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Criminal Profiling

Criminal profiling is also called offender profiling, and is a strategy of using existing information on a crime and crime scenes to come up with a psychological depiction of the perpetrator or criminal (Holmes and Holmes, 2008). It is considered the third wave in criminal investigation where the criminal's psyche is identified. According to Holmes & Holmes, (2008), the three aims of this procedure are: providing law enforcers with psychological and social assessment of a criminal; providing a mental evaluation of belongings the offender might have; and to give approaches and recommendations for interviewing. Profiling aims at producing the description of the 'criminal' in a criminal case using analysis of data on the incident, with well captured background information.

Congruent within the premise of the validity and reliability of a profile is that the person involved in these crimes has characteristics that reflect pathology of a crime. In some cases the crimes may be pre-planned or premeditated, then executed, like with the school shooting cases in Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois. In other criminal actions, lack of coordination, the lack of planning, mutilations, and such elements related to the crime scenes are usually reflective of a criminal's personality and behavior. Therefore, the crime scene itself can tell the pathology.

Two methods are usually used in profiling. One is called the inductive approach, and the other is the deductive approach. The inductive approach has a simple premise; the assumption that if certain crimes are committed by different people and they appear similar, the offenders must be sharing a common personality trait(s). Information is gathered from past case files and

other authentic sources like the media. A thorough analysis of where (scene) crime took place, and the evidence gathered from the place, allows the profiler to construct a mental picture of the suspected offender. With deductive approach, the more one knows about the victim, the more one knows about the offender. Thus from this perspective the profile is drawn from the physical and nonphysical (love, rage, hate, fear) evidence.

Coming up with a profile can assist investigators in identifying the culprits. They effectively narrow down on possible suspects hence reducing time wasting on different lines of enquiry that would otherwise hit a dead end.

Information gathered from crime scene is usually vital to locate an offender because there is no crime that is done without actions. It is these actions that are used by a profiler to put down the pathology of the crime.

In case a suspect's profile does not concur with any of the profile data, then the investigators could justifiably dedicate less time and resources going after the individual. At times, the profile agrees to a good extent with a suspect whom the detectives will now concentrate their investigations on.

The profiler could give advice on the manner in which interviewing the suspect would best be carried out. The profile may as well help the authorities to know where to start tracking for a particular offender; using information on their likely whereabouts and previous criminal acts.

Profiling is not always productive in criminal investigations. Psychological profiling is not very well understood, and science might not agree with results of profiling. Profiling can be done in different forms, under different circumstances, and by different people. It thus makes evaluation of its efficacy difficult. It is tricky to deduce the number of cases where information

is 'better' than detectives' analysis. It again raises ethical questions; if half of the information gathered from profiling is accurate, should we consider it viable to apprehend suspects? Profilers are usually sort after for cases that the police are experiencing difficulty. Would it then be reasonable to expect a profiler to have better success with the case?

It is possible that a senior detective with a reputation to uphold will seek to play down the usefulness of an input from an 'outsider' such as a profiler (Ainsworth, 2000). Again, could a profiler miss on minor but essential data, which might overall change their correct predictions?

Race too, has been a subject of profiling. Though not openly, police may still use race to predict the probabilities of criminality on those they stop for interrogation and checks. Arrow (2002) argues that they practice 'statistical discrimination'. Their objective is to make successful stops, success being indexed by collecting evidence of criminal potential. Members of a given racial or ethnic group may be stopped because the assumption is that they engage in certain crimes.

One vital element in the analysis of a crime is victimology. This element sometimes lacks enough information. The police could also be adamant in providing all the information on the suspect and their relations. Crime profiles are completed after the fact. However, there is still, no simple way that investigators or profilers or any psychologist or psychiatrist can predict the future behavior of previous offenders. For example, the development of a psychological profile of 23-year-old Seung Hui killed 32 at Virginia tech school in February 2008, and 27-year-old Steven Kazmierczak who shot 21 students and then killed himself on April 16, 2007, before their murderous

events would not have been of much use to the police or other officials (Holmes & Holmes, 2008).

Not all profiles are suitable in all cases-even in some murder cases (Holmes & Holmes, 2008). However, their reliability in cases where the suspect has shown psychopathology is to a good measure accurate (Holmes & Holmes, 2008). Crimes viable for psychological profiling are those where a criminal's reasoning is able to be dissected into from the crime scene or where the motive of the perpetrator is acquired. A problem of profiling, one shared by practitioners, is its inductive style. The profile consists of information obtained from previous similar offenses, however limited those cases may be (Holmes and Holmes, 2008). It gives the process an exclusive mode of operation when the offender could be a new person in crime.

As Muller (2001) argued, there is no particular consistent theoretical framework upon which profiling is based. However, it is noteworthy that components which classify most common approaches to profiling are: a) violent offenders on the prowl can be classified into certain groups and that b) the groups are having similar practices of carrying out crime, in offence characteristics and offender characteristics. Therefore, if one can outline the specific offence characteristics, subsequently the group that the offender belongs to, characteristics good for use for identification becomes visible. The essence of criminal profiling is its 'tool' used to reduce uncertainty in investigation of criminal acts. The behavior of the offender during a criminal act, commonly the distinctive behavior that is synonymous with such crimes, is believed to be convoluted with features or characteristics of the offender (Alison, Bennell, Mokros, & Ormerod, 2002). A profiler will always remember

that he works to help the police by fulfilling his professional duty. The goals, then, are reached through formal education and training as they are through the art of profiling itself. The necessity of profiling is immense, and even though it has critiques, the art is of a human being deducing likelihoods of human nature and therefore would go a long way in criminal investigation.

References

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