

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF CRIMINAL PROFILING

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ABSTRACT

Criminal Profilers enjoy a prominent status in the public eye due to dramatized media coverage, both fictionally and non-fictionally. However, literature is scarce on how one becomes a profiler and the degree to which the occupation is independent and professional. This study examines the current level of professionalism among criminal profilers. Through a content analysis of both literature and job announcements, this article suggests that, currently, there is little movement toward the professionalization of criminal profilers. Using Friedson's model of professionalization, this article suggests the professionalization of profilers is hindered by the lack of centralized expertise, the absence of any formal credentialism, and minimal autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

The use of profiling has a prominent status among U.S. media outlets. Movies such as *Silence of the Lambs* and *Red Dragon* and TV programs such as *CSI* have popularized criminal profiling. Still, profiling as portrayed by the media is not limited to fictional shows or movies – unsolved murder cases often result in headline news stories where “experts” are brought on air to describe the type of person that would commit such murders. Given the vast attention to criminal profiling, one would assume “real” criminal profilers enjoy a rather prominent status in both law enforcement and society at large. But are profilers experts? How does one become a profiler? Is profiling a profession? The purpose of this paper is to examine the current level of professionalism among current profilers.

This research considers criminal profiling to be any investigative technique utilized by law enforcement that is intended to classify unknown criminal offenders. Literature surrounding the professionalization of profiling is limited (for example Egger 1999; Turvey 2002). Though profilers clearly do not comprise an autonomous professional organization, this research considers whether profilers exhibit characteristics which are comparable to other professionals and thus lend themselves to future professionalization. A content analysis of both literature and job announcements was conducted to examine both the level of professionalism and any current movement to improve this level. The findings suggest a limited movement toward professionalization, particularly among workers who profile at the local law enforcement level.

The History of Profiling

The use of profiling dates back to the late 1600's, when steps were taken to predict the physical characteristics of witches (Vold & Bernard 1986; Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994). Since that time, drastic steps have been taken to improve not only the perception of criminal profiling, but also the scientific approach by which it is guided. According to Turvey (2002), 1956 marked the first well-publicized case in which psychological profiling was applied in the U.S. when a psychiatrist, James Brussel, proffered that, through the analysis of several crimes performed by a single offender, several key behavioral and psychological characteristics of the offender could be ascertained. Amidst the hunt for the “The Mad Bomber,” Brussel's profile was introduced in the *New York Times*. A typology which included that the suspect would be male, unmarried, Roman Catholic, and suffer from paranoia, Brussel also felt the man would be wearing a double-breasted suit upon his apprehension. George Metesky was later arrested and largely met the profile created (Turvey 2002).

Beginning around 1972, the FBI began to explore criminal profiling and its institutional use (Ainsworth 2001). Conducted at the FBI headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, FBI personnel worked extensively with thirty-six convicted serial murderers through interviews and developed psychological profiles of these murderers. Through the discovery of common trends among these criminals, the FBI developed profiles which included typologies of organized and disorganized offenders (Theoharris 1999). Organized offenders were thought to be sexually competent, have average or above average intelligence, a skillful job, and it was believed that they would

commit crimes in a similar manner. They typically planned their crimes, showed behavioral control at the scene of the crime, left very few clues at the crime scene, and frequently attacked strangers (Egger 1999). On the other hand, disorganized offenders were credited with possessing the opposite characteristics – socially deficient, below average intelligence, sexually incompetent, etc. They did not plan their crimes, and committed crimes in a haphazard manner (Egger 1999). The organizational approach to criminal profiling was monumental and brought about a new method of studying crime. As a result, police, through profiling, hope to identify the amount of planning that went into the crime, the amount of control used by the offender, the level of emotion at the scene, and the risk level (O'Toole 1999).

At about the same time, Groth and colleagues began to develop typologies of rapists, which resulted in four categories: power assurance, power-assertive, anger-retaliatory, and anger-excitement (Groth, Burgess & Holmstrom 1977). Today, psychological profiling is not limited to murderers and rapists. It is also used in hostage negotiations, terrorism, letter analysis, burglary, and arson (Campbell & DeNevi 2004).

The use of profiling has its critics, though. Pfohl (1985) argues that the terminology used in profiles only results in confusion. For instance, a sociopath is considered, amongst other symptoms, to possess superficial charm and good intelligence. But what exactly is superficial charm? Moreover, in a profile of the organized or disorganized offender, it is difficult to assess symptoms such as above average intelligence or sexual incompetence. To compound the ambiguity, Ainsworth (2001) adds that more often than not, the offender is actually classified as "mixed". Nevertheless, psychological profiling is a common tool used in law enforcement. Despite this acceptance, it can be argued that there is a general confusion among the public about what exactly a profiler is, what a typical profiler does, and how one becomes a profiler. So, can profiling be considered a profession?

THEORETICAL CONCERNS

Weber (1958) once noted that professionalization was the result of an ever-expanding bureaucratization of society. Research has focused on numerous aspects of profession-

alization, including the critical traits which characterize professionals (Etzioni 1964), the influence of social class on becoming professional (Leggatt 1970), and the role of institutional control in creating and maintaining a "monopoly of expertise" (Larson 1977; Abbott 1988). Still others have focused on the particular trajectory which is followed to acquire a professional status (Goode 1969; Friedson 1984).

Elliot Friedson (1984) points to three characteristics of professionalization which serve to distinguish a profession from an occupation: expertise, credentialism, and autonomy. First, a set of knowledge is possessed by the group that is considered superior to alternative forms. Moreover, this knowledge is specialized and monopolized. Thus, medical assistants may understand the origins of a particular illness, but the doctor is expected by others to be more knowledgeable and qualified to diagnose and treat. In part, expertise is the result of a second characteristic of professionalization, credentialism, which refers to an educational system for formal training which permits the transfer of knowledge. Professional groups most often require that a certain level of education has been attained or some type of formal training is required. Finally, a third characteristic of professions is autonomy, which refers to the profession's ability to self-govern through its own decision-making. For instance, police departments, for the most part, are self-regulating. Thus, when accusations are made, such as those involving the use of excessive force, typically the police department itself responds to the problem by initiating an internal investigation. The autonomy provided to professions is often a consequence of both expertise and credentialism.

This research considers the level of professionalization among criminal profilers. Though it is clear that profilers do not constitute a formal professional group, there have been recent attempts to gain such status (Turvey 2002). Thus, I explore three key characteristics of professions – expertise, credentialism, and autonomy – and examine the extent to which these characteristics have been achieved among criminal profilers.

While measuring expertise, several questions were considered. First, are criminal profilers "experts" within their field? Is this expertise measurable? If so, how is expertise achieved? Can expertise be achieved merely

through formal education or other training? Second, this paper considered the level of credentialism among profilers. Can profilers earn a professional status through some formal process? Is there a certification process involved in becoming a profiler? Finally, the third characteristic of autonomy was addressed through several questions. Do authorities who employ psychological profiling constitute a self-regulating entity? Who is ultimately responsible for the profile they create? Is psychological profiling a full-time position, in which one is hired solely on their ability to develop criminal profiles?

METHODOLOGY

This research used a content analysis of both existing literature and job announcements to explain the current level of professionalism among profilers. Babbie (1998) provides several steps for conducting a successful content analysis, including the development of a research question, the determination of the units of analysis, and the coding and categorization of data. In order to measure professionalism among current profilers, an in-depth review of fifty works of literature including books, peer-reviewed journals, and newspaper and magazine articles was performed. In addition, twenty job announcements were reviewed.

Specifically, 13 journal articles, 8 books, and 29 newspaper & magazine articles were content analyzed. The publication dates ranged from 1977, which included one of the first scholarly accounts of the use of criminal profiling to characterize rapists, to 2005. Over 90 percent of the published works, including the job announcements, were prepared from 2000-2005. This range of years was selected to determine the level of movement, if any, toward professionalization. The books and journals, prepared by profilers and/or scholars, were selected for their macro-orientation toward profiling as it is generally used by law enforcement. The newspaper and magazine articles were selected for their focus on more local, case-specific uses of criminal profiling. Databases including Factiva, Ebscohost and Proquest to were used to locate such accounts. The analysis of scholar and/or profiler accounts of profiling, combined with journalistic accounts was aimed at providing both the "ideal" and "actual" use of profiling among law enforcement. In addition to these fifty articles, the author

also chose to examine twenty job announcements and descriptions available on the internet to infer the necessary duties and qualifications of a profiler.

After the selection of texts was completed, the researcher noted all thematic elements contained in the literature. For instance, in the articles reviewed on profiling, themes emerged which focused on the development of profiling, the success of profiling, the extent to which it is used, the people who employ profiling, and the manner in which the approach is used. The major themes in the job announcements regarded the various job duties to be performed and the qualifications necessary within various law enforcement departments. After the development of thematic elements, the researcher categorized those themes into the following five groups: "Usage", "Method", "Duties", "Training and Qualifications" and "Success".

First, "Usage" refers to the particular crimes that psychological profiling encompasses. Second, "Method" refers to the ways by which various profiles are constructed. Third, "Duties" included themes related to the expected accomplishments of hired profilers. Fourth, "Training and Qualifications" refers to the ways in which individuals can learn to profile and what level of learning is expected. Finally, "Success" is a category that refers to how valuable profiling is according to those individuals who use and/or support the use of profiling and those who oppose it as a law enforcement technique. Upon the construction of categories, the data was then linked to Friedson's model of professionalization to examine the level of professionalism among profilers.

FINDINGS

Usage

Each article reviewed emphasized at least one type of crime in which profiling could be used. Of the fifty articles, twenty directed the focus to one use of profiling. For example, Kapardis and Krambia-Kapardis (2004) focused on the use of psychological profiling in fraud detection and prevention. White (1996) directed attention to profiling used in arson. Also, Chaddock (2000) and Morris (1999) focused on the infusion of psychological profiling into schools to identify potential "trouble-makers." Furthermore, psychological profiling has also been used to determine the likely characteristics of cer-

tain foreign leaders, such as Aristide, Yeltsin, Castro, and Hitler (Omestad 1994). The remaining thirty articles focused on psychological profiling as a whole as it applies to its use in serial murders, rapes, arson, robbery, fraud, hostage taking, kidnappings, letter analysis, and bombings albeit from a more general perspective. Clearly, there is much diversity in the use of criminal profiling.

Method

The articles also had themes which focused on the way in which profilers actually develop a typology of offenders. Thus, a category labeled "Method" was created. This category refers to whether the method is perceived as a science or an art.

Several authors argue that profiling is more closely aligned with an art (Egger 1999; Lehrer 2002; Parker 2002), or at least profiling conducted by the FBI (Jarvis 1997). Some argue that because the strategies and techniques of profiling performed by the FBI are rather secretive, resultant typologies then lend themselves to criticism relating to their validity and reliability (Ainsworth 2001). Also, the term "educated guesswork" was used widely to describe the development of a profile (Lehrer 2002; Parker 2002). Thus, although profiles may be "educated" or learned through training at the FBI, many believe such typologies are also largely a result of "guessing," rather than the product of an explicit, scientific approach.

Several authors argued that the process is either scientific, or could be scientific (Crace 1995; Jarvis 1997; Tandler 1993; Turvey 2002). Turvey (2002) suggests that such an approach can be taken during the creation of any psychological profile. He argues that profilers should 1) define the problem and assess the known victimology; 2) collect data to determine further characteristics; 3) form a hypothesis and prepare a written document which contains the evidence, victimology, patterns and behaviors, and potential motivations; 4) test the hypothesis as new evidence emerges; 5) interpret the results and 6) develop the profile.

Duties

The category labeled "Duties" was created due to the job announcements' emphasis related to the various chores that profilers would complete if hired. The duties required

by the various law enforcement agencies suggest that there are many similar elements involved in each job, but there are also several key distinctions. One concerns the very title of the job itself. For instance, 17 of the job announcements and descriptions discussed the need for "Crime Analysts." The Stillwater Police Department in Oklahoma employs a "Police Psychologist." Steilacoom, Washington was searching for a "Forensic Services Manager." Finally, Amarillo, Texas was looking for an "Investigative Trainee" who "collects and evaluates evidence to formulate defensible investigative conclusions." Only one agency was hiring a "Psychological Profiler." What explains the inconsistent nomenclature? Though these job descriptions clearly called for someone to develop profiles based on crime scene and related characteristics, there appeared to be a reluctance hire a "Profiler." One could possibly turn to Erving Goffman,

Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories. (1963)

Goffman believed that certain categories of behaviors in society are stigmatized, and one such behavior that has recently received much negative publicity is "racial profiling." Thus, law enforcement agencies are perhaps hesitant to hire a "profiler" in fear that the public would believe racial profiling to fit under the purview of criminal profiling.

However, the data suggest a more telling account which concerns the objectives of the hired worker. For instance, each job announcement contained information that explicitly stated that the worker would be expected to discover and analyze criminal trends, whether these trends derive from the criminal or the crime itself. While this is certainly criminal profiling, only seven of the job announcements used the specific term "profiling" within their list of duties. Eleven job announcements also noted that the worker was to directly consult with other authorities and are subject to the organization's rules and regulations. Another expectation within ten positions was the ability to employ mapping techniques to determine criminal patterns. Two police departments desired one who could contribute to the grant-writing process.

Importantly, then, profiling was expected for these positions, but so were numerous other duties. Moreover, psychological profiling may have been used, but so were other techniques such as geographical profiling.

Training and Qualifications

This category was constructed to refer to the process in which one can become a profiler. While Ainsworth (2001) notes that there are no degrees offered that result in one graduating as a "profiler," others suggest that there are at least several ways in which people can gain the necessary knowledge to become a profiler. For example, Kocsis, Irwin, Hayes and Nunn note that,

It remains fair to say that the most internationally renowned program for training psychological profilers is that conducted at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia by members of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit. (2000 311)

The job announcements reveal many different qualifications necessary within each department. Two largely accepted degrees were Criminal Justice and Public or Business Administration. Besides these programs, Newport News, Virginia would hire one with an equivalent to a Bachelor's in fields related to Urban Affairs or Statistics with experience. Santa Rosa accepted applications with Computer Science degrees and related experience. Corpus Christi, Texas sought one with a degree in Math and/or related experience. Salisbury, North Carolina desired a degree in Information Technology or a related field. Adding to the variety of degrees accepted was the Texas Department of Justice, which sought an Investigator Trainee who had a bachelor's degree or military experience which would replace the former requirement. Finally, only two agencies required education beyond the Bachelor's. A police department in Washington desired a doctoral degree in Psychology with a state license to practice and two years of post-degree practice. The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington D.C. required its Crime Analyst to have two years of graduate study.

Success

Finally, "success" was another pervasive thematic category within the literature. This

term carries with it many references. First, many authors considered ways in which the success of profilers should be measured (for example Tendler 1993; Bennetto 1995; Moor 1998). Two approaches were highlighted: 1) success as a measurement of catching the offender and 2) success as a measurement of narrowing the investigation. Several authors measured the success of psychological profiling in terms of whether the profile led to the arrest of that suspect (Beech 1995; Smith & Guillen 2001; Cowan 2002; Lehrer 2002). Smith and Guillen (2001), for instance, argued that cases in which profiles produce an arrest and conviction are not likely, with a few exceptions such as Gary Ridgeway, also known as the "Green River killer." The authors contend that the lack of arrests and convictions as the result of profiles suggest profiling is an unsuccessful investigative tool. Others contend that constructed profiles rarely consist of details and predictions the general population could not arrive at on their own (Beech 1995; Lehrer 2002). Moreover, some argue that even if the profile is accurate, decades might ensue before the apprehension of the suspect, which questions whether profiling is of much use overall (Vedantam 1996). Other authors believe that a different measurement must be used to ascertain the success of profiling. This perspective centers on the argument that profiling should be assessed in terms of how well it helps the investigation by narrowing the list of possible suspects (Douglas, Ressler, Burgess & Hartman 1986; Egger 1999; Theoharris 1999; Kocsis et al 2000; Kapardis & Krambia-Kapardis 2004).

Another theme related to success involved the characteristics inherent in a successful profiler. For example, Toufexis (1991) argues that a profiler's ability is the result of experience and research. Rosen (1997) says that intuition is also an important characteristic in profilers. Klump (1997) adds proper training as another feature. Kocsis et al (2000) argue that psychological understanding is the most important element. Finally, others cite the importance of characteristics such as brainstorming, educated guesswork, and viewing the crime from the offender's perspective (Ressler, Douglas, Groth & Burgess 1980; Douglas et al 1986).

THE LINK TO PROFESSIONALIZATION

Expertise refers to a standardized knowl-

edge that is unique and centralized. While the literature on profiling debates the key characteristics which leads to expertise, such as intuition, educated guesswork, formal training, etc., the job announcements suggest, in reality, that expertise in profiling is not something expected upon arriving at the job. Because such a wide variety of university degrees are accepted, expertise may lie in Psychology, Math, Business, or a plethora of other areas, but not Criminal Profiling. In addition, "related experience" is a highly valued characteristic. But whether related experience equates with expertise is highly debatable. Thus, what makes any profiler an expert? Lawyers are considered experts of the law due to years of schooling, training, knowledge of legal statutes, and their certification. Likewise, doctors have a centralized knowledge of the human body, attend years of school, receive certification, and are considered experts by the general public. Moreover, there is a certain amount of public trust that lawyers and doctors are more knowledgeable of the law and human body, respectively, due to these characteristics. However, profilers may have expertise in Psychology, but does that make them successful Criminal Profilers? Is there a certain number of years of law enforcement experience that eventually renders one an expert in developing criminal profiles?

An important discussion should also be had related to the different types of profiling that are conducted. If one has expertise in profiling arsonists, do they also have expertise in developing profiles of serial killers? A cardiologist and a neurosurgeon are both doctors, but one clearly has more knowledge of the human heart and the other of the brain. Further, this knowledge is obtained through years of formal schooling which prepared them for those specific positions. But a profiler of arsonists, though he or she may have years of experience related to investigating fires, has not combined this experience with years of formal training from other accredited profilers. Moreover, it appears from the job descriptions that one would not only develop profiles of arsonists, but they would also be expected to understand serial killers.

Credentialism refers to the profession's form of licensing or system of barrier in place to prevent some from entering the profession. The analysis above shows that there is

no current form of credentialism in place for profiling. Few job announcements and descriptions asked for anything beyond a Bachelor's degree in various fields of study. Currently, there is no form of certification available to deem one a profiler. Many of the authors presented profilers as properly trained and capable profilers. However, once again, this training clearly does not come from other accredited profilers or university degrees specifically related to Criminal Profiling.

Finally, autonomy suggests that the profession has the ability to self-govern. Clearly, profiling has yet to achieve this standard as well. While the creation of the Academy of Behavioral Profiling (ABP) shows movement towards professionalization, much progress has yet to be made. The job announcements show that profilers, specifically those working full-time with police departments, are subject to the rules and policies of the department rather than those of an autonomous organization of profiling. In order for profiling to be considered professional, an autonomous organization such as the ABP has to take complete control over psychological profiling in the U.S. Currently, it is logical to assume that if a profiler who also belongs to the ABP were to breach his or her code of ethics while working for a police department by helping to create a profile, that person could have his or her membership stripped away. However, it does not mean that the police department would not be able to use that same person in a future investigation which requires his or her development of a profile. This scenario clearly shows that autonomy, in Freidson's model, doesn't exist.

CONCLUSION

This study has looked at psychological profiling and the process of professionalization. The author has studied whether or not there is a level of professionalism, and if not, whether there is a current movement towards professionalization. By conducting a content analysis of literature related to profiling and job announcements calling for workers that use profiling, the study shows that there is no current level of professionalism among profilers. Several things must happen in order for profilers to professionalize. First and foremost, there is not a standardized, unique expertise central to profiling. In essence, anyone can be a profiler based on various educational outcomes and/or "related experi-

ence." Second, professionalism implies that some level of credentialism has been attained. Though there are certifications for areas that may incorporate profiling, no certification or licensing process exists which is unique to profiling. Third, profilers do not have the level of autonomy necessary to professionalize. Though profilers have a sense of autonomy in that they are able to create profiles using their own techniques, they are many times subject to the police departments' rules and regulations, as was illustrated in the review of job announcements.

For the most part, then, there is little movement toward professionalization. One may ask why this movement isn't taking place. There are relevant reasons as to why this is not occurring. To begin, one could consider why occupations should become professional. The manifest function of becoming professional is that the process enhances knowledge. In addition, knowledge becomes standardized. Given these valuable reasons to become professional, why isn't a movement occurring? There are several valid reasons for this. To start, a personal conversation with one who develops criminal profiles suggests that by demanding a process of certification, many previously capable and experienced experts would no longer be "qualified" to profile. This is similar to what many law enforcement agencies would experience if policing gained a professional status, rather than its current position where many local police departments hire applicants with only high school diplomas. This suggests that expertise can exist without unique credentials. Surely, there is logic to this argument. On the flip side, if a certification process exists and profilers obtain the necessary credentials, does this automatically deem them experts? The literature reviewed highly suggested that experience plays a major role in becoming a successful profiler. So, if a certification process takes hold, this process doesn't necessarily include experience, which is considered a valuable asset to a profiler. Most certainly, this applies to other fields as well. Finally, concerning autonomy, it could be argued that profilers should remain subject to the police department's rules, regulations, ethics, and procedures, rather than their own set of guidelines. This makes the department's expectations more uniform. While this research shows that there is no current movement towards profession-

alization, there are limitations to this study that future research could help to strengthen and solidify.

The primary limitation to this study involves the methodology that was used. This research does not include the perspective of profilers in regard to their attitude towards the professionalization of profiling. These perspectives are important, but appear to be fairly difficult to obtain. This is especially the case when virtually anyone can be a profiler. Nevertheless, future research would be strengthened through the use of interviews of individuals who use profiling on a regular basis. What characteristics do they believe makes them qualified to profile? Is expertise gained through education, experience, or a combination of both? Is one more important than the other? Research should also more deeply explore the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation for profiling.

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