

## BOOK REVIEW

Donald Rossi,<sup>1</sup> Ph.D.

### Review of: *Geographic Profiling*

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**REFERENCE:** Rossmo DK. *Geographic profiling*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2000, 347 pp.

Dr. Rossmo, a criminologist and a police officer has formulated a procedure that has been titled "geographic profiling" which is explained and illustrated in this relatively easy-to-follow book. A seasoned specialist in law enforcement, Dr. Rossmo has combined his experiences as a police officer with his education in criminology to offer an interesting formula intended to facilitate the process of investigating particularly serial crimes. The book's 12 chapters are enhanced by a glossary and lengthy bibliography. Criminal behavioral demography occupies nine of the chapters with one devoted to "geographic profiling," another to applications and a final concluding chapter. The reader will find a preponderance of descriptive criminology and an relative absence of criminal psychodynamics. This is not a work focusing on causality or etiology of criminal behavior. Rather, the author utilizes characteristics similar to diagnostic symptoms, a procedure that lends itself to the formula proposed by Dr. Rossmo. At the center of his model is computer analysis of variables associated with crime scene locations ideally resulting in the identification and apprehension of the perpetrator.

For this technological age, Dr. Rossmo's proposals are attractive, intriguing, and promising. However, when the reader discovers that the criminology is superficial and the methodology is at best elementary probability applied to a sophisticated presentation,

unsupported by empirical research, disappointment may follow. Unfortunately, most law enforcement personnel are not trained in research methodology nor are they sophisticated in empirical analysis of proposals, thus it is not difficult to understand the enthusiasm with which a model like Dr. Rossmo's would be accepted. His rationale may form the basis for a sound theory and the methodology he offers may suggest utility. However, Dr. Rossmo has offered nothing more than the idea that his computer paradigm has a higher probability of success than a good deductive reasoning police officer. At a time when investigators are often overwhelmed with cases, such a proposal can appear as a life saver.

In the section addressing validity, Dr. Rossmo offers explanations about validity, however, does not provide empirical evidence to support his position. He refers to his work as "mathematical," yet when this reviewer submitted chapter ten to a professor of mathematics for analysis and comment, the result was "probability" at best. Dr. Rossmo offers what may be a helpful tool for the organization of data. Research findings to support the validity of predictive probability are not provided. Additionally, an examination of the lengthy bibliography reveals few references to empirical research. The contents of "Geographic Profiling" is reminiscent of another investigative tool which was presented to the law enforcement community some 25 years ago. It too had much to offer and was embraced with eagerness and zeal, receiving recognition from the I.A.C.P. and spreading worldwide. While the practice had promise its methodologies had not been researched so as to establish a foundation of scientific worthiness. As a result, over a ten year period, it all but disappeared from law enforcement. The true merits of the methodology have yet to be demonstrated and its potential awaits discovery. Scientifically worthy meaning is demanding to obtain as it is with all good science. Law enforcement should be no less demanding than biology, chemistry, physics, or physiology.

<sup>1</sup> Director Behavioral Science Section, Michigan State Police (Retired); Diplomate in Clinical Psychology; Fellow Academy of Clinical Psychology; Clinical and Research Psychoanalyst; and Life Member, International Association of Chiefs of Police.