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New directions in offender typology design, development, and implementation: Can we balance risk, treatment and control?

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Abstract

It should come as no surprise that there is no "one-stop shopping" offender typology available that can identify the risk level, targeted treatment protocols, and control levels of the offender groups examined in this special issue: murderers, sex offenders, batterers, violent prisoners, and violent mentally ill offenders. We are in desperate need of further research establishing the links between offender risk level, offender treatment needs, and offender control requirements for each of these offender groups. This article provides a "state of the art" discussion of the key issues that must be addressed by policymakers, practitioners, and ultimately, the public, vis-à-vis the design, development, and implementation of typologies for each of these targeted groups of offenders. This is followed by our assessment of the lessons learned from the great prison classification experiment. We conclude by providing an assessment of new directions in the development of typologies of offenders and the communities in which offenders reside, based on the simple notion that offender change–not offender control–needs to be the primary focus of the next generation of correctional classification systems.
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1. Introduction

Our special issue of *Aggression and Violent Behavior* presents "state of the art" reviews of the research on the application of empirically-based offender typologies in each of the following areas: (1) sex offenders (Robertiello and Terry; Burgess, et al.), (2) homicide offenders (Roberts, Zgoba, and Shahidullah) (3) male vs. female batterers (Bender and Roberts), (4) mentally ill offenders (Harris and Lurigio), and (5) offenders involved in prison violence(Byrne and Hummer). In addition, we have included two studies that consider new approaches to typology development, including a theory-based typology of community culture that incorporates person–environment interactions and a social ecological framework (Stowell and Byrne); and a new typology of community violence that replaces the traditionally narrow focus on homicide with a wide range of behaviors resulting in violent death (Neuilly). Finally, we have included a study of that incorporates rarely used measures of nativity/ethnicity in order to shed new light on the relationship between immigration and various forms of community level violence (Stowell and Martinez). According to the authors, "Using ethnic-origin as a means of classifying a neighborhood's foreign-born population will promote a more nuanced understanding of the differential impacts of immigration on levels of violent criminal offending (this issue)". Given the recent attention focused on immigration policy generally and the Latino Paradox (i.e. Latinos have lower levels of violence than African Americans) in particular, this study's findings have important implications for community level violence prevention. Taken together, these articles underscore the shift from clinical to actuarial judgments in criminal justice decision-making generally and in typology development in particular (Gottfredson & Moriarity, 2006), while also suggesting new directions for theory, policy, and practice in terms of both offender-based and community-based typologies of violent behavior (Byrne, 2006).

At the center of most debates about how to classify, treat, and control violent behavior is the prison. The decision to send a convicted offender either home or to prison can be viewed as the result of a simple classification decision (prison vs. home) that has consequences for both offenders and communities that are important to understand (Byrne & Taxman, 2005). For this reason, we have included a review of the effectiveness of what some have called "the great prison experiment" (Clear, in press; Stemen, 2007); we then consider the implications of these findings for the specific groups of offenders that are the target of the typologies examined in this special issue: murderers, sex offenders, batterers, and violent mentally ill individuals. We begin with a discussion of the key issues that must be addressed by policymakers, practitioners, and ultimately, the public, vis-à-vis the design, development, and implementation of typologies for these targeted groups of offenders. This is followed by our assessment of the lessons learned from the great prison experiment. We conclude by providing an assessment of new directions in the development of typologies of offenders and the communities in which offenders reside.

2. The historical roots of criminal typologies: a brief note

In 1876, Cesare Lombroso, a medical doctor in Italy, and founder of the Positive School of Criminology wrote the first treatise on the biological and typological theory of the criminal. Based on anthropometric measurements Dr. Lombroso identified six types of offenders: 1) The born criminal; 2) the epileptic criminal; 3) the criminal of irresistable passion; 4) the insane or feebleminded criminal; 5) the occasional criminal, and 6) the persistent and non-abnormal type of criminal (Mannheim, 1960). Lombroso was the first to develop a classificatory typology, but he did realize the many limitations of his primitive typology in determining causation and motivation of the offenders. By today's empirically-based standards, Lombroso's early typology was very primitive.

Dr. Enrico Ferri, a former student of Lombroso, built on and expanded his mentor's typology in the early 1900s (Barnes & Teeter, 1958). Ferri expanded on the fifth and sixth subtype and added a seventh type. The "occasional offender" seemed to be the largest group, and a product of growing up with a family of lawbreakers and in crime infested neighborhoods. The "persistent criminal" was redefined as the habitual criminal who lacks education, grows up in poverty, has deviant companions, and is a product of his environment. The seventh subtype identified by Ferri was the involuntary criminal who causes damage as a result of poor foresight, negligence or disobedience rather than through evil intent or malice (Mannheim, 1960). Obviously, in terms of the conceptualization and testing of offender typologies based on psychological, psychiatric, sociological, and biological factors, we have come a long way in the past 100 years. The articles in this special issue document the important recent progress that has been made in the development of empirically-based offender classification systems and typologies.