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# **Offenders' Crime Narratives across Different Types of Crimes**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current study explores the roles offenders see themselves playing during an offence and their relationship to different crime types. One hundred and twenty incarcerated offenders indicated the narrative roles they acted out whilst committing a specific crime they remembered well. The data were subjected to Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) and four themes were identified: *Hero*, *Professional*, *Revenger* and *Victim* in line with the recent theoretical framework posited for Narrative Offence Roles (Youngs & Canter, 2012). Further analysis showed that different subsets of crimes were more like to be associated with different narrative offence roles. *Hero* and *Professional* were found to be associated with property offences (theft, burglary and shoplifting), drug offences and robbery and *Revenger* and *Victim* were found to be associated with violence, sexual offences and murder. The theoretical implications for understanding crime on the basis of offenders' narrative roles as well as practical implications are discussed.

In the last years, the social sciences have witnessed a strong upsurge of interest in narrative and stories as they apply to human lives and social relationships. Narrative methods have proliferated in many fields, and psychological theorists are challenged by the notion that human activity and experience are filled with "meaning". Out of this has grown the view that like literary constructions, life stories can be analyzed in terms of plots, settings, scenes, themes as well as characters and their dominant roles (McAdams, 1988).

Narrative theory proposes that individuals make sense of their lives by developing a story or narrative with themselves as the central character (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). A narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states and happenings involving human beings as characters or actors (Bruner, 1990). A development of this has been the proposal of the narrative role that an individual plays within their offending activity (Canter, 1994). Canter (1994) claims that offenders are not a random sample of the general population. They are limited people (Canter & Youngs, 2009, p. 123). Therefore, they see themselves as playing particular roles and live particular narratives that are limited by the specific themes that underlie them.

Criminal Narratives are of relevance because they link individual human actions and events into inter-related aspects of an understandable composite (Polkinghorne, 1988) in other words they link the actor to its actions. The way in which the events have significance for one another is the crucial contribution of the narrative approach (Polkinghorne, 1988). The main role is played by a person seeing, thinking and acting. Through his actions the criminal tells us about how he has chosen to live his life. The challenge is to reveal his destructive life story, to uncover the plot in which crime appears to play such a significant part.

The idea that individuals take on externally imposed roles that shape their involvement in criminal activity is also central to labelling perspectives (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938). Presser (2009) argued that an offender's narrative is an immediate antecedent of offending. These narratives are shaped by experience and then reflected in behaviour. An understanding of why individuals commit crimes requires an analysis and understanding of those internal stories; the narratives they are drawn upon (Canter, 1994; Canter & Youngs, 2009; Canter & Youngs, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2011; Youngs & Canter, 2012). Such narrative themes have been proposed for crimes including rape, stalking, serial homicide, robbery, burglary and arson (Canter & Youngs, 2009; Youngs & Canter, 2012). It has also been demonstrated in previous work by Canter, Kaouri & Ioannou (2003), Canter & Youngs, (2009) and Youngs and Canter (2011) Youngs and Canter (2012) who found that the roles played by criminals could be categorised into distinct narrative themes.

Youngs and Canter (2011; 2012) delineated a theoretical framework that drew together emotional, cognitive and identity components of narrative roles. These authors report empirical evidence of 4 narrative roles that are understood in terms of the major narrative themes that have been delineated in the works of Frye (1957) and McAdams (1988). The Narrative Roles they delineate are: The Professional Role, which is one of competency and mastery of the environment. The Revenger Role of distress and blame. The Victim Role is one of disconnectedness and despair. Finally the Hero Role, concerned with the hubristic taking on and overcoming of challenges.

Criminal activity can therefore be understood through in-depth analysis and understanding of those personal stories, called by Canter (1994) "inner narratives", as well as through

connecting those narratives to characteristic roles and actions and different types of criminal activity.

### **Offenders' Crime Narratives and Types of Crimes**

Although narrative processes as instigators of criminal activity have been examined in previous research, which narratives underpin specific types of offences has not yet been explored in any detail. Katz (1988) hypothesised that each crime has its own distinctive appeals, at once thrilling to its participants, and yet thrilling in different ways and for different reasons. An explanation for murder cannot possibly address burglary; motivations for shoplifting rarely impel someone to rape.

In his discussion of violent criminals, such as murderers and rapists Canter (1994) argues that the role played by the offender, that is the way in which he treats his victims, is conveyed in the way that he behaves while committing the offence. This role is related to the particular crime being committed. Katz (1988) argues that in violent crime, central to the experiences is a number of the family of moral emotions: humiliation, righteousness, arrogance, ridicule, cynicism, defilement and vengeance that give the offender the feeling that he or she has a moral right to attack. In murder, for example, it would be the experience of anger that would compel the murderer to commit the crime. One feature of the typical homicide is its character as a self-righteous act undertaken within the form of defending communal values. The perpetrator of the violent offence believes that it is he or she who has been wronged and, in gaining revenge, is defending moral equality.

Canter & Heritage (1989) conducted a comprehensive narrative analysis of the statements provided by victims of rape and developed a comprehensive multivariate model of offence

behaviour in adult stranger rape, which revealed that the major distinctions concerned the ways in which the offender interacted with the victim rather than the sexual activity as such. An analysis of 66 stranger rapes showed that the behaviours occurred in the crime scenes could be differentiated in terms of five different ways the offender interacted with the victim. Based on this analysis and drawing on McAdams work on narratives, Canter modified these themes to his three-way model of Victim as Object, Vehicle and Person. These themes are characteristics of sets of behaviour that provide an insight into the offender's narrative, by focusing on the way he deals with the victim.

Concerning property crimes, that Katz calls "sneaky thrill offences", these involve the initial construction of the object as seductive. Offenders feel propelled into action seduced by objects, people and most compellingly by the act of crime itself. The excitement provided by some devious property crime is undeniably seductive. Fleming (1999) also revealed, when he looked at young car thieves in British Columbia, that most youthful auto theft was carried out for recreational purposes, as opposed to stealing for profit. Excitement and thrills were the motives behind most of the thefts he analysed.

Becoming an armed robber on an ongoing basis, Katz (1988) hypothesises, entails a good deal more than making a calculated choice as to the most efficient way of earning money. Robbers adopt a social role and enter into a lifestyle that they value for its own sake; robbery is undertaken to support an identity and a lifestyle, not simply because it is the most efficient way of gaining income (Greenberg, 1997). Its sensual attraction is not the money earned alone, but the chaos, the excitement, the thrill, the danger of pursuit, capture, subdual, the ceremony of the domination and humiliation of the victim.

## **The Present Study**

The overall aim of this study is to explore the roles offenders see themselves playing during an offence and their relationship to different types of crimes. Previous research (Canter, Kaouri & Ioannou, 2003; Youngs & Canter, 2012) has demonstrated that offenders could draw on four dominant forms of narrative to account for any given crime: Hero, Professional, Victim and Revenger. The first objective of the study therefore is:

1. To determine whether the overall structure of narrative roles criminals see themselves as acting out when committing their crimes can be differentiated in terms of different roles themes e.g. hero, professional, revenger, victim.

For the proposed framework to be of value for treatment and other interventions with criminals, consideration must be given to the relationship between the different narrative offence roles and different types of offences. The second objective of the study therefore is:

2. To establish whether different types of crime, e.g. burglary, robbery, drug offences, violence, rape and murder, typically relate to different narrative offence roles.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The present study comprised of a new, not previously reported, sample of 120 convicted criminals. The offenders were incarcerated in a prison in the North of England. All the participants in the study were male with an age range of 21-72 ( $M=34$ ;  $SD=10.07$ ) and had been convicted for a range of crimes. Table 1 summarises the offences and their frequency within the sample.

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**INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

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## **Materials**

Participants were asked to complete the first version of the Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ v1) that has been further developed by Youngs and Canter (2012). Thirty-three statements hypothesised to represent the role the offender felt he was acting out during his crime were derived from intensive interviews carried out with offenders in pilot research by Canter and a number of his students over two decades (see Youngs and Canter, 2012 for description).

A five-point Likert scale was used in which offenders indicated the extent to which each of the statements described what it was like while they were committing their crime ranging from “Not at all” (1) to “Very much indeed” (5) with (3) being the mid-point “Some”. Such a scale allows for more elaboration on the subject’s answers, providing more detail than a simple yes/no format. The items can be seen in Table 2.

## **Procedure**

The questionnaire was presented as part of an extended interview in which various background characteristics and offence history were recorded. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors in the prison in a cell specially made available for the interview, so that a moderately quiet and completely confidential environment could be created for the interviewer. Interviewees were recruited on a voluntary basis and they were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could leave at any time if they wished. It was also emphasised that their responses were completely confidential to the research team and would not be made available to the prison authorities or the legal system in any way that would allow identification of individuals. It was thus explained to



them that their answers could not play any role in any appeal or request for parole that they might be making or any privileges within the prison. They were then given a brief explanation of the study and asked to give an honest account of their experience of committing an offence they had committed, that they could remember very clearly, and to consider what they felt whilst they were in the process of carrying out that crime.

They were then asked to read through a list of narrative roles statements describing how people may experience crimes and to indicate the extent to which the statements reflected their own particular experiences during the crime they had already described. It was stressed that they should answer the questions having in mind that particular crime and to consider how it was whilst they were in the process of carrying out that crime, not before or after. Once they had completed the questionnaire they were asked to describe briefly the crime of which they had been thinking. This is the list of crimes in Table 1.

### **Analysis**

Data generated from the questionnaire responses were analysed using SSA – I (Lingoes, 1973). Smallest Space Analysis is a non-metric multidimensional scaling procedure based upon the assumption that the underlying structure, or system of behaviour, will most readily be appreciated if the relationship between every variable and every other variable is examined.

Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) represents the co-occurrence of variables, in our present study narrative roles, as distances in a geometrical space. The SSA program computes association coefficients between all variables. It is these coefficients that are used to form a spatial representation of items with points representing variables. The closer any two points

are to each other on the spatial configuration, the higher their associations with each other. Similarly, the farther away from each other any two points are, the lower their association with each other.

A number of studies from intelligence (Guttman, 1954) to criminal actions (e.g., Canter & Fritzon, 1998; Canter & Heritage, 1989; Salfati, 2000) have found such MDS models to be productive. The particular power of SSA-I comes from its representation of the rank order of co-occurrence as rank orders of the distances in the geometric space (the use of ranks leads to it being considered non-metric MDS).

To test hypotheses, an SSA configuration is visually examined to determine the patterns of relationships between variables and identify thematic structures. Narrative roles with similar underlying themes are hypothesised to be more likely to co-occur than those that imply different themes. These similarly themed narrative roles are therefore hypothesised to be found in contiguous locations, i.e. the same region of the plot. The hypothesis can therefore be tested by visually examining the SSA configuration. The coefficient of alienation (Borg & Lingoes, 1987) indicates how well the spatial representation fits the co-occurrences represented in the matrix. The smaller the coefficient of alienation is the better the fit, i.e. the fit of the plot to the original matrix. However, as Borg & Lingoes (1987) emphasise there is no simple answer to the question of how “good” or “bad” the fit is. This will depend upon a combination of the number of variables, the amount of error in the data and the logical strength of the interpretation framework.

In summary, the SSA was used to explore the co-occurrences of narrative roles and allowed for the testing of the hypothesis that they will be differentiated into themes.

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**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

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## **RESULTS**

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the 33 statements. The 3-dimensional SSA solution has a Guttman – Lingoes coefficient of alienation 0.15251 in 27 iterations, showing a very good fit between the Pearson’s coefficients of the role variables and their corresponding geometric distances in the configuration. The labels are brief summaries of the full questions (See Table 2).

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**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

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### **Themes of Narrative Offence Roles**

The first stage in the interpretation of the SSA is to test the hypothesised structure of the narrative roles by examining the SSA configuration. The regional hypothesis states that items, which have a common theme, will be found in the same region of the same space. The approach used to interpret the SSA was to carefully study the resulting pattern and identify whether or not the variables, the narrative roles in that case, formed distinct themes. Initial examination of the configuration of points suggested that it would be possible to differentiate different themes of roles. The next stage in the interpretation was to examine the grouping of variables and determine whether or not each of the four groups of variables could be defined by a common theme. For example, the roles situated at the bottom left quadrant were: “it was interesting”, “it was fun”, “I knew I was taking a risk”, “it was like an adventure”, “it was exciting”, “I was looking for recognition” and “it was a manly thing to do” that indicate a

hero type and that is how this region/theme was named. It should be noted here that the relationship between variables and themes might be circular meaning that the interpretation of the items form the basis for the interpretation of the themes and the interpretation of the themes influences the interpretation of the items. By examining the SSA configuration (Figure 1), it is apparent that the narrative roles could be differentiated into four dominant themes of narrative offence roles: Hero, Professional, Revenger and Victim. Case studies illustrate the four themes.

### *Hero*

The eight elements that can be conceptually linked as Hero role are:

1. It was fun, 2. It was interesting, 3. It was like an adventure, 4. It was exciting, 5. I was looking for recognition, 6. It all went to plan, 7. It was a manly thing to do, 8. I knew I was taking a risk

This type of offender could be described as an individual that perceives the experience of crime as a manly and brave thing to do, as an interesting and enjoyable adventure that he involves himself in, knowing he is taking risks, because he is looking for recognition.

### Case 9:

The offender stole credit cash cards from some acquaintances, got into a taxi and was wondering around looking for suitable machines to use, the ones that there weren't any visible cameras close by. He said that he used a taxi firm that he knows that wouldn't raise any questions. Someone showed him before how to do it and he managed to withdraw £1,050. After taking the money he used the same taxi to go back home. Immediately after he went to town and spent the money on his wife and children. He said that the whole experience was fun, interesting, exciting and like being on an adventure.

### *Professional*

The seven elements that can be conceptually linked as Professional role are:

1. I was like a professional, 2. It was routine, 3. I was doing a job, 4. I knew what I was doing, 5. Nothing else mattered, 6. For me it was just like a usual days work, 7. There was nothing special about what happened

This type of offender could be described as an individual, who is acting professionally, perceives his crime as a job, therefore part of the routine of his life and he acknowledges his criminal behaviour. He is engaged in criminal activity in a qualified, specialised manner, which implies that he could be portrayed as a highly skilled, intelligent and competent individual who bases his actions on his criminal experiences.

### Case 1:

The offender committed a theft in a jewellery shop. The crime was planned and he went equipped with bags. He described that he was a professional thief, and the crime was routine, and he knew he was doing a job as what was happening was not special, just a usual days work.

### *Revenger*

The eight elements that can be conceptually linked as Revenger role are:

1. It was right, 2. I was in control, 3. It was a mission, 4. I had power, 5. I just wanted to get it over with, 6. I couldn't stop myself, 7. I was trying to get revenge, 8. I was getting my own back

This type of offender justifies his criminal behaviour, feeling that it is right to take revenge being on a mission. He sees himself in control of the situation feeling powerful and has the sense that he couldn't help himself.

#### Case 80:

The offender explained that he was in a hostel and some guy was bullying an old man. The offender told him to leave him alone but he came at him with a knife and tried to stab him. He disarmed him and returned the weapon in self-defence, as the guy said he had a firearm. The offender also admitted that in the beginning he tried to stop but when the other person produced the blade he had to deal with it. He was convicted for section 18 wounding. He described that during the crime he was in control trying to get revenge and felt that he couldn't stop himself.

#### *Victim*

The ten elements that can be conceptually linked as Victim role are:

1. I had to do it, 2. I was helpless, 3. It was my only choice, 4. I was a victim, 5. I was confused about what was happening, 6. I didn't care what would happen, 7. What was happening was just fate, 8. It was like I wasn't part of it, 9. It was the only thing I could think of doing, 10. I guess I always knew it was going to happen

This type of offender can be described as the victim of the situation, who does not regard himself responsible for and part of his crime. However, he has no other choice, but to commit his offence as this is something, that couldn't be avoided due to his belief that the events in his life are a function of luck, chance, fate, or other external factors beyond his control or manipulation.

Case 117:

The offender was walking his dog and got into a fight with someone; as a result of the fight he killed him. During the incidence he described how he felt helpless and that this was his only choice. In addition, he was confused about what was happening, it was like he wasn't part of the event and at the moment he didn't seem to care about what was going to happen. But at the same moment he believes that what happened was fate, something out of his control.

**Internal Reliability of Narrative Offence Roles**

The four narrative offence roles are proposed to reflect distinct themes to any given crime. This implies that the sets of narrative roles identified as representing each of those themes should form a scale in the sense that their combined existence is a reasonable indication of some underlying dimension. Cronbach's alpha was utilised to determine the reliability coefficient of each of the sets of offender narrative roles that define a region. The narrative roles and the  $\alpha$  for each theme are given in Table 3.

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**INSERT TABLE 3 HERE**

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As can be observed for the *Hero* theme with 8 items the alpha coefficient was .81, for the *Professional* theme with 7 items .76, for the *Revenger* with 8 items .78 and for the *Victim* theme with 10 items .85 and, indicating a high degree of association between the variables in each of the four themes.

## **Relationship Between The Narrative Offence Roles and Types of Crimes**

In order to investigate the relationship between types of offences and narrative offence roles, the crimes the offenders had described were assigned to one of six broad categories: Property Offences (Burglary, Theft, Shoplifting, Fraud;  $n=20$ ), Drug offences (Possession, Supply;  $n=20$ ), Robbery ( $n=20$ ), Violence (Assault, ABH, GBH, Violence, Wounding;  $n=20$ ), Sexual Offences (Indecent assault, Attempted Rape, Rape;  $n=20$ ), Murder (Murder, Manslaughter;  $n=20$ ).

To examine the relationship between the narrative offence roles themes and types of crimes each of the 120 cases was individually examined to ascertain whether it could be assigned to a particular theme. Every case was given a percentage score for each of the four narrative offence roles, reflecting the proportion of Hero, Professional, Revenger and Victim. Percentages were used rather than actual numbers because the four themes contained unequal numbers of variables. Any individual case was classified as belonging to a particular theme if the proportional score for that dominant theme was greater or approximately equal ( $\pm 5\%$ ) to the score for the other three themes added together. This method of classification was also employed by Canter & Fritzon (1998) and Salfati (2000). Figure 2 illustrates the results

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**INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE**

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By examining the figure above it can be observed that 50% ( $n=10$ ) of the property offenders were assigned the Hero role, 35% ( $n=7$ ) the Professional role, 10% ( $n=2$ ) the Revenger role and 5% ( $n=1$ ) the Victim role. For drug offenders 40% ( $n=8$ ) were assigned the



Professional role, 35% ( $n = 9$ ) the Hero role, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) the Revenger role, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) the Victim role and 5% ( $n=1$ ) couldn't be classified. For robbers 50% ( $n = 10$ ) were Hero, 30% ( $n = 6$ ) were Professional, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) Revenger, 5% ( $n = 1$ ) Victim and 5% ( $n=1$ ) couldn't be classified. For violent offenders Revenger was the predominant theme (55%,  $n = 11$ ) with 20% ( $n = 4$ ) being Victim, 15% ( $n = 3$ ) Hero and 10% ( $n = 2$ ) Professional. From the sexual offenders 45% ( $n = 9$ ) were assigned to the Victim role, 25% ( $n = 5$ ) the Revenger role, 15% ( $n = 3$ ) the Hero role, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) the Professional role and 5% ( $n=1$ ) couldn't be classified. Finally, 45% ( $n = 9$ ) of murderers were assigned the Revenger role, 30% ( $n = 6$ ) the Victim role, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) the Hero role, 10% ( $n = 2$ ) the Professional role and 5% ( $n=1$ ) couldn't be classified. In total, 97% ( $n = 116$ ) of the cases could be classified into one of the four narrative offence roles supporting the notion that criminals' experience of crime can be described in terms of their predominant narrative roles and these vary according to crime type.

## **DISCUSSION**

The first objective of the present study was to determine whether the overall structure of roles criminals see themselves as acting out when committing their crimes can be differentiated in terms of different narrative offence roles in line with previous research (Canter, Kaouri & Ioannou, 2003; Youngs & Canter, 2012). Patterns that did emerge from the SSA suggested that offenders have acted out different narrative offence roles while they were offending: Hero, Professional, Revenger, and Victim, supporting previous research.

The Hero role describes offenders who perceive their criminal behaviour as an enjoyable and fascinating adventure. They are seduced by their desire for other people's belongings and when

they complete their crime, they experience a euphoric appreciation of its significance. The Professional offender sees himself as an expert when committing his offence. He refers to his criminal activity as a job. He acknowledges and justifies his offences without caring about the consequences, as it is part of the routine in his life. The Revenger is the type of offender who feels that he is doing the right and the manly thing by offending; having the sense that he could not help himself. It is he who has been wronged and, in gaining revenge, is defending moral equality. Finally, the Victim role describes an offender who perceives himself to be the victim of the situation. He reacts with violence because this seems to be the only alternative solution resigning his actions to fate. Reliability analysis found very high  $\alpha$  and therefore indicated a high degree of association between the variables in each of the four narrative offence roles.

A further objective of the present study was to determine whether there is a relationship between the narrative offence roles (Hero, Professional, Revenger, Victim) and different types of crimes. By assigning each case to a particular narrative offence role it was shown that 97% ( $n = 116$ ) of the cases could be classified into one of the four narrative offence roles and these varied across types of crimes. For property offenders and robbers the predominant role was Hero (50%) followed by Professional (35%) while Revenger and Victim only represented 10% and 5% respectively of the sample. Half of the property offenders and robbers saw their crimes an enjoyable adventure supporting previous research that has shown that the excitement experienced from these crimes is seductive and the main motivation behind such crimes (Katz, 1988; McCarthy, 1995; Flemming, 1999). In robbery, the offender demonstrates a manliness demanding recognition (Canter & Youngs, 2009). The Professional role, the second most dominant, has been a recurrent theme in the literature and many typologies draw attention to the level of skill in burglary (Maguire & Bennett, 1982; Walsh,

1986; Cromwell, Olson & Avery, 1991; Merry & Harsent, 2000) and degree of professionalism in robbery (McClintock & Gibson, 1961; Conklin, 1972; Walsh, 1986). For the professional offenders the offence is part of a committed criminal activity and so involves considerable skill and planning (Canter & Youngs, 2009).

Similarly, for drug offenders the predominant role was Professional (40%) followed by Hero (35%). Revenger and Victim only represented 10% and 10% respectively of the sample. Not surprisingly, results closely resemble those for property offenders and robbers; the relationship of drug related offences and acquisitive crime is well documented and many theories have attempted to explain the connection (Bennett, Holloway & Farrington, 2008). For many drug offenders, crime is about sustaining a lifestyle which includes drug use (Brain, Parker & Bottomley, 1998).

For both violent offenders and murderers the predominant role was Revenger (violence = 55%; murder=45%). While for murderers the second most frequent role was Victim (30%) followed by Hero and Professional (10% each) for violent offenders the second most frequent role was Hero (20%) followed by Victim (15%) and Professional (10%). Katz (1988) argues that righteousness and vengeance are central to the experience of a violent offender. The perpetrator of the violent offence believes that it is he or she who has been wronged and, in gaining revenge, is defending moral equality. He gives examples of offenders who murder unfaithful spouses in defence of property rights. More than a quarter of the murderers in the current study saw themselves as Victim. For Katz (1988), the practical objective of those who kill is not necessarily to kill. In the nonpredatory assault or homicide “much of the violence is of an impulsive nature. Sometimes it is difficult to tell who is the victim and who the offender” (Block, as cited in Katz, 1988, p.32). For violent offenders, the second most

predominant role was that of the Hero. It seems that their offence has a positive effect and similarly to robbers the violent offender demonstrates a manliness demanding recognition.

Lastly, 45% of sex offenders saw themselves as Victims followed by Revenger (25%), Hero (15%) and Professional (10%). Interestingly almost half of the offenders see themselves as the victims of the situation. This role can be interpreted in terms of the victim role model (Canter, 1994) and corresponds to the Victim as Person role where the offender attempts to achieve some intimacy revealing the emptiness that runs through this narrative. A quarter of the sex offenders saw themselves as Revengers; this role corresponds to the Victim as Vehicle role (Canter, 1994) where the offender uses the victim as a means through which to express his anger and desires (Canter & Youngs, 2009). At the heart of this narrative is a vindictive and avenging agenda.

Beyond the theoretical implications in understanding the immediate causes of criminal action the current study has several practical implications in terms of treatment and rehabilitation programmes for offenders. The identification of different narrative offence roles and their relationship to different types of crimes suggests that different programmes may be appropriate for different offenders. A therapist can uncover the narrative offence roles, recognise their significance for the individual and help an offender invest energy and care into new and more promising aspects or domains. In addition, the identification of different narrative offence roles and their relationship to different types of crimes can have implications for interviewing techniques. A line of questioning that may be productive with a rapist that sees himself as victim probably will not work with a thief that sees himself as a hero. Therefore, interviewing techniques can be tailored to individual cases according to their Narrative Offence Roles (Youngs and Canter, 2009).

Of course for this model to be of any value further research also needs to establish to what extent offenders act out different or the same narrative offence roles when they commit the same type of crime. In order to examine this in more depth, offenders need to be questioned about what roles they acted out during not only one (as it was the case in the present study) but more crimes. For example, an offender that was asked to describe and talk about a burglary can also be asked to talk about another burglary that he might have committed and a different crime such as violence for example. Especially interesting would be to see the differences or similarities in narrative offence roles in an offender who committed an offence against property and an offence against a person. In addition, offenders were asked to describe a crime of their choice that they could remember well. The selection of the crime might be an important factor influencing the offence narrative roles. It is suggested that future studies address the issue of the selection of the crime by asking offenders to discuss the reasons behind their choices.

The study was restricted to six broad types of crimes namely: property offences, drug offences, robbery, violence, sex offences and murder with 20 cases represented by each crime type. Further studies, that can look at statistical significances, are necessary with larger datasets, female offenders, and other forms of criminality as well as group crimes or/and one or multiple victims. A cross-cultural investigation would be particular useful as there is the issue of the cross-cultural application of how offenders use concepts such as narrative roles in different countries. Furthermore, the offenders in the present study took part voluntarily. The decision to participate may reflect some inherent bias in the traits of the participants, therefore the sample may not be representative of the offenders' population. While there are limitations in regards to self-selection bias, ethical considerations arise with unwilling participants; In addition, willingness to participate in the study may provide more insight into the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, It should also be noted that the statements are

postoffence verbalisations. As such, even if the offenders in the study reported that they remembered the details of the offence well, they may be distorted by memory issues as well as postoffence developments such as conviction. All participants described an offence for which they were caught and convicted. Future research should explore the impact of different offence outcomes. It is possible that people may report more positive affect in the experiences of offences which remain undetected.

The issue of postoffence rewriting raises of course a broader issue about the validity of self-reported narrative accounts generally. The phenomenological approach takes the stand that a person's account is their subjective perception and should be taken at face value. It does not have to be believed as objective fact but can be taken to indicate the constructs and related perspectives the individuals brings to the issues at hand. It may show how they wish to be seen, which is relevant to setting up interviews and therapeutic interventions. Even if what the offenders offer, are implicit justifications, they are demonstrating the storyline they consider the most relevant to their own understanding of their circumstances. It is that personal account that forensic psychologists have to work with either in investigations or in therapeutic interventions.

Despite the above limitations the current study shows the value of narrative processes in exploring criminal activity. Narrative theory has much to offer in the comprehension and analysis of criminal behaviour and this is the first step in understanding the processes that instigate criminal actions across a variety of crimes.

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**Table 1.** Number of offenders interviewed for each crime type

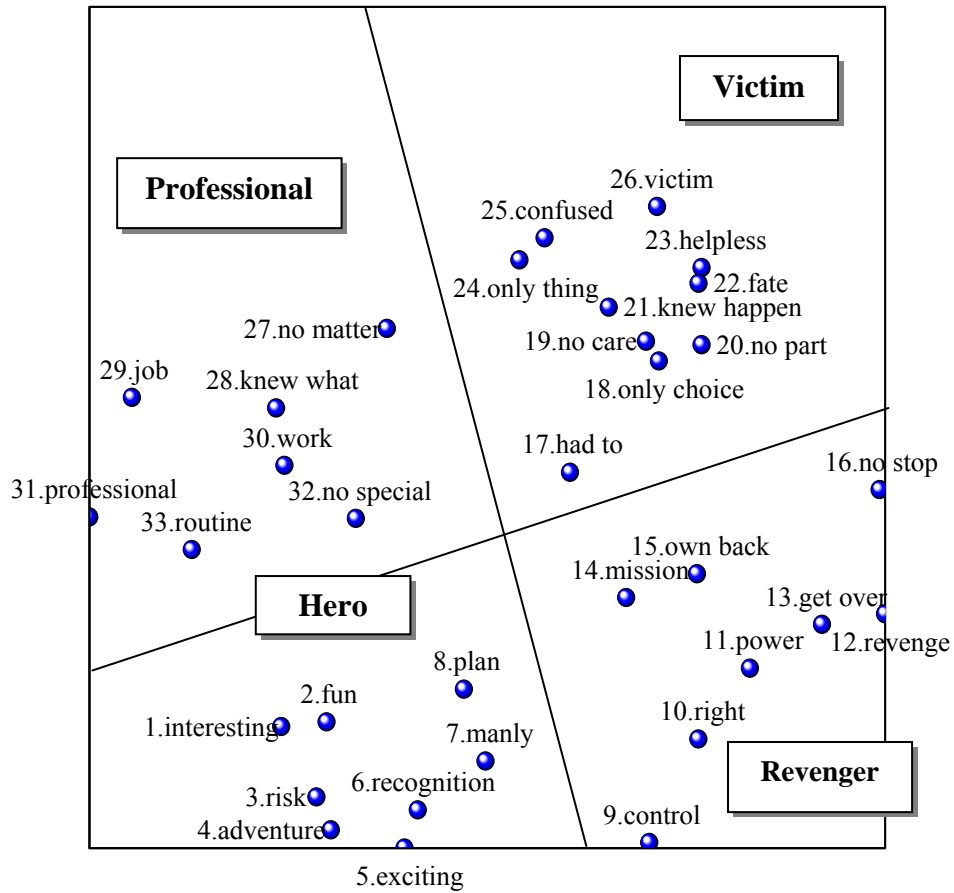
<b>Type of crime</b>	<b>No of offenders</b>
Theft	6
Shoplifting	1
Burglary	10
Supply drugs	15
Drugs possession	5
Robbery	20
Assault	7
Violence	1
Fraud	3
ABH*	2
GBH**	2
Wounding	8
Rape	17
Attempted Rape	1
Indecent Assault	2
Murder	19
Manslaughter	1

\*ABH = Actual Bodily Harm

\*\*GBH = Grievous Bodily Harm

**Table 2.** Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ) Used to Indicate Roles Criminals Saw Themselves as Playing While Committing an Offence

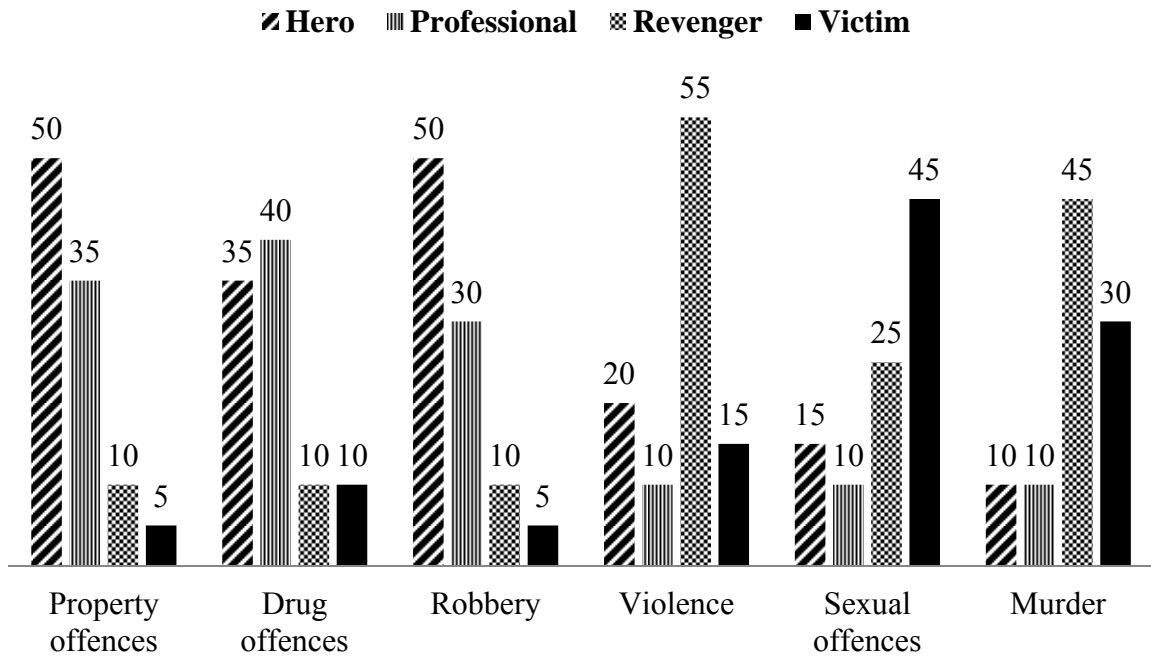
<b>Full Item</b>	<b>Analysis label</b>
1. It was interesting	interesting
2. It was fun	fun
3. I knew I was taking a risk	risk
4. It was like an adventure	adventure
5. It was exciting	exciting
6. I was looking for recognition	recognition
7. It was a manly thing to do	manly
8. It all went to plan	plan
9. I was in control	control
10. It was right	right
11. I had power	power
12. I was trying to get revenge	revenge
13. I just wanted to get it over with	get over
14. It was a mission	mission
15. I was getting my own back	own back
16. I couldn't stop myself	no stop
17. I had to do it	had to
18. It was my only choice	only choice
19. I didn't care what would happen	no care
20. It was like I wasn't part of it	no part
21. I guess I always knew it was going to happen	knew happen
22. What was happening was just fate	fate
23. I was helpless	helpless
24. It was the only thing I could think of doing	only thing
25. I was confused about what was happening	confused
26. I was a victim	victim
27. Nothing else mattered	no matter
28. I knew what I was doing	knew what
29. I was doing a job	job
30. For me it was just like a usual days work	work
31. I was like a professional	professional
32. There was nothing special about what happened	no special
33. It was routine	routine



**Figure 1:** 1 by 2 Projection of the Three - Dimensional Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) of Narrative Offence Roles with Regional Interpretation  
Coefficient of Alienation = 0.15251

**Table 3.** Internal Reliabilities for the Four Narrative Offence Roles

<b>Narrative Role</b>	<b>Hero</b>	<b>Professional</b>	<b>Revenger</b>	<b>Victim</b>
Number of items	8	7	8	10
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.81	.76	.78	.85



**Figure 2:** *Percentage of Crime Types Assigned to Each Narrative Offence Role*