The Process Of Creating A Criminal Profile

Criminal profiling has begun to rise and become a popular tool utilized by law enforcement all over the nation. Criminal profiling is the construction of a psychological, behavioral and demographic profile of the type of person likely to have committed the crime. Profilers help investigators by putting together a profile based on the evidence and information provided. In the 1970s, America had a rise in serial crimes and law enforcement needed help bringing the violence down. The Federal Bureau of Investigation began the Behavioral Science Unit and set out to gain information on previous serial killers about motives, planning, and details. They used this information to create a nationwide database to help catch predators using collected data to connect open cases or use behavioral characteristics and the patterns from closed ones. Since the introduction of this system police departments all over the nation can connect serial murders, suspicious missing persons, and unidentified remains to one another. There are many ways in which criminal profilers acquire information of offenders by collecting input, processing their decision, assessing the crime, profiling the criminal, investigating, and eventually apprehending the criminal.

Profilers start their process by gathering input about the crime scene. It is important for criminal profilers to know what they are looking for and to have “widespread exposure to crime scenes and some exposure to criminals who had committed similar crimes” to be able to accurately create a profile (Bartol). Criminal profilers gain most of their information from crime scene photos and the crime scene itself. Most profilers can gain clues on basic characteristics such as age, race, and sex, based solely on the crime scene alone. The violence and the type of crime can also give an indication of the motive of the perpetrator. There are a number of behaviors that trained professionals look for at crime scenes to “explain the evidential behaviors in an attempt to predict things that could help give some indication as to who the perpetrator is” (George). If the suspect follows a pattern in their crimes it makes it easier for the analysts to create a profile. Criminals also may leave a crime scene organized or disorganized. An organized crime scene includes a hidden body, the weapon has been removed from the scene, it appears to have been well-planned, the victim was specifically targeted, and aggression took place before death. Organized crime scenes suggest the offender has an average or above average intelligence, they’re quite skilled, and are most likely obsessed with the media coverage of their crimes. Disorganized crimes are the opposite, the body has not been hidden, the weapon is present at the scene, and the crime appears to be spontaneous rather than planned out. The offender of a disorganized crime scene is usually below intelligence, socially isolated, lives close to the scene, and is extremely anxious. There are many behaviors specific to psychopaths, though regular people as well, such as superficial charm, lack of remorse, promiscuous sexual behavior, and are usually narcissistic.

Criminal profilers then start the decision process of arranging their input into meaningful patterns and analyzing victimology and offender risk. Most transgressors will start with small crimes and eventually escalate throughout their criminal history. Profilers have learned that “one of the most common warning signs that potential serial killers display is a love of setting fires” along with a tendency of voyeurism (Museum). Though rare, some serial murders may also start by killing small animals. These patterns help police and profilers narrow down or eliminate suspects. Victimology is another way of narrowing down a suspect list, though it is

proven intelligent criminals may attack at random. Victimology is the study of the victims in multiple crimes composed by the same criminal. Most victims are very similar to each other in appearance and sometimes social status, this gives profilers an idea of the pattern of the suspect's approach. Profilers not only look at the victims appearance and lifestyle but at "whether the victims have met or worked together in the past, or if they share a common interest" giving them more insight of the suspect's pattern (Claridge). Profilers also look at where the crime has taken place, such as if it is in a remote area the suspect may not be as charming or socially active. On the other side of the spectrum if the crime is committed out in the open it suggests that the criminal is bold and may be able to charm their victims into a secondary location. Many victims put themselves unknowingly into vulnerable situations such as secluded paths or places where alcohol and drugs are present. All of these factors accumulate into the criminals pattern and can help profilers gain additional information. The time of day also come into consideration going along with the personality of the suspect. Most criminals may commit their crimes at night, but if planned they can strike mid-day suggesting a confident and cunning individual. Victims may put themselves in dangerous situations by being alone late at night or trusting complete strangers during the day. Ted Bundy famously charmed his victims in the middle of the day in crowded places by luring them away from friends and striking once they were secluded.

Profilers use their information to reconstruct the crime scene and determine the motivation for the offense. Reconstructing the crime scene and reenacting helps profilers slip into the mindset of the offender, taking in violence level and the method of attack. Crime scene reconstructing helps profilers gain information of the events that surrounded the attack. Profilers look specifically for modus operandi (method) and signature of the offender. The modus operandi is "what the offender must do in order to commit the crime" it's what they chose to do to their victims to either torture or kill their victims (Bonn).Criminals often use the same method, but may improve and tweak their method as they continue to gain knowledge and confidence. The modus operandi also gives insight to details on the suspect close contact such as manual strangulation or stabbing present the idea the perpetrator was more personal with their crimes. The signature of the criminal is unique to the perpetrator themselves, it is something they do that they sometimes feel is necessary. Though unique to the suspect, there are some similarities about what they may take from their victims or the weapon used in the attack. The signature comes from the psyche of the offender and may represent a fantasy that the offender had previous to the crime. From this information profilers can determine the motive of the crimes such as passion or anger. Motives are an important part in profilers to help to type the offender. Motive is important because "without an understanding of why people commit certain crimes in the way they do, we are left to begin at square one on every investigation" without motive it is hard to prove a reason why the crimes happened and it gives profilers more insight of the offenders personality (Zandt). From all of the information that the investigators have collected profilers can accurately determine specific qualities of an offender such as age, sex, social status, intelligence, and psychological characteristics.

From all of their information the profilers then put together their offender profile that aids in the police investigation. The profile of the offender helps law enforcement by letting them focus on suspects who fit the profile and are more likely to be the correct transgressor. Profilers also help police when interviewing suspects using "different strategies for obtaining information for different offenders can be applied" because the technique used on one offender may not be suitable on the use of another. It helps when trying to get the suspect to confess when profilers have the knowledge of their personality traits. If police are aware of how the suspects may act

they can try and get ahead of the offender and make it easier to apprehend them. Criminal profilers also have created the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program where “local officers can input their case data to look for matches from other jurisdictions to generate new leads” and to connect their cases with others in different areas (George). The goal of criminal profilers is to assist the local law enforcement with narrowing down the list of suspects and not to completely take control of the investigation.