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| **Offender Profiling: The Top-Down Approach AO1** | | | |
| **Offender Profiling**  This is an investigative tool employed by the police when solving crimes, the main aim of which is to narrow the field of enquiry and list of likely suspects. Professional profilers will often be called upon to work alongside the police especially during high profile murder cases. Methods vary, but the compiling of a profile will usually involve careful scrutiny of the crimes scene and analysis of the evidence (including witness reports) in order to generate hypotheses about the probable characteristics of the offender (their age, background, occupation etc.) | | **Organised and Disorganised Types of Offender**  Serious offenders have certain signature ‘ways of working’ (MO: modus operandi) and these generally correlate with a particular set of social and psychological characteristics that relate to the individual.   * ***Organised offenders***: planned the crime in advance; the victim is deliberately targeted and will often reflect that the killer or rapist has a ‘type’; they maintain a high level of control during the crime and operate with detached surgical precision; little evidence left behind/clues at the scene; (usually) above-average intelligence; skilled/professional occupation; socially and sexually competent; usually married, may even have children * ***Disorganised offenders***: little evidence of planning crime in advance; offence may have been spontaneous/spur of the moment; crime scene reflects impulsive nature of the act, body is usually still at the scene and appears to be very little control on the part of the offender; tend to have lower than average IQ; unskilled work or unemployed; history of sexual dysfunction and failed relationships; tend to live alone and often relatively close to where the offence took place. | |
| **The American Approach**  The top-down approach to profiling originated in the US as a result of work carried out by the FBI in the 1970s. More specifically, the FBI’s Behavioural Science Unit drew upon data gathered from in-depth interviews with 36 sexually motivated serial killers including Ted Bundy and Charles Manson.  Also known as the typology approach, offender profilers who use this method will match what is known about the crime and the offender to a pre-existing template that the FBI developed. Murderers or rapists are classified in one of two categories (organised or disorganised) on the basis of the evidence, and this classification informs the subsequent police investigation. | | **Constructing an FBI Profile**  There are 4 main stages in the construction of an FBI profile:   * Data assimilation – the profiler reviews the evidence (crime scene photos, pathology reports etc.) * Crime scene classification – as either organised or disorganised * Crime reconstruction – hypotheses in terms of sequence of events, behaviour of the victim etc. * Profile generation – hypotheses related to the likely offender e.g. of demographic background, physical characteristics, behaviour etc. | |
| **Offender Profiling: The Top-Down Approach AO3** | | | |
| **Only applies to particular crimes**  P: One weakness of the top down profiling approach is that it is only best suited to certain crime scenes.  E: For example, only crimes that reveal important details about the suspect, such as rape, arson and cult killings, as well as crimes that involve such macabre practices as sadistic torture, dissection of the body and acting out fantasies. More common offences such as burglary and destruction of property do not lend themselves to profiling because the resulting crime scene reveals little about the offender.  E: This is a weakness because it is a limited approach in identifying a criminal.  L: As a result it can be argued that the top sown approach to offender profiling has limited use, therefore reducing its credibility. | **Based on outdated models of personality**  P: Another weakness of offender profiling using the top down approach is that the typology classification system is based on the assumption that offenders have patterns of behaviour and motivations that remain consistent across situations and contexts.  E: For example, critics such as Alison et al (2002) have suggested that this approach is naïve and is informed by old fashioned models of personality that see behaviour as being driven by stable dispositional traits rather that external factors that may be constantly changing.  E: This is weakness as it means that the top down approach, which is based on ‘static’ models of personality, is likely to have poor validity when it comes to identifying possible suspects and/or trying to predict their next move.  L: For this reason, overall, the use of the top down approach in offender profiling can be seen as unreliable. | **Evidence does not support the ‘disorganised offender’**  P: Another weakness of the top down profiling approach is that it only supports the organised offender and not the disorganised offender.  E: For example, Canter et al (2004), using a technique called smallest space analysis, analysed data from 100 murderers in the USA. The details of each case were examined with reference to 39 characteristics thought to be typical of organised and disorganised killers. Although the findings did indeed suggest evidence of a district organised type, this was not the case for the disorganised type.  E: This is a weakness because it seems to undermine the classification system as a whole.  L: As a result, the top down approach to offender profiling can’t be applied to all types of offenders which reduces its credibility. | **Classification is too simplistic**  P: A weakness for the top down approach for offender profiling is that the behaviours that describe each of the organised and disorganised types are not mutually exclusive; a variety of combinations could occur in any given murder scene.  E: For example Godwin (2002) asks how police investigators would classify a killer with high intelligence and sexual competence who commits a spontaneous murder in which the victim’s body is left at the crime scene. This can be subjective.  E: This is a weakness and has prompted other researchers to propose more detailed typological models, for instance Holmes (1989) suggests there are 4 types of serial killer: visionary, mission, hedonistic and power/control, whilst Keppel and Walter focus more on the different motivations killers might have rather than trying to determine specific types.  L: This weakens the overall credibility of the top down approach to offender profiling as offender types can be hard to distinguish between. |