

# 3

## Understanding Criminal Behavior

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The following are all case synopses of crimes that occurred in Edmonton, Alberta in the past year. Some may read very much like the kind of crime that has occurred in your jurisdiction:

- A twenty-something male, appearing drug-addled and nervous, runs into a gas station at 02:15, points a knife at a clerk and makes off with \$27.00 in cash and ten cartons of cigarettes. It is believed that this is the thirteenth armed robbery he has committed in the past two months. This is the third time he has robbed this particular gas station and the second time he has robbed this clerk.
- A recently paroled child molester, in breach of his conditions, goes to a public swimming pool. While there, he befriends a young family, paying particular attention to their ten-year-old son. He asks if it would be all right to take their son for a sleepover at his house. They are reluctant but their son really wants to go and they agree. During the sleepover, the molester sexually assaults the boy.
- A group of aboriginal (Native American) juvenile females are hanging out at a convenience store. They begin talking with a group of three young white males who come out of the store. They invite the boys back to one of the girls' home. The boys readily agree. Once they reach the home, they enter and are taken down to the basement. They find a large group of young aboriginal males waiting for them.

The boys are beaten, robbed, and terrorized for hours and are locked together in a bathroom. They then all escape from a small window in the bathroom. This is the third such violent interracial incident in this neighborhood in the past three months.

- A bank manager approves a loan for a fictitious person. He wires half of the money from this loan into the accounts of twelve other fictitious persons—all of whom have significant loans. The money in these twelve accounts is then wired in the form of loan payments back to the bank. The bank manager then takes the remaining half of the money and creates a thirteenth account. Next he withdraws most of it in cash and parses it out among a group of mistresses and escorts he has been frequenting. The amount of money embezzled approaches \$16 million.

Almost all crimes, including those above, have three things in common: an offender, a victim and a location.<sup>1</sup> Some have more than one of each. As a crime analyst, one of your primary jobs will be to look at these and provide an analytical product that is going to deal with such crimes and help put these offenders, and others like them, in police custody.<sup>2</sup> All the crimes described above had an analyst assigned to them and because of their good work (and others'), all of these offenders ended up in police custody and, eventually, in prison.

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<sup>1</sup> There are a few exceptions. So-called "victimless" crimes such as drug use and prostitution may not have an obvious victim. However, even in these crimes there is a requirement for elements or persons coming together in space. For example, a drug user will get drugs from a supplier and a "john" will need to encounter a prostitute in order to journey to a space in which to commit the crime.

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter *crime analyst*, rather than *intelligence analyst*, is used in most cases. The methodology and applications of theory suggested here are applicable for either type of analyst. See Chapter 1 for a discussion.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how analysts can apply their knowledge and understanding of criminal behavior to tactical and strategic crime analysis. This chapter provides an overview of criminological theory, focusing on the theory known as the *criminal event perspective*.

The methodology that is presented in this chapter is *ideal*. Not every analysis needs to follow the format that will be presented here, as time or circumstance may not allow for such detail. After learning the most complex or comprehensive method, an analyst can then easily adapt the format to his or her own work. Finally, the methodology is not just the author's invention. Several analysts who, in turn, have been influenced by the work of other analysts worldwide, have developed this methodology over the past several years in the Edmonton Police Service's (EPS) Intelligence Analysis Unit.

This type of work is not easy, and it typically will be reserved for experienced crime analysts with intermediate to advanced analytical skills. Novice analysts may find it advantageous to first review the suggested readings noted at the end of the chapter.

### The Role of Theory in Crime Analysis

Criminological theories all try to explain aspects of crime or criminal behavior. Most offer insight into this behavior that can be applied in crime and intelligence analysis. These theories vary in their degree of acceptance among criminologists. The theories that have the greatest acceptance usually have more empirical support than other theories. Some theories seem more philosophical than theoretical. For example, critical criminologists look at the way "crime" is defined and who defines it.

Most criminology theories attempt to explain offenders' motivations for committing crimes.

A few examine victim behavior to see if there are common reasons for why certain types of persons are more likely to be victimized. Recently, criminology has seen a rise in the popularity of theories that look more at places of crime rather than people of crime. Place-based theories try to explain why some sites or areas are more crime prone than others.

Crime analysts do not have the luxury of the academic. They cannot just pick a theory that only explains a portion of criminal behavior and apply that time and again throughout their professional life. The proficient crime analyst will take an integrated theoretical approach and will examine offender behavior *and* victim behavior *and* the place of the crime. Some criminologists have put a name to this type of integrated thinking and have called their approach the *criminal event perspective*. Sacco and Kennedy provide this definition:

Criminal Event comprises its precursors, including the locational and situational factors that bring people together in time and space; the event itself, including how the interactions among participants define the outcomes of their actions; and the aftermath of the event, including the reporting to the police, their response, the harm done, and the redress required, and the long-term consequences of the event in terms of public reactions and the changing of laws.<sup>1</sup>

Another way of saying this would be that a crime occurs when the path of an offender crosses with the path of a victim. Where they meet is the crime scene. All three are vital elements of the crime. A distinct advantage of the criminal event perspective and others like it is that they look at the whole of a crime and are thus readily transferable to crime analysis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent F. Sacco and Leslie W. Kennedy, *The Criminal Event: an Introduction to Criminology*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Research examples include: Erin G. Van Brunshot, "Assault Stories," in *Crime in Canadian Society*, 6th ed., ed.

Criminological theorists try to make sense out of criminal behavior. They see patterns, make hypotheses, and test their theories. Crime analysts essentially do the same thing. The purpose of theory and crime analysis is to organize the chaos or to make simple what is complex. This is not an easy thing to do. There are reasons why some unsolved crimes go unsolved for so long and why it might take months or years to investigate a tip concerning an individual a police department contacted in the first week after a serious crime was committed. Likewise, there are important reasons for why a particular high crime neighborhood has been a problem area for decades. The good news is that a proficient crime analyst can be part of the solution to these problems.

Effective analysis of crime always result in some sort of analysis product. This can be a map, chart, timeline, written report, or otherwise. Generally, analysts will provide these products with either a tactical or strategic focus. In the next section, we will see how an understanding of criminal behavior can be used in tactical analysis.

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Robert A. Silverman, James J. Teevan, and Vincent F. Sacco (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 2000); Robert F. Meier, Leslie W. Kennedy, and Vincent F. Sacco, *The Process and Structure of Crime* (Piscataway: Transaction, 2001), see esp. Patricia L. Brantingham and Paul J. Brantingham, "The Implications of the Criminal Event Model for Crime Prevention"; and Laura A. Thue, "Gender and the Social Processes of Violence: the Interaction Between Personal and Situational Factors" (PhD dissertation, University of Alberta). The criminal event perspective is also reminiscent of Routine Activities theory; see Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: a Routine Activities Approach," *American Sociological Review* 44 (1979): 588–608. Routine activities theory sees crime as the interaction of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and a lack of capable guardianship.

## Applying a Knowledge of Criminal Behavior in Tactical Analysis

As noted in Chapter 1, tactical analysis provides information or intelligence that will assist in the identification of immediate crime problems and, hopefully, in the arrest of a specific criminal. This type of analysis is not new. In the 1970s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began structuring a tactical analytical process known as psychological profiling. This process has been one of the foremost and successful in its application of a knowledge of criminal behavior in capturing violent criminals. The profiling process was heavily influenced by psychiatry and psychology and, as such, was centered on offender behavior.

In 1978, the FBI began the Serial Murder Project. Their goal was to conduct interviews with serial murderers who (presumably) had insight into their offending behavior that could be used to develop ways to assist the FBI in capturing future serial murderers more effectively.<sup>1</sup> They then developed a mentorship-based curriculum for training other profilers. Today, profilers can be found working in the United States, Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Australia, across Western Europe, Japan, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Crime analysts will be called on to perform similar duties. This may be in a homicide or rape series but will often be something more

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<sup>1</sup> G. Maurice Godwin, "Reliability, Validity, and Utility of Extant Serial Murder Classifications," in *Criminal Psychology and Forensic Technology: a Collaborative Approach to Effective Profiling*, ed. G. Maurice Godwin, 61–78 (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> see: Robert K. Ressler, Ann W. Burgess, and John E. Douglas, *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives* (Washington, DC: Lexington, 1988); John E. Douglas et al., *Crime Classification Manual* (New York: Lexington, 1992); Vernon J. Geberth, *Practical Homicide Investigation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Elsevier, 1996); and Ronald M. Holmes, ed., "Psychological Profiling," in *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 15 (1999).

mundane and common like a burglary or robbery series. They may also be called on to provide an analysis on a single crime such as a homicide or sexual assault.<sup>1</sup>

As discussed in the previous section, the best approach is to take an integrated look at the crime series. Rather than an offender profile, a crime analyst using an integrated approach will likewise produce an integrated product. The author proposes that a useful name for such a product would be a *Series Profile*. The name emphasizes that the entire series is being profiled and not just the offender or victim or place.

A Series Profile is the written product of a crime analyst versed in a knowledge and understanding of criminal behavior. Depending on the crime, the complexity of the investigation, and the time on hand this could be anywhere from a couple of pages to hundreds of pages long. It is a virtual dissection of a criminal event in which all known aspects of a crime are taken out, examined in part, and considered within their contribution to the whole. It will be a vital contributor to the “intelligence process”<sup>2</sup> and is designed to guide an investigation. The Series Profile will discuss all three components of the criminal event. These components will take the form of sections. This will include offender characteristics, victim or target characteristics, and spatial characteristics. In each of these sections the Series Profile will indicate what is known and what is not known about a series and, if not known, what could be found out through further investigation. Analytical comments and recommendations for investigative follow-up will need to be made after each of the sections. The following pages describe the sections of a Series Profile.

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<sup>1</sup> Though this chapter focuses on series, the techniques discussed in this section can be easily adapted to single case analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Frost, “Criminal Intelligence: the Vital Resource; an Overview,” in Godwin, 61–78.

## Offender Characteristics

The first major section includes all that is known about the offender. When writing this section, assume that the readers of the report will know little to nothing about the case and are relying on the report to give them the background they need. Time permitting, this section can be supplemented with images, charts, graphs, tables, timelines, and so on. Maps should be reserved for the spatial characteristics section.

The offender characteristics section is made up of a number of sub-sections that include the following: classification of the series, physical description of the offender, vehicle or mode of transport description, crime or a sequence-of-events description, *modus operandi* description, and signature and motive description. Following these sub-sections, a discussion could be provided of any suspects in the series. Finally, a sub-section covering analytical comments will need to be offered.

### *Classification of the Series*

A series is defined as two or more criminal offenses committed by an individual or group of individuals. Alston notes these separate and specific classifications of series:

- Class I: a single offender acting alone in all reported offenses.
- Class II: two or more offenders acting together, where all offenders are common to all cases.
- Class III: two or more offenders committing some offenses together, some alone, and some with others in which a binding or overarching element keeps the group together and the series continuing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan D. Alston, “The Serial Rapist’s Spatial Pattern of Target Selection,” in Godwin, 2001.