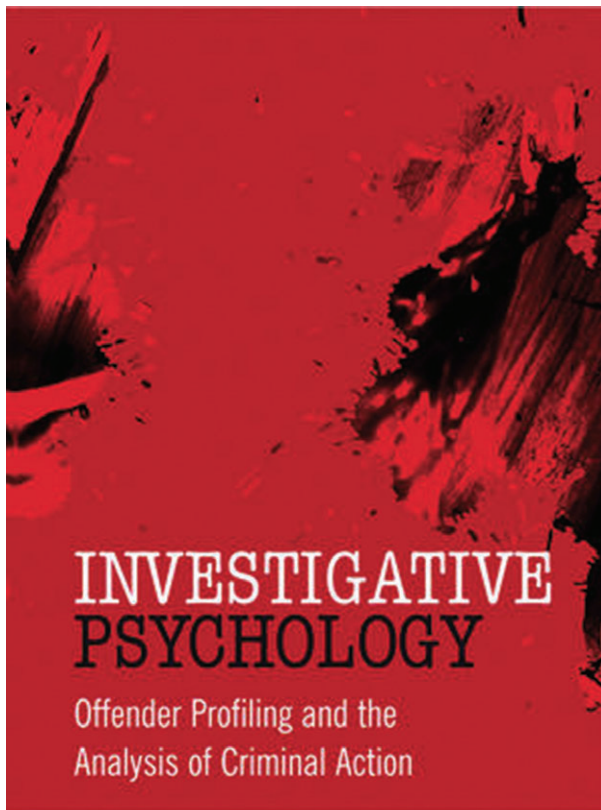


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Investigative Psychology: Offender Profiling and the Analysis of Criminal Action

By DAVID CANTER and DONNA YOUNGS

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DAVID CANTER & DONNA YOUNGS

‘Investigative Psychology’ constitutes the first attempt to create a book that fully describes and explains the circumstances under which a new field of Psychology evolved as well as highlighting its full range of applications. Based on their rich experience derived from their involvement in numerous crime investigations, Canter and Youngs analytically present how science and police practice can be effectively integrated. Overall, they offer an informative textbook that captures the complexities underlining the involvement of psychologists in the investigative cycle and gives solutions to real-life investigative dilemmas.

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The book is divided into three parts with the first introductory part consisting of four chapters and the remaining two parts consisting of six chapters each. All chapters are similarly structured: a small list of contents at the beginning followed by the learning objectives and the chapter synopsis. Each chapter ends with a summary, suggestions for further reading, and questions for discussion and research which aim to stimulate the readers' interest whilst actively enabling him/her to comprehend the presented concepts. The book ends with a glossary of important terms. A companion website is offered with a sample from the book (i.e. free access to the entire first chapter), an outline of the contents and teaching/student resources linked to the book; perhaps a perfect guide for the 'to be buyer' rather than the book holder, bearing in mind that no new information related to the book is provided.

The first part of the book offers the readers an introduction to investigative psychology. Canter and Youngs demonstrate how criminal profiling emerged from the human tendency to make inferences about people from their actions. They illustrate how this tendency evolved as they present in illustrative tables actual profiles from different periods, ranging from the naïve profiling of 'witches' during the middle-age European witch hunts, to the more systematic profiles of criminals from individuals with a medical background or from those who have been actively involved with the police (e.g. Vidocq). The authors present some samples of premature investigative advice in the form of summaries of characteristics in early mass media cases (e.g. 'Jack the Ripper', 'Dusseldorf Vampire', 'Mad Bomber' and the 'Boston Strangler') and they introduce the contribution of FBI in the more systematic thinking during the stage of inferences as well as the FBI's role in the realisation of the importance of studying serial killers. The authors basically describe the historic events that clear the path for a new branch of psychology to emerge.

The second part of the book describes in detail the framework that investigative psychology utilises in order to adequately explain, analyse, and predict criminal actions. The authors present the identified patterns of such actions (e.g. styles, signatures) and they explain the theory-based methodologies that can be utilised by investigative psychologists during the analysis of multifarious data involving criminal behaviour. Canter and Youngs present the radex model of criminal differentiation, which is a tool that identifies distinctive patterns within dynamic and complex criminal action. In perhaps one of the most fascinating chapters of the book (Chapter 6) the authors offer the innovative approach of personal narratives under which all criminal actions can be considered. The authors go one step further to combine narrative theory and an action systems framework. They also present real-life narratives of criminals and research-based findings regarding the characteristics (both behavioural and geo-spatial) of offences of diverse nature (e.g. robbery, arson, murder) clarifying in such a way the potential utility of such a unique approach. The chapter on criminal psychogeography vividly illustrates the contribution of investigative psychology in the understanding of complex criminal behaviour (i.e. geographical activity of serial offenders). Canter's and colleagues' findings can help significantly the police to identify the spatial behaviour of criminals over time, but their utility is not limited there. The novel and innovative combination of personal narratives, criminological mental cartography (i.e. criminals' mental representation of the locations where they committed their crimes in the form of drawings) and models of environmental learning reflect the flexibility of investigative psychology, as a discipline, to absorb and amalgamate different psychological perspectives in order to advance our knowledge of complex human behaviour. In the last two chapters of the second part of the book, Canter and Youngs analytically describe the circular route of crime-related information: from the crime scene to the court and future research in such a way that it becomes evident that the opportunities for inten-

tional or unintentional distortion of information are numerous, and there is a need to set a framework under which data and/or evidence is collected, processed, and used for research purposes. In addition, the authors highlight the risk of relying on conclusions derived from experimental studies and report the procedures employed for the interviewing of suspects, victims, and witnesses. They also describe the techniques used for the assessment of the veracity of the accounts derived from such procedures.

In the last part of the book, Canter and Youngs selectively target specific types of criminal actions ranging from the less affective and more common ones (e.g. burglary, robbery, fraud) to the most extreme and rare (rape, murder, terrorism, and organised crime). They attempt to offer models of differentiation for each type of crime by using the narrative model to explore the life stories of the offenders, identifying the role assigned to the victims, and exploring the psychological context in which the offence has emerged. They also present the reader with the social network analysis, a method of identifying the key organisational structures within criminal networks which consequently reveals the vulnerabilities of criminal groups as well as the way they operate. It is a particularly fruitful approach when studying complex forms of crime with serious social implications such as organised crime and terrorism.

Perhaps the most influential theoretical framework within the book is the personal narratives framework. Relevant research has identified four themes which characterise, to some degree, the role that criminals have assigned to themselves during their life story (Ioannou, 2006). Identifying these roles can facilitate the detection as well as the treatment of offenders. As Canter and Youngs highlight, it is extremely difficult to characterise something as complex as a criminal narrative. However, they suggest that a carefully organised questionnaire in conjunction with an open account of the offender's life story can reveal some of the essence of a personal life story. In such a way, cross-examining the answers in the questionnaire with the open account, as well as with other known information from the crime-scene (e.g. type of weapon used), could highlight inconsistencies. Such inconsistencies could potentially put in doubt the veracity of the life-story. As a matter of fact, the authors present such inconsistencies in a narrative (Example D, p. 134). Interestingly, they do not consider the implications of such contradictions when accepting the life story account as real, neither when questioning how often such contradictions may exist but not detected. Most of the narratives represent a reflection of a distorted cognitive belief system which, in essence, comprises the psychological context of the offence. Nevertheless, the revealed cognitive distortions that, to some extent, expose the roles which offenders assign to themselves, can be the outcome of a strategy that (especially sexual) offenders employ in order to protect their self-esteem, avoid social disapproval, and to meet self-deceptive positivity needs (Michailides, Devilly, & Ward, 2004) rather than a reflection of the actual reasons that lead the offenders to commit the crime. This is something that needs to be explored in future research in the narratives approach as the ethical and practical implications of an erroneous interview or treatment-planning because of the assumption, for example, that the offender sees himself as a victim, could be significant for the perpetrator, the victim and perhaps the rates of recidivism when and if the offender is released.

This book constitutes a very valuable collection of findings regarding the detection, prediction, and organisation of information about different forms of criminal behaviour; as well as the processes underlining the decisions and the actions made when such information is obtained. The authors destroy the fragile myth of the fictional, experienced, and intuitive detective who acts instinctively in bizarre crime cases by revealing the numerous

challenges which surround the investigation of a crime at different levels. The book can be of particular use to students and professionals with an interest in forensic psychology and related disciplines. More importantly, it presents a way of thinking which can be utilised by all disciplines attempting to systematise complex information irrespective of the context and content of such information. The use of multidimensional scaling in social sciences, for instance, shows the need to create interlinked themes rather than non-flexible categorisations, when trying to make sense of complex phenomena. Such a philosophy could be adopted by psychiatry and medicine during the diagnosis and treatment of patients. Often, such processes are solely based on the behavioural/cognitive and biological expressions of the disease. Which symptoms co-exist, which sets of symptoms create distinctive clusters, how these clusters link with the existing theoretical and clinical knowledge, and what implications these observations should have on the conceptualisation, terminology, and treatment of the disease? These are the types of questions that the investigative psychology approach could answer although the context of the answers is not directly linked with the context of advice an investigative psychologist offers, for instance, in a serial rape case. Overall, this book is a tool for innovative thinking and a must read for those who want to keep in touch with one of the most promising and fascinating branches of psychology.

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