

Criminal Profiling: Principles and Practice, Richard Kocsis,
Humana Press, New Jersey, 2006

There are many types of criminal profiling. Some are based on intuition and experience or a combination of both. These have spawned a number of books that often tell us more about the authors than about the techniques they employ. Others are based on theories of human personality. Others still are based on geography. Finally, there are those which require a vast amount of information about crimes being fed into linked computers in an attempt to answer the question 'What sort of person commits this sort of crime?' (70% males, 85% in the 20–30 year age bracket, etc.), rather than the more useful question, 'What can be predicted about the particular person who committed this particular crime?' All these methods have their supporters and their detractors. And, unfortunately, very few of them have contributed much to the actual apprehension of criminal offenders (except on TV). The basic problem with most of them is that, lacking a sound scientific base, they do not lend themselves easily to rigorous scientific scrutiny.

Dr Kocsis is a scholar with an international reputation for research in this field, and especially research into the scientific basis, or lack of it, of current techniques (which has not endeared him to those who use these techniques). He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and books in this area. In the present book Dr Kocsis takes us, step by step, through his own method of criminal profiling, called Crime Action Profiling (CAP), a method which has a scientific base that others lack.

Dr Kocsis begins his book with a brief discussion of the origins of criminal profiling and a critical analysis of the problems. He deals with the latter in chapters entitled 'Smoke and Mirrors — The Illusions of Accuracy in Criminal Profiles' and 'Rhetoric vs Reality', chapter headings that neatly sum up the major problems. He then looks at the components and processes of profiling in a chapter based on his own and other research, defines his subject area and looks at the psychological make-up of serial offenders (which is far from being a composite picture). The remainder (and bulk) of the book describes in detail his own elegant CAP models and their application to the crimes of serial/sexual murder, serial rape and serial arson. Crucial to these models is a statistical technique known as multidimensional scaling. In order to assist the reader Dr Kocsis takes care to explain the technique (and other statistical concepts employed in the book) in simple language that even a reader with little or no prior knowledge of the subject could understand. Indeed, the whole of Dr Kocsis' book is written in clear and simple language which, as Professor Palermo points out in a foreword to the book, 'helps the noninitiated understand the process of profiling and the initiated to put it into practice'. For those interested in the science of profiling, as opposed to the somewhat dubious art, this is the book.

Peter Shea