

Combining Psychological and Sociological Theories for Better Understanding and Explaining Crime, a Look into Serial Killing

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This short review does not pretend to address serial killing, but to show how one situation in the process of serial killers maybe explained in psychological as well as in sociological thinking. This small example may sharper the attitudes in the need of integrational thinking when explaining human behavior.

Since the days that Philosophy was the main and even the only accepted thought that can explain all phenomenon's in our life, the rise of biology, psychology and sociology became the main disciplines in explaining human behaviors. Living biology aside, as it's not in the scope of this review, psychological and sociological thoughts started to emphasize their unique ability in explaining human behaviors.

In trying to be the only "right" way of thinking, psychology started to asset explanations to many kinds of human behaviors. An example to this process was explaining crime in psychological language and terms. By doing so, the psychology disqualified any competitor explanations from other disciplines. Many schools of criminology around the world adopted the psychological explanation to crime, as the only possible, or as the "true/ right" explanation to crime. After some years, the rise of sociology and the use of sociological explanations to crime, confront the psychological explanations, in showing that the sociological explanation is "right" for itself.

It took a long time for both disciplines to acknowledge that neither of them can give comprehensive explanations to all criminal behaviors, while they ignore each other's theoretical, as well as empirical, potential contributions for better understanding this phenomenon. The main point is that we cannot differentiate personality from society. The human being is affected by and affects his social surroundings. Even if the specific criminal acts, in the end, by his wishes or instincts, we cannot exclude social attributions from his personal acts. On the other hand, we cannot explain rise or fall in crime prevalence only by using social explanations (Durkheim, 1951), because not all people in society are affected in the same ways from social changes. For better understanding, we need a psychological point of view. For example, it is well documented phenomenon that immigrant's males from patriarchal culture origin, tend to murder their partner females more than immigrants from other cultures of origin, and more than native males (Edelstein, 2011). Sociological explanation to this fact combined theories on culture transition, acculturation stress and reversal of status and roles between men and women, in order to explain the differences in intimate partner homicide between these immigrants and other men.

These explanations seem exact and "right". But over the years more and more voices demanded explanations to why most of immigrant men do not committing IPH, although they suffered from the same difficulties that other immigrants did (Edelstein, 2014). Revisited explanations today, must take into account psychological trait as well as psychological dis-orders in order to give more comprehensive explanations. On the other hand, the explanations to mass murders were traditionally psychological ones. How can sociology explain psychological dis-orders and insane?

Since the 90s more and more books and articles showed that there are satisfying social and cultural explanations for mass murders (Fox & Levin, 2003; 2004; Mullen, 2004). For example, since men are still esteem in accordance to their earnings' abilities, scholars found that there is a connection between unemployment, separation and family murder. In addition, 80% of mass murderers were not insane! (Edelstein, 2014).

Another area in which the sociology and psychology complementary each other in explaining human behavior, is serial killing. For many years psychologists claim that serial killers have fantasies that are prior to the murder itself, sometime these fantasies can prolong for a long time. Psychologists try to explain the development from fantasies to action in different explanations. For example, some scholars claimed that the fantasies are no longer satisfies as before, and the killer are looking for a thrill and satisfaction by committing the murder. This explanation has its roots in many human behaviors, mainly in explaining addictions to drugs and alcohol, gambling and even to pornography. The psychological explanation is that fantasies create arousal or thrill as its new and exciting, but after some time the human being become bored because the exposure to the same level of thrill does not exciting any more, we get used to it. As a result, we are looking for a larger or stronger dose, in order to feel excitement again, repeatedly (Hale, 1998; Mitchell, 1997; Vronsky, 2007; Fox & Levin, 2004; Van Der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2005; Carlisle, 1988). The serial killer will escalate his fantasy until he will turn to fulfill his fantasy in the real world and commit a murder.

This explanation was accepted for many years, until a sociological explanation was introduced. The reason for new ideas was that the psychological explanation did not really explain the transition from thinking or fantasizing to acting. In sociology as in psychology criminal use techniques for reframing reality in order not to be blamed by others or by themselves as mean, bad etc. Sykes & Matza (1957) theory of neutralization of guilt and blame, supply a better explanation to the serial killer's actions. The reason that the serial killer, move from imagination to action was explained by neutralization. In the process of development we internalize the social norms that inhibit several behaviors. When a person intended to commit a crime which is a deviance from the social norms, he needs to neutralize these norms in order to act. Sykes & Matza (1957) describe five ways to do so. One of the most common one is blaming the victims. For example, many rapists claim that if a girl is wearing exposing clothes, or if a girl is walking alone at night, "she wanted to be rape", "she looked for it", or in other words- she deserved what she got. Another neutralizes technique change the criminal to a hero. Many serial killers, who raped and murdered prostitutes, claimed that they deserve a reward and not a punishment. They only cleaned the neighbor from prostitutes, so little children would not have to be exposing to this dirt around their home. After neutralizing normative boundaries, nothing can stop a serial killer from murder innocent people. Serial killers as well as most criminals use these techniques at least twice: once it's enable them to commit the crime (i.e. to move from fantasy to action), the second time they use it is after they deeds, in case they are filling guilt.

If the reader thinks to himself that this explanation combines also

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psychological point of view, he is right. This combination is my main point. We cannot differentiate in general, and in an artificial way between the two disciplines. The conclusion is that in order to better understand human behaviors; we should to combine our knowledge into an integrated thinking, that includes other disciplines as well, rather than emphasizing the uniqueness of our school of thought.

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