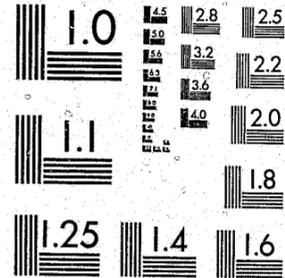


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THE COVER: No elephant crossing! A Salt Lake City officer does his duty, citing the transgressing trunks as Orville Wilson, a crime laboratory photographer, captures the moment.

Federal Bureau of Investigation
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

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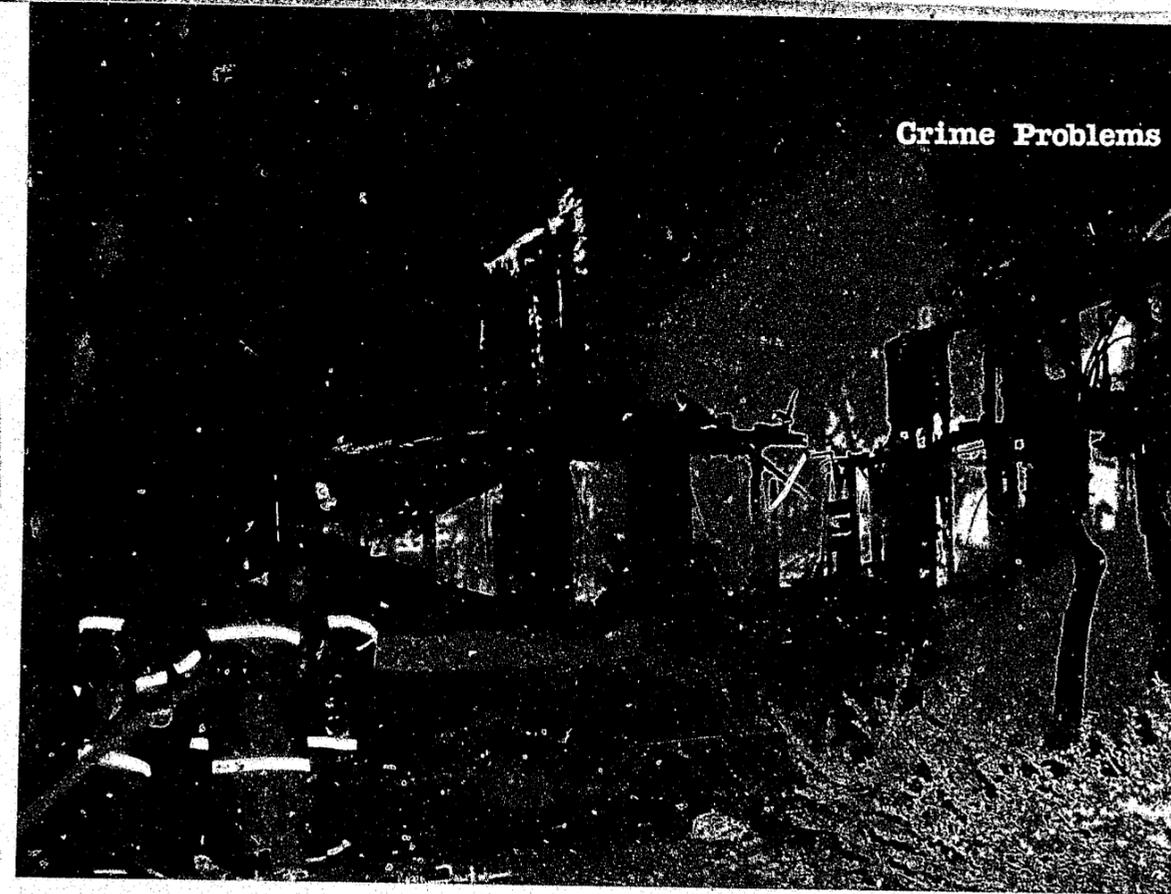


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THE FIRESETTER A Psychological Profile (Conclusion)

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Arson-for-Profit

In 1974, Angelo Monachino, the owner of a construction business in Rochester, N.Y., became the subject of heightened interest when it was learned that he had been involved in the arson of a Rochester tire company in December 1972. Monachino's eventual cooperation with local and Federal authorities resulted in a Federal indictment charging a series of eight arsons and insurance frauds committed in the Rochester area between 1970 and 1973 which netted over \$480,000 in insurance proceeds. His testimony also assisted Federal prosecutors in indicting six defendants for a number of bombing incidents which occurred on October 12, 1970. In addition, three separate mail fraud indictments were returned, involving owners of the buildings burned by the arson-for-profit enterprise. Monachino also testified before a State grand jury and trial of top-ranking members of the Rochester organized crime syndicate for the mur-

A Projected Psychological Profile of the Professional Hired Torch

Age: The age may vary from late twenties to mid-late sixties. However, his age will generally concentrate between early thirties to midfifties. The psychopath may begin to "burn out" between 45 and 50 years of age.

Sex: Male.

Race: Typically, the professional hired torch is caucasian. This will vary, of course, with the area of the country and location of the arson activity.

Intelligence: Average to above-average intelligence (often very cunning and street-wise).

Personality style: Psychopathic (antisocial) style of personality, with such common characteristics as egocentricity, manipulative and exploitative behavior, deceitfulness, pathological sense of confidence, impulsivity, lack of anxiety, remorse and guilt, propensity for high-risk living, schemer and con man.

Marital status: Not uncommon to be single, separated, or divorced.

Marital stability: Often unstable due to his personality and impulsive lifestyle.

Lifestyle: Somewhat impulsive and erratic; often characterized by high-risk living and excitement-seeking; possible nomadic; prone to be nocturnal.

Socioeconomic level: Often middle class, but may be prone to be heavily in debt or over-extended financially.

Use of alcohol: Common (not uncommon to find excessive drinking, but not during his torching activity; frequently a heavy social drinker).

Occupation/Employment: May be employed in a variety of capacities from professional businessman to unskilled laborer; however, frequently employed by others. If he owns or operates a business, it will be frequently financially marginal.

Work habits: Irregular and marginal.

Prior criminal history: Although he may not have an arrest history he may have been suspect in a variety of crimes ranging from fraud to homicide. He may have an arrest history for such offenses, but without accompanying criminal convictions.

He may have one or two criminal convictions, though suspect in numerous other criminal activities.

He may have an extensive criminal record, with convictions for fraud, assault, and even murder.

Firesetting motivation: Rationally motivated by economic incentives.

Arson planning: Premeditated and often carefully planned to avoid detection.

Solitary or group firesetting: If he is an affiliate or member of a loosely knit or structured criminal enterprise, he may work with one or more other arsonists. If he is an independent, he will most often function as a solitary arsonist.

Behavior prior to firesetting: Often prepares the facility for burning a day or so prior to firesetting in order to insure that it burns as intended.

Behavior at firesetting: As little time as possible is spent in the structure at the time of firesetting. The fire is usually timed in order to provide for his adequate departure prior to the incendiarism.

Behavior after firesetting: Commonly departs the fire scene immediately and prior to the arrival of the fire service. Often returns home, to a bar, or to other planned activities to establish an alibi.

Although there is no concrete clinical proof supporting the contention that the professional arsonist is psychopathic in style, there is reason to suspect that many of them are antisocial or have at least adopted the characteristics more typically associated with that personality type. This postulate is based on their behavioral pattern and choice of a criminal lifestyle.

According to the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual—Mental Disorders* (DSM) III, only persons 18 and over are diagnosed as antisocial (psychopathic) if:

1) There were at least two instances of deviant behavior, such as theft, vandalism, or unusually aggressive behavior, before age 15;

2) There have been at least three behavior problems, such as financial irresponsibility, illegal occupation, and poor work history, since age 15 and no period longer than 5 years without such a problem;

3) The antisocial behavior is not a symptom of another disorder.⁹⁷

Characteristically, the psychopath knows right from wrong, is in touch with reality, and does not suffer from psychotic delusions or hallucinations. Therefore, he does not fall, by definition, within the purview of legal insanity. The most dangerous psychopaths, according to James C. Coleman, et al., are:

"... those who are not only intelligent and completely unscrupulous, but also show sufficient self-control and purposefulness of behavior..."⁹⁸

William and Joan McCord have described the psychopath as "an asocial, aggressive, highly impulsive person, who feels little or no guilt..."⁹⁹

Although impulsive, he is also often a very cunning, methodical, and premeditated offender capable of any form of criminal behavior. It is also possible for this type of personality to remain undetected in society and free from criminality. He may, however, stay on the periphery of unlawful conduct, e.g., shyster lawyers, unscrupulous businessmen, and unethical politicians. The psychopath's life is frequently characterized as risk-taking, exploitative, manipulative, irresponsible, and unethical. If engaged in criminality, he is often found to be involved in fraudulent schemes, as well as various forms of aggressive and assaultive behavior. Some of the most brutal homicides are perpetuated by psychopaths. Due to their sadistic nature, they receive great satisfaction from seeing others suffer. It gives them a sense of power and dominance.

The psychopath is known to manipulate or to toy with the police during their investigations. He may even offer assistance or provide evidence to the authorities in an effort to mislead them. He is not easily intimidated. Consequently, approaching a psychopathic suspect for the purpose of discouraging him, by telling him that he is a target of an investigation, will often only encourage his continuation. His egocentricity and pathological self-confidence drive him to prove his superiority.

Arson-for-profit would appear attractive to a psychopath. The risks of being caught are low and the financial incentives are often extremely inviting. In addition, it would provide him with a suitable and profitable outlet for his sadistic, excitement-seeking nature. He would receive tremendous pleasure and gloat in being able to frustrate the authorities in their efforts to solve his crimes.

This type of offender is not easily deterred. The threat of punishment often has little or no impact on the psychopath's behavior. He is most vulnerable, however, when it becomes obvious to him that he has been trapped and there is no way out. At that point, he may bargain or offer a deal to save himself or to at least minimize his punishment. He does not like to be the scapegoat. When he sees this happening, he often offers to become a Government witness or informant. It should be recognized, how-

"... a comprehensive analysis of the arson enterprise will most likely divulge multiprofiles rather than a single, typical one."

ever, that whatever he does or offers is to his own advantage. If he foresees no personal benefit or gain from his cooperation, chances are that he will not cooperate. Relying on this type of personality for assistance is risky, even when it appears that he is amenable.

In light of this, it is advantageous for arson and law enforcement authorities to know when they are investigating or targeting a psychopathic suspect.

Their selection of investigative strategies should be based on his style of personality. For instance, the premature interview of this type of suspect could prove to be damaging, if not fatal, to his future prosecution. He is not likely to offer a confession nor is he prone to inform on his confederates, unless he sees his own prosecution as inevitable. Furthermore, if he detects weakness in the ongoing investigation, he may become stimulated to continue flaunting his incendiary talents before the authorities and then boast of their inadequacy to stop him. If he were previously unaware of being investigatively targeted, his premature approach by authorities could drive him into more discreet activity, thus further complicating the investigation.

The most vulnerable aspect of the psychopath is his egocentricity or love of self. Self-gratification and self-preservation are central to his impulsive behavior. He is prone to be manipulative and exhibitionistic (to demonstrate his superiority), but over-confidence can lead to his downfall.

Although he is sensitive to manipulation by others, it is possible to manipulate subtly this type of offender. When he perceives a challenge by the authorities, he often instinctively reacts. He must prove his dominance. However, psychopaths characteristically react to frustration with fury. Thus, they may become extremely dangerous when cornered or frustrated.

There is insufficient data on which to base a conclusive profile of the professional hired torch. Glimpses of his personality, however, have been captured in those who have been identified as professional "torches," and the psychopathic style of behavior appears to be manifested in many of them to varying degrees.

The Arson Conspirators

As noted previously, conspirators in arson-for-profit schemes and enterprises have been identified most often by their criminal associations and occupational and professional titles. However, one's title or occupation is not sufficient, in and of itself, to characterize psychologically an individual. Persons with varying personalities, behavioral styles, and backgrounds may be employed in similar jobs or careers. Although the professional participant (the banker, insurance adjuster, or lawyer) plays a vital role in the successful operation of arson-for-profit enterprises, his occupation does not descriptively illustrate his personality or explain why he has chosen to become involved to the exclusion of others. People are unique and individualistic.

Some of the known arson co-conspirators have had long criminal histories; others, only sporadic conflict with the law. Many have lived exemplary lives up to a point. They have been civic-minded and forthright—even dedicated to the pursuit of honesty. Some have even stood as bastions against criminality and lawlessness. What then caused these persons to turn to dishonesty and criminal behavior? Were they latent criminals? Is their involvement fortuitous? Do they share common personality traits or patterns?

These questions cannot be answered with any certainty, since little is really understood about any of the conspirators. Consequently, attempting to assess their psyches would be, at best, speculative and tenuous at this time without in-depth study and supporting clinical evidence. While behavioral scientists have theorized on the reasons for criminal behavior, there appears to be no single causative factor for crime. If anything, it is eclectic.

Although a significant portion of arson appears to be attributed to the severely mentally and emotionally maladjusted, arson-for-profit seems to be the product of a rational offender who has selectively chosen incendiarism for financial considerations rather than for the relief of tension or for vengeance, though neither of these elements can be totally eliminated from any firesetting behavior.

Arson-for-profit is an attractive offense to the professional criminal. Smalltime hoodlums and fly-by-night arsonists have possibly seized upon incendiarism as an opportunity to establish a reputation and earn easy money. In either case, their involvement is symptomatic of their basic behavioral and psychological predisposition to crime. Chances are that if they were not "burning" for money, they would be engaged in other forms of criminality. In fact, it is not uncommon to find these persons engaged simultaneously in arson as well as in other forms of criminal behavior. Crime, then, is a way of life and a style of persistent behavior for these offenders.

It is possible that many conspirators have seized upon arson as an opportunistic method for expeditiously and safely extricating themselves from financial difficulties. If their lifestyles were assessed, a common history of risk-taking, impulsiveness, poor judgment, and pretentious living would probably be found. It is likely that they have invested unwisely, squandered their savings, and over-extended their indebtedness. They have sought to make fast money and to acquire social recognition and prestige through the acquisition of wealth. Instead, their lives have been marked by continuous failure and frustration. Out of desperation they seek relief from this burden so they can start anew. However, their lifestyles will not change and they will continue to strive for the unattainable. Their desire for more is insatiable.

There are certain businessmen and entrepreneurs who appear to have accepted arson as a legitimate and profitable alternative to bankruptcy and excessive overhead. Some have even adopted it as a common business practice or as an investment enterprise. Although often void of a registry of criminality, these unethical businessmen and investors have often been engaged in fraudulent activities or on the fringes of criminality much of their business careers. Some of these financiers have even accepted fiduciary interest in organized or loosely organized crime activities. Their behavioral style closely correlates with that of the psychopath—impulsive, egocentric, and ruthless. Therefore, their involvement in arson is not out of character; it is actually compatible with their basic psychological pattern.

There are also those engaged in arson who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Their lives are characterized by the inner-city ghetto, poverty, unemployment, governmental subsistence, and feelings of isolation and exploitation. Here, arson is used as a method of social and racial protest, as well as a technique to elevate fraudulently their living standards and to obtain better housing. Such behavior often demonstrates cultural conflict as well as criminality.

The anatomy of an arson scheme or enterprise depicts a structural network and pattern of interrelated components. Whatever the configuration of the network, each participant has a specific role and is involved for a particular self-serving purpose. The players are psychologically prepared to engage in such behavior; all that is required to unify these components is the catalyst—opportunity. Therefore, economic arson is often a fortuitous act as well as a continuing enterprise. Arson-for-profit frequently feeds off crises. Many of the co-conspirators are drawn to this form of criminality because they perceive it as offering a simplistic and undetectable solution to their immediate distress or needs.

A reliable profile cannot be presently constructed on a "typical" arson-for-profit conspirator. The variability of backgrounds and personalities of the participants may even preclude the development of a stereotypic profile. In fact, a comprehensive analysis of the arson enterprise will most likely divulge multiprofiles rather than a single, typical one. What is needed is a comprehensively designed analytical investigation into the individual and interpersonal dynamics of such group behavior.

An Arson Protocol

Any successful criminal prosecution is predicated on a well-systematized and comprehensively formulated investigative process. The more complex the scheme though, the more necessary it is for the investigation to be strategically planned and executed.

One of the most critical support components in any arson-for-profit investigation is the intelligence gathering and analysis function. If appropriately designed and employed, this process can provide invaluable insight into the operation of the criminal enterprise and furnish the data necessary to design specific targeting strategies. On the other hand, a hastily built investigative approach may prove to be fatal to the successful penetration and destruction of such a scheme.

A technique which holds promise for effectively targeting the participants in arson-for-profit is the psychological profile. If appropriately constructed, the profile can possibly serve as an analytical tool in identifying and assessing the most vulnerable elements in the conspiracy. The profile, however, must be based on a comprehensive and standardized data collection format. Therefore, an arson protocol appears to be a necessary and vital prerequisite to implementing a psychological profiling program in arson-for-profit cases.

The term "protocol," as defined in psychiatric and psychological literature, means:

"The individual case record; the 'raw material' of a study or experiment before it has been included into the conclusions or overall results of the study. In clinical psychiatry, the protocol commonly refers to the complete case history and workup, in contrast to the case summary or final conclusions about the individual case."¹⁰⁰

Basically, a protocol is a data collection instrument designed to record raw material of a given study—subject or group. The instrument would facilitate and standardize the collection and analysis of relevant criminological, psychological, and demographic information on known or suspected arsonists and arson conspirators. It would aid in the selective targeting of certain members of a group by furnishing data necessary to pinpoint those most likely to be vulnerable to intensive investigation or susceptible to Government persuasion.

"One of the most critical support components in any arson-for-profit investigation is the intelligence gathering and analysis function."

sion to act as informants or to become witnesses for the Government.

The protocol could also serve as a research instrument for interviewing and assessing subjects who have been convicted on arson-related violations. Profiles gleaned from such studies could serve three purposes: (1) To provide applied and comprehensive profiles of known arsonists and arson conspirators; (2) to aid in the training of investigative personnel who are assigned to arson task forces and organized crime strike forces; and (3) to support future investigative efforts in these areas.

An Overview

Arson and arson-for-profit is one of the fastest growing criminal activities in this country today. By explaining the many psychodynamics related to firesetting and demonstrating the applicability of psychological profiling to arson, it is possible to illustrate the cluster characteristics and firesetting behaviors associated with particular arsonists.

However, it is apparent that all firesetters are not alike and that little is really known about their motivation or firesetting behaviors. Because of this, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive and detailed study of known firesetters of all types, to include the various pathological firesetters, as well as those who engage in arson-for-profit conspiracies. **FBI**

Footnotes

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¹⁰¹ U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Governmental Affairs, *ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, pp. 111-115.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Jack Horn, "The Big Business of Arson: Building Burners for Hire," *Psychology Today*, February 1976, p. 52.

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¹⁰⁶ Robert G. Vreeland and Marcus B. Waller, *The Psychology of Firesetting: A Review and Appraisal* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1979), p. 4.

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