

# *Criminal Behavioral Assessment of Arsonists, Pyromaniacs, and Multiple Firesetters*

The Burning Question

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Historically, human beings have had a long and intense fascination with fire. Once it was realized that the powers of this phenomenon could be harnessed and manipulated to suit the needs of the individual who wished to control it, a new and deadly category of criminal activity arose, the act of arson. Deliberate firesetting, or incendiarism, is one of the most malevolent and potent forms of maladaptive behavior that is spawned by the criminal mind. It is also one of the least understood and infrequently studied behaviors because of problems such as design complications, biased sampling, unreliable subjects, and reporting errors and inconsistencies. However, data gathered over the previous years have significantly increased our knowledge surrounding various aspects of the arsonist, and yielded several hypotheses that explain why an individual engages in willful firesetting activities. This article will provide a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding arson in an attempt to better understand those whose obsession with fire ceases to be extinguished.

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**I**n order to fully understand and appreciate the context presented here, it is first necessary to operationalize the concept that is the basis for this article. *Arson* may be described as “the willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property or another, etc.” (Department of Justice, 1980). *Firesetting* is a broader, more general term because the act does not require intent on the part of the individual. Thus, a person can engage in firesetting behavior by accident (i.e., careless smoking). In contrast, the phrase *deliberate firesetting* is often used synonymously with arson



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and is predicated on the relevance of intent. *Pyromania* is another term used in conjunction with arson. Pyromaniacs, however, "have a persistent compulsion to set fires. They receive no material benefit from the act and lack conscious motivation for it" (Bennett & Hess, 1984). Pyromania eventually received official recognition when it was incorporated into the *DSM-III* (American Psychological Association, 1980) as a disorder of impulse control.

The estimates on the percentage of deliberate firesetters who are pyromaniacs are extremely varied and controversial. Some estimates are as high as 40% (Mavromatis & Lion, 1977), whereas others claim that pyromania is very rare, especially cases involving those individuals who obtain sexual gratification from the act (Geller, Erlen, & Pinkus, 1986; MacDonald, 1977; Rice & Harris, 1991). *Fire-bug* is a term coined by Lewis and Yarnell (1951), who in 1951 conducted the most extensive study ever undertaken on criminals and their association with fire. Fire-bugs are "those offenders who said they set their fires for no practical reasons and received no material help for the act" (Lewis & Yarnell, 1951). An additional category is reserved for the hired torch. The hired torch is a "professional who sets fires for financial profit" (Bennett & Hess, 1984). Other subcategories continue to be teased out of the literature as the database on arson continues to develop. These distinct categories include psychotic firesetters, female firesetters, juvenile and adolescent firesetters, nonpsychologically motivated firesetters, personality-disordered firesetters, group firesetters, and so forth. In reviewing the literature on arson and firesetting, it was readily apparent that there was a lack of consistency and cohesiveness in the attempts to provide an adequate classification schemata.

The historical significance of arson and its penalties is lengthy and diverse. Prior to the French Revolution, arson in France was punishable by death, and in a few documented cases, the arsonist was burned alive (Steinbach, 1986). During the turn of the 19th century, attempts were made in Germany and France, and eventually Britain and America, to understand pathologic arson. In 1833, Marc introduced the concept of *monomanie incendiaire*, or pyromania, as a condition suffered by pathologic arsonists (Pilgrim, 1885).

Germany and France were the first countries to designate pyromania as a form of insanity, which led to the enactment of legal clauses whereby those individuals diagnosed with pyromania could avoid the death penalty. Isaac Ray was the first American to use the term pyromania when, in 1844, he used the term in the second edition of *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*. Ray described pyromania as a "distinct form of insanity, annulling the responsibility for the acts to which it leads." In the early 20th century, arson was adopted into a psychoanalytical framework by Freud (1932), as well as by Stekel who, in *Peculiarities of Behavior* (1924), wrote about the

“sexual root of pyromania.” Freud, in particular, postulated the idea of disordered psychosexual development, with a specific mention of fixation (or regression) to the phallic-urethral stage of psychosexual development. Freud’s interpretations were laden with references to homosexuality, the similarities of the flames in action to the phallus in motion, and the overwhelming desire to extinguish the flames with a stream of urine (Freud, 1932; Zeegers, 1984).

### **STATISTICS ON THE CRIME OF ARSON IN AMERICA**

On a per capita basis, the United States has one of the most extensive arson problems in the world. Between the years of 1983 and 1989, more than 2 million fires, 5,800 civilian deaths and 28,500 civilian injuries occurred, and 8 billion dollars in property loss occurred annually between these years (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1988). In 1989, 97,000 fires were attributed to suspicious origins, which led to an estimated 1.5 billion dollars in property damage (Karter, 1990). Arson was also the third leading cause of residential fires, the second leading cause of residential fire fatalities, and the leading cause of nonresidential fires. However, during that same year, only 15% of arson-related offenses were solved by arrest, and of these, 50% were never prosecuted, and roughly one third of those cases prosecuted were found not guilty. Therefore, only approximately 3% of arson offenses led to convictions (Blumberg, 1981; Hall, 1990).

In the past 10 years, arson has ranked within the three leading causes of fires in five countries. In 1990, it was the leading cause of major fires in the United Kingdom and the major cause of insurance loss in Germany. In Japan, 21% of all structural fire deaths between the years of 1983 and 1987 were direct results of incendiary suicide (Hall, 1990). During the year of 1989, in the United States, a fire department responded to a fire every 15 seconds. In addition, many of these fires were of a suspicious nature; these accounted for roughly 30% of all fires (Karter, 1990). Statistics such as these are endless, and they help to promote the need for an understanding of arson and arson-related behavior so that effective treatment programs can be implemented.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF ARSONISTS**

Regardless of how much information has been gathered about arsonists, the behavioral science profession still does not have a complete understanding of this aberrant behavior. It is important to note that there is not a typical arsonist per se; there are only certain characteristics that may be common among those who engage in deliberate firesetting activities. Arson is an

extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon; therefore, the psychological clues gathered from an individual who participates in such an activity may be present in one circumstance and only partly present, or completely absent, in another. Therefore, they represent generalizations that may or may not apply to all cases. There are also problems with obtaining information on arsonists. Anthony Rider (1980) divided this problem into the following five areas: (a) the problem of apprehending arsonists; (b) the legal disposition of arson crimes with the few who are incarcerated; (c) the sources of arson statistics was not centralized until 1978; (d) the legal constraints on information exchange; and (e) the focus and conclusion of past research. Even with this in mind, behavioral science has been able to draw on certain clues and inherent traits that have led to the advent of arsonist profiles much like those of sexual homicide perpetrators, pedophiles, or rapists. A summary of the variables (see Table 1) will be introduced here, with a more extensive list in the form of profiles of two categories of arsonists, a pyromaniac and a hired torch (outlined in Appendix A and Appendix B).

A final variable worth revisiting is that of gender. Much of the data on arsonists has traditionally focused on males due to their involvement in the majority of arson-related crimes. Some studies have concentrated their research more specifically on female arsonists and have yielded some interesting results. A study by Bourget and Bradford (1989) claimed that female arsonists' motives, although similar to those of male arsonists, are often more dangerous and dramatic. For example, there are cases of revenge firesetting and cases of destruction of property that holds some symbolic tie with the woman. Female adolescents often display more concrete motives, such as a rebellion against parental authority or a show of attention-seeking behavior (Bourget & Bradford, 1989). Another variable that was researched in this study was the relationship between the time when the crime was committed and the phases of the menstrual cycle (no correlation was found). A separate research project focusing solely on women concluded that none of the female arsonists studied displayed any evidence of sexual arousal as a result of arson; this is a trait that has been discussed in the male arsonist literature (Stewart, 1993).

### **CRIMINAL MOTIVES AND METHODS**

The motives for arson are subjective and diverse. Much of the literature on arson motives contain innumerable classifications and categories, and many of the typologies are flawed, due in large part to the enormous complexity of the task. However, from the data, several motives do overlap, and they will be discussed here. The predominate motives behind arson include variables ranging from revenge, excitement (including sexual), vandalism, vagrancy,

**TABLE 1**  
*Arsonist Characteristics*

Age	The data varies over an extremely wide range on this component; however, according to one study, the mean age for men was 25 years, and the mean age for women was 31 years (Rix, 1994). One summary of firesetting behavior listed an age range of 4 to 73 (Barker, 1994).
Race	Most studies listed subjects as predominately Caucasian.
Gender	The vast majority of arsonists are male.
Environment	Arsonists frequently come from "disruptive, frustrating, harsh, broken, or unstable homes. Families are often large and in the lower socioeconomic levels. One or both parents are frequently absent from the home. Many come from homes in which the father was absent and the mother was domineering, overly protective, rejecting, or abusive" (Bennett & Hess, 1984). If the father was present, he was typically indifferent, unresponsive, or rejecting (Vreeland & Levin, 1980). A recent study listed a background of parental abuse in 63% of arsonists (Harris & Rice, 1996).
Prior criminal history	Most studies of incarcerated arsonists listed extensive criminal histories; however, not all previous arson offenses resulted in criminal convictions.
Intelligence	Many studies listed intelligence levels that are below average or showed arsonists to be mentally deficient. Of course, it is speculated that this category of arsonist is the one that is most often detected by law enforcement, whereas the intelligent arsonists often get away with their crimes for a longer period of time.
Academic performance	As it relates to the intelligence factor, arsonists often have low academic performances and a high rate of grade failure due to poor study habits.
Social relationships	"Many arsonists are socially maladjusted and loners, lacking the social skills needed for good interpersonal relationships. For most arsonists, relationships with all people are difficult, especially relationships with women" (Bennett & Hess, 1984; Leong, 1992).
Marital ties	Due to the consequences outlined in social relationships, it is expected that numerous arsonists lack marital ties. Many express or hide a fear or hatred of women. Those who are married typically lack the necessary skills for a healthy interpersonal relationship with their partners.
Employment history	Arsonists are typically unemployed or work in unskilled positions, and they often display poor work habits. Difficulties with coworkers and people in authoritative positions are apparent. Often, they will drift from job to job.
Physical deformities and defects	"Arsonists have exhibited a high incidence of physical abnormalities and deformities, sufficiently so that it may be a factor in producing a stressful environment that sets the occasion for activities such as arson" (Bennett & Hess, 1984).
Alcoholism	Several arsonists reported intoxication at the time that they set the fire. According to one study, approximately 43% of institutionalized arsonists reported an alcohol problem in the last year (Rice & Harris, 1991). Another study reported that 56 out of 58 violent offenders and impulsive

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

	firesetters fulfilled the <i>DSM-III</i> (American Psychological Association, 1980) criteria for alcohol abuse, and 44 of 54 subjects had first- or second-degree blood relatives with alcoholism (Linnoila, DeJong, & Virkkunen, 1989). Another study stated that as many as 84% of the arsonists studied have an alcohol problem (Rasanen, Hakko, & Vaisanen, 1995).
Sexual disturbance	It has been the subject of controversial speculation that sexual perversions are associated with arsonists. However, the exact nature of this is unknown. Arson may act as a sexual substitute, and many pyromaniacs have reported a correlation between sexual excitement and arson. As a side note, in one study, a positive history of sexual abuse was found in 18% of men, and 44% of women (Puri, Baxter, & Cordess, 1995).
Emotional disturbances	"Fire-setters are frequently described as psychiatrically disturbed, emotionally distressed, maladjusted, and lacking self-control and self-confidence. They often exhibit significant distress and tension, and they may manifest psychopathic, neurotic, or psychotic disorders" (Bennett & Hess, 1984)

cry for help, attempted suicide, rehousing, psychosis, carelessness, insurance fraud, cover-up, heroism, arson by proxy, vanity, political arson, pathological jealousy, antidepressant, fire buff, hero syndrome, other manipulations, and unknown or no obvious motive arson. One classification of motives for arson has been proposed by Prins, Tennent, and Trick (1985). This classification system tends to encompass the majority of motives that are found throughout the literature. This classification system is as follows:

- A. Arson committed for financial reward
- B. Arson committed to cover up another crime
- C. Arson committed for political purposes (e.g., for specific terrorist or similar activities)
- D. Self-immolation as a political gesture
- E. Arson committed for mixed motives (e.g., in a state of minor depression [reactive], as a cry for help, or under the influence of alcohol)
- F. Arson due to the presence of an actual mental or associated disorder
  1. Severe major or recurring depression
  2. Paranoid schizophrenia
  3. Organic disorders (e.g., brain tumor, head injury, temporal lobe epilepsy, demented processes, disturbed metabolic processes)
  4. Mental subnormality (retardation)
- G. Arson due to motives of revenge
  1. Against an individual or a group of individuals—specific
  2. Against society or others—general
- H. Arson committed as an attention-seeking act (but excluding motives set out under E)

- I. Arson committed as a means of deriving sexual satisfaction or excitement
- J. Arson committed by young adults (17 years and older)
- K. Arson committed by children

(Prins, Tennent, & Trick, 1985, pp. 275-278)

Revenge or anger is an extremely common motive for arson, accounting for as much as 40% in some cases (Rice & Harris, 1991). It is a particularly common motive in western countries where it can take the form of revenge directed at one individual (the boss who fired the arsonist, the lover who rejected the arsonist), or in a larger perspective, directed toward society in general (Davis & Milton, 1997; Inciardi, 1970; O'Connor, 1987; Prins, 1986). Jealousy often plays an integral role in conjunction with revenge.

*Communicative arson* is a popular buzzword that inevitably makes its way into the arson literature. Communicative arson is not a diagnosis; rather, it is a descriptive term used to describe firesetting behavior that expresses a desire, wish, or need. According to Jeffrey Geller (1992b), a psychiatrist who has extensively studied the nature of firesetting behaviors, "fire is a good medium of expression for such persons (those lacking in social skills), because firesetting is non-confrontational and requires no verbal exchange or direct communication of any kind".

Although, in a historical sense, fire has had a long enduring relationship with sexual components, the literature backing this affiliation is rare, and there exists some researchers who discredit the correlation altogether. "All of the evidence for the sexual motivation of firesetting consists of case studies, anecdotes, literary analyses, and uncontrolled group studies" (Quinsey, Chaplain, & Upfold, 1989). It is argued that sexually motivated pyromaniacs, although true to life, make up only a small percentage of the arsonist population (Bradford, 1985; Hill et al., 1982; Scott, 1974a). Indeed, much of the data involving sex and fire is derived from case studies that typically involve fire fetishism. A *fetish*, by definition, is an object that evokes devotion and respect, and is worshipped as magical by primitive peoples. However, it also means an object abnormally stimulating to sexual desires. The vast majority of case studies involving fire fetishes focused on the perpetrator watching the results of his arsonist act while engaging in masturbation. It is not uncommon, in many cases, for the arsonist to report seeing images of certain individuals dancing in the flames (Bourget & Bradford, 1987). One study involved orgasmic reconditioning coupled with covert sensitization in the treatment of a fire fetish. The subject, a 20-year-old male, reported a history of masturbation associated with firesetting. He claimed that this was his only sexual outlet. Measures involving physiological and subjective tests indicated a greater sexual arousal to photographic slides of fires than to slides of nude females. Via reconditioning therapy, the subject reoriented his sexual

arousal from stimuli involving fire to stimuli involving women (Lande, 1980).

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC CONSIDERATIONS**

In order to rationalize the behavior of an arsonist, it is often presumed by law enforcement, firefighters, and the lay public that the individual must be psycho or crazy in some aspect. However, arsonists, on the whole, are not mentally ill. Roughly 2% of arsonists receive a court hospital order each year, and of those arrested for arson, only approximately 10% are considered to be mentally ill (Barker, 1994).

Even with these relatively low percentages, arson does have an association with mental disorders, as well as medical and neurologic disorders that are included in the following summary (Geller, 1992a). Many tests have been used in the assessment of arsonists, these tests include the WAIS-R, WISC-R, Rorschach, MMPI, and MMPI-2. However, to date, no standardized psychometric approach to the study of arson has provided adequate cross-comparison results. Other problems, such as inadequate study designs, discrepancies in subject population, and methodological approaches, have also impeded the quest for new data (Davis & Milton, 1997).

- A. Disorders of thought or perception
  - 1. Delusions as a component of schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, and other psychotic disorders (Geller, 1984; Koson & Dvoskin, 1982; Prins, 1986)
  - 2. Hallucinations as a component of schizophrenia or alcoholic hallucinosis (Geller, 1984; Scott, 1974b)
- B. Disorders of mood
  - 1. Depression (arson reported secondary to major depressive disorder, dysthymia, and the depression of bipolar affective disorder; Berelowitz, 1986; Moore, Thompson-Pope, & Whited, 1996; O'Sullivan & Kelleher, 1987; Wiklund, 1987)
  - 2. Mania (arson reported secondary to hypomania or mania in bipolar affective disorder; Geller, 1987; Prins, 1986)
- C. Disorders of judgment
  - 1. Developmental disorders (mental retardation; Bradford, 1982; Day, 1990; Harris & Rice, 1984)
  - 2. Dementia
  - 3. Psychoactive substance induced
- D. Disorders of impulse control
  - 1. Intermittent explosive disorder
  - 2. Pyromania



- E. Chromosomal disorders (arson reported in association with Klinefelter's syndrome, and with XYY syndrome (Eberle, 1989; Miller & Sulkes, 1988; Nielsen, 1970)
- F. Central nervous system disorders in association with epilepsy, head trauma, and brain tumors (Byrne & Walsh, 1989; Tonkonogy & Geller, 1992)
- G. Infectious diseases (reported with HIV-associated dementia; Cohen, Aladjem, & Bremin, 1990)
- H. Endocrine and metabolic disorders (in association with diabetes; Linnoila, DeJong, & Virkkunen, 1989)

The current data fluctuates greatly as to what percentage of the arsonist population is driven by psychotic motivation. One study concluded that only 6% of the arsonist subjects could be diagnosed with psychosis; whereas 54% displayed a personality disorder, 12% a mental handicap, 3% a depressive disorder, and the remaining 25% fell into various other categories (Rix, 1994). Another study claimed that 25% of arsonists could be described as psychotic (Koson & Dvoskin, 1982).

Some other interesting studies involving psychobiological variables have been conducted as well. Most notably, five separate studies conducted on pathological firesetters have suggested metabolic or neurotransmitted abnormalities. In particular, these five studies implied that the arsonists all showed significantly lower concentrations of cerebrospinal fluid monamine metabolite levels, specifically 3-methoxy-4-hydroxyphenylglycol (MHPG) and 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid (5-HIAA; Barnett & Spitzer, 1994; Virkkunen, DeJong, Bartko, Goodwin, & Linnoila, 1989; Virkkunen, DeJong, Bartko, & Linnoila, 1989; Virkkunen, Nuutila, Goodwin, & Linnoila, 1987). It has been hypothesized that a low 5-HIAA concentration in the cerebrospinal fluid correlates with disorders of impulse control. Pyromania, as mentioned earlier, is classified under this category. Behavioral criteria for pyromania include (a) a recurrent failure to resist impulses to set fires; (b) an increasing sense of tension before setting the fire; (c) an experience of either intense pleasure, gratification, or release at the time of committing the act; (d) a lack of motivation, such as monetary gain or sociopolitical ideology for setting fires; and (e) not due to another disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). This undoubtedly raises some interesting questions in regards to the legal context.

#### **MENTAL DISORDER, MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES, AND CRIMINAL CULPABILITY**

Labeling someone diagnostically as a pyromaniac has historically been one method of absolving the individual from the crime. However, firesetting is rarely found under the McNaghten, or the irresistible impulse, test, and

because few firesetters are insane by the legal standard, the main point worth debating is whether they are a future risk to society and whether they are treatable (Davis & Milton, 1997).

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, arson is a complex and difficult phenomenon to understand, and it is responsible for the loss of lives and the loss of billions of dollars of property annually. Various complications concerning designs, subjects, and legal access to data have impeded the quest to better comprehend the arsonist and his or her behavior. Despite the problems, a significant amount of valid information has been collected, thus allowing attempts to be made with regards to classification, antecedent environmental conditions, arsonist behavioral traits, recidivism, organismic variables, and the possible implementation of intervention and treatment programs. Using a behavioral assessment model, numerous traits of the arsonist have been outlined, including common motives for engaging in deliberate firesetting activities. Biological models as well as theories based on inadequate social learning skills were also reviewed. Psychologically, arson is a difficult offense to evaluate. Historically, the legal system has viewed the act of arson as a willful and malicious act; however, with the recent data being obtained specifically in regards to psychobiological variables, we could see the further development of legal loopholes through which arsonists may be exonerated from their crimes. It is important for the applied criminologist, psychiatrist, or psychologist to not become overly preoccupied with specific diagnoses or labels, such as pyromania; instead, they should look at the sum total of variables involved in the behavior, and progress from there to obtain the most thorough and complete assessment possible.

Arson, unlike other crimes, is unique in the sense that the magnitude of its power is often unknown, even to the arsonist. A gunman can choose the number of rounds to expend, and a knife-wielding perpetrator can make a conscious choice as to the number of wounds to inflict, but an arsonist surrenders the power of choice once the fire takes on a mind of its own. Fire chooses its own course of destiny based on several environmental factors; it is no longer dictated by the malevolent wishes of the individual who gave it life. This makes it one of the most deadly and potent forms of criminal behavior. It is therefore worthy of any and all attempts aimed at successful arson prevention.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Profile of the Pyromaniac**

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Age	The heaviest concentration was between ages 16 to 28, with the highest frequency at age 17.
Gender	Male.
Race	Predominately White.
Intelligence	The pyromaniac can range from being mentally defective to being a genius (approximately 22% of those with no explanation for their firesetting were low-grade defectives).
Physical defects	This was found to be frequently present.
Enuresis	This was present in some.
Mental disorders	Psychopathy, as well as psychotic disorders, were identified within this category; the compulsive urge also appears to reflect a neurotic obsessive-compulsive pattern of behavior.
Academic adjustment	They have poor educational adjustment, although some pyromaniacs were intellectually bright. Their academic performance was marginal or scholastically retarded; they were underachievers.
Rearing environment	A pathological, broken, and harsh rearing environment with inconsistent discipline and parental neglect was typical. Pyromaniacs noted an unhappy home life.
Social class structure	Some pyromaniacs emerged from middle or even upper socioeconomic levels, whereas others were products of lower-class environments.
Social adjustment	They are socially maladjusted. They have severe problems in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
Marital adjustment	Although some pyromaniacs are married, their marital relationships were poorly adjusted.
Sexual adjustment	Sexually maladjusted and inadequate, they have limited contact with women.
Occupation or employment history	Most frequently, they are unskilled laborers, if they were employed at all. Many accepted subservient positions and became resentful when they realized that their work was degrading.
Personality	The pyromaniac has been described as a hopeless misfit; a feeble person; and a physical coward with feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, insufficiency, and self-consciousness. They are introverted, seclusive, aloof, frustrated, and lonely people. They have unconscious fears of being unwanted and unloved, and they suffer from a wounded self-esteem and a lack of pride and prestige. They often project an image of calmness and indifference (although anxiety and tension are still present). However, they have vague feelings that their defenses will fail them and that these repressed impulses will emerge. They tend to be defensive and obstinate in attitude, and they feel ambivalent toward authority. Although they have an inner dependency on authority, they also have contempt for authority. In fact, they have repressed their rage and hatred toward society and authority figures. They lack ambition and aggressiveness. Some have stated that they did not want to really hurt anyone. They are apologetic, yet ashamed for being apologetic. They seek expression through excitement. Some pyromaniacs have been found to be quite intelligent,

neat, and methodical in their behavior. They have a craving for power and prestige. Some have failed to express remorse or to accept responsibility for their firesetting behavior.

Criminal history	Many had histories of delinquency and criminal behavior that includes running away, burglary, theft, and other property offenses.
Use of alcohol	Alcohol was frequently used as a method of escape and as a way to remove social inhibitions, but they did not set fires because they drank. Of the 447 who offered no explanation for their firesetting, except for an "irresistible impulse," 70 were alcoholic (approximately 16%).
Suicide	Some attempted suicide after their arrest and incarceration.
Motives	The exact motivation in each case was unknown; however, the following motives were identified: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They have a desire to be a hero and the center of attention (craving for excitement and prestige), to play detective at the fire, to render first aid, to help rescue victims, and to assist firefighters.</li> <li>2. They have a desire to show themselves to be sufficiently clever to cause the experts, the firefighters and detectives, problems and to render them helpless. They have grandiose ambitions to be the executive who directs the fire fighting activity and puts the firefighters into action.</li> <li>3. They enjoy the destruction of property (vagrants exhibiting pyromania receive pleasure in watching the destruction of buildings).</li> <li>4. They have an irresistible impulse (they could not offer an explanation except that they were driven by an unexplainable force or impulse to set fires).</li> <li>5. Revenge, although not consciously present, was also considered to be a possible factor.</li> <li>6. Sexual satisfaction (this was noted in only 40 cases)</li> </ol>
Irresistible impulse	No single precipitating factor produced this impulse. It was believed to be the result of an accumulation of problems that caused stress, frustration, and tension. Examples include thwarted sexual desires, loss of employment, death of a parent or loved one, threats to personal security and masculinity, explosive protest over the imagined immorality or promiscuousness of a mother or spouse, fear or impotency, and other.

### *Firesetting Experience*

Type of fires	Their fires were generally made in haste and in a disorganized fashion, often set in rubbish; basements; and in and around inhabited dwellings such as office buildings, schools, hotels, and other structures in thickly populated sections of cities. Frequently, they were made in rapid succession. Matches, newspapers, and other available materials were used in starting the fires.
Number of fires	Frequently, they started numerous fires, sometimes hundreds of fires, before they were caught.
False alarms	They were also known to set false alarms.
Time of day	Their fires were often nocturnal.
Regard for life	They have no regard for life (fires were frequently set in and around occupied buildings).

Type of firesetter	They were usually solitary (an insignificant number set fires in groups or with a partner).
Emotional state and behavior just before the firesetting	Pyromaniacs frequently expressed the following symptoms preceding their firesetting: mounting tension and anxiety; restlessness and an urge for motion; conversion symptoms, such as headaches, pressure in the head, dizziness, ringing in the ears, and palpitations; a sense that the personality was merging into a state of unreality; and an uncontrollable urge or irresistible impulse to set fires.
Emotional state and behavior during the firesetting	While setting the fire, pyromaniacs felt that the act was so little their own that they described an emergence of a dissociative state (a transient sensation of being controlled by an external force—a feeling of being automated). They recognized that the firesetting was senseless, but they did not have the control to prevent it. To a causal observer, they would appear normal and in control.
Emotional state and behavior after the firesetting	Pyromaniacs expressed a sense of relief and even exaltation. After setting a fire, their tension subsided. Few expressed sexual satisfaction in setting fires. They often stayed at or near the fire to watch, or to assist the responding firefighters by rendering first aid, or to rescue victims from the fire. Some enjoyed playing detective at the fire scene. Some pyromaniacs, after setting the fire and ensuring that the firefighters would respond, went home to a restful sleep.
Arrest	Some pyromaniacs ensured that they would be identified and arrested; some even turned themselves in to the police. Many continued to set fires until they were apprehended. The arrest seemed to release the magical hold that the irresistible impulse had on them. It was a relief for them to be stopped from setting fires.
Confession	Pyromaniacs often readily confessed or admitted guilt, although they expressed no remorse or regret for their behavior; they did not generally accept responsibility for their firesetting activity. They were most often quiet and cooperative under arrest.
Selection of target	Firesetting targets are often randomly selected for no apparent reason.
Recidivism	There was a 28% recidivistic rate in the study.

NOTE: Compiled by the FBI, based on studies conducted by Lewis and Yarnell (1951).

## APPENDIX B

### Profile of the Hired Torch

Age	The age may vary from late 20s to late 60s. However, the age will generally be concentrated between early 30s and mid 50s. The psychopath may begin to burn out between 45 and 50 years of age.
Gender	Male.
Race	Typically, the professional hired torch is Caucasian. This will vary, of course, with the area of the country and the location of the arson activity.
Intelligence	They tend to have average to above-average intelligence (often very cunning and streetwise).

Personality style	They have a psychopathic (antisocial) style of personality, with such common characteristics as egocentricity; manipulative and exploitative behavior; deceitfulness; pathological sense of confidence; impulsiveness; lack of anxiety, remorse, and guilt; propensity for high-risk living; the hired torch is a schemer and a con man.
Marital status	It is not common to be single, separated, or divorced.
Marital stability	The marriage is often unstable due to the hired torch's personality and impulsive lifestyle.
Lifestyle	Their lifestyle is somewhat impulsive and erratic. It can often be characterized by high-risk living and excitement-seeking. They are possibly nomadic, and they are prone to be nocturnal.
Socioeconomic level	They often belong to the middle class, but they are prone to be in heavy debt or financially overextended.
Use of alcohol	Alcohol use is common (excessive drinking is common, but not during the torching activity; the hired torch is frequently a heavy social drinker).
Occupation or employment	The hired torch may be employed in a variety of capacities, from being a professional businessperson to being an unskilled laborer. The hired torch is frequently employed by others. If the hired torch owns or operates a business, it will frequently be financially marginal.
Work habits	They tend to have irregular and marginal work habits.
Prior criminal history	Although there may not have been an arrest history, the hired torch may have been a suspect in a variety of crimes that range from fraud to homicide. The hired torch may have an arrest history for such offenses, but without any accompanying criminal convictions. The hired torch may have only one or two criminal convictions, but is a suspect in numerous other criminal activities. The hired torch may also have an extensive criminal record, with convictions for fraud, assault, and even murder.
Firesetting	They are rationally motivated by economic incentives.
Arson planning	The arson is premeditated and is often carefully planned to avoid detection.
Solitary or group firesetting	If the hired torch is an affiliate or a member of a loosely knitted or structured criminal enterprise, he or she may work with one or more other arsonists. If the hired torch is an independent, he or she will most often function as a solitary arsonist.
Behavior before the firesetting	They often prepare the facility for burning a day or so before the firesetting in order to ensure that it burns as intended.
Behavior at the firesetting	As little time as possible is spent in the structure at the time of the firesetting. The fire is usually timed in order to provide for a departure prior to the incendiarism.
Behavior after the firesetting	They commonly depart the fire scene immediately, before the arrival of the fire service. They often return home, to a bar, or to another planned activity to establish an alibi. (Rider, A.O., 1980)

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