The Bottom-Up Approach and Geographical Profiling

David Canter – John Duffy “Railway Rapist”

Task: Watch one of the following documentaries and read the notes on the bottom-up approach and geographic profiling. Then consider the questions at the bottom of page 2.

Bottom-Up Approach to Offender Profiling

Sometimes known as the British Approach, the bottom-up approach to offender profiling makes use of past data on similar crimes committed in order to build a picture of the offender.

Investigative psychology is the bottom-up approach developed by David Canter. Canter et al.’s (2004) critique of the bottom-up approach was partially motivated by a desire to see offender profiles built on objective data rather than an “intuition” based approach, such as that used by top-down profilers. Canter’s work was developed over a period of several years and Egger (1999) argues that it is partially based on some key assumptions about the interactions between offenders and their victims:

1. **Interpersonal coherence** – there is a consistency between the way offenders interact with their victims and with others in their everyday lives.

2. **Time and place** – the time and location of an offender’s crime will communicate something about their own place of residence/employment.

3. **Criminal characteristics** – characteristics about the offender can help to classify them, which helps the police investigation.

4. **Criminal career** – crimes tend to be committed in similar fashion by offenders and can provide indication of how their criminal activity will develop.

5. **Forensic awareness** – offenders who show an understanding of a police investigation are likely to have had previous encounters with the criminal justice system.
With these principles in mind, bottom-up profilers can build a picture of the offender, often by also using other techniques, usually statistical in nature, which enables them to objectively analyse the evidence.

**Geographical Profiling**

Geographical profiling is a form of bottom-up profiling and takes particular note of the principle of time and place as mentioned above. *Canter and Youngs (2008)* identified that there are a number of telling clues regarding the place crimes are committed in relation to the offender. The principles of geographical profiling are as follows:

- **Locatedness** – in any violent crime, it may be that several locations are relevant. For example, an offender may meet the victim, attack, dispose, etc. in different locations. All of these locations are part of building an accurate picture.

- **Systematic crime location choice** – this is the assumption that crime scenes are not random. The offender will likely have some kind of connection with the area or at least familiarity.

- **Centrality** – as crime scenes are likely to occur in a familiar area to the offender, this means that crime scenes tend to cluster. Here there are two types of offender that can require further analysis: commuters who will travel from their home to the crime scene, and marauders who will commit offences close to home.

- **Comparative case analysis** – this is the assumption that the crimes are being committed by the same offender and therefore increases the precision of geographic profiling.

**Questions**

1. Which features of the bottom-up approach apply to David Canter’s investigation of John Duffy?

2. Which features of geographic profiling apply to David Canter’s investigation of John Duffy?

3. The usefulness of Canter’s profile in a real-life sense is clear to see; it resulted in the successful arrest of John Duffy. However, one can’t forget that this is still a case study. **Outline two issues with using a case study as evidence for geographic profiling.**

4. Some psychologists argue that the bottom-up approach is more useful in comparison to the top-down approach, as it can apply to more than one type of crime. **Outline one other strength of bottom-up profiling.**

5. Create a plan for the following essay question: **Discuss one or more approaches to offender profiling.** [16 marks]