



Figure 10.3 Arthur Shawcross
In the USA, Arthur Shawcross had been in prison for murdering a ten-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 1972.

He served 15 years and was released in 1987. March 1988 marked the start of a long string of murders, where Shawcross chose prostitutes as his victims. Over two years he murdered 11 prostitutes and many of the bodies were found near the Genesee River in New York State. The victims were usually strangled, beaten and in some cases mutilated.

- A criminal profiler called Gregg McCrary, from the FBI, was brought in to help with the investigation. Together with Ed Grant, an investigator, he visited crime scenes and looked at the case files. They thought that half the murders had a clear pattern, which suggested the same perpetrator. From the available evidence they suggested that the murderer was:
- 1 White.
 - 2 Male.
 - 3 In his late twenties/early thirties, although they stated that this was probably his mental age rather than his actual age.
 - 4 A previous offender of violent crimes.
 - 5 In a low-paid job.
 - 6 The driver of a cheap, basic car.

Evaluation

There is a lack of theoretical foundation to this approach, which gives it a feel of an inexact science – more hunch than reasoning. In some people's view this reduces its credibility as it lacks the background research to say why it works. Reliance on intuition is problematic as personal emotion and memories can sway intuition.

This method of profiling can only really be used in the crimes of murder and rape. This restricts its applicability, unlike the geographical approach, which looks at the pattern of crime rather than the crime type, making it more versatile.

Probably married.

Living or working near the Genesee River.

Keen on hunting or fishing.

As the murderer had started leaving bodies where they were and coming back to cut them up at a later date, McCrary and Grant suggested that the police should try to find a body before it was cut up. When one was found, they said the police should not remove it but instead should conduct a surveillance operation. McCrary and Grant thought that the murderer would revisit the body and that he could be caught this way.

This was exactly what happened. Shawcross went back to the body, which meant the police could arrest him.

The profile drawn up by McCrary and Grant was surprisingly accurate and the only aspect that was wrong was the age, as Shawcross was ten years older than they suggested. However, his mental age was younger, so in some ways this aspect was correct too.

Shawcross was found guilty, and although he pleaded insanity, the court found him to be sane and he received a 250-year prison sentence.

Back story

This case shows the accuracy level that can occur when typological (top-down) profiling is used. The profile, for this case, was very accurate.

This is a case study and as such cannot be used to prove a profiling method correct universally.

Having two main categories of criminal is very simplistic. It is likely that criminals do not fit neatly into either category, therefore making the prediction of their characteristics difficult. It is likely there will be more types, and the distinction is too restrictive.

Each crime scene is unique and there are many different variables that should be accounted for. This makes the typological definition difficult to apply and this affects its accuracy.

The bottom-up approach

This method builds a picture of the potential criminal from facts and figures collated from previous crimes of the same type. This removes the intuition element of the profiling.