

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Investigative Psychology: Offender Profiling and the Analysis of Criminal Action, by David Canter and Donna Youngs**

Wiley, Chichester, 2009 (paperback) 470pp incl index; US\$148

Canter and Youngs are leading members of the International Research Centre for Investigative Psychology at Liverpool University, a centre that has published many books on offender profiling and related topics. Their 2009 book summarises the state of scholarship and thinking, from their perspective, in relation to investigative psychology. They define the discipline as follows:

Investigative psychology is the study of offenders and the processes of apprehending them and bringing them to justice. It deals with what all those involved in crime and its investigation do, feel and think. The dominant objective is the understanding of crime in ways that are relevant to the conduct of criminal or civil investigations and subsequent legal proceedings. As such IP is concerned with psychological input to the full range of issues that relate to the management, investigation and prosecution of crime. But it is also an approach to problem-solving psychology that has relevance far beyond crime and criminality. (p4)

They describe investigative psychology as based on the following principles:

- All investigation is a form of decision making in which information is retrieved. Inferences are made on the basis of that information and actions result that, in turn, may generate further inferences to keep the cycle repeating until a resolution to the investigation is achieved.
- The contributions to investigations grow out of an understanding of criminal actions and the effective modeling of those actions.
- A key issue in contributing to all aspects of an investigative process is the identification of the salient aspects of any given set of criminal actions – of everything that happens in a crime and of the components of psychological and investigative significance.
- This modeling contributes to central problem-solving processes, which consist of making inferences about subsets of information, such as the characteristics of an offender, from other subsets of information, such as the details of what happens in a crime.
- In order to make effective inferences it is necessary to be able to make valid and fruitful distinctions between offenders and between crimes.
- The contribution of IP comes from the development of scientific principles and decision-support systems based on those principles not from the special intuitions or deductions of apparently gifted individuals. It thus feeds into many aspects of police training and the procedures that police use and is drawn on by many other people whose jobs require some form of detection or investigation. (p4–5)

Their book is an argument for investigative psychology as a distinct and legitimate applied discipline of psychology, extending beyond offender profiling but providing a framework for integration of a number of areas of psychological insight into areas of criminal and civil investigation. They accept and acknowledge that offender profiling has been questioned by researchers and argue in favour of an academically grounded approach. They maintain that what distinguishes investigative psychology is its focus upon problem-solving. Not all will agree with this but they concede that the central challenge for the development of investigative psychology "is to keep its feet firmly within the realms of systematic, scientific psychology whilst still reaching out to applications and integration with the processes of investigation." (p23) Their view is that this means that much of the research may need to have the form of "action research or attempting to create the scientist practitioner".

Chapter Two deals with what it describes as "foundations", including the emergence of criminal profiling. The authors comment that initially, when inferences were drawn about offenders from the crimes they had committed, "there was no basis for these inferences other than untested assumptions and superstitions." (p41). In making what might otherwise appear to be a telling concession, though, the authors are drawing upon phenomena such as the diagnosis of witchcraft some centuries ago. Chapter Three takes up with the "coming of the informed detective" and describes relevant writing of Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, concluding with profiling of Jack the Ripper. Chapter Four is entitled "The Age of Profiling and the Road to Investigative Psychology". The title is a touch grandiose but the historical material is extremely readable and a fine synthesis of the past 150 years of what can loosely be classified

as offender profiling. The second part of the chapter, which deals with the emergence of investigative psychology is autobiographical in respect of Professor Canter and his group.

Part Two of the book sets out a framework for studying criminal actions and drawing inferences about offenders. It starts with a "radex of criminality". It sets out a series of "canonical equations", the relationships between sets of variables, utilising a variety of ways of classifying criminal offences by reference, for instance, to subsets of age, gender and ethnicity. Chapter Six addresses the applicability of narrative theory to criminal behaviour, contending that through the criminal's actions "he tells us about how he has chosen to live his life". (p121) This moves into evaluation of generic bases for differences in offending styles, commencing with identification of salient features of a specific crime. Chapter Eight deals with what the authors call "criminal psychogeography" in which theories and patterns of offenders' use of space, resources, opportunity and "criminal range" are explored. The authors again are candid about the limitations of their work. They identify a propensity toward propinquity in offending and a "morphology or structure to offence locations" with a high proportion of cases showing a "marauding" pattern but travelling offenders confounding what might otherwise be important consistencies. In Chapter Nine, which deals with the large amounts of "investigative information" that constitutes the data upon the basis of which criminal investigations are conducted, they urge the identification of trustworthy evidence at an early juncture. They argue for careful systematisation and distillation of information and awareness of sources of distortion and contamination, including unconscious transference. A subset of what they discuss is weaknesses in identification and eyewitness testimony. However, this only constitutes a small

part of the chapter. It is, of course, covered by many other specialist works.

Canter and Youngs argue that “far and away the most common source of information about what happened in a crime is the open interview. Police interviews are ‘open’ in the sense that no standard questions are asked that allow only selection from a number of predetermined responses as the answer.” (p215) They discuss different interview procedures and summarise the attributes of the cognitive interview, starting with the recommendations of Geiselman in 1985:

- Establish rapport
- Listen actively
- Encourage spontaneous rapport
- Ask open-ended questions
- Pause after responses
- Avoid interrupting
- Request detailed descriptions
- Encourage intense concentration
- Encourage the use of imagery
- Recreate the original context
- Adopt the rememberer’s perspective
- Ask compatible questions
- Encourage multiple retrieval attempts.

As they put it, as the cognitive interview was derived from experimental studies of memory, it “offers a tidy framework for psychological research” (p219). However, its effectiveness for police interviewing in which police are searching either for a confession or admissions is debatable. The authors are aware of this issue and address issues related to suspect interviewing and deception in Chapter Ten. They describe “the IEE approach” (improving interpersonal evaluations), refer briefly to psychophysiological lie detectors and the “Reid approach to interrogation”. They summarise the principles of statement validity analysis.

Part Three of the book deals with the meat and potatoes of offender profiling. It explores models of offending behaviour and applications of investigative psychology. It

deals serially with “acquisitive crime” (Chapter Eleven), sexual offences (Chapter Twelve), murder offences (Chapter Thirteen), organized crime (Chapter Fourteen) and terrorism (Chapter Fifteen). The authors note that in most murders the offender will be known to the victim and in many cases the offence will be preceded by domestic violence or stalking scenarios. They argue that the “key investigative challenge then is differentiating between these scenarios to identify those that may develop into murder.” (p353). It is in the murder chapter that certain of the key differences between their approach and that of, for instance, the FBI are explicated.

The authors’ chapter on terrorism is fresh, topical and preliminary. It is the commencement of their work on this difficult and controversial subject and is augmented by D. Canter (Ed.), *The Faces of Terrorism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). They acknowledge challenges and problems in studying terrorism. They observe that terrorist crime is distinctive because it is driven by ideological commitment and is defined in terms of its objectives rather than the actions that occur (p390). They comment that “the lack of any obvious distinguishing characteristics of terrorists makes the investigative strategies for identifying them exceedingly difficult if the focus is on individual terrorists.” It may well be that there is more to be said about this issue in respect of “home grown terrorists” in western countries. Canter and Youngs conclude their chapter by commenting that the understanding of terrorist networks and how to disable them is a crucial contribution of investigative psychology to the study and investigation of terrorism (p391).

The final chapter of Canter and Youngs’ book is entitled “Investigative Psychology in Action”. It summarises a number of ways in which the authors maintain that investigative psychology can contribute and is contributing to

police investigations. They concentrate upon geographical offender profiling and the linking of cases to a common offender. They identify psycholinguistics and psychological autopsies as emerging areas of investigative profiling and articulate six fundamentals of investigative psychology:

- Researchers have styles;
- Data speak theories;
- Theories are practical;
- Context provides meaning;
- Structures explain;
- All methodologies assume but some assume more than others.

Canter and Youngs' book is well organized and presented in a lively way that will make it accessible and useful for students. At the start of each chapter it sets out "learning objectives" and contains a synopsis. It has a "further reading" section and a series of questions for discussion and research at the end of each chapter. Its glossary is useful, its bibliography is extensive and its index is sound.

*Investigative Psychology* by Canter and Youngs is a mature and brave step by innovative and leading researchers in forensic psychology. It concentrates on offender profiling but incorporates a range of cognate issues which are defined as falling within the applied discipline of investigative psychology. The work is very much a

statement of where the discipline had reached as of 2009. Canter and Youngs' work is controversial and aspects of it are assertively disputed by other well regarded scholars; theirs is a fraught and fractious area of scholarship. In *Investigative Psychology* they have laid bare their theories and the reasoning which has led to them. They have made a number of important concessions in terms of evidentiary bases and methodologies and mapped a path for the discipline in contributing to investigative processes and reasoning.

*Investigative Psychology* is a genuinely important work, synthesising as it does the work of Canter's team at Liverpool University over the better part of two decades. It will be controversial. It articulates theories in a way which will facilitate constructive debate, refinement and further research. Canter and Youngs' work is exceptionally well presented. It is logical, well researched and referenced, readable and entertaining without for the most part descending into the titillating of the sensationalist. It is an engaging and very honest contribution to the evolving discipline of forensic psychology. It should be essential reading for students and practitioners of forensic psychology, criminology, law enforcement and criminal law practice.

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