

Traits of a good investigator essay

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Traits of A Good Investigator A good, professional investigator is a rare individual. This person must have a number of personality traits that are individually uncommon, and exceedingly rare in combination. Since the compensation for most investigators is not that great, it is rare that the professions needing good investigators attract people who have all these traits. Nevertheless, a good investigator must be persistent, goal-oriented, clever, open-minded and knowledgeable. A good investigator must be persistent.

When seeking evidence or answers, it is important for the investigator to know that their goal may not be a short time in coming, and often it will require them to sift through large volumes of irrelevant minutia, searching for important pieces or patterns needed to solve a particular case. An example of the persistence needed to be a good investigator is given by Oakland police investigator Jim Saleda. (Fricker) Saleda received a complaint about a sexual assault allegedly committed by a prominent local citizen, Yusuf Bey. (Fricker) Saleda began by combing through police records looking for any other complaints against Bey that had not been pursued by police. (Fricker) After an extensive search, he found several reports, and uncovered the names of dozens of other victims who had not filed complaints about the abuse. (Fricker) While Bey was accused of lewd conduct with a minor in 2002, he never stood trial, as the case was dropped when he died in 2003.

(Fricker) As a result, Bey's activity was never proven in a court of law.

(Fricker) Saleda's investigation yielded witness interviews from four of Bey's victims, as well as hundreds of birth, police, court and county records, and interviews with at least a dozen people knowledgeable about the events,

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which indicated that Bey had sex with children for years. (Fricker) One of Bey's first victims, referred to in the documents as "Jane Doe 1", had been abused by Bey for ten years and bore him three children when she was a minor. (Fricker) DNA tests confirmed that she was truthful about the allegation. Among the police reports, Saleda found a report to a child abuse hotline from "Jane Doe 1's" stepmother alleging sexual abuse by Bey on her son. (Fricker) The boy denied the abuse, and Bey was never questioned. Saleda found that in 1996, a 15-year-old reported to her probation officer that she had been abused sexually by Bey.

(Fricker) After allegedly being threatened by Bey, the girl and her mother declined to press the complaint. (Fricker) The investigator discovered a 1994 report of Bey's assaulting "Jane Doe 1's" stepmother, but since the lady said she was only reporting the incident to document it, the case was not pursued. A second interview with "Jane Doe 1" yielded a claim that Bey had abused dozens of girls and fathered forty-two children from this abuse. (Fricker) The victim then gave the name of another victim, her sister. This second victim became "Jane Doe 2" when Saleda went out of state to interview her and learned that she had two of Bey's children as a result of his abuse. (Fricker) When DNA test confirmed that "Jane Doe 1" was being truthful about her children, Yuseuf Bey was arrested. (Fricker) When news of his arrest came out, Saleda was inundated with phone calls from other alleged victims and witnesses.

According to the calls, said Saleda, "The suspect had about nine wives, and he started having sex with most of them when they were minors. ..

. The wives had to band together to prevent the suspect from molesting children. ...

It was well known that females did not go to the suspect's room alone.”

(Fricker) Saleda also tracked down the girl who reported the abuse to her probation officer. She became Jane Doe 3.

(Fricker) A fourth victim Jane Doe 4 was molested as late as 1996. This was significant because the statute of limitations had expired on the cases for Jane Does 1-3. (Fricker) When Bey died of colon cancer in 2003, he faced 27 charges relating to his activity with Jane Doe 4. (Fricker) Saleda's persistence in finding all of Bey's victims was instrumental in gaining closure for the people who suffered for years because of him.

If it were not for Saleda's persistence, Bey would never have faced charges, since Jane Doe 1's case was beyond the statute of limitations. A good investigator needs to be devoted to the singular goal of finding the truth. It is a typical shortcoming in criminal investigation for police and investigators to develop “ tunnel vision” with respect to a certain theory of a crime.

It is possible for investigators to dismiss or minimize evidence that contradicts such a pet theory. A good investigator must fairly weigh the evidence and its importance, not to the particular theory of choice, but to the truth of the circumstances. In the well-publicized rape case against members of the Duke Lacrosse team in 1996, prosecuting attorney Mike Nifong was counting on DNA evidence to prove the guilt of the suspects in the case.

(Spilbor) When the DNA evidence returned to sign of the accused individuals, Nifong then indicated that this proved nothing. (Spilbor) This

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was an unfair analysis given that the reported facts of the case by the victim indicated that DNA, or at the least, condom residue, should have been present.

(Spilbor) As a result of his tunnel vision, not only was Nifong to lose the case in court, he was also charged with misconduct and disbarred. (Spilbor) One of the most important roles of investigators is questioning or interrogating witnesses. It is vital that fairness be observed when an investigator is interrogating a suspect. If the interrogation is conducted with the goal of obtaining truth, then fairness is a simple enough trait to achieve.

Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that interrogations have the expressed purpose of obtaining confessions. (Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 25)

Often, this is done without regard for fairness, and sometimes with disastrous results. The use of coercive or otherwise unfair techniques in interrogation has led to numerous proven false confessions. (Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 27) In 1989, a female jogger was beaten and raped in Central Park in New York City.

Five young men were convicted of the crime based solely on their own confessions, which were obtained with a promise that they'd be allowed to go home if they confessed. (Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 29) Thirteen years later, a fifth man confessed to the crime, and claimed he had acted alone. (Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 29) DNA evidence supported his account. (Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 29) The five young men's convictions were overturned, after having spent 13 years being punished for a crime they did not commit.

(Kassin ; Gudjonsson, 31) A fair approach to interrogation would be one that is designed to get the truth, rather than a confession, and, if truth is the goal

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of investigation investigators must question witnesses fairly. In order to be effective, an investigator must be clever. While it is true that in a vast majority of cases, crimes follow certain patterns of behavior and evidence, the ones that do not require some cleverness on the part of the investigators to solve. In July of 2008, Investigators in New Mexico solved what appeared to be a homicide by watching a five-year-old episode of a television program called CSI.

(Poehler) The victim in the real-life case, Thomas Hickman, died of a gunshot wound to the back of his head, and duct tape over his mouth. (Poehler) Investigators, rather than jumping to the obvious conclusion of a car-jacking situation gone wrong, explored the scene and came across an unusual piece of evidence: a number of balloons caught in a nearby cactus. (Poehler) Tied to these balloons was the gun responsible for the shooting. (Poehler) One of the investigators recalled an episode of the television drama, CSI, called “Homebodies” in which a character committed suicide by tying a gun to a set of balloons in hopes of the weapon floating away from the scene. (Poehler) The motive, on both the program and in the real life case, was insurance fraud. (Poehler) Hickman had taken out an \$800, 000 insurance policy on himself that would not have paid his family in the event of a suicide.

(Poehler) Open-mindedness is a key trait of an investigator. It is vital that an investigator not become enamored of a certain theory of a crime, because they begin to look for evidence that supports the theory that they have embraced, and minimize evidence that refutes it. One famous case where this occurred was in the homicide of a young girl named JonBenet Ramsey in 1996.

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(Bardsley ; Bellamy 1) Six-year-old JonBenet Ramsey was found murdered in the basement of her own home. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 2) When she was first found to be missing, her parents assumed she had been abducted, since there was a ransom note asking for \$118, 000 and a promise to contact John Ramsey with delivery instructions. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 2) While they waited for a ransom call that never came, police, conducting a routine sweep of the house, found the victim’s body in the basement. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 3) The attacker left a ransom note. The handwriting in the ransom note appeared to have similarities to samples provided by the Ramseys.

(Bardsley ; Bellamy 3) These factors, and other allegations, completely false, convinced investigators from early on that either John or Patsy Ramsey had murdered their own daughter. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 5) Based on nothing more than some media stories, which proved to be false, the Police began to proceed on a theory that John Ramsey had sexually assaulted and murdered his daughter. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 14) JonBenet’s records at her family doctor were examined, and her autopsy findings reviewed, and no evidence was found to substantiate this theory. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 16) Despite the complete lack of evidence implicating any of the Ramsey family in the murder, media attention and false reports kept police tied to the idea that one or more members of the family were involved.

(Bardsley ; Bellamy 18) The theory that an intruder had murdered JonBenet was quickly rejected by police when the media reported three important elements that appeared to disprove an “ intruder theory”. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 19) First, that despite snow being on the ground, there were no footprints surrounding the house. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 19) Second, that there

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was no sign of forced entry, and third, that a struggle would have been heard because of the victim's proximity to her parent's room. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 19) All three of these objections were patently and provably false. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 28) The lack of footprints was not unusual, since photos of the house showed no snow in the immediate vicinity of the house itself.

(Bardsley ; Bellamy 28) There was, in fact an unlocked window, which led to the basement, explaining the lack of forced entry, and JonBenet's room was down a fifty-five foot carpeted hall from the Ramsey's master bedroom, making it far from unlikely that a struggle might have occurred without being heard by JonBenet's parents.

(Bardsley ; Bellamy 28) This evidence was ignored for years by investigators who were already convinced of the Ramseys' guilt. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 33) Other evidence which supported the theory of an intruder attack was a boot print inside the basement that police could not connect with any of the Ramseys, a palm print inside the house that similarly was unaccounted for, trace biological evidence on the victim that did not match that of the Ramseys, and signs of disturbance on the window sill at the alleged point of entry. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 34) Despite these items, and a complete lack of any evidence to support a theory that the Ramseys themselves were involved, police did not clear the parents of involvement until DNA evidence found on the victim, long determined not to have come from the Ramseys was sent for analysis. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 35) This did not occur until seven years after the murder. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 36) By the time the Ramseys were publicly cleared of wrongdoing, Patsy, JonBenet's mother, had died of cancer, and both John and Patsy had endured years of media hand police

harassment. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 36) Although a confession was given by another suspect, David Carr, the case remains unsolved. (Bardsley ; Bellamy 38)As a gatherer of evidence, an investigator must have a detailed knowledge of certain fields of science and evidence gathering, and a working knowledge of numerous other fields. While many investigators in the modern age are specialists in particular fields such as computers, video, DNA, trace evidence analysis, and others, any investigator needs to have a working knowledge of all these fields in order to properly identify items that may be, or contain evidence.

They must be able to make inferences based on the condition of a crime scene, blood patterns, and many other characteristics of a scene that they encounter. Investigators must be experts at pattern-searching both small and large crime scenes, because trace evidence is becoming increasingly important for law enforcement. As a function of their role in interviewing witnesses, investigators must also have a working knowledge of psychology, and detection of deception.

Observational skills are another key field of knowledge that an investigator must have. While observation is a skill, there are learnable techniques for observation and retention that can be obtained by a person who wishes to become involved in the investigative fields. Another important realm of knowledge, which is often lacking in trained investigators, but which is, in fact, vital to their work is knowledge of the mechanisms of logic and reasoning. It is important for an investigator to be able to employ proper methods of reasoning while pursuing leads and forming theories. The employment of false or erroneous logic could lead to incorrect conclusions.

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The criminal justice system has standards of proof. It is not a coincidence that the burden on proof in a criminal case is placed on the party issuing an accusation. “ Proving” innocence is a logical impossibility, since basic logic teaches us that a negative cannot be proven. In other words, one cannot prove (unequivocally) that they did not commit an act. In situations where the defense is called upon to prove something, it is in the affirmative, like proving legal insanity, or self defense. It is clear that a good investigator must be persistent, goal-oriented, clever, open-minded and knowledgeable.

As the examples above have indicated, when investigators do not have these traits, the possibility of negative outcomes increases. At best, these might be a dismissal of a case due to improper evidence gathering, at worst, poor investigative skills could lead to the wrongful prosecution, and even conviction of an innocent person. Given that the ultimate goal of the Criminal Justice System is to dispense fair and just responses to alleged criminal acts, nothing is more repugnant to the system that the conviction of an innocent suspect. Having investigators with the five traits described herein can reduce the likelihood of such a negative outcome.; References; Bardsley, M. ; Bellamy, B.

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