Profiling in Crime Scene Behaviors Left by Serial Homicide Offenders

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Introduction

The history of profiling, specifically towards homicides, came from clinical psychology and psychiatry (Trojan & Salfati, 2008). The reason for this new strategy is because clinicians interviewed serious offenders for court evaluations or treatments (Trojan & Salfati, 2008). A specific type of profiling called offender profiling, studies the connection between the offender and their behaviors left at crime scenes (Trojan & Salfati, 2008). This specific study helps law enforcement narrow down the search of the offender from a list of suspects. Offender profiling helps find a strong connection between the offender and the crime scenes because of the characteristics left behind (Salfati & Canter, 1999). The central idea towards offender profiling is to study the characteristics left at crime scenes in order to study the behavior of the offender (Trojan & Salfati, 2008). Studies have suggested that behavioral patterns left by the offender at crime scenes link towards other aspects of their life (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). One of the key understandings towards behavioral evidence is how consistent the offender leaves the same or similar behaviors at their crime scenes (Sorochinski & Salfati, 2010). Similar patterns throughout crime scenes in offenders allows investigators to understand the individuals overall behavior (Sorchinski & Salfati, 2010).

Homicide

Homicide offenders are the most common individuals profiled during investigations. Throughout history, homicide offenders were separated in specific groups and subtypes to have a better understanding of psychological and behavioral measure (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). Most homicide offenders knew their victims causing their crime scene behavior towards the victim to reflect their interpersonal style (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). The interaction between the victim and the offender is linked towards positive and negative reinforcement (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). This link can eventually become a habitual response towards aggression. Most aggression research found that the act of killing an individual is linked to an emotional reaction towards a stressful situation (Salfati & Canter, 1999). Offenders are generally classified into two styles of aggression, hostile and instrumental. The type of aggression an offender has is determined by their goals or rewards they wishe to gain (Salfati & Canter, 1999). Offenders who have instrumental aggression wish to gain desired objects or status possessed by another individual (Salfati, & Canter, 1999). These offenders will obtain the desired object at all costs. Offenders who have hostile aggression respond to anger-inducing conditions (Salfati & Canter, 1999). The goal for these offenders is to cause extreme suffering for the victim. Behaviors towards control of the victim lead to the psychological meaning of the need for power and dominance (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). This action requires the ability to control the situation and completely dominate the victim (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). Postmortem behaviors towards the victim are associated with the offenders need for pathological personal gain (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). Homicide offenders that remove forensic evidence in crime scenes indicate the experience towards previous criminal acts (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). Offenders who exploit crime scene behaviors indicate that the offender did not care about the victim (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). Victims whose faces or bodies were covered at the crime scene showed behavioral action that did not fit with the offender (Horning, Salfati, & Crawford, 2010). Understanding the behaviors of the offender and what is left at the crime scenes is crucial to finding the individual.

Aim

This paper aims to describe the relationship between serial offenders and their crime scene behaviors. Studies done in the past compare serial offenders to single-victim homicide offenders, and to determine whether serial offenders use the same behaviors for each crime. Aggression, weapon use, criminal history, and the relationship towards the victim will be examined to determine the behaviors in serial homicide offenders.

Previous Study

Carrie Trojan and Gabrielle Salfati (2011) did a study to compare the history profiles of serial and single-homicide offenders. What they focused on was the basic patterns between the similarities and differences between single and serial homicide offenders between ten variables.They specifically looked at criminal history to determine whether or not these individuals shared a common criminal background towards degree of instrumental or displays of violence towards the victim.

Data for single-homicide victims was collected from case files belonging to the Cincinnati Police Department between the years of 1997 to 2006 (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). Data for serial homicide offenders were retrieved from fully adjudicated state and local cases (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). After collecting the data, there were a total of 137 single-homicide offenders and 17 serial offenders who were responsible for 97 victims (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). 90% of offenders were male, 15% of offenders were white, 85% of offenders were black, and victims ranged in age between 1 to 83 years old (Torjan & Salfati, 2011).

The variables used for the study were important because of the criminal background between the two groups. The first variable carefully studied was sexual offenses. This was studied for two reasons, because of its co-occurrence with other variables, and the different meaning of the term for single-homicide and serial homicide offenders (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). The second variable studied focused on the weapons each offender used towards their victim (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). This was an important variable because serial killers prefer to use personal items rather than impersonal ones that made the killing quicker. The third variable focused on assault, and its prior history with the offenders. Serial offenders showed prior assault offenses in contrary to what was expected (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). The fourth and fifth variables focused on robbery and armed robbery. Trojan and Salfati wanted to show which group showed more aggression towards their attacks. Theft and burglary were the sixth and seventh variables. These were included in the study because of the high prevalence of offenses made among serial homicide offenders (Torjan & Salfati, 2011). Vice-Sex Offenses was the eighth variable included in the study. Serial homicide offenders showed a significant amount of history towards this offense compared to single homicide offenders (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). Towards this variable, prostitutes were the main focus because of their vulnerability and availability to the serial offenders (Trojan & Salfalti, 2011). The ninth variable included disorderly offenses. High prevalence was shown towards single-homicide offenders showing more than 50% being convicted with this act (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). The final variable focused on damage offenses to study the violence each offender did prior to their killings (Trojan & Salfati, 2011).

Each offender received separate profiles for the ten variables in order to compare their overall offending patterns (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). The study showed that serial homicide offenders had profiles that were unique from single-homicide offenders and even from each other (Trojan & Salfati, 2011). Certain offenses connected to serial homicide offenders caused a difference in crime scene behavior compared to single homicide offenders (Trojan, & Salfati, 2011). Robbery and armed robbery tended to be the variable that distinguished the difference in crime scene behaviors towards serial and single-homicide offenders (Trojan & Salfati, 2011).

Serial Offenders

One theory towards the behaviors of serial killers is the change in behavior from one offense to another (Sorchinski & Salfati, 2010). This reduces the risk of them being caught from law enforcement (Sorchinski & Salfati, 2010). Another theory that is focused on serial killers behavior is through clinical and investigative literature. This theory implies that a serial killers behavior changes because of their fantasy, which is a central role in their homicides (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). Law enforcement agents look at the change in patterns rather than idiosyncratic behaviors because serial killers may have a consistent pattern across homicide series (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). This could improve the understanding of behaviors expressed by the serial offenders. The interaction between the offender and the victim is a key importance to serial offenders. How the victim reacts to the attack causes an impact on the actions of the offender (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). The change of actions causes the offender to learn their behavior and quickly change their strategy in order to kill the victim (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). Criminals mature and develop over time. They learn new behaviors and better strategies to accomplish what they want. Over time, serial homicide offenders become more experienced and confident throughout their killings (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). As their experience grows, this would allow them to realize what they truly want out of the killings and their goals change as well as their fantasies evolving (Sorchinksi & Salfati, 2010). For serial killers, the fantasy is the most important part of the killing. It provides the rationale, ritual, motive, anticipated gain, victim selection and satisfaction for them (Sorchinski & Salfati, 2010). If the serial offender cannot obtain their fantasy, they quickly become frustrated and lose control of their actions (Sorchnski & Salfati, 2010). By losing control, this changes the risk-taking and planning behaviors for the offender. Marina Sorchinksi & Gabrielle Salfati (2010) did a study to find the consistency or inconsistency of patterns in serial homicide offenders across several homicide cases. What the study showed was that serial offenders tended to change their crime scene behaviors in the first and second crimes, with the third crime showing similar patterns to the first. This indicated that serial offenders changed their behavioral patterns overtime to find one that was enjoyable. Serial offenders showed similar behavioral patterns with the interaction towards the victim, but changed when it came to weapon use.

Conclusion

When it comes towards offender profiling, new discoveries have helped law enforcement capture homicide offenders. This type of profiling helps law enforcement to understand the characteristics of the offender to learn their behaviors in the crime scene (Salfati & Canter, 1999). Although profiling has evolved and helped capture criminals, there is still a lack of studies to help form valid and reliable investigative profiling methods. Further studies should be made to have a better understanding of criminal profiling, and help law enforcement capture criminals to ensure citizens safety.

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