

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PETER B. AINSWORTH, *Offender Profiling and Crime Analysis*. Cullompton, U.K. and Portland, Oregon: Willan Publishing. 2001, x + 197 p., \$43.10, paper.

Ainsworth has written a highly readable and useful account separating myth from reality in the theory and practice of understanding patterns in criminal offending. Although the author does not break any new ground nor add any new knowledge to that of any experienced researcher in the field, I would not hesitate to recommend this book to my graduate or even undergraduate students coming to the topic for the first time with an enthusiasm often derived only from popular media and entertainment industry accounts of "crime profiling." The book does a reasonably good job of reviewing current theories and practices and in deflating some of the rhetoric that envelops them.

The chapters reviewing psychological and ecological theories of criminal behaviors and the gathering of information on crime lay the groundwork for critical examinations of a few common approaches: crime mapping, geographical profiling and police investigative approaches –crime scene analysis and psychological profiling of offenders. I particularly appreciated Ainsworth's attention to the completeness, validity and reliability of sources of information on crime, mostly police investigative and witness accounts, and his highlighting of the considerable limitations of this information for understanding criminal events, offender and offense characteristics and for making reasonable predictions. His account of the academic skepticism that has greeted the many claims of self-styled "profilers" is pointed and effective. Ainsworth concludes that most of what passes for "profiling" simply lacks theoretical and empirical grounding and can present no scientifically acceptable evidence of its contribution to criminal investigation. There is furthermore often no credible statistical probability of the sorts of predictions that are claimed.

Ainsworth is a respected psychologist and comes to this topic with a focus on individual motivation and behaviors that will feel somewhat foreign to many readers of this review. His enthusiasm for the work of psychologist David Canter, who has attempted to bring some rare rigueur to the topic, surprises a little given that many of the book's criticisms of profiling practices could equally be made of Canter's work.

The absence of any discussion of offender profiling in correctional settings is surprising. There is some discussion of clinical psychological profiles, but prediction-scaled classification of incarcerated offenders is a widespread practice with a long history that I would have expected to receive some attention. This is all the more so as many of the predictive behavioral models coming to the fore in criminal investigation have their roots in clinical correctional research.

I can understand why the author does not deal with the hot-button issue of "racial profiling" in the book. The term "racial profiling" is an entirely rhetorical construction that seeks to extend definitions of racial discrimination beyond individual manifestations into intentional organizational practices. The rhetoric of "racial profiling" is itself a topic highly worthy of examination. However, it is so patently absurd to consider that there could be any scientific basis for the singling out of individuals for investigation: the idea of blanket traits such as skin color, birth nationality, or ethnic origin is unlikely to receive attention from any serious scholar. Notwithstanding, accusations that the police practise "profiling," although denied by the police, are common. Some public authorities do indeed openly engage in such practices under the label "profiling." It would have been useful to address these (mis)appropriations of the term "profiling" directly.

A basic question is left unasked in this book: "What contributions can profiling and crime analysis truly make to public safety?" These tools seem inevitably applied to highly sensational and publicized yet also highly rare events, such as serial offenders' committing major violent or sexual offenses. Yet, the most commonly occurring, more routine types criminal offending that most threaten public safety seem resistant to understandings rooted in profiles of individual behaviors. These persist for reasons other than our lack of understanding of their traits and patterns, but rather because of our inability or unwillingness to act upon them. Is it the exotic character of the crimes themselves, rather than the purported value of these tools that best explains their appeal both to the public and to many scientific communities?

Ron Melchers *University of Ottawa*