



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2003

12 Offender Typology in Action: Case Studies of Hate Offenders and the Impact on Law Enforcement Training

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The goals of this presentation are to present to the forensic community case studies of mission and thrill-seeking hate offenders, as defined by the research of McDevitt and Levin, that assist in understanding the implications of alternative sentencing guidelines, as well as evaluating existing screening mechanisms as useful in predicting hate-related violence. In addition, the paper will explore the means of educating law enforcement on this topic as it relates to criminal investigation skills and practices.

Proposition: That a greater understanding of how McDevitt and Levin's theory as practically applied to real world examples of offender behavior will result in better decision-making by members of the criminal justice system.

This paper focuses on the experiences of Anti-Defamation League staff, who, through the implementation of a "Juvenile Diversion Program," as well as law enforcement training and community response, came in contact with both members of extremist groups as well as those connected to them. In addition, the paper highlights effective training techniques utilized by the presenter in educating law enforcement as to the need to understand Offender Typology, as not only a predictor of violence, but as a means of enhancing follow-up investigations.

In July of 1999, Benjamin Smith, a member of the white supremacist group, World Church of the Creator, went on a multi-state killing spree, murdering two and injuring several others in his racially motivated attacks prior to taking his own life in a police standoff. Smith had been a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and had several run-ins with both the University police as well as the Student Judicial system for crimes unrelated to bias; he had been picked up for exposing his genitals at a girls dormitory and had been repeatedly cited for physically battering his girlfriend. Extensive conversations with his girlfriend, as well as Student Judicial staff paint a vivid portrait of a young man who was not only seduced by the mission of a particular hate group, but of an individual who actively sought out the "right" group to seduce him.

In the spring of 2000, ADL reached out to UIUC, participating in anti-bias programming and leading educational programs on offender typology. In preparing for this effort, staff researched possible screening mechanisms for violent or suicidal behavior in youth, and presented it to UIUC judicial staff. The screening mechanisms were found at the web site www.OregonCounseling.org, operated by Mentor Research Institute (MRI), a non-profit 501(c)3. MRI is affiliated with the American Mental Health Alliance-Oregon (AMHA-OR), a non-profit mutual benefit professional corporation. According to the Student Judicial Staff who had met repeatedly with Smith, not only did he fit the "mission offender" typology; he also met nearly all of the criteria of the violent or suicidal behavior in youth screening mechanisms.

ADL staff has also worked with the criminal justice system to devise juvenile diversion programs as part of court-ordered sentencing on hate crime cases. Part of that training requires that all prospective offenders be screened by ADL staff to determine if their level of commitment to their particular extremist group is so severe as to prohibit them from growing beyond their violent, racist tendencies. Upon acceptance to the program, the offender meets with a broad range of ADL staff, where issues including racism, anti-Semitism, and extremist group ideology are explored. Through these conversations, staff was given a window into the world of the "thrill seeking offender," where part of the thrill comes from dabbling in extremist group ideology, enhancing the youth's sense of self and connectedness, buoying him into criminal action. In fact, the similarities between the needs of youth whom join extremist groups were, minus the element of financial gain, identical to youth who joined traditional street gangs.

ADL plays a large role in educating law enforcement nationally on issues of hate crime and extremist group activity. The presenter has ten years of experience in law enforcement training, and has found empirically that this audience responds most effectively when new theories are related to practices already implemented on some level. For example, connecting "Offender Typology" to what the criminal justice community currently knows about the profiling of stalkers and the varying levels of risk posed by them has been very successful, as has the aforementioned gang reference. Key to effective training is the level of practicality provided by the presenter, as well as the relationship of new material to older, accepted material.

In conclusion, it is critical that the forensic and greater criminal justice community recognizes the utility of both the research that supports McDevitt and Levin's work on offender typology, as well as its practical applications. In addition, by utilizing other screening mechanisms to augment it, the theory may be applied in a manner that supports better understanding of offenders so that they may be sentenced justly, treat them appropriately, and protect communities with a higher degree of thoughtfulness and care.

Hate Crimes, Offender Motivation, Bias Crime