).
 - **Supporting prosecution** by demonstrating behavioural similarity in court.

- ❖ **Marauder versus Commuter** offender (Canter, 1994). On later slides.

COMMON WAYS MENTAL MAPS ARE PUT TO CRIMINAL USE



Scouting & familiarity.

Repeated observation (walking/driving through an area) lets someone learn where entrances, blind spots, opening times, and patterns of movement are.



Route planning.

Knowing likely paths, bottlenecks, and quickest exits helps choose how to move through an area. (High-level concept — not instructions.)



Timing and routines.

Mental maps include temporally predictable patterns (when a shop is quiet, when guards change shifts). Predictability is exploitable.



Target selection.

Identifying opportunities: poorly lit zones, low-visibility entry points, or places with few witnesses.



Social mapping.

Understanding who hangs where and relationships between people (e.g., who watches a particular corner) — useful for social engineering or surveillance.



Concealment and caching. Remembering spots to hide items temporarily or to loiter without attracting attention.



Network mental maps.

For organised groups, maps extend to fences, contacts, and escape routes across neighbourhoods or cities.

CRIME LINKAGE: WHAT IT INVOLVES

1. Modus Operandi (MO):

The method or technique used to commit the crime.

Example: how the offender gains entry, what tools are used, or how they approach a victim.

The MO can change as the offender learns or adapts.

However, it is often also their MO: Behavioural consistency

2. Signature or Behavioural Theme:

Behaviours that fulfil a psychological or emotional need rather than practical necessity.

Example: specific posing of victims, unique verbal expressions, or symbolic actions.

These tend to be more consistent across crimes by the same person. (Behavioural distinctiveness).

3. Forensic and Physical Evidence:

DNA, fingerprints, shoe prints, tool marks, digital traces, etc.

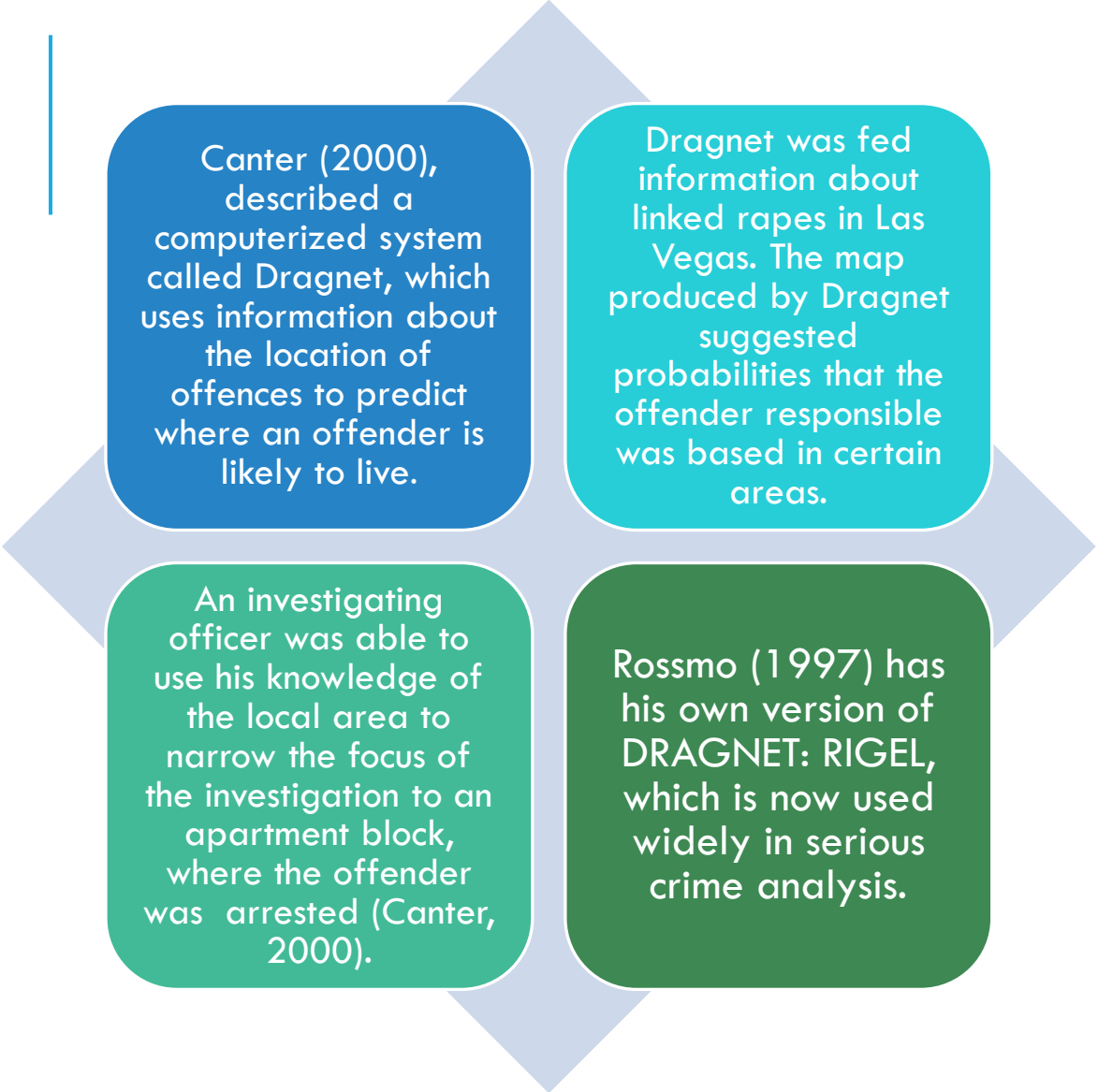
These provide objective connections between incidents.

BEHAVIOURAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND BEHAVIOURAL CONSISTENCY

Crime linkage (also known as comparative case analysis) is an investigative technique used by law enforcement to determine whether multiple distinct crimes were committed by the same offender based on their behavioural patterns.

Unlike traditional forensic identification, which relies on physical traces like DNA or fingerprints, crime linkage focuses primarily on **how the offender acts** at the crime scene. It is especially critical when tracking down serial offenders across different geographic regions.

Stages	Involves
1. Data Collection & Coding	Analysts gather comprehensive case files, (the "index offense") and code them.
2. Analytical Comparison	Compares MO and crime signature.
3. Database Searching	ViCLAS and VICAP.
4. Environmental/Situational Filtering	Analysts account for situational variations, temporal and geographical changes.



Canter (2000), described a computerized system called Dragnet, which uses information about the location of offences to predict where an offender is likely to live.

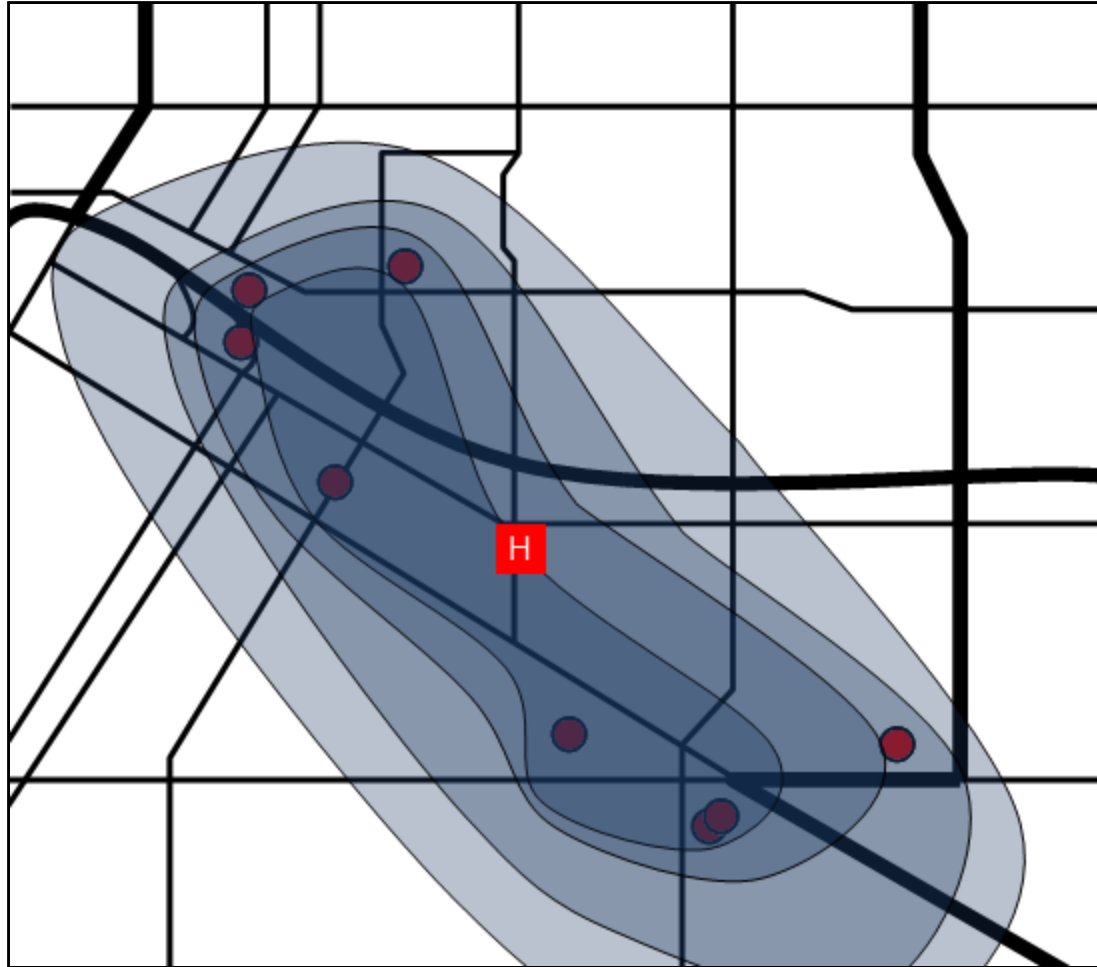
Dragnet was fed information about linked rapes in Las Vegas. The map produced by Dragnet suggested probabilities that the offender responsible was based in certain areas.

An investigating officer was able to use his knowledge of the local area to narrow the focus of the investigation to an apartment block, where the offender was arrested (Canter, 2000).

Rossmo (1997) has his own version of DRAGNET: RIGEL, which is now used widely in serious crime analysis.

AN EXAMPLE OF RAT (ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY)

DRAGNET ANALYSIS: JUSTIN PORTER'S HOME AND LOCATION OF ATTACKS



RIGEL VS DRAGNET (TWO RAT SYSTEMS)

Feature / Purpose	Rigel	Dragnet
Type of tool	Analytical profiling system	Investigative prioritisation and suspect-ranking system
Main use	Helps analysts understand patterns in serious sexual offences (e.g. rape series)	Helps detectives identify likely suspects from large datasets of potential offenders
Developer / Origin	Originally developed by Kim Rossmo former police officer and Criminologist	Developed by the Home Office in collaboration with data scientists and David Canter
Focus area	Behavioural and geographic profiling — looks at where and how offences occur	Statistical and data-driven — ranks suspects based on factors such as proximity, MO, and past behaviour
Data used	Crime scene characteristics, offender behaviour, victim details, and geographic locations	Police databases (e.g. previous offenders, known associates, vehicle movements, etc.)
Output	Psychological and geographical insights — helps profile an unknown offender or link crimes	A ranked list of suspects for detectives to investigate
Key terms	Buffer zone, Distance Decay	Commuters and Marauders, Circle Theory

BUFFER ZONES AND DISTANCE DECAY

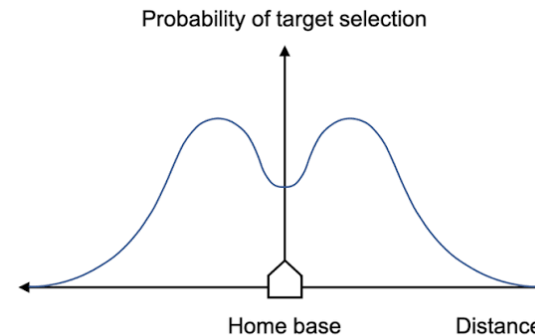
In geographic profiling, **distance decay** and **buffer zones** are the two defining mathematical features that describe an offender's journey-to-crime (JTC) distribution.

Distance decay is the spatial principle that as the distance from an offender's home base increases, the probability of them committing a crime decreases, based on the **Principle of Least Effort**.

Criminals operate within their "cognitive maps" (comfort and familiarity) because travelling too far can have diminishing returns.

The **Buffer Zone** is the radius immediately surrounding the offender's anchor point (home/workplace) where the likelihood of them committing a crime is very low.

This happens due to fear of recognition and target geometry – poisoning their own doorstep.



CIRCLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL RANGE

This is a foundational spatial model in geographic profiling and investigative psychology developed by Canter and Larkin in 1993.

The theory is based on domocentricity, the idea that a criminal's spatial behaviour and mental map of opportunities are anchored around their home or base. They proposed that the geographical area in which an offender commits a series of crimes can be mathematically represented as a circle, which usually encompasses the offender's residence.

How the "Circle" is Constructed

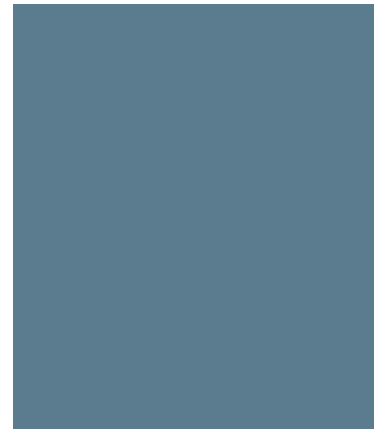
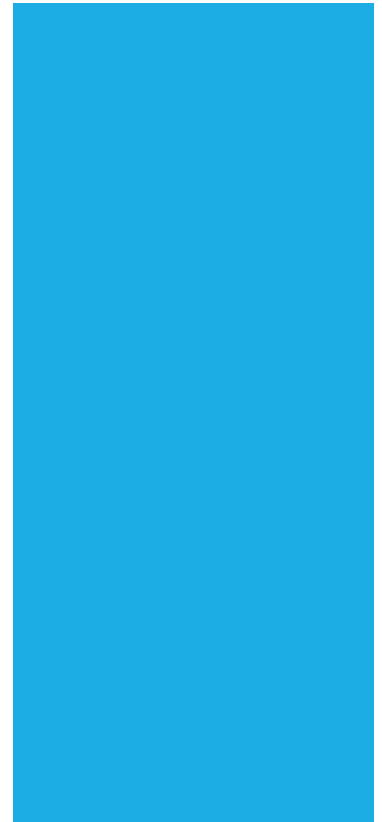
To apply the model to a series of linked crimes, analysts follow a simple geometric procedure:

Identify the Outliers: Find the two linked crime scenes that are the furthest apart from each other.

Draw the Diameter: Use the straight-line distance between these two furthest crimes as the **diameter** of the circle.

Generate the Range: Draw the smallest possible circle that encompasses all the known offence locations using that diameter. This boundary is defined as the offender's **criminal range**.

The primary goal of the Circle Theory is to classify the spatial style of the offender, which heavily dictates where police should look for them.



SPATIAL STYLES: 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.

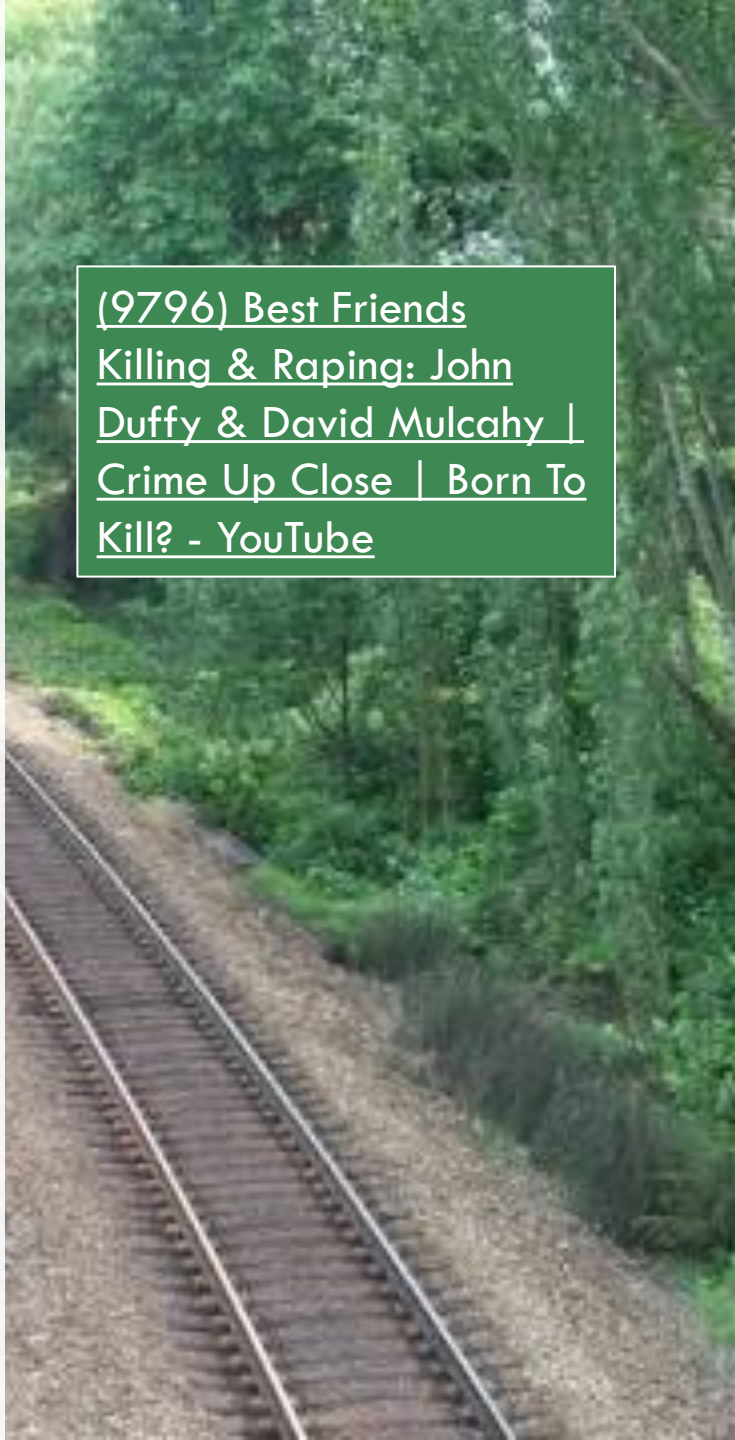
THE RAILWAY RAPIST (FIRST USE OF GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILING)

Between 1982 and 1986, a series of 24 brutal sexual assaults and 3 murders took place across North London. The attacker targeted women near railway stations, pulling them into nearby alleyways or secluded areas.

The Metropolitan Police had a list of **over 2,000 potential suspects** but needed to narrow it down. Then, they approached David Canter.

Canter delivered a highly specific profile to the police. While it included behavioural traits (e.g., that the offender had a history of domestic violence and likely worked a job with a connection to the railway), the geographical deduction was the most precise element.

By filtering the list of 2,000 suspects using Canter's geographic circle and occupational profile, the police were able to narrow the search down to just **two men**. John Duffy was suspect number 1,505 on the original list. Following physical surveillance and blood testing, Duffy was arrested and convicted in 1988.



[\(9796\) Best Friends Killing & Raping: John Duffy & David Mulcahy | Crime Up Close | Born To Kill? - YouTube](#)

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

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 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 a single 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.

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

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 look at arson, burglary, robbery, murder & stranger sex.

Homology assumption

Offenders displaying particular crime scene behaviours should have **similar characteristics**.

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.

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. Wilson et al., (1997) suggest that neither assumption is correct: most offenders show both organised and disorganised features and 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 problems with the data on which the FBI's typologies were originally based. The sample of 36 offenders is **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 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 presented in favour of the FBI system has largely been narrative, in popular accounts of offender profiling. The problem is that profilers are far more likely to report their successes than their failures, giving a distorted view of how often profiles contribute to the 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 were 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.

REAL CRIME: RACHEL NICKELL - DOCUMENTARY



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.