Criminal profiling: pros and cons

Many people who hear someone say they are a criminal profiler they are inclined to think of T. V. depicted shows such as Profilers, Criminal Minds and movies like Silence of the Lambs. Unfortunately, these examples portray a glamorous classification of capturing criminals (Fulero and Wrightsman, pg. 79).

Criminal profiling is considered to be the process of analyzing a crime scene and using the information found to determine the identity or features of a perpetrator. Although this does not give you the perpetrator's name, it can be helpful in narrowing down suspects. For example, a profiling based on a crime scene provides information that may include personality, sex, age, ethnic background, and possible physical features such as scars, tattoos, birthmarks, or height and weight of the perpetrator. This type of information can be used to identify possible suspects, but it also depends on who fits the profile (www. mtholyoke. edu).

The process of psychological profiling was first used as a method in America during the 1950's. Investigators found fascinating patterns and similarities between serial killer's behaviors. Selected patterns found consist of the killers having suffered from abuse at a young age. Whether it was sexual or physical this kind of abuse led to abnormal behaviors later on. During a range of young ages through teenage years, they would start fires and they were cruel to animals or other children. Then in the late teenage years to early twenties, were engaging in petty crime and defying authority (www. library. thinkquest. org).

According to some, committing serious criminal acts usually starts at about or around the persons mid to late 20's. Particularly at this older age range being able to manipulate victims and show a significance of power or domination is a main motivation for criminals, as well sexual intentions. Murdering someone gives the perpetrator sense of control in which they have never had before. Some criminals feel that they need to relive the events that occurred during the murder or crime, so they take something of personal value from the victim. Such as, jewelry, clothing and they go as far as body parts (www. library. thinkquest. org).

Personality is considered by many to be one of the most important parts of criminal profiling. The personality profiles of criminals are the way in which a crime is committed, also known as the ' method of operations' or M. O. The M. O. includes the identity of the victim, what the victim or victims have in common, the weapons that were used, the lack of sympathy, and the sign of any torture and/or sexual molestation. Analyzing these aspects of the crime scene, an investigator can determine the motives of the perpetrator. This can lead to the description of the perpetrator's personality, or a personality profile (www. mtholyoke. edu).

Appropriately, criminal profilers have methods in which they operate by. According to www. criminalprofiling . ch, there are seven profiling methods and six scientific approaches to profiling of criminal suspects.

In the profiling methods, the first is the evaluation of the criminal act itself. Included in the act would be the M. O. and the signature. The signature is in disregards to why he does the acts he does, or the thing that " fulfills" him

emotionally. Then an evaluation of the precision of the crime scene or scenes would be taken. An analysis of the victim or victims is conduced, this is also known as victimology. Subsequently, an evaluation of the preliminary police reports is seized, as well as the medical examiners autopsy protocol. As a result, the set up of a profile with critical offender characteristics is constructed. Lastly, an investigative suggestion to a prediction on the construct of the profile is constructed. The next level is to check with local investigators and propose practical strategies to get the unidentified subject or UNSUB to " make a move".

Then there are the scientific approaches to profiling criminal suspects. Initially there is profiling inputs. Inside this first stage an accumulation of all information about the crime is pulled together. Information that includes physical evidence from the crime scene, photographs of the crime scene, any autopsy reports and photos, witness testimonies, background information about the victim or victims and police reports. At this stage the criminal profiler does not want to know about suspects because it could cause a prejudice direction to their profile. Second are the decision process models. Within the decision processing model the profiler organizes all information into questions and patterns through many dimensions of criminal activities. Questions such as, what type of homicide has been committed, what is the primary motive of the crime and so on. Third is the crime assessment. Based on the findings of the other stages, the profiler tries to recreate the behavior of the offender and the victim. For example, as general profiling rules say: vile facial injuries are directed to killers who know their victims, murders committed with any weapon that happens to be available

display greater impulsivity than murders committed with a gun and may reveal a killer who lives rather closely to the victim and murders performed early in the morning rarely involve alcohol or drug use (www. criminalprofiling. ch). Fourth is the initial criminal profile. This is where the profiler formulates the scetch of the most likely suspects. The majority of usual profiles include such items as the perpetrator's race, marital status, sex, age, where they live, employment history, past criminal records, psychological characteristics and beliefs and values. Fifth is the investigation stage. The investigation stage involves a written report that is given to the investigators that concentrate on suspects matching the profile. Most likely the police have already talked to the suspected but had no reason to doubt the suspect's testimony. Still, if evidence is introduced at this stage the profile would need to be revised. Preceding the investigation stage is the apprehension stage. Ultimately, the main objective of the stages was to capture the right suspect which in turn leads to the interview technique. With the purpose of getting the perpetrator to confess or talk about the crimes he has committed, this technique can lead to helping in assessing he influences of background and psychological variables (www. criminalprofiling. ch).

Investigators putting together a profile use another two approaches inductive and deductive. Inductive profiling imply believing that when a criminal commits a crime they have relate motive or experience of someone who has committed the same type of crime . An example of this is re-offending rapists whose target is white women, more often than not are most likely not to be black. Based on the fact that crimes in the past that have been similar have rarely crossed racial lines. However, these statements

have been inquired and have encountered a lot of publicized negative aspects.

Deductive profiling involves a process that avoids generalizations and averages. This method involves carefully studying suspects in great detail and changing findings in when new evidence emerges. A deductive profile is established on the offender's actions prior to, in the course of and after committing the crime. For example, if the murderer used a provisional weapon, the investigators are then able to assume that the crime was most likely random. Another example entails serial murderers. At this juncture, investigators are able to find out if the murder was organized. Which means that the killer carried out a planned attack on the victim, or if the attack was disorganized the murder was unplanned and the killer conducted themselves in an inexact way. Organized killers tend to carry a " tool kit" that has a mask, gloves, duct tape and rope. With these tools they can bind their victims while hiding their identity and not leave finger prints.

Criminal profiling is used not only to find possible offenders, but it also helps narrow down a list of offenders that the police have already compiled. Although it doesn't work in every case, criminal profiling has helped investigators to catch many criminals. Through assessing the patterns and motives of previous criminals, criminal profiling allows investigators to accurately predict the characteristics of future and current offenders, which allows killers and other perpetrators to be caught before they can continue on to other crimes (www. wisegeek. com).

Predictable, criminal profiling does have disadvantages, or cons. Some cons to criminal profiling involve not being able to identify a specific suspect nor reveal a certain individual, let alone an address or phone number. There are even instances when perpetrators purposely staging crime scenes to throw police and investigators off the right track. In many instances, the profiler will not know that area making more room for erroneous conclusions. Furthermore, profilers tend to have more background knowledge in psychopathology than the little background they have in forensic or criminal knowledge. Hence if the investigators and profilers do not work together it can cause the investigation to go unsolved because the information collected from both parties has not been collaborated.

While there are cons or disadvantages to criminal profiling not surprisingly there are the pros to criminal profiling.