

Book Review: John Douglas and Mark Olshaker, *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*. New York, NY: Pocket Books. 1995. ISBN: 978-1-5011-7996-9 (Paperback). 420 Pages. \$8.99.

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Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit is a first-hand account by retired Special Agent John Douglas who was one of the first criminal profilers in the FBI's history. The book details his life's work by focusing on the psychological profiling that he developed to study the most prolific serial killers in America, and understand the serial killer thought process. The prologue of the book begins by describing a sudden illness that he had never experienced before, and ultimately one that would come close to ending his life. During his time as a profiler, the Special Agent traveled around the country to lecture about the cases he has worked and to help other agencies solve cases. While working in Seattle, he was hospitalized for a high fever and a seizure that ultimately put him in a medically induced coma where he was expected to have permanent brain damage even if he survived the physical trauma.

Mindhunter opens with the first chapter covering details into specific types of crime scenes and how the FBI can support local law enforcement during the investigation process. Douglas compares the mind of a serial killer to that of a hunter and describes how one who is hunting a killer must actually think of hunting the victims that the killer chose. This chapter goes on to describe how clues at a crime scene can tell law enforcement more about the offender and even provide indicators about the offender's personality. He describes his work as a "weapon" that he has developed over the years while working hundreds of cases. The author then describes his high school, college, and military

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experience. Douglas has multiple confrontations with law enforcement during his college experience and discusses how his time in the military was not what he expected.

After a rough patch between school, and his time in the military, Douglas was approached by a special agent from the FBI. He joined the FBI in 1970 and gained notoriety through an array of participations during his training and classes. It is once he joins the Behavioral Science Unit (what would later become the Investigative Support Unit) in the FBI that he noticed many of the courses that intended to teach the FBI agents were not actually teaching them about profiling. While traveling to instruct other law enforcement agencies about profiling, he realizes that no one from the bureau has ever spoken with convicted killers to acquire more information for the profiling process. As it turns out, the accuracy of profiling serial killers is best learned through comprehensively researching and evaluating different crimes. Profilers who can adopt different approaches and practice various means of research and observations are more likely to produce more accurate profiles. (Kocsis, R. N. 2013).

Douglas begins a new initiative by asking the Bureau for permission to interview the convicted offenders. Ed Kemper and Charles Manson were among the first inmates to be interviewed. At the end of chapter six, it becomes clear that profiling had been elevated by interviewing multiple offenders and connecting evidence from the crime scenes to the killers' thought process. *Mindhunter* demonstrates how the foundation of profiling was established with these procedures to show a promising future for criminal profilers.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable techniques that agent Douglas demonstrates throughout the book is finding the suspects Modus Operandi, also known as MO, and discovering the suspects' signature. In Chapter 13, the "signature" of a serial killer versus the "MO" is explained by Douglas. The book details the case of Robert Hansen, a purportedly easygoing, prominent member of Anchorage, Alaska who is later found to hunt humans. A seventeen-year-old prostitute had escaped his kidnapping and torturing to alert police of her capture. Police later dropped the potential charges after he produced a verified alibi and claimed that a prostitute cannot be raped. Douglas uses this case to explain the difference between a signature of a serial killer versus the MO. He claims that a Modus Operandi is a learned behavior and can be improved upon. It's what the perpetrator does to commit the crime. It is self-motivated by the offender and can be changed as needed. The "signature" of a suspect is a term the Special Agent uses to describe what

the perpetrator must do in order to fulfill his desires. According to Douglas, the signature remains the same and does not change like the MO. (Forensic Examiner, 1996).

Later, the bodies of three other women would be found in Alaska (where Hansen owned a cabin for hunting game) who were all killed by the same type of bullet, that of a .223 Ruger Mini-14, a high-powered hunting rifle. Two of the three victims were topless dancers in the area. Since prostitutes are often transient and do not report assaults to police, it can be difficult to point to a perpetrator until it is too late, and the prostitute is found dead. This same problem was pointed out by Douglas in the case of Gary Ridgway. Prior to learning about the suspect, Douglas analyzes the crimes, and evidence, and later describes the killer with specific features such as his height and a likely stutter. It was also determined by Douglas that Hansen was likely bullied by his peers, particularly women, which is what drove his hatred, and need, to kill prostitutes. In this case, the police had a suspect, but Douglas gave a profile to the police prior to learning about the suspect. It is clearly portrayed that the Special Agent can determine when to use profiling during his investigation and when profiling the potential offender can be dangerous to the victims (Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association, 2007). Douglas was accurate to include the stutter. It is understandable that Douglas can give an accurate description of what the killer may have suffered in childhood based on the crimes, however it is fascinating that he can accurately suggest that the killer may have a stutter, or other speech impediments by his methods.

Douglas also accurately determined this in chapter eight while covering the case of David Carpenter. Aside from the extremely specific and accurate description of suspects, the case of Robert Hansen itself is that of tremendous interest. Hansen was a wealthier serial killer that owned a private airplane and had the means to be a big game hunter. Along with his remote cabin and knowledge of the landscape, Hansen would kidnap women then rape and torture them. After the attacks, he released his victims naked into the wilderness to hunt and kill them like animals. He would later confess to killing 17 women but was only convicted of four murders. Finally, the least important discovery of this bizarre case that Douglas also accurately speculates, but interesting nonetheless, was that Hansen drove a Volkswagen Beetle like many other prolific serial killers. Establishing the Modus Operandi, and the signature, of a serial murder has become a fundamental part of profiling and investigative work.

One of the most historically significant cases that *Mindhunter* covers is the Atlanta Child Murders, or the case of Wayne Williams. This case is unquestionably pertinent to the study of serial killers, and profiling for a multitude of reasons. Victims ranged in ages seven to twenty-eight years old, and many victims were still missing while others had been found dead. The glaring issue with this case, notably once Douglas became involved, is that sixteen children had become victims before the case even gained attention by law enforcement because the victims were all Black (Anderson Eric Gary. 2007). *Mindhunter* covers the most well-known serial killers including Dennis Rader, Charles Manson, and Ted Bundy, but often underacknowledged are the Black serial killers. America does not seem to give the same notoriety to prolific Black serial killers as they do White serial killers. There are many reasons why this continues to happen, even to this day, including racial issues, the imagery of slavery, and the media and law enforcement portrayal of serial killers.

When learning about serial killer profiling, oftentimes a serial killer is thought to be young, white, and charming because that is what is portrayed in many true crime books and film, and often what the media chooses to cover (Branson, A. L. 2013). When the children of Atlanta were found dead or missing, many did not think that the cases were related. However, many of the parents came together in search of help for the missing children. The crimes were thought to be committed by the Ku Klux Klan, also known as the “KKK”, and were controversial for crossing multiple jurisdictions as well as involving multiple city and political officials. This case became one of the first to cover a Black serial killer and changed the understanding of what a serial murder looks like. Douglas, along with the other FBI agents working with him, did not believe the crimes were actual hate crimes for several reasons. Douglas describes that hate crimes are usually done in a public manner in order to make a statement. Next, he explains that many of the dump sites where the bodies were found were in characteristically black neighborhoods making it almost impossible for a white serial killer to be in the area multiple times and go undetected. Lastly, many of the victims were locals and with experience in their surrounding neighborhoods. He explains how this shows that the unidentified subject was likely someone that the victims could trust as one of their own rather than an outsider. The decision to accuse, and convict, Wayne Williams as the Atlanta Child Killer was controversial and still remains so today. However, this case was critical to the development of multijurisdictional agencies coordinating more cohesively while publicizing a case that involves multiple Black victims with a Black serial killer.

Another valuable program implemented by Douglas and the FBI, was the Criminal Personality Research Project. This project involved asking convicted criminals to cooperate with law enforcement for research purposes. In chapter seven of *Mindhunter*, Douglas wants to understand what leads a person to become a sexual offender and find other driving factors including the victim choosing process. He begins his research by interviewing convicted serial killer and rapist, Richard Speck. Speck was guilty of raping one woman and killing eight women in a single night. The interview process proved to be difficult as Speck initially refused to speak with FBI agents because he felt that he was not crazy like other murderers. Douglas explains this encounter in detail and describes how an investigator must modify the interview technique according to how the offender wants the interview to go.

Douglas casually begins speaking to a counselor in the room and using vulgar language. He becomes looser with his words and pretends to have an aggressive attitude about the victims. This gets Richard Speck's attention, and he begins talking with investigators. Douglas remains casual with the conversation and slowly begins to learn more about Speck who tries desperately to continue his tough guy persona. This case was fundamental to the project because it showcased behaviors of an unorganized killer. However, Richard Speck was considered by Douglas to be a mass murderer, while his MO fell under the disorganized serial killer category. The FBI profiling method includes studying the crime scene, the victims, and the personal traits of the offender to help bring together the profile. Disorganized serial killers do not plan the offense and have little control over the outcome of the crime. The crime scene is generally chaotic and there is usually a generous amount of evidence left behind (Boschken, J. 2014). Interviewing people like Speck were pivotal to establishing the pattern of a disorganized offender. Later in the chapter, Douglas defines an organized killer who continues to improve and refine the details of his killings after every attack.

In *Mindhunter*, killer Jerry Brudos is introduced as a shoe fetishist. When discussing the different forms of paraphilia for serial killers, having an obsession with an inanimate object seems to be the least harmful. Brudos, however, was anything but harmless. The fetish began when he found a pair of high heeled shoes, but his furious mother demanded him to dispose of them. He tried to keep his fetish hidden by breaking into homes at night to steal shoes, which later progressed to underwear. His fetish for objects eventually led to him attacking women. Therapy at Salem State hospital did not seem to help his sexual fantasies and he was later released because he was not found to be dangerous.

Soon after release, he killed a woman, cut off her foot and put it into one of his cherished shoes. Brudos showed traits of an organized offender which tied into his fantasies that he developed when he was a child. His activities escalated as he refined his lived-out fantasies and became obsessed with perfecting the process of his crimes. He later was placed at the Oregon State Penitentiary after previously being released from Salem State hospital for being non-violent.

Mindhunter is considered the pioneer story of criminal profiling and explains how the Behavioral Analysis Unit began and developed the revolutionary methods still used in today's law enforcement practices. Prior to Douglas joining the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, the profiling of a serial killer was only based on evidence from crime scenes and scenarios. Once he joined the FBI, they were able to assist multiple law enforcement agencies in some of the country's most prolific serial murder cases. The author received commendations and much admiration for his work with the Behavioral Science Unit within the FBI. The work that Douglas describes throughout the book was pivotal for investigations into serial killers. The publication is intriguing, impeccable and its contents produced a strong foundation to criminal profiling. The book has even influenced pop culture by inspiring multiple movies, shows and writings since its production.

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