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Fool for Love: The Psychology of Security Violation

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Title: Fool for Love: The Psychology of Security Violation

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Abstract: This article discusses why Pfc. Bradley Manning, United States (US) Army, who has been accused of illegally disclosing classified material—more than 150,000 diplomatic cables, 90,000 intelligence reports, and at least one video – allegedly performed the actions in question.

Pfc. Bradley Manning, United States (US) Army, has been accused of illegally disclosing classified material—more than 150,000 diplomatic cables, 90,000 intelligence reports, and at least one video.

Why did he do this, assuming he did? In an article by Ginger Thompson for The New York Times, the motivations of Pfc. Manning are explored by attributing causal power over behavior to past social events, putative mental phenomena, and how Manning might have interpreted them. Classmates in Oklahoma made fun of him for being a computer “geek”. His parents divorced. His father often was away from home and, apparently, did not tend to many of Manning’s basic physical and social needs. He was later “kicked out of the house” for “being gay.” Classmates in Wales made fun of him for his “American accent,” his time spent with his computer, also about “being gay.” He seemed to be more serious and opinionated than others his age about issues of politics and religion. At least early on he refused to mention “God” in the US Pledge of Allegiance and “would get upset, [and] slam books on the desk if people wouldn’t listen to him or understand his point of view.” In the Army his “brainpower” was wasted by “fetching” coffee for officers and sweeping floors.” He was formally reprimanded at least twice, once for assaulting an officer. As a soldier, he needed to conceal his sexuality. He finally “fit in” with a social circle of “politically motivated computer hackers” and his boyfriend, a “self-described drag queen”. Manning may have experienced interludes of loneliness, a “desperation for acceptance” and “delusions of grandeur”.

As readers of IBPP are aware (see “The Prolifer’s Story”, August 4, 2010), to come up with an appropriate motivational account, a profiler collects information and analyzes it in three ways. First, there’s the identification of correlational linkages with the problematic behavior, here, security violation, as the end point. All the above information from the Times and assuredly much additional information, perhaps all information that has ever existed might well be so correlated, even if the correlation was 0. Then, there’s assuming causal linkage from the correlational. Here the Times information would not only be associated with the security violation but be presumed to have a force leading to its occurrence or not. Third, there’s the placement of the correlational and causal within a satisfying narrative—telling a story. To many readers, the Times information seems to form a tragedy more easily than an epic, satire, comedy, or romance. All three of these tasks have unmet challenges including discerning a significant size of correlation, the right type of causality—e.g., efficient, final, material, formal, and so on, and the genre of story that elicits some sense of satisfaction and completeness from various groups of readers of text who vary in degrees and types of political power. Often enough, the egregious misbehavior of the accused and/or convicted individual elicits such strong negative emotion that the pursuit of knowledge to understand motivation—even in the service of better understanding the damage done and preventing future incidents from others—is impeded by the external constraints of those in authority and the internal constraints of their mind and ours.

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So, what can and can't be done? If not motivational profiling, then what might be of some value? It's fairly easy with competent interrogation and analysis of the security violation itself to identify specific micro-behaviors—in this case, how to find the information, how to get access to it, how to transmit to others, and so forth. One can then make it more difficult to engage in such behaviors in the future. Given a systems perspective on security, this, hopefully, may be done without facilitating other micro-behaviors leading to the same security violation or some other one of equal or greater severity.

But to get at the motivational elements? Money and ideology often are cited as causal factors. Added to these are various personality traits and constellations including psychoactive use and abuse and various psychopathologies all bearing on desire, will, instinct, impulse, and conation. Then there are the social factors including country of origins, ethnicity, known and unknown associates, and various allegiances and relationships again bearing on motivation. As well, there may be varying stress levels reaching a point functioning as some catalyst or triggering event or mechanism.

But maybe some violators of security, maybe Pfc. Manning, are just fools for love. Nothing complicated. Except that love may be very complicated, indeed. As the main characters in Sam Shepard's eponymous play first produced in 1983, the search for love leads to much less than total control of their lives, even when it feels like total control. Important life details are inaccessible to awareness, misinterpreted in a manner both barren and baroque. Motives, thus, are only partially conscious to each violating self, let alone significant others. (And if significant others happen to get it right, this right won't be, can't be, believed by the doer of wrong). To some security violators, all other people are on a permanent casting call for the part of a lifetime even as it's not their lives, even as they might be discarded without a thought. Some security violators may be buffeted by recurring forces as they are faced with recurring scenes, as familiar as they are never mastered, even if played to perfection. All for a little thing called love.

From Shepard to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche may be suggesting that to truly love one's life, one must be ready and willing to accept its eternal recurrence. That is, to accept an eternity of one's life experienced over and over again. The good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly. How many of us are ready to do this? And, if not, are we doomed to transgression, hurting ourselves and those around us? Even if not for eternity? (Keywords: Bradley Manning, Love, Espionage.)