

RUNNING HEAD: Criminal Profiling Today

Criminal Profiling Today; New Future Tomorrow

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Abstract

Criminal profiling is a recent use of psychology to get into the minds of criminals to figure out why they commit these crimes, if there is a certain type of person that commits these crimes, behaviors of typical criminals, and possibly predict the next crime. These conclusions can be helpful to the police in the narrowing down of suspects, thus resulting in a case solved with minimal victim casualties. The future for this field is open to interpretation and many people have their doubts.

Criminal profiling is a generally new topic of discussion when it is used to help law enforcement officials solve crime. This psychological typology of profiling criminals has been put to the test many times and somehow has been tossed between accepted and disproved multiple times. The man accredited with the discovery and first use of criminal profiling is John Douglas who was a former head of the FBI's Investigative Support Unit (Douglas, 2007). He didn't have the support of the FBI but he was the first to develop the psychological profile of the Unabomber. The first technique he used in his way of criminal profiling was he confronted, interviewed, and studied dozens of serial killers and assassins – including Charles Manson, Sirhan Sirhan, Richard Speck, John Wayne Gacy, David Berkowitz, and James Earl Ray – to understand their motives and get inside their minds (Annals, 2007). The main way a profiler works is the profiler identifying himself with both the predator and the pray.

Douglas “examines a crime scene and creates profiles of the perpetrators, describing their habits and predicting their next moves. He is a renowned figure in law enforcement and the model of Scott Glenn character in the movie, *Silence of the Lambs*” (2007, p.8).

FBI agent Douglas has an extensive list of popular cases that he has worked. Some include: JonBenet Ramsey, The Unabomber, The BTK Strangler, Green River Killer, and the Atlanta Child Killer. These cases were extremely popular and were not solved immediately. So in these cases, criminal profiling was useful because the police were at a dead end and knowing

the type of person that would commit these acts helped them out in narrowing their suspect list. For example the Atlanta Child Killer killed 29 people, most of which children from the age 1979-1981.

How Criminal Profiling Started

Criminal profiling is a technique to categorize and determine the type of person that commits certain types of crime. An FBI agent who I discussed earlier in the introduction started this type of profiling criminals. He had no support by the FBI because this was not an approved method, or even known at the time. This uses psychology and behavioral science to understand why people act the way they do and if there is a common trend. This was not an easy thing to get to catch on especially because it was such a new topic that had never been thought of before, using psychology methods to understand and solve crime. After he solved some of his most popular cases, his office went from handling 54 cases in 1981 to handling over 1,000 in 1995 (Douglas, 2007). As those numbers can speak for themselves, it shows that the profiling tended to work and if not to find the actual perpetrator, it allowed the law enforcement agency to get rid of some of its suspect list. Once people started to trust this method, there were more and more people giving it an opportunity to help their cases out and then it was a snowball effect from then on and is now popular enough to have its own hit TV show named after it. *Criminal Minds* is one of the most popular shows on TV right now.

“Over the past three decades, criminal profiling has gained tremendous popularity as a media topic, an academic area of

study, and a tool for police investigations worldwide” (Snook, Gendreau, Bennell & Taylor, 2008, p.42).

Although this was a method to catch on so quickly, it made an impact on the people that were attempting it that made it stick with them, and gave them confidence in this method. After it helped the FBI to solve some big name cases, more agencies around the country were willing to attempt it. John Douglas now has seminars around the country explaining his way of problem solving and categorizing criminals. He also explains how using psychology in law enforcement will help to them understand why criminals commit these acts. It should be noted that the problems involved in determining crime rates and assessing trends are extremely complex (Schur, 1969). When knowledge is being spread by individuals such as Douglas who know and have personal experiences, it helps the average person become better at their job. Criminal profiling has many subset steps to finding out what type of person commits crime but those steps are sometimes overlooked.

Explanation of Criminal Profiling and What it is Today

Criminal profiling is defined as “a technique for identifying the major personality and behavioral characteristics of an individual based upon an analysis of the crimes he or she has committed” (Bennel, Corey, Taylor & Ecker, 2008). Profiling has become a common tool for prioritizing suspects and developing new lines of enquiry in serial criminal acts. The cranial profiling environment typically involves three stages.

“Police officers collect crime scene data (e.g., photographs, detective reports, and autopsy results). These data are then forwarded to a profiler who makes predictions about the personality, behavioral, and demographic characteristics of the likely criminal. These predictions are then reported to the investigating officers” (Snook, et al, 2008, p.1258).

There are two ways criminal profiling can be classified. The first is having a clinical orientation. Clinically oriented profilers draw from their own training, experiences, knowledge, and intuition to help them predict offender distinctiveness. Statistically oriented profilers are derived from the analysis of offenders who have committed other crimes in the past that are similar to those being investigated (Snook, et al, 2008). Today this technique is used in some cases but still is up for argument when the facts are laid on the table as whether or not it is a proven way to characterize a criminal. It has been a proven fact that serial killers were more likely to be of above average intelligence than someone randomly picked from the population (Crabbe, et al, 2008). And it was found that serial killers more often bound victims, that they were more likely strangers to their victims.

Problems with Criminal Profiling

The main problem with criminal profiling is there is nothing to physically prove that this methodology works. According to a study in 2001 regarding the content of criminal profiling

found only twenty-five percent of statements in profiles were inferences about offender characteristics (Snook, et al, 2008). A thing that that has been put into question is that a criminal profiler goes about doing the same steps that a psychic detective does. So this in that context would not be a new invention, just a different word to describe the same thing. This use of psychology does not always work. An example of such is a case that put an innocent man away for life from what a criminal profiler said did it. The case was a pregnant wife was told by her husband to put her neck in a noose while he stood behind her and her husband lifted her legs and hung her (Canter, 2009). The husband was tried and put away for the murder, but when the profiler looked back at statistics he realized that a tenth of suicides have no obvious prior indicators. So the diagnosis of the case was wrong and the man that was innocent was imprisoned for something he did not do.

Specific type of typology

The organized-disorganized typology has been the main force behind criminal profiling practices for many years. Recently it has been under scrutiny because evaluations of this typology suggest that it does not match the variations in offender behavior (Snook, et al, 2008). There are two specific things that are issues with criminal profiling and the way it has gone about processing.

“People are occasionally required to rely on their memory of a profile when determining whether that profile matches a particular suspect’s background and many profiles are

constructed in such a way that strong gist representations are likely to be encoded when the profile is first presented, and a range of suspect descriptor's are likely to cue gist traces, which will sometimes cause false recognition" (Bennell, et al, 2008, p.72).

One consequence in using profiling as a main tool to help in solving crimes is that profiles are not always written down, or formally documented. So it is hard to prove in such situations it is hard to keep track of potential suspects. In many cases profiles can go on for years and be continually added upon when new leads or new characteristics come up. Law enforcement has a major impact on citizens and how safe they feel so any negative marks are not a good mark on their record. The last thing that is a concern for the use of criminal profiling is that to become a profiler there is no schooling or testing that must be completed to become a profiler. That is why people might have totally different profiles for the same suspect. Then the question is which one should be believed. That is why criminal profiling would be a much more trusted typology if there was certain schooling that had to be completed to be called a criminal profiler.

Example and Future for Criminal Profiling

The use of criminal profiling has played the biggest role in the United States solving almost 1,000 cases a year. Elsewhere in the world, such as the United Kingdom, used this

technique for about 242 cases. Criminal profiling has been documented as being used in 11 countries and they are: Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany, Canada, Ireland, Malaysia, Russia, Zimbabwe, and The Netherlands (Snook, et al, 2008). With the future of criminal profiling being changed every day because it is such a new topic, it is safe to say that there will be no solid predictions for the future. Through trial and error up to this date though, such as the second premises for developing scientifically based profiling systems. Some psychologically important variations between crimes that relate to differences in the people who commit them have become known as the specificity assumption (Crabbe, et al, 2008). One this has become certain about offenders and how they can be profiled. "Offense location of serial homicide offenders is guided by a recognizable rationality. This rationality seems to be influenced by the offender's familiarity with the mental mapping of the environment, the psychological role of his home, and previous offense locations and/or his attempt to avoid detection" (Crabbe, et al, 2008). In having a majority of countries involved in this type of crime fighting, there is no doubt that in just a few years this method will only get better. The following is an example of a disorganized offender that was developed by the FBI:

"White male aged 25-27; thin undernourished appearance; single; living alone in a location within one mile of the abandoned station wagon owned by one of the victims. Residence will be extremely slovenly and unkempt, and evidence of the crime will be found at the residence. Suspect will have a history of mental illness and use of drugs. Suspect will be an unemployed loner who does not

associate with either males or females and will probably spends a great deal of the time in his own residence. If he resides with anyone, it will be with his parents. However, this is unlikely. Subject will have no prior military history; will be a high school or college dropout, probably suffers from one or more forms of paranoid psychotics" (Bennel, et al, 2008, p.73).

This is a basic profile that would be sent to a law enforcement agency that is handling the case and they would then run through each one of these characteristics to cross off or take another look at the suspects that match or don't match. Different profilers might have different characteristics but the majority of them should be the same. That is the point of this new methodology in criminal profiling.

Summary and Conclusions

Criminal profiling is a fairly new topic and has been tested and questioned ever since an FBI agent introduced it by the name of Douglas. He worked on many top named cases but did not have the same amount of technology that there is available today. Criminal profiling can only get better as technology increases because there are advancements everyday. This has been proven and then disproved, as this happens this form of solving crimes is fixing its loose holes and getting better.

As of 2008, there are 11 countries including the United States using this methodology to find and profile criminals. This is only the beginning because through those 11 countries there

were 242 cases criminal profiling was used. This number can only increase and as the methodology becomes fine-tuned and the problems are taken care of, the world with trust this method. This method is easily understood and doesn't take a lot of effort on specific police organizations. There are usually only two or three profiles in a major city. This method definitely isn't the top choice in investigating crimes, but if the other techniques don't work, criminal profiling is called up to the plate. And as of now it is becoming successful.

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