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Book Review

Exceptions to the Rule:

A Review of *The Criminal Personality, Volume I: A Profile for Change*

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The major purpose of the first volume of an intended three-volume series by Samuel Yochelson and Stanton E. Samenow (1976) is to provide evidence that understanding the thought processes of chronic criminals provides the major key to understanding criminal behavior. Volumes II and III will deal, respectively, with the techniques of therapy developed for the analysis and correction of criminal thought patterns, and with the special problems of therapy with criminals who are chronic drug users. This review of Volume I is divided into three parts, the first being a review of the content and major points of the book, the second being a critique of the book in general terms, and the third being an analysis of the value of the book for potential readers with different needs and from different backgrounds.

CONTENT REVIEW

The senior author's initial contact with criminals was at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D. C. with individuals judged (under the Durham rule) not guilty by reason of insanity. After years working with that hospitalized population, Dr. Yochelson gradually eliminated his work with hospitalized criminals, since the close association which was possible between these individuals was not conducive to positive change; it was during a later period of work with nonhospitalized criminals that Dr. Samenow joined the senior author.

The authors emphasize that their subjects were "hard core" criminals, with thousands of crimes considered for every one committed, and hundreds committed for ev-

ery one resulting in punishment. While the men with whom the authors worked are described as having committed sufficient crimes to each spend over 1500 years in jail if convicted for all their crimes, some had committed “hundreds of thousands of crimes” and never had been arrested. Most of the criminals in the study had “committed violations in three major categories—property, sex, and assault.” The range in age was from 15 to 55, with more blacks than whites represented. Data were gathered from 240 criminals, 12 of whom spent over 5,000 hours each with the authors; 35 others spent over 100 hours each with the authors, while 100 criminals were seen for between 10 and 100 hours each and 93 for less than 10 hours each.

After sketching the factors influencing the development of their own thinking about the criminal personality (in Chapter 1), the authors provide (in Chapter 2) a 50-page summary of classical criminology, beginning with 19th century trends and ending with current thinking in the 20th century. They suggest that most physiological, psychological, and sociological factors previously identified as causing criminal behavior cannot account for such behavior, for most people exposed to those factors do not become criminals. Specifically, they criticize the literature on the association of constitutional and emotional dispositions with crime, especially the XYY syndrome research, and they dismiss the psychopathic personality as being an ill-defined “wastebasket” category. The authors also review and criticize the literature on sociological causes such as social deprivation, child-rearing and socialization practices, the role of the schools, the media, and the concept of anomie. Although both authors were trained in psychoanalytic technique, they direct some of their strongest criticism toward approaches derived from that system; they criticize theories that postulate that criminal behavior results from unconscious guilt derived from disturbed Oedipal relationships, that some criminals want to get caught, that the crime is often a “cry for help,” and that criminals often experience a need for punishment to remove guilt. Similarly, reviewing the literature on psychological testing, the authors conclude that in contrast to the testing movement, the single best predictor of criminal behavior is past criminal behavior.

Following their critical historical review, the authors present their view of the personality of the chronic criminal. They suggest that a life pattern of criminality had begun very early for most of their subjects, often in the preschool years. Early criminal patterns include justification of criminal activities and a general lack of remorse or concern over crime. The criminal child is described as energetic, thrill-seeking, irritable, and possessing short attention spans, indicating a pattern of motor and mental hyperkinesia “always found in the criminal child.” The young criminal often alternates between patterns of being good and being hellish, and usually demonstrates inability to plan for the future, particularly regarding finances. Responsibility is avoided, affection rejected, and lying becomes a way of life, often leading to the criminal’s mistrust of other family members. While rejecting the willingly and frequently offered guidance of the (generally) stable family members, a pattern of exploitation of the family is developed. Under such pressure only a minority of parents hold firm to their normal values and virtues, but even those parents do not often reject their criminal children.

The urge for thrill-seeking finds expression in fast bikes and cars, in destruction, in the choice of older playmates and associates, and in attempts to emulate

the criminal behavior of older models. The power-oriented criminal child views those who do not engage in criminal behavior as weak, often leading him to torment and harass "straight" people. Such behavior usually results in being perceived as a problem child by age 10.

In school the criminal child acts on the belief that he is smarter than the other students, seeking to separate himself from the "common herd." His pattern of non-work leads to the "drop off" status—a state of nearly total noninvolvement. Like the family, the school is presented by the authors as tolerant, cooperating, guilt ridden, and conscientiously searching for ways to motivate the criminal child.

The authors characterize the criminal as "driven toward sexuality" rather than "sexually driven," with the young criminal often being involved in sexuality even before sexuality is pleasurable.¹ Sexual and social exploitation continues into marriage; the authors state that they have yet to encounter a criminal who was a faithful husband.

The criminals' self-concepts are described as alternating between seeing the self as worthless and as overvalued. The criminal population is viewed as prone to lie for little reason, suspicious of the motives and actions of other people, and virtually without insight into their own motives and behavior. Although most criminals are healthy and good-looking individuals, they have many fears, including fears of sickness, punishment, and of appearing weak; they are often intolerant of pain.

To account for the development of the criminal personality as described above, without recourse to explanations based upon the physiological, psychological, and sociological theories criticized in their review, the authors depend upon their analysis of the "thinking errors" which characterize the criminal. Such analyses are possible despite each criminal's perception of his own uniqueness, for "without exception, one criminal is like another with respect to mental processes described in this volume." Since "rational choice" is available to the criminal, the authors wish to focus upon "how much a criminal is a victimizer, rather than a victim—a molder of his environment, rather than a mere product of that mold." They conclude that major thinking errors are associated with thoughts about the self and about the relation between the criminal and his social world. In discussing those errors of criminal thought, the authors introduce new terms frequently; examples of the authors' analyses of those "thinking errors" are presented in the following paragraphs.

In the "zero state" the criminal perceives himself to be worthless and hopeless. In that state the criminal does not present the "classical picture of depression—rather than appearing flat, inert and despairing, he is blazing with anger (often unexpressed)." But he is not in rebellion against authority per se, but rather is angry toward society only when it interferes with his needs and desires. The authors contend that the criminal contemplates suicide only when he enters the "zero state" in combination with "a collapse of his opinion of himself as a good person."

¹ Despite the hearty sexual appetite reported by the authors, they contend that in confinement homosexuality is far less often forced upon the criminal than the media report. They believe that it is extremely rare for a homosexual rape to occur between criminals in prison when there is no desire or provocation from the victim. Others (e.g., Davis, 1970), who have made systematic studies of this issue in other prison systems have come to radically different conclusions concerning that issue.

The criminal is presented as an occasional “perfectionist” who keeps his criminal nature apart from his frequent sentimentality, and who prevents any awareness of danger during criminal activity through “fragmentation.” He is closed, blocking all honest interactions in order to avoid self-disclosure, and he is unable to adequately plan for the future or to maintain an appropriate perspective on time; he fails to understand the consequences of his actions for others.

Through “corrosion” the importance given to external or internal deterrents is slowly eliminated until “the desire to commit an act outweighs the fear to the point where the desire is implemented.” Similarly, “cut-off” is the practice of instantly eliminating thoughts of potential deterrents from consciousness. Equipped with such defenses, external deterrents (such as the threat of prison) are only temporarily effective for the hard-core criminal (while “underrated” in their effectiveness for the non-extreme criminal).

In discussing responses to being apprehended, the authors state that from the criminal’s idiosyncratic understanding of right and wrong, the only injustice is his apprehension and punishment.

The authors characterize the “thinking errors” described above as quite different from insanity, criticizing the idea that mental illness is often implicated in the crimes of the habitual criminal. Less than 3% of their own subjects have experienced real “mental illness.” Instead, they cite the motivation and (often accomplished) ability of the habitual criminal to convince others that he is not guilty by reason of insanity. The authors state that “in our experience, no criminal has ever suddenly done something that he has not *repeatedly* considered before.” They therefore find the concepts of impulse and compulsion inapplicable to the hardened criminal.

“Nonarrestable phases” in the criminal are described extensively. Such phases involve activities and occupations which criminals often find appealing because those activities satisfy the same needs for power, control, and importance which criminal activities satisfy more directly. Those “criminal equivalents” are often police work, politics, and the arts. The authors document their assertions by noting that 10%–15% of the applicants for police and fire departments were found to be criminals in one study, and by citing the frequent criminal problems in national, state, and local government as evidence of the political criminal equivalent. Control and power through the ministry is another frequently sought channel of criminal equivalents; the authors cite as evidence the frequent ambitions of their own subjects to enter missionary work and they cite several newspaper articles detailing arrests of ministers, rabbis, and priests for criminality.

The authors describe a nonarrestable period of “limbo” in which the criminal does not become directly involved in arrestable criminal activity, although irresponsible thinking continues. This stage is possible when the criminal has found a temporarily satisfying criminal equivalent. However, they state that the extreme criminal “eventually demands greater excitement; all the hard core criminals in our investigation have gone beyond criminal equivalents in their search for excitement, breaking out into more violations, which may be arrestable.”

Another nonarrestable phase is labeled “monasticism,” during which the criminal apparently believes that he has “sinned” and that he should assume a “holy” role for

awhile. Criminal activities do not occur during this phase. Unfortunately, when the phase ends the criminal often considers himself purified and returns to an even higher rate of overt crime than previously.

The authors' emphasis on thought patterns and the rational choices open to the criminal eventually led them toward the development of therapeutic approaches relying upon the identification and control of criminal thinking patterns; the evolution of their procedures was gradual. Their initial approach was through psychoanalytic techniques applied to help the criminal gain insight into the underlying psychodynamics of his criminal behavior. But insight was ineffective, potentiating the development of excuses by the criminal for criminal behavior rather than providing relief from criminal tendencies. Group therapy experiences were similarly unsuccessful. "It was not long before we began to see that what was ostensibly a therapy group was really operating as a gang." They identified much of what the criminals told them in the context of therapeutic interviews as information designed to be self-serving—either giving a desired impression, lying for lying's sake, or so that the criminal could bend the therapist to his needs for parole testimony, the maintenance of criminal behavior, etc. A new program based upon insight into character traits and behavior patterns rather than personality, was equally nonproductive. The authors concluded that they had "placed too much faith in the efficacy of talk." Instead they discovered that insight occurred as a consequence of changed behavior, with a following change in motivation, interest, and eventually feelings.

After briefly describing their procedure for having each criminal continuously monitor his thought patterns every day, the authors concluded that the important ingredients for therapeutic success included a desire to change one's criminal pattern, and a willingness to recognize that backsliding could be disastrous. The criminal must be impressed with "just how rotten a person he was." Therapy included attacking any "criminal thinking" including any irresponsibility of thought or deed, which was recorded in the 24-hour written record of thought processes that the criminals were taught to maintain. Self-disgust was stimulated and fear encouraged. The authors indicate significant success with their therapy, with at least a dozen of their graduates maintaining "impeccable" lives, while those who dropped out of the program invariably returned to crime.

CRITIQUE

In attempting to show that more traditional ways of understanding criminal development are insufficient, the authors do not present arguments that are logically compelling or well documented with data. In addition, they are not able to develop any convincing theoretical alternatives to those traditional accounts. The problems and deficiencies in their discourse will be discussed in this section.

The authors mistakenly search for ultimate causal variables to account for their clients' criminality. Thus they reject any variable demonstrated by other research to have some causal relationship with criminal behavior if they can argue that it does not invariably lead to criminal behavior. Broken homes, for example, are dismissed as an important cause of criminality since some siblings are not turned to crime by this background variable. Unfortunately for their argument, the authors' denial of the relevance

of such factors as broken homes, disadvantaged economic circumstances, and bizarre socialization techniques by parents is not based upon evidence presented in numerical form or upon contrasts with any comparison group; nor do they consider the possibility that such factors might interact to cause criminal behavior. Instead, the authors merely ask the reader to accept their conclusion that most of their criminal clients came from homes with some caring adults, that they were socialized in normal ways, etc.

Alongside the illogicality of discounting the impact of social, physical, and psychological variables simply because such variables are not perfect independent predictors of criminality, the authors compound the problem by an insufficient review of relevant literature. Certain review sections are arranged so that the flow of evidence favors the authors' hypothesis that traditionally considered variables do not predict criminality. For example, in reviewing the literature associating the presence of an extra Y chromosome (the XYY syndrome) with criminality, the authors first mention the excellent research review by Jarvick et al. (1973), mentioning the conclusions that there is "strong presumptive evidence" for association between the XYY syndrome and criminal behavior. Unfortunately, they then follow their presentation of that study with the conclusions of the 1969 NIMH Conference (out of temporal sequence) which suggested that "no causal link had been demonstrated between chromosomal patterns and antisocial behavior." Actually, the Jarvick study presents data superior to those available to the NIMH conferees, leading to the conclusion that substantial evidence does exist that the XYY syndrome is related to criminality.²

The work on the association of psychopathy with criminality was similarly insufficiently reviewed, with very little discussion of relevant modern psychological research (e.g., Hare, 1970; Lykken, 1957; Schachter and Latane, 1964). That research has been effective in demonstrating that criminal behavior is often associated with the psychopath's inability to experience negative emotional reactions when tempted to engage in criminal behavior. While the authors refer to some literature that demonstrates the association of psychopathy with emotional shallowness, their section ends with no articulate explanation of why they wish to dismiss the literature on psychopathy as being irrelevant to the understanding of criminal behavior.

The authors emphasized that their survey of the literature took place only after their own work was well under way, so that they would not suffer a "stultifying effect" on their own initiative. Generally, their insufficient handling of other theoretical approaches reflects this attitude, with the authors not taking their review task sufficiently seriously, apparently since their "truth" had already been discovered. Had the

² A major problem for interpretation of the XYY data had been that specific associated physical characteristics such as subnormal IQ and tallness might have interacted with social reactions (e.g., being teased by children about intelligence, size, etc.) to lead indirectly to a pattern of aggressiveness that would eventually lead to criminality. Most researchers wished to answer the question of whether a more direct genetic link existed between criminality and the XYY syndrome. The brilliance of the Jarvick et al. (1973) study rests in their having identified a population with most of the same associated physical problems found commonly with XYY people. That is, Klinefelter's syndrome men (XXY) display similar propensity toward mental deficiency, tallness, etc., and they are found with approximately equal frequency in the population as XYY men (approximately .14%) and with approximately equal frequency in mental institutions (approximately 1%); however, whereas approximately .9% of criminal populations consist of XXY men, approximately 1.9% consists of XYY men, leading to the conclusion that the extra Y chromosome may indeed be associated with aggression or criminality.

authors spent more time studying some of the real deficiencies in the other research and theoretical approaches they reviewed, they might have avoided some of the obvious problems in their own research and theory, which are discussed below.

In attempting to demonstrate the superiority of understanding the criminal through an analysis of the criminal's thinking patterns, the authors present no theory or evidence to explain why such patterns emerge. Instead, they confine themselves to describing those thinking patterns that they characterize as criminal. The reader is left with nothing more than the vague impression that the authors apparently believe (since they attempt to derogate all significant environmental explanations) that some hereditary force or unspecified environment-heredity interaction accounts for the "thinking errors" of the criminal.

In the long chapters on criminal thought patterns that constitute the bulk of the book, the major failing is that while the authors attempt to create abstract generalities about criminal thought and behavior they present evidence in a manner that is largely unconvincing. That is, since many of the thought patterns represent exaggerated masculine and lower-class values, it would be very informative if the authors had comparable data from noncriminal men from similar cultural and social backgrounds.

In attempting to formulate abstractions about "thinking errors," the authors present evidence in the form of their own notes from interactions with their clients. This is a very limited form of evidence, since the authors do not discuss in detail the degree to which their own emerging theory may have disposed them to see confirmation of their theory in their subjective data; nor are they prone to present numbers.

Issues of possible observational bias and data validity aside, the style of writing itself often presents material in an illogical and confusing manner. Passages that attempt to develop specific insights regarding a specific behavior or thought pattern often become catalogs of all possible combinations of relevant thought or behavior. Often these combinations are presented in rapid succession with no useful suggestions to explain when and why the exceptions to the main point will emerge, as indicated in the following examples: (1) "Although some criminals compete with one another in dress and some criminal youngsters who cannot afford school supplies may sport \$60 shoes, many criminals do not care about high style—they prefer to remain inconspicuous in dress like their contemporaries." Since the authors see all criminals as essentially functioning in similar manners, they find it difficult to deal with the situation of a child molester who is a "seemingly responsible man" except that he had molested children. The fact that he was viewed "for 12 years—as a good worker" stands in marked contrast to most of what the authors presented about their criminals being poor workers, but the authors seem never to relate the exceptions back to the initial abstractions.

(2) Similarly, dealing with the topic of fear, the authors indicate that some criminal children deal with their fears by retreating while others deal with their fears by confronting them. While emphasizing that the criminal is afraid of many things, particularly of physical injury and of being "put down," the authors state that "the criminal is very fearful but does not tolerate fear; most of his fears are within his control, so he can eliminate them long enough to do what he wants." On the one hand he is described as having a remarkable capacity to eliminate fear, and, on the other hand, they observe that "the criminal never truly eliminates fear." Statements such as "either the

criminal is overly concerned and nearly convinced that he is going to perish or he neglects his condition completely” are common.

(3) In describing good and bad behavior of the criminal in confinement, all possible alternatives are discussed. The criminal in confinement is described as either attempting to be good in order to score points with the intent of getting out quicker, or as being obstinate and refusing to subordinate himself to the system. After describing the universality of criminal hyperkinesia, “the criminal’s energy is sometimes not so apparent. He may appear indolent or tired when he is in a situation that he regards as boring.”

(4) After pages of description of the occasional sentimentality of criminals, including lengthy and numerous descriptions of concern and kindness for animals and other people, the reader is told “most criminals conceal their sentimentality.” And “the criminal can wall-off this sentimentality even from his own awareness, because it is incompatible with his self-concept.” And later: “the criminal rarely shows warmth or tenderness . . . according to the criminal’s view, kindness is weakness.”

(5) The section on perfectionism presents similar problems. Beginning with “not every perfectionist is a criminal, but every criminal is a perfectionist,” the authors suggest that the “criminal is perfectionist only in the things he chooses: it is not a global characteristic.” His perfectionism depends on what he values. For example, “he may dress immaculately, or he may be a slob.” While a criminal may scrub a floor spotless one day, “the same person on a different day neglects the floor entirely because he prefers to do other things.” It is stated that perfectionism may move him to extraordinary accomplishment in school or work, although the point has previously been made that this is far from typical. While “perfectionism in one activity rarely lasts, owing to desires to do other things, . . . another pattern involves not making the effort at all,” and “his perfectionism surfaces from time to time for various periods.” The reader is left with nothing except the observation that the authors are amazed that criminals who often seem undisciplined except in their criminal activity, show occasional strivings for high achievement or “perfectionism” in unpredictable ways. Unfortunately, rules for predicting when the perfectionism will be evoked are never presented.

(6) Even in the sections which present more systematic observations, such as the section on the sexuality of the criminal, contradictions are often difficult to sort through. On the one hand, the criminal is portrayed as not caring at all about the satisfaction of his partner, while on the other hand, he is shown as going to great lengths to be satisfying to the partner so that he is heroic in her eyes. In this section, as in several others, in addition to the contradiction problems, the authors essentially “rediscover the wheel,” presenting such ideas as that sexual behavior is often really an attempt to satisfy needs for power and control (aptly documented and expressed by others such as Davis, 1970). After pages of materials designed to inform us that criminals are sexually preoccupied (for reasons other than sexual satisfaction) it is stated that “some criminals are so active in other kinds of crime that sex does not matter,” and that “there is no such person as a criminal who is only a ‘sex offender’.”

In addition to the problems in the writing style, the thinking pattern of the authors is sometimes quite circular. Consider the following sentence presented to verify the idea that thinking patterns about violations have been previously present in the thinking of all criminals. “When a ‘Madison Avenue’ executive cracks some-

one's skull, it is no surprise to us [the authors], because we know that even if he has never been violent before, violence has been present in his thoughts as a way in which he would like to deal with the world."

One of the features of the book which is of limited value to the reader is the unnecessary coinage of new terms. While the authors go to a great deal of trouble to verify that terms such as "corrosion" and "cut-off" are more useful than more traditional, psychological terms, their discussion of how such mental processes work is often surprisingly insufficient. For example: "The criminal always has control over his own thinking. When he chooses to be guided by his fears, cut-off is not evoked; he deters cut-off for his own gain. Another way of saying this is that he can cut-off the cut-off when it is to his advantage." These word games continue through the middle chapters to the point where even the stalwart reader must become exhausted.

While the authors' attempts at abstracting generalities from their data may be faulted in various ways, a more serious question must be raised about the validity of their observations. The authors reassure us that "in our investigation of the criminal mind, we have obtained an authentic picture of thinking processes as *they were occurring* . . . Instead of relating self-serving stories, they have told us what mental processes are operative specifically with respect to crimes, including the period before they are committed, the period during the commission of the crime, and the aftermath—from idea through execution." Yet the authors assert that the reasons previous attempts to understand criminals have failed is that authorities have unwittingly believed what criminals have told them, and that criminal accounts are always self-serving and "made up of distortion, justifications, and lies." The authors acknowledge that their own early attempts to achieve accurate criminal biographies were distorted by the criminal's self-serving lying. Even their early experience with family histories taken outside of the institutional setting proved disappointing, for they found that often relatives and parents would lie to create a good impression for their criminal offspring. But the authors assure the reader that their recent procedures for gathering family and personal histories with the aid of social workers, and others, were successful in obtaining valid information where previous researchers had failed. Although they indicate that only "validated" information is presented, the procedures and techniques for obtaining and "validating" the information are to be presented in the second volume. It is unfortunate that insufficient documentation of the authors' technique is presented in Volume I for the reader to be able to evaluate whether or not the authors have some claim to the truth which has previously eluded others.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL VALUES

In their concluding page of text, the authors state "to have written Volume I without Volume II would have been only to engage in an academic enterprise for the classroom," for it is the second volume that will describe in detail the techniques that were utilized to determine the "valid revelations" of criminal thought patterns upon which Volume I was based. Given the limitations that most modern social scientists see in case study research, which requires one to take on faith the authors' ability to interpret their subject better than previous authors, it must be doubted seriously whether Volume I will find its way into many such classrooms.

While, as a theoretical contribution to the understanding of criminal personality, the book has very limited value, the authors do indicate intriguing success with their therapy, particularly since any success at all with truly chronic criminals is seldom announced. It may be that the practical knowledge concerning their specific therapy procedures (to be presented largely in later volumes) will represent the advance in knowledge which the authors had wished for Volume I. Furthermore, the wealth of detail presented in Volume I, while of limited theoretical value, should provide valuable insight and detail for those who plan to be involved with chronic criminals in any professional manner. In particular, the section (largely Chapter 8) dealing with the behavior of criminals with therapists could be useful since the authors describe in detail the tactics that the criminal uses to anger the therapist and subvert the therapy process. Similarly, the authors present the section on the faking of insanity well, making that section particularly useful for the professional who will work with criminals.

In summary, although the first volume of the planned three-volume series is not recommended for those looking for new insight into the origin or dynamics of "the criminal personality," the volume could prove quite beneficial to those with practical rather than theoretical interests.

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