

Argument – In Support of Criminal Profiling

A serial killer terrorizes the city of London. Police are stymied by the lack of motive and by the dearth of evidence that would indicate any one suspect. The killing goes on unabated for weeks without the police getting any closer to the killer. A consultant is called in who presents a profile of the killer. The time is the 1880s. The consultant is Dr. Thomas Bond. The killer is Jack-the-Ripper.

The question is, if Jack-the-Ripper was alive today, in a more investigatively-educated society, would criminal profiling be a viable option in his capture and prosecution? Over the past hundred years there has been an escalation in crime. Investigators are carrying heavier case loads than ever before, and they are expected to provide a broader range of evidence in order to meet the demands of cases that may hinge on minute details. In an effort to increase the effectiveness of investigations, many investigators have turned to the field of psychology to aid in the capture of offenders. Criminal profilers have become a common part of many investigations, but the use of criminal profiling is still subject to debate. This is a critical subject, because profiling could affect how investigations are conducted and could potentially be used in a court of law for either the prosecution or the defendant. The following paragraphs demonstrate use of criminal profiling in investigations.

Dr. Katherine Ramsland, a researcher of criminal profiling, who has studied extensively with well-respected profilers, provides one example of a successful profile. In January 1978 an unsub entered the home of pregnant Teresa Wallin. She was shot to death and then mutilated. Three days later the same man entered another home and killed Evelyn Miroth, and her friend, son, and infant nephew. Agents Ressler and Vorpapel from the FBI Behavioral Science Unit were brought in to study the case. Working independently, Ressler and Vorpapel came to the same conclusions. Based on evidence gathered from the scene they concluded that it was likely the unsub wouldn't be employed where it took a lot of organized thinking or was unemployed, was likely getting disability checks, had little education, was in his mid-twenties, was psychotic, lived fairly close to the crime scenes, wasn't very mobile, white, thin and undernourished, untidy, reclusive, kept evidence of the crime, and had probably been institutionalized at one time. Ramsland (2010) said that "this composite portrait was developed from known data that such crimes tended to be intra-racial, specific to a certain age range, and similar to what other violent offenders with a paranoia-based mental illness had done" (p. 33). Ressler thought that the unsub would continue killing until stopped. (Ramsland, 2010, pp. 32-33) This profile led investigators to Richard Trenton Chase. When the investigators went to arrest Chase, he surrendered. The investigators found enough evidence to take him to trial, and he was eventually convicted.(Ramsland, 2010)

As Ressler and Vorpapel compared Chase to their profile, they found that they had been accurate on many points. Chase had "been institutionalized several times, had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and had a history of being preoccupied with signs that something

was physically wrong with him. He lived alone, was unemployed, and received disability funds” (Ramsland, 2010, p. 33).

Criminal profiling was used in another case that occurred in June of 1988 in Delaware. Police found the naked body of a woman. A blunt instrument had been the cause of her head injuries while significant bruising on the body was partly the result of being bound hand and foot and strangled. She had tape residue on her face and hair. Fibers found at the crime scene turned out to be from carpet. Furthermore, another unsolved case from 1987 had the same characteristics as the 1988 murder. The police brought in the FBI and “after analyzing the crime scene evidence, the victimology, and geographical locations where each victim was found, the FBI profilers generated a criminal psychological profile” (Ramsland, 2010, p. 240) that indicated the offender was probably in his mid-twenties to mid-thirties, a white male, lived nearby, worked in construction, drove a van in which he accumulated many miles while stalking victims, would present a macho image, would enjoy dominating women, have no difficulty maintaining a steady relationship with a girlfriend or wife, would be prepared for the crime in bringing his own weapon, and destroy any evidence when finished with the crimes.

As a result of that profile, the police began an undercover operation that led to an arrest and seizure of the suspect’s van. Though the defense attempted to suppress carpet fibers gathered in the undercover operation, the Delaware Superior Court “upheld the seizure of the van fibers, however, primarily because of the criminal psychological profile. The profile also played a role in the conviction of the defendant: FBI agents testified to the similarities between the murders and the fact that the same person had committed each one” (Ramsland, 2010, pp. 240-241). The actual profile, however, was not admitted as evidence proving innocence or guilt of the defendant.

These are just two examples of cases in which criminal profiling helped to catch and prosecute murderers. They show that profiling can help in investigation and show that the court system is willing to recognize the testimony of expert profilers. Criminal profiling can cause investigators to have tunnel vision in that they only see what they want to see that will link to a particular suspect, but with a proper perspective and trained profiler, profiling can aid in developing leads, saving valuable time in the process of investigation that could result in saved lives. Criminal profiling can also help to build the prosecutor’s case against an unsub. Furthermore, in the hands of professionally trained investigators, criminal profiling is based on psychology – a valid science.

As was the case of the killer Chase, criminal profiling can actually help in an investigation to obtain leads as to the killers identity, mo, and even where the killer is likely to strike next. Former FBI Behavioral Science Unit agent Gregg O. McCrary, in his book “The Unknown Darkness,” states that “none of us mistakes criminal profiling for an established science, and no responsible agent would rely on a profile alone for solving a case, we know that with sufficient information, the psychological assessment from behavioral tools can be surprisingly accurate” (McCrary & Ramsland, 2003, p. 21). David Canter, director of the Centre of Investigative Psychology, who is hailed by some as the “father of offender profiling in Britain,” believes that

“psychologists have much to offer to criminal, and other, investigations” (Canter, 1998). While McCrary said criminal profiling is not yet an established science, through the use of the science of psychology combined with criminal investigation and the studying of multitudes of cases, pictures begin to emerge as to what unsubs may look like. The FBI has been instrumental in engaging in investigative procedures to establish profiling.

Furthermore, according to Ramsland, the FBI goes through an extensive process to develop a profile. The FBI’s premise, as stated by McCrary, is that “behavior reflects personality whether that be criminals or non-criminals” (2003, p. 10). He believes that “through a thorough and accurate assessment of those details, we can draw certain logical inferences about the offender” (2003, p. 10). Ramsland concurs with McCrary and goes further to tell about the process of profiling:

From scene elements, profilers can deduce aspects of the offender’s behavior that could inspire crime: whether he has been snubbed or has a deformity, is recently unemployed or separated from a significant person, abuses drugs or alcohol, has access to firearms, is physically strong, or has served in the military. Each aspect of the crime is studied to determine how the offender viewed it...It is also important to know if the offender commits a crime via contact with the victim or from a distance, with a knife, blunt force, or a gun. (Ramsland, 2010, p. 38)

As to the legal implications of criminal profiling, there are several cases that support the use of it in the courtroom. In many cases, the testimony of a criminal profiler was considered as expert testimony and therefore included in the prosecution. In *State v. Code*, 627 So. 2d 1373 (La. 1993) Douglas, a behavioral analyst key to developing the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit, gave testimony on the modus operandi and ritual aspects of the defendant that was accepted as evidence. In *State v. Russell*, 882 P2d 747 (Wash. 1994,) because Douglas was considered an expert witness, he was able to provide testimony to be included as part of the defense. His opinion was that all three murders were committed by the same person. Terri Wood Law Office cited the *US v Gil*, 58 F3d 1414 (9th Cir. 1995) in having allowed criminal profiling testimony as “specialized knowledge of human behavior patterns characteristic of particular criminal activity” (Oregon; *State v Dunn*, Lane co. Circuit Court). According to the Terri Law Wood Office, the profiler is able to “illuminate physical evidence, and offender behavior, in a way that allows jurors to understand all of the available evidence in a case so as to arrive at a fully informed determination of guilt or innocence of the accused” (Oregon; *State v Dunn*, Lane co. Circuit Court). (www.terriwoodlawoffice.com)

From the examples and testimony provided here, we can deduce that criminal profiling can be a very useful investigative tool in the hands of professional profilers. Criminal profiling is based on scientific data developed in psychology and keen observation of crime scenes. Prosecutors and judges alike have approved of the use of profiling to convict criminals. As psychology and criminal investigation evolve and build on more cases, criminal profiling will become an ever better investigative tool. So, if Jack-the-Ripper were committing his crimes today, would criminal profiling help to catch the elusive killer? As a result of the evidence provided here, the answer may very well be, "yes."

References

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