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Narrative Roles in Criminal Action:
An Integrative Framework for Differentiating Offenders

Donna Youngs and David Canter

The proposal that offenders' narratives help to shape criminal action raises the possibility of a limited set of narrative themes for distinguishing offenders that can be explored through the roles criminals see themselves as playing during offending episodes. Within personality psychology McAdams (1993) has also argued for a restricted set of personal narratives in any given culture produced by the dominant dimensions of *Potency* and *Intimacy*. Integrating these ideas with the literature on the distortions in offenders' cognitive processes and emotional experiences, allows 4 distinct narrative roles to be proposed: *Professional, Victim, Tragic Hero* and a *Revengeful Mission*. Examples of these from narrative interviews with offenders illustrate their components, offering hypotheses for empirical study and a new aetiological perspective in criminology.

Criminal Narratives as Instigators of Action

Presser (2009) recently argued that an offender's narrative is an immediate antecedent of offending and thus has a direct impact as a 'key instigator of action' (Presser 2009: 177). She implies, as Toch (1993) argued in relation to the violent men's stories he studied, that offending is the enactment of a narrative rather than the narrative being an interpretation of the context out of which the offence has emerged. This utilisation of narrative ideas is consistent with Presser's conceptualisation of narrative as one '..that effectively blurs the distinction between narrative and experience by suggesting that experience is always known and acted upon as it has been interpreted symbolically' (p184). This is distinct from a narrative operating as a *post hoc*, interpretative device that provides insight into an individual's subjective understanding of the factors that motivated behaviour. Understood in this way, the narrative framework has the potential to explain what Presser calls 'dynamic factors at the point of behaviour'.

The value of this perspective can be seen both for understanding the instigation of crime and desistance from it. Maruna (2001), for instance, suggests that different self-narratives are themselves implicated in whether or not offenders reconstruct their identities so that criminality is not part of them. Furthermore, Horgan (2009) shows the significance of changes in personal narratives for 'walking away from terrorism'. This is also reflected in McAuley's (1994) studies of what supports or inhibits paramilitary activity in Northern

Ireland. Such narratives may represent the underlying, integrative, general theoretical mechanisms that Ward (2000) discusses in his analysis of sexual offenders' specific cognitive distortions. Narratives represent a potential form of the alternative, positive causal processes that Maruna and Mann (2006) call for in relation to their compelling argument against a causal role for post hoc rationalisations.

The narrative framework offers criminology then a causal process that assigns the offender personal agency, informing understanding of why offenders engage in (as well as desist from) crime. This eschews a positivist emphasis on the individual as an organism. As Canter (2008) shows, considering offenders' narratives treats them as active persons rather than socio-biological organisms. It also allows a consideration of the proximal antecedents to crimes, informing understanding of the immediate precursors to offending actions. These are what Presser calls the neglected 'here and now of crime' (Presser 2009:179).

Dominant Narratives

Presser's (2009) arguments have their roots in studies from many different disciplines which indicate that non-criminal behaviour patterns can be distinguished in terms of coherent narrative themes.   Some of these studies draw attention to the prospect that any given culture has a limited set of such themes. The origins of the proposal that there are only a limited number of stories available to draw on and that as a consequence all narratives are version of a few basic plots was first mooted by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Rather more recently Frye (1957) and Foster-Harris (1959) proposed four fundamental plots upon which all stories are built. Booker (2006) argued there were seven and Tobias (1993) proposed 20 master plots. These and many other frameworks all show some underlying similarity in distinguishing between narratives with happy endings, often called Romances or Comedies and those with a sad ending, usually known as Tragedies. In addition there is a common distinction between very active storylines that often consist of a series of episodes, which would be recognised as an adventure story (although Frye, 1957, refers to these as 'Romances') and much more passive, unstructured surreal or ironic stories that most people would recognise as anarchic comedies. Although there are many variants on these different themes and combinations of them, it is productive to consider a) Tragedy, b) Comedy/Romance (referred to here as a Romantic Quest, after Canter and Youngs' 2009 application to criminality), c) Irony and d) Adventure as basic plots or prototypes of many stories.

A Psychological Framework for Narrative Differentiation

Although the idea of basic plots owes most to fictional accounts there have been some attempts to link them to actual personal narratives that people think themselves as living. McAdams (1985, 1993, and 1999) has been particularly active in promulgating this view. In the context of life stories, McAdams (1993) argues that personal myths are organised according to two themes that he terms Agency and Communion, where Agency is concerned with power and achievement and Communion with love and intimacy. The combination of the extremes of these two dimensions gives rise to the four narrative forms that can be seen to relate to the basic plots explored in the literary tradition.

The two primary psychological dimensions that McAdams identifies underpin differences in human functioning that have emerged across a range of areas of psychological study. So although the narrative approach is rooted in models of human beings as active agents as

protagonists in their own storyline, other perspectives that use a different vocabulary nonetheless relate to similar issues. For instance Leary's (1957) consideration of interpersonal aspects of personality, proposed two dimensions described in terms of Dominance/Submission and Love/Hate. Another example are the structural reanalyses of Schutz's widely used FIRO theory of interpersonal tendency (Schutz 1992). They suggest that his original three dimensions of behavioural orientation may be better conceptualised as the two dimensions of Control and Openness/Inclusion, echoing Leary's personality dimensions (Mahoney and Stasson 2005; Dancer and Woods, 2006; Furnham 2008).

Hermans' (1996) ideas on the self, its strivings and meaning in life provide powerful further support for two similar motivational trends. These distinguish between 'S' motives, which are strivings for superiority, power and expansion and 'O' motives, which are strivings for contact and intimacy with others (Hermans 1996). Thus whether we are considering differences in interpersonal disposition, or the basis for human meaning and self-strivings, the variations can be related to two fundamental psychological constructs that concern potency and intimacy. It therefore is reasonable to assume these same dimensions will underlie the forms of personal myth that run through individuals' life stories.

Adjusting for the Criminal Context

The challenge in developing these ideas as the basis for distinguishing offenders' personal narratives is to understand how the psychological processes of intimacy and potency may manifest in the criminal context. As Maruna and Copes (2005) note 'the scientific study of personal accounts and self-narratives has advanced substantially, but this development has been largely isolated from the study of deviance' (Maruna and Copes 2005:4). In criminal terms, rather than a concern with love and warm interactions with others, intimacy may be better understood as a measure of the relevance to the offender of the victim and the significance of the impact of the offending on the victim in allowing him/her to attain the objectives s/he seeks. High levels of intimacy would produce an overall approach to offending that revealed an awareness of the victim and an explicit desire to affect them. For those high on intimacy then, the criminal activity would be conceptualised by the offender as some form of interpersonal transaction between him and the victim. By contrast, in narratives characterised by low levels of intimacy the victim is not likely to be very relevant to the offender.

Potency in the context of offending potency can be understood as the imposing of the offender's will. High levels of potency would characterise an approach to offending in which the offender sees himself as taking charge and is focused on maximising his gains. For those offenders high on potency, the criminal activity would be conceptualised as the conquering or mastery of the environment and/or victim necessary to achieve his aims. The low levels of potency would imply some passivity in the role of the criminal protagonist; a feeling of being swept along by events.

Narratives as vehicles for identity

For psychologists identity has been linked with group membership while criminologists have emphasised the significance of identity in perpetuating criminal behaviour through labelling (e.g. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell 1987; Becker 1963). Although, as Maruna and Copes (2005) note, '..theorists across numerous disciplines have started to agree that

one's identity takes the form of a personal narrative..' (Maruna and Copes 2004:33), there is rather less understanding of the different substantive forms that identity can take within a specific criminal context. However, some indication of how this may operate can be derived from McAdams (1993) application of the dimensions of agency and communion to the study of non-criminal imagoes. He defines imagoes as 'the characters that dominate our life stories...a personified and idealised concept of the self' (McAdams 1993:122). McAdams specifies 15 imagoes derived from combinations of levels of Agency and Communion, which are reflections of Power and Intimacy.

For McAdams, agency and communion are highly positive themes. High levels of agency and communion thus give rise to imagoes such as the Healer, the Teacher, the Humanist and the Counselor. These would not be expected to be part of criminals' personal narratives. However, some of the imagoes he proposes that are dominated by agency with little intimacy do resonate with the identities that offenders may enact during a crime. For example, the agentic imagoes of the Warrior, the Traveller, the Maker and the Sage, draw attention respectively to concepts of being in battle (Warrior), overcoming obstacles (Traveller), being productive (Maker) and being expert (Sage) that may all capture aspects of the self awareness that contributes to high potency criminal roles. The common themes to all these potential offence identities are strength and power. At a fundamental level then one prediction would be that criminal narratives will reveal roles that are delineated in terms of the extent to which the offender sees himself as strong or weak.

The Escapist and Survivor imagoes McAdams describes may also be relevant to the criminal context. The sense of alienation (the Escapist) and feelings of being put upon and having no choice (the Survivor) that McAdams describes capture a core distinction in self-awareness or identity aspects of criminal roles. They can be seen to be the obverse of intimacy. The sense of alienation of the Escapist would imply the adoption of an offending role characterised by social distance in which reference to others would be minimal or non-existent. On the other hand, an identity based on feelings of being put upon, is predicated upon a central concern with others and their demands. It would be hypothesised to produce offending roles that were reactions to others in some form. At a fundamental level then, intimacy based differences in identity imply roles that would be further distinguished in terms of the extent to which other people have any significance for the offender during the crime.

Cognitive Distortions in Narrative Roles

Although narratives are proposed as an integral part of criminal actions they still imply some form of cognitive processing that give these actions meaning. The extensive research establishing the significance of criminal thinking styles, biases and distortions therefore is helpful in elaborating the essence of narrative processes (see Maruna and Copes 2005, for a review).

The seminal ideas on offenders' cognitive distortions were set out within Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization: denial of injury, denial of responsibility, denial of the victim, condemnation of those who condemn and an appeal to other, higher loyalties. Further important ideas were developed within Bandura's (1990) strategies for 'moral disengagement' in which he specifies interpretations of criminal action that displace responsibility, diffuse responsibility, dehumanise the victim, assume the role of victim for oneself and distort the consequences of the action. Part of the challenge in specifying

criminal narratives lies in understanding how these different neutralizations will connect with different forms of narrative (Maruna and Copes 2005).

It follows from defining intimacy in the criminal context as relating to the significance for the offender of the victim that narratives exhibiting low intimacy will be associated with cognitions that minimise the impact of the offence. Thus those interpretations that dismiss or minimise the harm to the victim (for example, Sykes and Matza's denial of injury or denial of the victim and Bandura's dehumanising of the victim or assuming the role of the victim oneself) will be part of rather different narratives than will cognitions that are centrally concerned with the impact. Within these latter personal plotlines it would be expected that rather than minimising the impact on the victim, the offender will reinterpret his/her offending so that the salient issue is the impact in terms of the offender's objectives. In other words, when intimacy is high such that the offender is highly aware of the impact on the victim, the justificatory distortions in the interpretation of events will not minimise the harm but avoid it, instead taking the form of focusing on the offender's objectives.

The underlying potency dimension, defined here in the criminal context as the imposing of the offender's will, would suggest further key differences between narrative roles relating to the offenders' interpretation of the responsibility for actions. One hypothesis would be that low levels of potency would produce a tendency to attribute the responsibility for the situation and the actions to others (e.g. Sykes and Matza's denial of responsibility; Bandura's displacement of responsibility; Bandura's diffusion of responsibility). In contrast, high levels of potency would indicate a role within which the protagonist not only owns the actions but also the evaluation of them, refusing to submit to the judgements of others (Sykes and Matza's condemnation of the condemners; Sykes and Matza's appeal to higher loyalties; Bandura's distortion of the consequences).

Emotional aspects of Role Experience

Katz's (1987) discussion of 'sneaky thrill' and other emotions such as humiliation, righteousness and cynicism, as enticements to offend, argues for the central relevance of affective states to crime. This suggests that, beyond the cognitive distortions that are relevant to understanding different offence narratives there are also emotional aspects of the experience of crimes. Many studies agree that emotional experience is underpinned by two major bipolar dimensions, such that the range of emotional states are produced by the combination of arousal-non arousal and pleasure-displeasure (e.g. Russell 1979; 1997). Four broad classes of mood are generated by these two axes: Elation (High Arousal, High Pleasure), Distress (High Arousal, High Displeasure), Depression (Low Arousal, High Displeasure) and Calm (Low Arousal, High Pleasure).

The potency and intimacy concepts can be seen to accord with the emotional states that may be associated with differences in roles offenders adopt as part of their offence narratives. It was argued above that in the criminal context, intimacy relates to the significance of the impact of the offending on the victim in allowing the offender to obtain the objectives he seeks. Given that direct contact with a victim during a crime can, with a few exceptions, not be expected to be pleasurable, the hypothesis therefore follows that, in the criminal context, a higher tendency towards intimacy will tend to be associated with greater displeasure derived from the offending. However in some cases, the desire for impact on others associated with

higher levels of intimacy may be targeted more generally taking the form of seeking recognition rather than affecting an individual. With this lack of direct contact an actively negative state of displeasure would not be predicted. So, direct contact may mediate the generation of displeasure, such that where there is no direct contact with a victim the displeasurable state may not be produced.

The absence of a direct interaction with a victim would not in itself generate a pleasurable state, although other aspects of the offending may generate some mildly positive affect. The central proposed distinction in the quality of emotional state across roles is therefore between a negative state of displeasure and a neutral-mildly pleasurable state.

Differences in the arousal component of the emotional qualities of offending roles are hypothesised to relate to the potency dimension. Although some degree of arousal would be expected to be produced by most offending, there will be differences in the extent to which the adopted role itself, as the instigator of the action, carrying the offender through the crime, is an aroused or activated one. Where potency is high, the offender will see the offence as simply a mastery of the environment or victim to his ends so arousal would not be expected to be driving the role. In contrast, the highest levels of arousal would be predicted where the offender feels he is acting against his will in some way.

Less aroused or activated states during a crime would be hypothesised to be part of higher levels of criminal potency where the offender is imposing his/her will. Where the offender does not feel in control, this lower potency would produce a more aroused emotional state.

Interpreting Actions in a Crime

Interestingly, support for intimacy and potency as the basis for distinguishing offenders' action narratives can be found within empirical work on behavioural patterns within crimes. Studies of criminal specialisation and modus operandi or offending style (Canter and Fritzon 1998, Salfati and Canter 1999, Youngs 2004) have consistently interpreted the different behavioural patterns they reveal in terms of two underlying distinctions. These are on the one hand, Instrumental/ Proactive offending and on the other, Expressive/ Reactive offending. Orthogonal to these is the distinction between an Object or Property target for this activity and a Person-focused target.

These consistent distinctions in the actual activities of offenders can be mapped on to variations in potency and intimacy. The focus on either property or person focused offending patterns picks up differences in the desire and willingness to interact with others that would be produced by different levels of intimacy. Similarly, offending activities that are initiated by the offender, or are 'instrumental', capture the tendency to dominate and take charge that is produced by high levels of potency. Those criminal actions that are the offender imposing his will contrast with those acts that are forms of expression without any attempt to take control.

FOUR FUNDAMENTAL OFFENCE NARRATIVE ROLES

Roles as Summary of Narratives

When summarising narratives, McAdams like many others refers to particular roles such as Warrior or Survivor. This reveals that one particularly powerful way of summarising personal narratives is as the consideration of the roles that the offender adopts and enacts during specific offences. Offence roles offer a means of summarising complex narrative processes. They offer a direct means of exploring the operation of the offender's narrative as an immediate antecedent of criminal action. The implicit quality and fleeting form of narrative processes suggests that to discern themes and psychological meaning these need to be given concrete form and examined in specific contexts. Offence event roles provide a medium through which implicit narrative processes are given tangible form and can be related to a given context through descriptions that capture the quality of the agency that is underpinning the action in that event.

The offence narrative role is the distillation of an underlying storyline or narrative theme into a form that captures the protagonist's agency and intent in relation to the specific crime event. The quality of this agency and intention will allow the core theme to be defined.

From considerations of the combinations of Potency and Intimacy levels discussed as they are reflected (respectively) in the offender's identity when carrying out the crime (Strong v Weak; Others significant v Others insignificant), with emotional components (Calm v Aroused; Displeasure v Neutral states) and forms of cognitive distortion (Present own alternative evaluation of actions v Responsibility attributed to others; Avoid/refocus impact v Minimise impact), four overall themes emerge. These emergent themes are proposed to take the form of distinct Offence Roles that capture the essence of a particular Narrative:

- A. (High Potency/High Intimacy) The person who sees himself as powerful and for whom one or more other people and their reactions are a significant part of his Romantic Quest narrative, may be thought of as acting out a *Revengeful Mission* role.

- B. (Low Potency/Low Intimacy) By contrast the criminal who feels he is being pushed by the fates, having little control over his actions and little concern for others plays the role of the *Tragic Hero,* within a general narrative of Tragedy.

- C. (High Potency/Low Intimacy) The offender who lives out a narrative in which he is in control, enjoying his power and for whom others are irrelevant acts the role of *Professional,* as part of an Adventure narrative.

- D. (Low Potency/High Intimacy) Here the offender sees himself as having no power and being alienated from others who are nonetheless significant to him, so seeing himself as a *Victim* within this Irony narrative.

In their comprehensive review of the current state of neutralization research and its potential for the narrative perspective in criminology, Maruna and Copes (2005) argue that 'future research should use a mixed nomothetic-idiographic strategy that allows for the development of quantitative indexes derived from qualitative information' (Maruna and Copes 2005: 49). The first step within such a strategy is the detailed examination of case studies against theoretical hypotheses that inform the subsequent development of potential categories within a detailed content analysis framework. The following examination of 4 case study transcripts from interviews with offenders in prison provide illustrations of each of the 4 hypothesised roles as part of personal offending narratives.

Example A: A *Revengeful Mission* narrative role; this shows the significance of not being able to stop whilst on a mission. He was convicted of GBH with Intent, and was 24 years old.

"My mum had a grievance with this fella next door, he was putting pressure on her and bullying her. I used to think he was a family friend but he kept knocking on her door with bottles of brandy and stuff hassling her to have a drink with him. I used to play football for him when I was a kid. My mum told me what he had been doing and I vowed to front him, something had to be done. I didn't make any preparations as was not really a vendetta. On the night it happened I had been taking coke for 6 hours and had been drinking all day. He came into my local with his mate It was all in good spirits until he came in. He said, "your mum is just a slut anyway". I told my friend that he was getting it, he snapped a cue in half and I put 2 snooker balls in my sock, we waited outside in my mate's car. I knew I wanted to hurt him, I was going to run at him when they came out. Whatever happened, happened. There was a scuffle on the floor and my victim tried to run away. I got up before him and hit him 5 or 6 times. I saw all the blood and stopped hitting. He got up and said I was getting killed, I started to chase him again but he ran in through his flat door. I was fuming. I realized what I had done and was caked in blood.

I was given life with a three and a half year tariff. The alternative to this would have been to just not do it. It did no good anyway, I am in here and my kids have got no dad there. I know how it feels to have no dad around and I promised myself that I would be there for my kids, that's the biggest thing that's done my head in. I had to eat my words, they have no dad, well only once a week when they come and visit me in here."

The proposed Revengeful Mission role was hypothesised to emerge out of the following of offence-identity, cognitive and emotional components:

- Offence identity : Strong; Others Significant

- Cognitive Distortions: Present Own Alternative Evaluations of Actions; Avoid/Refocus Impact in terms Offender's Own Objectives

- Emotional State: Calm; Displeasurable

that reflect the underlying combination of High Potency and High Intimacy psychological processes.

Although A had been given a life sentence for a very violent assault he describes the assault he committed almost like a 'Gunfight at OK Corral'. To restore his manly pride, wounded in the insult to his mother, he waited for his victim and then attacked him. The sense of potency and the offender's determination to impose his will characteristic of the Revengeful Mission role is clear in the statement ' I knew I wanted to hurt him' . He claims he felt there were demands on him to do it and that he 'had to do it'. So although he was exerting his authority he implicitly exonerates himself by reference to 'higher powers'. He implies that 'whatever happened, happened' as though it was part of a bigger mission. This is a clear example of the forms of cognitive distortion expected within the Revengeful Mission offender's interpretations: There is no attempt to deny responsibility or minimise the harm rather the offender supersedes other judgements, asserting his own evaluation of the incident. The significance of the victim playing

a role in the offender's narrative is also clear, illustrating the criminal aspects of high levels of 'intimacy' hypothesised within this role.

Although he claimed it "was not really a vendetta" it is clear from his account that there was a history to his anger and that despite his claim that he "didn't make any preparations" he did indeed create a vicious weapon and wait for his victim. This speaks of the relatively calm, controlled emotional state that drives a Revengeful Mission. The statement 'I was fuming' describes a cold fury that is consistent with the negative feelings associated with this role without suggesting any loss of this control. He seemed to think that he could assuage the insult and return from the violence, but now realises what a weak storyline that was to follow.

Example B: A *Tragic Hero* narrative role in which the offender can see no other way of acting and the act was everything, nothing else mattered. He was convicted of murder, and was 26 years of age.

"I am in here for murder; there are other little crimes with it as well, like assault and sexual assault.
I walked into this house and was having a drink and my victim was slagging one of my mates girlfriends off. I thought "that's not right" The lad whose girlfriend it was there. I said "you better say something to him". He didn't and so I got up and just started laying into him while he was on the chair. There are parts of the incident I just don't remember. After beating him up for a bit, I took him to the bathroom, filled the bath and told him he would either die by drowning or I was going to fucking kill him. I was stabbing him for an hour or so. I didn't take any weapons with me, I was not out to cause trouble, that's not my lifestyle, I try and avoid trouble. I can't remember where I got these knives from
The reason I did it was just because of what he said about my mates, to let him know he just couldn't do that.
Afterwards I went and got a wheelie bin from outside and brought it in the house. I told him to climb in it from the bath but he fell on the floor. He was there for about 20 minutes, I thought he was dead. I stabbed him in the back of the neck again when I realized he wasn't and he got in the bin. I threw white spirit all over it set it on fire and took him in this bin down to the canal. I kicked it over and he fell in the water, he was screaming so I picked up a brick and hit him over the head to shut him up.
I went back to the flat, borrowed clothes and went out on my own then, that was my night ruined. I seen a bouncer at this club that all bouncers go to when they are not working. This one I saw had broken my leg before, I got into a fight with him and hit him over the head with a piece of scaffolding and kicked him a few times. I can't remember where I slept that night. I handed myself in 2 days later and what I was in police custody I was all black and blue. They had the police doctor look at me and they found a tooth in my knee, it was not my victims or the bouncers, so it could be anyone's."

The proposed Tragic Hero role was hypothesised to emerge out of the following of offence-identity, cognitive and emotional components:

- Offence identity : Weak; Others Not Significant

- Cognitive Distortions: Responsibility Attributed to Others; Minimise Impact

- Emotional State: Aroused; Neutral

that reflect the underlying combination of Low Potency and Low Intimacy psychological processes.

As Frye (1957) makes clear the essence of tragedy is that of an heroic figure is overpowered by the fates. In Tragedy, there are wrathful gods or hypocritical villains who attempt to manipulate the tragic hero to evil ends. The protagonist is generally pessimistic and ambivalent as he has to avoid the dangers and absurdities of life, in which he finds that pain and pleasure, happiness and sadness are always mixed. The recurring emotions are sadness and fear. He is perceived as powerless at the hands of his nemesis. In the Tragedy, the "extraordinary victim" confronts inescapable dangers pursued by life's doom. Included in tragedy are stories of 'the fall', dying gods and heroes, violent death, sacrifice, and isolation. In the classic tragedy, the hero finds himself separated in some fundamental way from the natural order of things. The separation makes for an imbalance of nature, and the righting of the balance is the tragic hero's downfall. Like Oedipus, the tragic hero may be supremely proud, passionate, and of soaring mind; yet, these extraordinary attributes are exactly what separate him from common people and bring about his eventual demise. Frye (1957) remarks that tragedy evokes in the listener "a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)" (Frye, 1957, p.214).

The offence role that this narrative produces is that of the Tragic Hero. Consistent with this role, the offender attributes responsibility for his actions to others, including the victim: 'The reason I did it was just because of what he said about my mates..'. The protagonist has no choice indicating that it is the only option available to him, believing it is 'fate'. He eventually, 'heroically' hands himself in. This captures the individual's egotistical sense of his own significance, while, in line with the low intimacy associated with this role, the others involved are merely foils for his actions. The consequence for them means nothing to him, as his comment that 'that was my night ruined' reveals so clearly.

The account given in by B shows the justification which is the hallmark of a tragedy. The offender saw his actions as being the right thing to do "to let him know he just couldn't do that", although it ultimately leads to disaster. There is a total commitment to a life of violence that is so chillingly portrayed in this narrative, emphasised by the killer having an unknown person's tooth in his knee. Yet as the offender's comment here that 'I try and avoid trouble' reveals, the horror of the violence he perpetrates is set against a weak self-identity, producing the Tragic Hero role. Many people would actually describe this man as on a tragic life course from his early years or as 'a disaster waiting to happen".

Example C: A *Professional* narrative role showing the contribution of being in control and how they relate to the excitement. The offender was convicted of theft and robbery, and was 23 years old.

"Going into a shop and picking a rack of watches worth £5K-£10K. I ask the sales man to see the watch I put it on and just walk out. I would sell it for money but not for drugs, but to buy nice clothes. Sometimes I go out with the intention of doing it but sometimes I'll just do it then and there if it looks nice, or I'd go back the next time. If I go on my own I'll stay local but if I'm with someone else than I'll go out of town like to London or York.

The planning is done in the car, we'll discuss where they'll wait for me, have the car parked and which way I'll run. They'll never chase you.

I feel excited when talking about it, preparing to do it and thinking about when you get the money and where you'll go and what clothes you'll buy. It is an adrenaline rush. I always laugh when I run it's a nervous thing, the buzz. When there are no customers in the shop I'll run out but if there are customers then I'll walk and then run. In the car you think is it going to happen and then afterwards you have it. Park the car out of the way and plan a route. They don't expect you to be in a car but on foot. Feel safe when I get in the car.

I usually go for small things that are high value, something you can conceal and run with. I split the money with my mate and we party for the weekend. I've only been caught for the little things and not for the big things.

It takes 5 mins to plan the theft because we go there and have a look around, then do it and leave...if you walk around town then you get yourself on CCTV."

The proposed Professional role was hypothesised to emerge out of the following of offence-identity, cognitive and emotional components:

- Offence identity : Strong; Others Not Significant

- Cognitive Distortions: Present Own Alternative Evaluations of actions; Minimise Impact

- Emotional State: Calm; Neutral

that reflect the underlying combination of High Potency and Low Intimacy psychological processes.

Example C is typical of adventure narratives, which are often provided by burglars and robbers. Here, the confident feeling and 'strong' self identity of being a 'professional' is clearly expressed. He is pleased to point out his expertise, mentioning how he thwarts the expectations of the authorities and his awareness of the need to avoid CCTV cameras. Indeed, his account is dominated by details of the technicalities of the offending, the 'tricks of the trade'. The excitement produced out of this adventure is mentioned directly, to the extent that he even feels "excited when talking about it". But typical of the Professional, the role he adopts during the actual commission of the offence is a less aroused one of calm competency ('I put it on and just walk out'). The offence produces pleasure which comes from the power he feels in what he achieves. In line with the low intimacy levels underpinning this offence role, the offender highlights the irrelevance of the consequences of his actions for others by simply not mentioning the victim or nature of the target at all.

Characteristic of the Professional offence role, the offender makes no attempt to disown or attribute responsibility for his actions to others. Rather, he entirely owns his actions (indeed boasts of them) but presents his own alternative framework for the evaluation of them ('I would sell it for money but not for drugs, but to buy nice clothes').

As noted Frye (1957) calls this type of narrative a 'Romance' in reference to such archetypal stories as Ulysses, which he compares with the sun's zenith, summer, and triumph. Stories of the hero's great exploits, of apotheosis, and of entering into paradise are manifestation of this mythic archetype. In the Romance, an aspect of life is configured as a successful hunt, or a

pilgrimage to some desired end, consisting of three stages: a perilous journey with preliminary minor adventures, then usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die, and finally exaltation of the hero. The protagonist is an ever-moving adventurer who tries to overcome adversity and take control of the new challenges in order to emerge victorious throughout life's journey. He or she embarks on a long and difficult journey in life in which circumstances constantly change and new challenges continually arise. In the criminal context this accords with offending being seen as an opportunity to gain satisfaction and pleasure from mastery of the environment, that is facilitated by the adoption of a Professional offence role.

Example D: A *Victim* narrative in which the offender expresses helpless confusion. He was 46 years old.

> *"I was supposed to drive my stepson to the scrap yard but he wanted to stop at the bet shop. I drove to the bet shop and waited in the car. He comes running out with a bat and money bags, he'd done an armed robbery. He got in the car and I drove away. I was screaming, 'what have you done' and he was screaming, 'drive Dad drive'. As I'm driving I'm screaming and the money is going everywhere. The police were chasing us in their cars and the helicopter was following us as well. Chasing and sirens. It was a 25 minute chase, everywhere I went they were chasing me, I was going the wrong way on the roads. I crashed into a bollard and ran away. Police caught me. I got 7 years and my son got 5 years. My son pleaded guilty and I didn't know it was happening so I pleaded innocent and got 2 years extra.*
>
> *I would not have gone to the bet shop. He had a bat up his sleeve so I didn't know what he was planning to do. I should have drove off, but I couldn't as I would have got a hard time from the mother, but I got a hard time anyway. He apologises for what he'd done. He did it and got out before me. But he's done it to me again. I had my own flat and he had hidden drugs in there. He got 5 years and I got 4 years and he got out before me again! This isn't me, armed robbery and drug possession. I usually get charged for driving offences. I don't touch drugs and don't go to bet shops.*

The proposed Victim role was hypothesised to emerge out of the following of offence-identity, cognitive and emotional components:

- Offence identity : Weak; Others Significant

- Cognitive Distortions: Responsibility Attributed to Others; Avoid/ Refocus Impact in terms of offender's own objectives

- Emotional State: Aroused; Displeasurable

that reflect the underlying combination of Low Potency and High Intimacy psychological processes.

This role emerges from a life story in which nothing makes much sense; there are no rules and nothing matters. The term refers equally to a genre or a style of film characterizing " a dark, corrupt and violent world". The seemingly tough characters often found in *Film Noir*

seem to represent Frye's idea of Irony. His definition of Irony is rooted in Socrates as an *eiron* or self-deprecator (Frye, 1957, p. 172). This general framework for life would produce offender accounts of the roles they were playing in terms of the confusion and powerlessness. An extension of this sense of powerlessness, given a world-view where normal social and moral codes do not apply, will be the inverted notion that it is in fact the offender that is the main victim in the event. This is the generalised sense of impotence characteristic of Irony rather than the angry conviction that one has been wronged seen in Example A. The role of being a victim is essentially associated with negative emotions. They point to endings that just dissipate into nothingness and are certainly not happy ones.

Example D is the account of an individual who has indisputably adopted a Victim offending role. He saw himself totally at the mercy of his son's misdemeanour, clearly revealing the hypothesised tendency to attribute responsibility to others that is characteristic of this role. He suggests this all came out of a confused, helpless lack of understanding of what he was involved in that reveals the weak self identity associated with the Victim role. The hallmarks of the victim narrative are strongly indicated also by the comment the offender makes that that the person he thought was to blame, his son, got out of prison before he did.

The significance of others within his story is clear, both in the general positioning of his account and plight relative to his son as well as in specific references throughout to others (e.g. 'I should have drove off, but I couldn't as I would have got a hard time from the mother'). The predicted negative and aroused emotional state associated with the adoption of the Victim role during an offence is neatly captured in this account within the offender's description that 'As I'm driving, I'm screaming..'.

CONCLUSIONS

By bringing together a mixture of cognitive, affective and narrative perspectives on criminality it has been possible to propose that four dominant roles can be identified that characterise the personal narratives of many offenders. The Revengeful Mission role in which the offender who sees himself as strong and powerful is seeking a particular impact on another person (s) as part of a Romantic Quest narrative. Underpinned by high criminal levels of the two fundamental psychological dimensions of potency and intimacy, this role is further revealed in distorted cognitions about the ends or consequences of their actions, while accepting responsibility for the means. The adoption of this role is associated with a calm, non aroused but negative emotional state.

The Tragic Hero role, where the offence is an inevitable, justified response, which the offender is powerless to avoid. The commission of the crime is entirely about the enactment of the offender's Tragedy; the victim irrelevant. Underpinned by low levels of potency and intimacy, this role is further revealed in cognitive attributions of the responsibility to others as well as the dismissal of the harm done. Adoption of this role is associated with an aroused but not entirely negative emotional state.

The Professional role, where the offence is an opportunity for the offender to demonstrate his strength and expertise as part of an unfolding Adventure. The focus is on this mastery of the environment in pursuit of the gains he seeks rather than the victim or target. Underpinned by

high levels of potency but low levels of criminal intimacy, the hallmark cognitive distortions are produced by a combination of ignoring the victim, yet owning responsibility for the offence actions but reinterpreting the end consequences in one's own terms. The emotional state that facilitates the adoption of this role during the commission of the offence is one of calm, non aroused, neutrality.

The Victim role where the offender sees the offence as a consequence of his powerlessness at the hands of others, within a generalised Irony narrative. Within this role, responsibility is attributed to others and the offender is in an aroused, negative emotional state. The crime is interpreted by the offender as happening as a result of his confused, helplessness and feelings of alienation from others.

The particular combinations of the components that interact to produce these roles provide interesting insights into the potential relationships between distinct constructs that come from fundamentally different criminological schools. They draw together aspects of the emotional experience of crime emanating from Katz's (1988) innovative writings on the affective seductions of crime, with the cognitive focus of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralisation and Bandura's (1990) theory of moral disengagement, as well as aspects of criminal identity that reflect the subcultural perspectives of Cloward and Ohlin (1960) and others. The roles described here suggest some specific relationships between these cognitive, affective and identity concepts.

The specification of four distinct Narrative Offence Roles highlights the potential application of narrative approaches within criminology that goes beyond the analysis of post-hoc accounts derived to inform understanding of the offender's subjective interpretation of his involvement in crime. Rather, narrative processes have explanatory power, themselves acting to generate and direct criminal action; the distinct narrative themes providing a basis for differentiating offenders and their action patterns. Indeed from the post positivist, constitutive view of narrative that Presser has recently articulated (Presser 2009), the behaviour *is* the enactment of the narrative; pursuit of the narrative itself the motivation. The challenge to exploiting this explanatory potential is clear in Presser's assertion that narratives ... 'change too quickly to be captured and measured by the researcher....the offender's life story, including its affective dimensions, has no fixed or necessary essence'(2009:179) . For Presser then, the narrative themes in an individual's experiences are multiple, evolving and too fleeting to capture and measure.

The proposed operationalisation of narratives within crimes as the roles offenders assign to themselves and see themselves as acting out through the offending, may allow these processes to be captured. By considering them in the specific context of a given crime, it is suggested that it will be possible to give the narrative themes concrete, explicit form as particular components of the offender's experience and understanding of the situation and his actions within that situation. Certainly, the identification of the examples of the associated forms of cognitive distortions and emotional states, as well as the related components of self identity within the case studies explored here supports the feasibility of measurement.

By being able to measure specific narrative themes we open up an as yet unexploited approach to exploring and explaining the immediate causes of criminal action. The Professional, Victim, Tragic Hero and Revengeful Mission roles, because they capture the intention to act that is the essential component that drives a narrative construction (rather than less immediate motivational factors and influences), get us closer to understanding the

processes through which the action is instigated and sustained through the offence (Canter 1994). This is the issue that Presser summaries as a question of 'why this action here and now?' (p 189). This is an application of the narrative framework to criminology that goes beyond work exploring post hoc interpretations of circumstances and unfolding events within offenders' life stories. It builds on but posits a more significant potential for the narrative perspective than the dispositional-style tendency towards redemption (as opposed to contamination) self-stories in facilitating desistance from crime (Maruna 2001). Rather it proposes that particular narratives, operating through offence roles, act positively to drive specific criminal action patterns; that different offending styles are underpinned by different narrative processes.

The identification of different Narrative Offence Roles is a pathway to two distinct but interrelated developments for the narrative approach within criminology. One explores which narratives will underpin which criminal actions. Canter and Youngs (2009) offer some more detailed ideas about the action patterns that may relate to particular themes through the narrative interpretations they apply to offending styles within particular offence types. A second considers which offenders will report which narratives. This has been explored to some extent in the non-criminal context, although much of the focus of this work has been on the correlates of narrative complexity (e.g deVries and Lehman, 1996). How the substantive content of a criminal narrative role relates to the cultural context, personal background, personality, intellectual or other psychological characteristics of an offender remains to be established. Crucially, though, this approach provides a systematic framework for putting the criminal centre stage in his own story rather than being merely an organism to be explained away by his genetics and biology.

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