Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

Offender Profiling: Theory, Research and Practice

Edited by Janet L. Jackson & Debra A. Bekerian. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons. 1997. 233 pp. £16.99 (pb). ISBN 0-471-97565-6

Having heard Professor Don Grubin giving a highly amusing, but ultimately slightly sceptical account of offender profiling, I was minded to be sceptical about the grander claims of profilers; so with some apprehension I turned to review this book. However, the series preface makes it clear that it is intended to be a critical treatment of "an area of potent myths . . . where scientific fact has been noticeable by its absence". This sentence appropriately catches the combination of scientific uncertainty about offender profiling, and its very seductive and exciting public image. All the contributors appear to be mindful of this tension, and I found the book interesting and stimulating to read.

The editors begin by putting profiling in the context of "stranger violence". It is immediately clear that profiling applies to only a minority of offenders, because the majority of interpersonal violence is carried out by perpetrators on victims they know well. However, there is much more public information and anxiety about violence between strangers than there is about violence between intimates, which may account for the public interest in offender profiling and profilers. The ability to identify a 'bad man' without seeing him is, indeed, a potent myth.

Profiling as defined (on p. 2) is the practice of making inferences about offenders from their observed behaviour as detected in the evidence at the scene of the crime. The question then becomes, is this an extreme type of behaviourism? Or is it a realistic appraisal of the persistence of behavioural patterns? Or is it an acceptance that behaviour has meaning to offenders, and that the evidence of an offender's actions provides evidence of the workings of his internal world (which might be the very opposite of behaviourism)? Indeed, one of the authors (p. 24) makes reference to the "symbolic content" of the offender's behaviour.

All the authors make it clear that offender profiling is not a solution to crimes, but rather a tool to guide strategy, support management and improve case understanding. Not all types of crime may be amenable to profiling, especially where personality is affected by drugs. The various chapters explore the different theories that are important to offender profiling, noting especially the importance of personality theory. It is clear that there are two schools of offender profiling, the clinical and the statistical, and the authors make different cases; thus, Badcock & Boon write on clinical information for their profiling, and Farrington & Lambert describe a statistical approach.

Is profiling useful? Is it accurate? These apparently simple questions are highly complex to address and answer. A study has been conducted by the London Metropolitan Police and the Home Office and this study is well reviewed by Gudjonsson & Copson. They note that only a third of data are open to checking for accuracy, and they conclude that offender profiling is probably more accurate than not; that clinical probably has the edge over statistical profiling; and that some profilers are very much better than others. Such findings are a nice example of the ethical tensions that arise in relation to research and the criminal justice process. If profilers vary so much in their skills, one may only speculate on how much damage and expense might be caused by an inept profiler.

The study of offender profiling described by Gudjonsson & Copson also demonstrates the importance of 'fuzzy logic' in thinking about criminal justice processes. Fuzzy logic is a scalar rather than absolute way of thinking about truth. Thus, components of statements may be true or false, for example, 'a jaguar is an animal which has four legs and plugs into the wall'. One component of this statement is so false that it renders the true components meaningless. Even if one added increasing amounts of true information (e.g. has spots, lives in the South American jungle, is catlike), the false information would still make the statement meaningless. In offender profiling, presumably the same applies. It will not be meaningful to say "The offender is male, early 20s, white, named Fred and lives in Dagenham" if one of those bits of information is false, even if others are true. It could be argued that some types of information are, therefore, of greater import than others – it may matter little whether or not the name is Jack, but it will be crucial that the gender be right. Thus, even if profilers get some facts right, false components may make the profile invalid. Given the potential abuse of profiling in terms of civil liberties, caution is warranted.

This book tells the reader a great deal about the investigation of a serious crime, where experts fit in and something about the process of 'good coppering'. One chapter is almost entirely devoted to a discussion of criminals who are understood and conceived of as 'hunters', and the hunting metaphor persists throughout the book. What was missing for me was a philosophical section about the difficulties of making inferences about mind from action, and the ethical implications of doing so.

This book does not need to be on everybody's shelves, but for those who have a slightly broader contextual interest in the criminal justice system this might well be an interesting addition to the library.

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Psychological Trauma: A Developmental Approach

Edited by Dora Black, Martin Newman, Jean Harris-Hendricks & Gillian Mezey. London: Gaskell. 1997. 412 pp. £30 (pb). ISBN 0-902241-98-2

In their concluding chapter, the editors of this book remind readers that their aim has been to provide a comprehensive account of the many different aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and to bring

together the accumulating knowledge about reactions to traumatic experiences. This aim is admirably achieved and the book is packed with information on all aspects of this relatively young diagnostic syndrome. Over 40 contributors, mostly, but not exclusively, from the UK, and representing a wide range of professions bring an extensive variety of perceptions and experiences to the subject.

The book is systematically arranged into four parts, of which the first, entitled 'Human responses to stress: normal and abnormal' reviews the origins of PTSD, current classification systems, distinctions from grief reactions, and outlines different explanatory theoretical models (i.e. physiological and biological mechanisms, psychoanalytic and cognitive–behavioural models). Part II reviews disasters in more detail, starting with a typology of disasters and including brief descriptions of a number of significant British community disasters in the later 1980s – the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, the Lockerbie bomb, the King's Cross fire. Although one feels a little like a voyeur in reading again about these tragedies, the value is that there was something specific to be learned by professionals from each. For example, following the *Marchioness* river boat disaster in 1989, it was recognised how important it can be for relatives to identify the deceased personally, even if badly disfigured.

Part III deals with diagnosis, intervention and treatment, covering all current treatment modalities, and also specific situations such as dealing with children and adolescents, school-based approaches, and the role of police, employers and volunteers. It is acknowledged that the effects of treatment are seriously under-researched, with much still to be learned, such as whether early debriefing approaches modify the later development of significant psychopathology.

Finally, Part IV covers legal aspects, victims as witnesses and claimants, ethical issues, and some basic guidelines for organising psychosocial responses. A brief but practical chapter on psychiatric assessment of stress disorders for legal purposes will be helpful to many psychiatrists called upon to do medico-legal work.

All chapters are fairly short and packed with facts, with a bibliography of varying length at the end of each. This is a reference book to be dipped into and used as a starting point in approaching this complicated subject. My only quibble is with the subtitle – it is not entirely clear what is implied by "a developmental approach", unless it refers to the gradually evolving understanding of the whole concept of psychological trauma and its effects. In my view a better subtitle could be either "a comprehensive approach" or "a multi-disciplinary approach". Nevertheless, this is an excellent publication. All professional libraries should have a copy and many individuals will find it good value for money.

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Death and Bereavement Across Cultures

Edited by C. M. Parkes, P. Laungani & B. Young
London: Routledge. 268 pp. £45 (hb); £14.99 (pb).
ISBN 0-415-13136-7 (hb)/0-415-13137-5 (pb)

Bereavement is a significant life event across all cultures and thus makes an interesting starting point for understanding the stress and impact of loss on individuals as well as their families. It is also well known that different cultures have different taboos and different rituals to deal with loss and bereavement. These rituals are key factors in supporting the bereaved individuals by providing a structure and context in which to mourn and deal with their loss. Such a structure can work towards the benefit of the individual by avoiding a pathological grief reaction. In some cultures it is expected that mourning will continue for a year and during this period no 'happy' events such as marriage will be arranged. Another key difference across cultures is the assumption that we know what dying, death and life are. In many cultures people are counted as dead whom most Americans would consider alive and people are counted as alive whom most Americans would consider dead. On the island of Vanatinai, south-east of Papua New Guinea, for instance, people are thought of as dead whom we would consider merely unconscious, so it is possible for a person to die a number of times. Others have argued that the response to death across cultures at a visceral level is the fear of death as well as sadness, both of which are universal emotions.

Divided into three sections with 13 chapters, the editors set the context for grief and bereavement in the first two chapters. Although they include definitions of culture, they do not include the notions of the self and identity which will determine how any individual sees himself/herself as part of a kinship system and how this identity is affected by the loss due to bereavement. The impact of religion on identity formation could have been built upon the introductory chapters. One could argue that individuals who live in egocentric societies may well have different patterns of bereavement and may well respond differently to pathology. In such societies the loss may affect individual's self-esteem more strongly and may well lead to pathological grief reactions, especially if rituals are not there to provide an element of structure and support.

The second section deals with individual cultures or religions, providing highlights of the rituals and taboos.

For practising clinicians, especially those who work with the bereaved, the third section provides some helpful advice. The book would have benefited if attachment and losses across cultures had been discussed earlier in the volume.

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Mania: Clinical and Research Perspectives

Edited by Paul Goodnick. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press. 1998. 412 pp. £53.95. ISBN 0-88048-728-3

A new book on mania is still bound to be overshadowed by Goodwin & Jamison's towering monograph *Manic Depressive Illness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Paul Goodnick is to be congratulated on assembling a volume that concentrates on areas of new development, while dealing with older topics in a refreshing and original way. That his opening chapter is on 'creativity and mood disorder' and the final chapter is on