

## Short Communication

# What is Criminal Profiling Anno 2020: A Short Communication

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### ABSTRACT

Criminal profiling has been through many different periods during the time the field has existed, but none of which has resulted in a scientific validation of the field and thereby shown how it could be effectively used in the capable hands of law enforcement. Part of the problem is that there is no proper collaboration between law enforcement and the academic world from which the scientific validation could arise. This brief communication will give an overview of the main approaches used today, as well as explain the overall building blocks of a proposed Trinity-approach. The Trinity-approach consists of a geographical profile, which should lay the foundation of any profile. The reason for the geographical profile to be the foundation is that this type of profiling has shown reliable results compared to other types of profiling. The next step should be a profile of the victim and finally followed by the profile of the offender. The profile of the victim, as well as that of offender should come from a database containing extensive scientific studies within the field of criminal profiling. The strength of the Trinity-approach is a build-in scientific foundation, based on scientific studies that have undergone proper scientific review. The hope is to generate interest and debate, and call upon collaboration between law enforcement and academics to develop a scientific basis for the effectiveness of profiling as well as evaluate the reliability and validity of the Trinity-approach.

### Keywords

Trinity-approach; Criminal profiling; Database profiling; Profiling; Geographical profiling; Offender profiling; Victimology.

### INTRODUCTION

Criminal profiling is a strange and unclear phenomenon and even after many years of utilization and intense research it is still not very clear what criminal profiling really is. It has been accused of being anything but a science and more a matter of creative arts than a useful method for criminal investigation<sup>1,2</sup> and possibly no better than a bartender's ability at predicting or identifying offenders.<sup>3</sup> The field has experienced many different periods and influences, and has been portrait as something between the gut feeling of moody and genius personalities and the intricate puzzles solved by old and wise women. These have not been very useful to show the true potential of profiling or how it could be used in the capable hands of police anywhere. There are several possible reasons for this. Part of the problem might be the lack of uniformity in methods, data and terminology,<sup>4-8</sup> as well as ab-

sence of proper scientific assessment of how effective criminal profiling is.<sup>4-6,9,10</sup> This communication will briefly identify the main approaches to criminal profiling today, but the main intent is to describe the Trinity-approach to criminal profiling. However, it is not meant to provide a detailed manual on how an efficient profile should come about, nor is the intent to lay out a well-established model. The hope is to generate interest and debate, and call upon a future collaboration between law enforcement and academics to work towards developing a scientific assessment of the efficiency and assessment of the Trinity-approach in criminal profiling.

According to Fox and Farrington (2018) there are two overall main approaches today. One approach is a process created on a case-by-case basis by a profiler who has considerable training, experience, and practice in the field, with no clear process, methodology or systematic approach for integration across cases.<sup>11,12</sup>

The other main approach involves profiling by using objective and replicable measures, such as Canter's investigative psychology<sup>13,14</sup> or case linkage analysis,<sup>15,16</sup> or evidence-based profiling.<sup>17,18</sup> The purpose of this article is to propose the Trinity-approach for criminal profiling.

## DISCUSSION

The intent here is not to describe in detail the specific steps of the Trinity-approach. Rather it is meant to be a starting point from which the Trinity-approach can be explored and shaped by collaboration between law enforcement and academics. The purpose is mainly to advocate for criminal profiling to contain certain elements, as well as steps in particular order to come up with efficient and reliable profiling process. The individual stepping stones of the Trinity-approach already have their own validation in place. The systematic integration of the steps is what is needed.

The Trinity-approach makes use of geographical profiling in step one, and the use of a database of scientific studies in steps two and three. Geographical profiling is an investigative methodology that analyses the location of the crime scene to determine the most probable area of the offender's base or residence founded on concepts such as journey to crime, dead zones, population density, building density, street grids and maintenance of the local area. The aim is to aid the police narrow down the number of areas in which the suspects is most likely to reside and thereby streamlining their investigation process to be faster and more efficient.<sup>19,20</sup> The geographical profile should be the first step towards a full profile, as the area for the offenders base or resident can be predicted to a high degree as established by many previous studies.<sup>18,20-34</sup>

The next step includes the establishment of the profile of the victim. Both the profile of the victim and the profile of the offender in the Trinity-approach should come from a database. During this process, the focus is on the victim of the crime: Who is the victim? What makes this victim a typical victim of this type of crime and what makes this victim an atypical victim of this type of crime? This line of inquiry involves the victim's demographic, background, lifestyle, as well as many other aspects of the victim's life. Basically, anything relating to the victim's situation and attributes. The last step in the Trinity-approach is the offender profile. In the past the offender profile has been the main part of a criminal profile and sometimes even the only part of the profile. The offender profile does not have a high reliability though,<sup>1-3</sup> which probably has been one of the main reasons for the shady reputation of criminal profiling in the past. Offender profiling is a tool used by law enforcement, psychologists and others to help identify the major personality, behavioral, and demographic characteristics of an offender based upon an analysis of the crime scene behaviors.<sup>6,35,36</sup> However, predicting what demographics tend to be the most likely culprits of a certain behavior is difficult at best and impossible at worst. Human behavior is at least partly triggered by motivations and intentions, and motivation can be very difficult to establish.<sup>37</sup> To complicate things even more, motivations, as well as intentions may sometimes change quite quickly depending on different times, places and situations.<sup>38,39</sup> In other words, the

shady reputation of criminal profiling in the past was probably at least partly due to a low success rate in relation to offender profiling. However, it was more than just low success rates, as part of the problem is that there are no really proper scientific methods applied to assess the success rate of offender profiling.<sup>4-6,9,10</sup> If a uniform, systematic and scientific approach of criminal profiling is utilized and assessed by collaboration of law enforcement and academics then a new era for criminal profiling may begin.

The profile of the victim, as well as the offender should be pulled from a database. The database should contain numerous inputs from scientific studies generated around the world. The topics should include victimology, offenders, linking, talking with different types of offenders, etc. Basically, any topic connected to the investigative process can be included.

When creating the database which should be the foundation of the profile of both the victim and the offender, there are different factors to be aware of. Many elements of a profile could be influenced by culture, policy, location, and time among other things. Information in the studies used in the database should be evaluated for their consistency and divergence in the findings. In most scientific disciplines there are many studies of a single element or factor, and not all of them yield consistent results. Studies that show consistent results regarding a specific element can be grouped and noted for ease of access, reference and organization. Also, worth mentioning here is how various facets of human behavior are at least partly culture bound. Some aspects of a profile may be less straightforward than others. Today's world is a melting pot more than ever before. It is likely that scientific research from other countries and cultures may be useful. However, it is likely that some information will be less useful compared to other information in one setting, whereas in another setting it may not. For example, time and location both are of great importance to an investigation team. As such, it could negatively influence the success rate of a criminal profile created in Denmark in 2020, if the profile included the use of a scientific study about homicide from Spain in 1938. Whereas, if the profile included a scientific study about spatial human behavior and building density also from Spain from 1938 it might not negatively influence the success rate.

It all depends on the methods of the study and how the information is weighed. Databases could be shared across nation, but studies with consistent findings should be determined and grouped together at the national level as relevant and appropriate. However, having a good solid national database supplemented with scientific research from other countries may be helpful if the national law enforcement has a well-developed procedure for writing information in the criminal records, from which a useful scientific study must take its point of departure.

## CONCLUSION

Criminal profiling is popular today in entertainment media, but it should be popular for entirely different reasons. Today it is a clever way of capturing an audience for a television (TV) show or a movie, but it should be popular for its reliability and effectiveness,

because it could help law enforcement in their process of investigating and solving crimes. Here the Trinity-approach is described only in loose terms, as the details should be established by collaboration between academics and law enforcement. Law enforcement are the ones who will be using the approach and therefore the final details should be established along the way and the success rate the proposed approach achieves.

A profile will never be any better than the material it is based on. Scientific articles and papers are crucial. However, that does not mean that different perspectives cannot be of use. Different sources could be included in the database, weighed and evaluated for their effectiveness and contribution to establishing the validity and reliability of the Trinity-approach. Culture and context play crucial roles. It is hoped that. This communication will facilitate and encourage collaboration between law enforcement and academics to move towards a valid approach to criminal profiling, as well as to ensure a properly rigorous process of assessing the effectiveness of the process.

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