

# A Narrative Approach to Criminality

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Psychology discovers Eng. Lit

“No clear explanation”?

# TORTURE WIFE GETS 7 YEARS

A WOMAN was jailed for seven years yesterday for torturing her doting teenage husband and leaving him scarred for life.

Mother-of-four [REDACTED] forced husband Ryan to scald his own genitals, beat him with a stick and umbrella, and poured boiling water over his shoulder while he was bathing their baby son.

His injuries were so serious that his mother did not recognise him and thought he was a vagrant.

[REDACTED], 35, who has three children from another marriage, married Ryan two years ago after a whirlwind romance. She

By **ASHLEY BROADLEY**

soon began to control her husband, now 20.

[REDACTED] was sentenced at [REDACTED] Crown Court. The judge said there was no clear explanation for her wicked behaviour.



CRUEL: [REDACTED]



TORMENT: Ryan

# Approaches to the Causes of Criminality

- LEGAL
  - Agency
  - Responsibility
  - Intention
  - Conscious control
  - Planning
  - Control
- *The Person*
- BIO-SOCIAL
  - Genes
  - Hormones
  - Brain dysfunction
  - ‘Personality
  - Upbringing
  - Social inequality
- *The Organism*

# Emergence of a 'Narrative Perspective'

- Jerome Bruner 'Acts of Meaning' (1990) – challenging information processing model.
- Dan McAdams 'The Stories we live by' (1993) – Challenging trait theory of personality.
- John McLeod 'Narrative and Psychotherapy' (2001) Challenge to dynamic therapies

# Challenge to Positivist Orthodoxy

- The world is constructed by our understanding not there to be discovered.
- *We actively* make sense of the world rather than being pushed by internal or external forces.
- Our notion of our 'self' is fundamental to how we act on the world.

# The Narrative Approach in a Criminal Context

- Katz (1988): a condition necessary for an offence to take place is the requirement of a line of interpretation in which the individual understands himself and how he is perceived by others. This relates to the role that an individual plays;
- Narrative data consist of stories people tell about their life episodes or about their lives as a whole. Those stories relate to how people understand the significance of things that have happened to them and of the things they have done

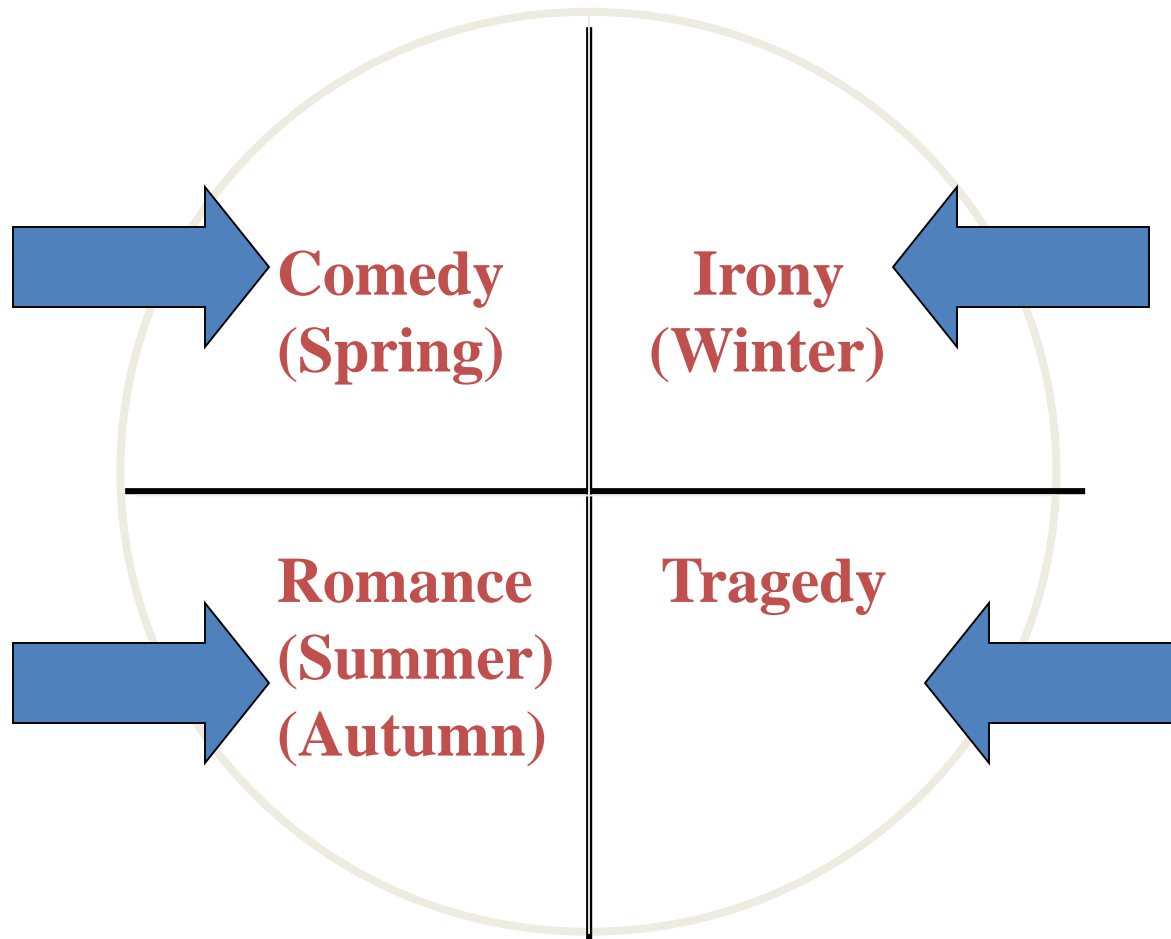
# SOME IMPORTANT CAUTIONS

- Personal narratives are created accounts - stories
- Stories are shaped in relation to their audience.
- Most studies are of fluent, effective people.
- We focus on what narratives the Criminal's ***Actions*** reveal.

# Narrative theory

- Psychotherapy: narrative description to understand behaviour. People's past experiences, their present feelings and knowledge and their expectations about the future, exert a powerful influence on their actions
- Mc Adams (1988). Power, Intimacy and the Life Story: Every person is a "Biographer of self". Personal narratives give shape and meaning to people's lives. We experience our lives as both actors and observers of a series of events organised in time. An individual may see himself as a father, hero or carer ; "main characters"
- Life stories can be conceptualised as one of the four mythic archetypes or story forms, comedy, romance, tragedy and irony (Frye, 1957) He offers four archetypal mythoi that relate to the four seasons of the year: Comedy (Spring), Romance (Summer), Tragedy (Autumn), and Irony or Satire (Winter). According to Frye, "the fundamental form of narrative process is cyclical movement" (Frye, 1957, p.158).





## Northrop Frye's Four Archetypal Stories

- Tragedy
- Adventure
- Romance
- Comedy

## Dominant Emotions Hypothesised

- Despair
- Excitement
- Happiness
- Schadenfreude

(malicious glee)

# Hypothesised Roles of Offenders

## **Adventurer**

It was like being on an adventure.  
I was doing the manly thing.  
I was acting like a hero.  
It seemed fun.  
I found it interesting.

## **Revenger**

It was like being in control.  
I was doing harm.  
I was acting out of revenge.  
It seemed right.  
I found that I could not help myself.

## **Criminal**

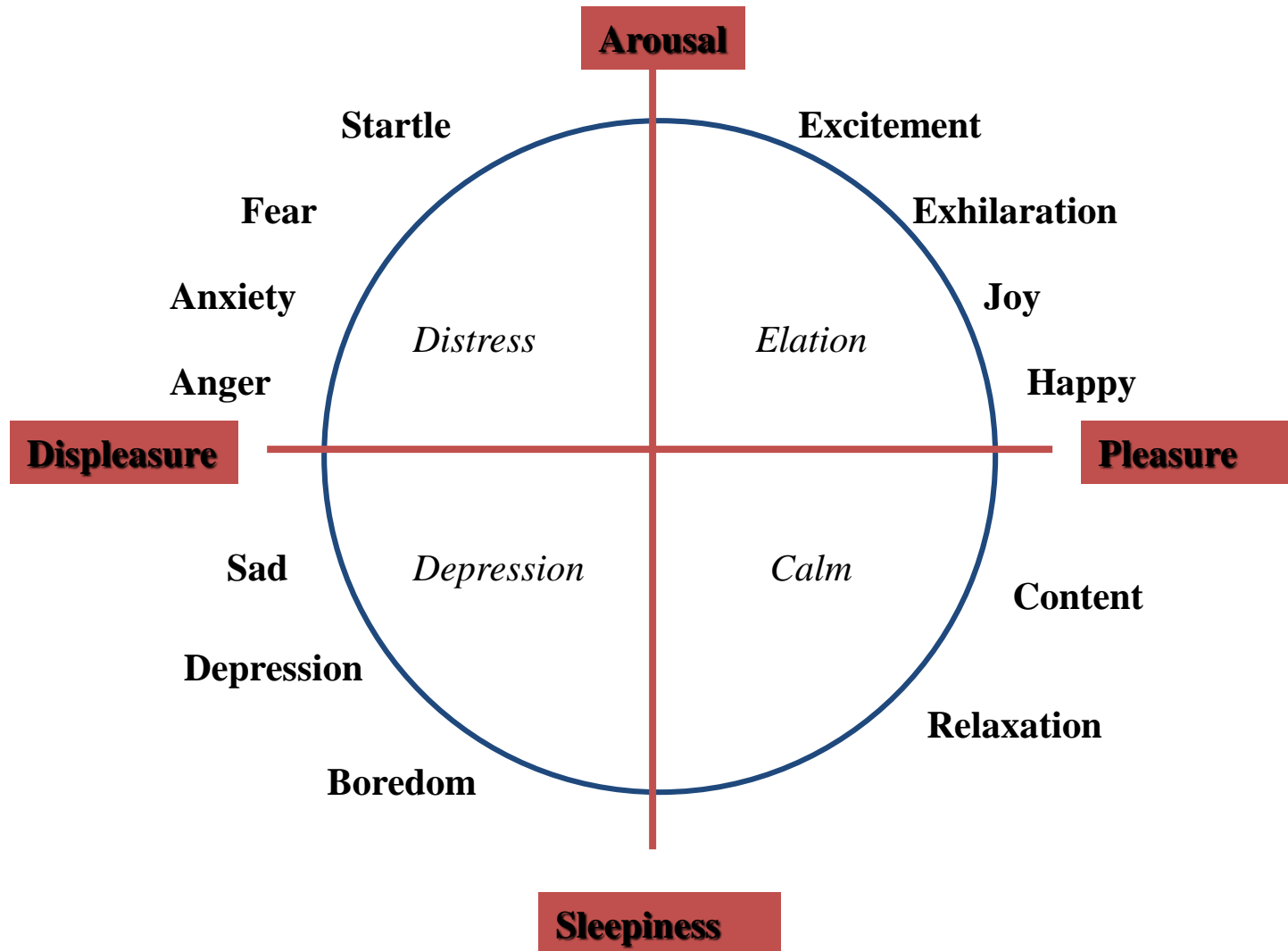
It was like being a professional.  
I was doing a job.  
I was acting like a criminal.  
It seemed routine.  
I found that I knew what I was doing.

## **Victim**

It was like being a victim.  
I was doing it because I had to.  
I was acting like I was not part of it.  
It seemed like the only thing to do.  
I found that I did not care.

# Circumplex of Emotions

(James A Russell 1997)



# Sample of 78 Offenders

Background Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age at interview (yrs)	19 - 58	32.68	9.44
No. years since crime (yrs)	1 - 23	3.68	4.05
Age at 1st conviction (yrs)	8 - 47	17.5	7.36
No. previous convictions	0 - 100	12	15.33
No. years secondary ed. (yrs)	0 - 11	4.24	2.1

Carried out by Caroline Cross and Richard Murray

# Crimes Convicted of

Robbery

Murder

Drug supplying

GBH/ABH

Burglary

Rape

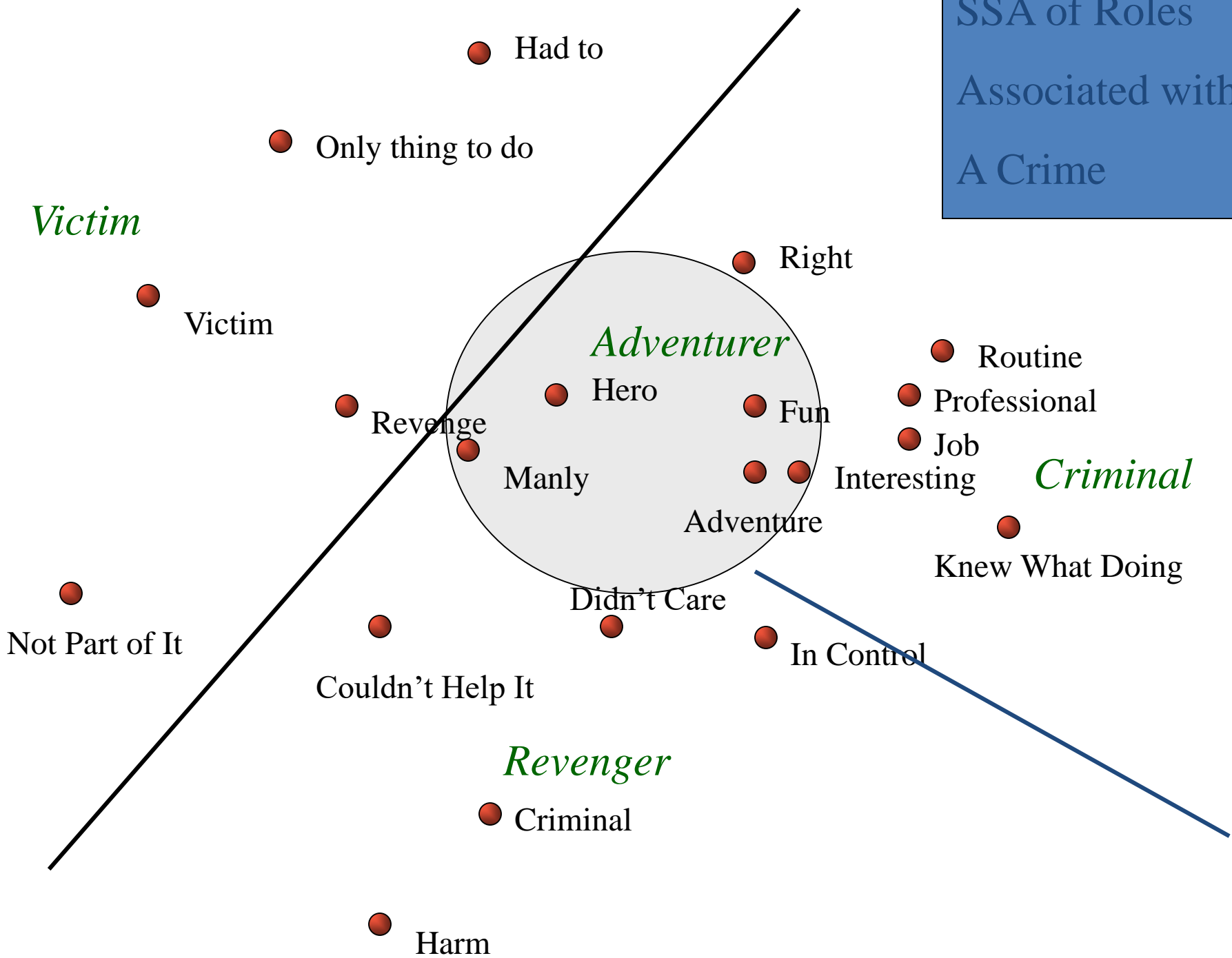
Fraud

Theft

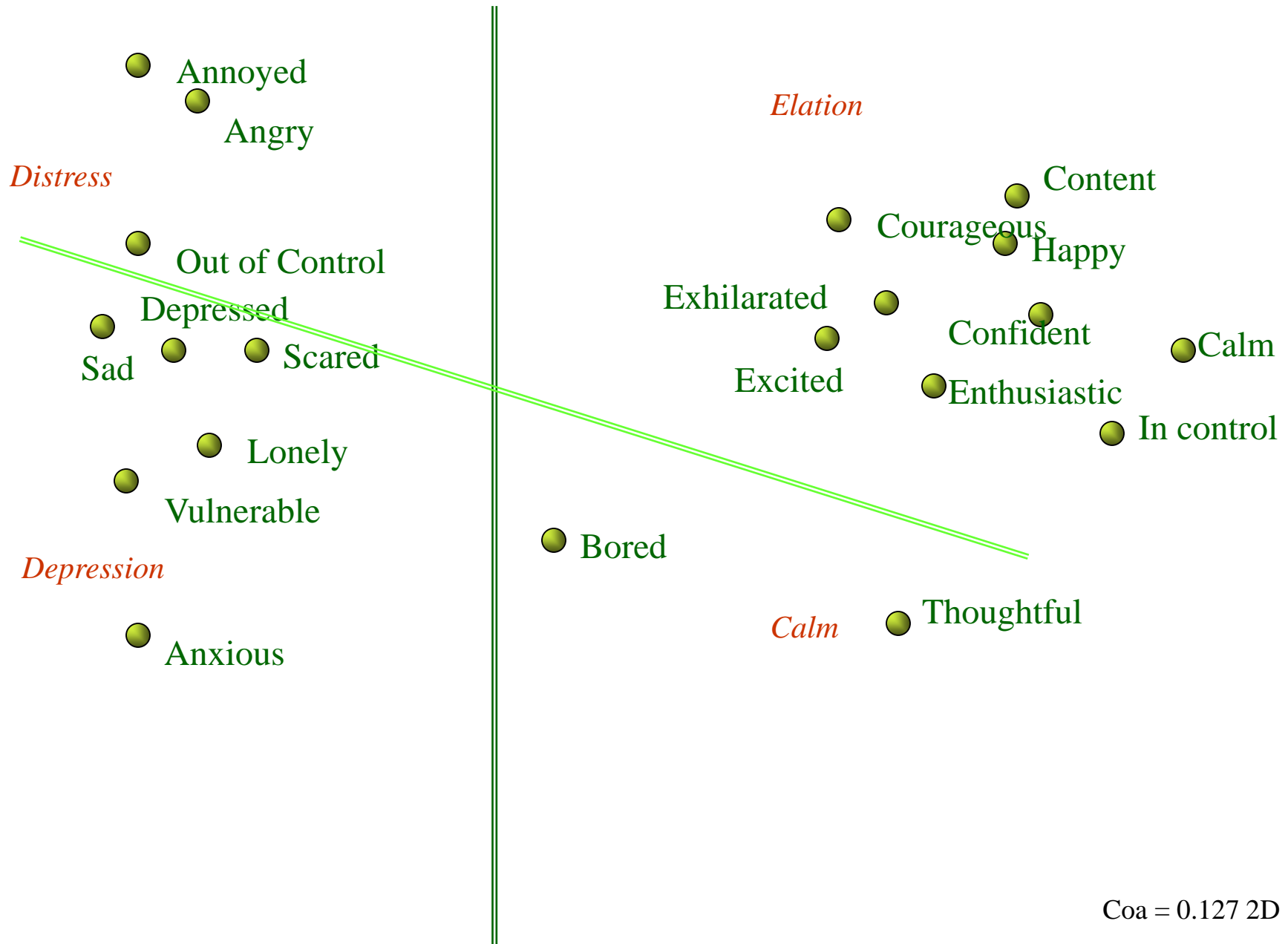
Driving offences

Arson

SSA of Roles  
Associated with  
A Crime

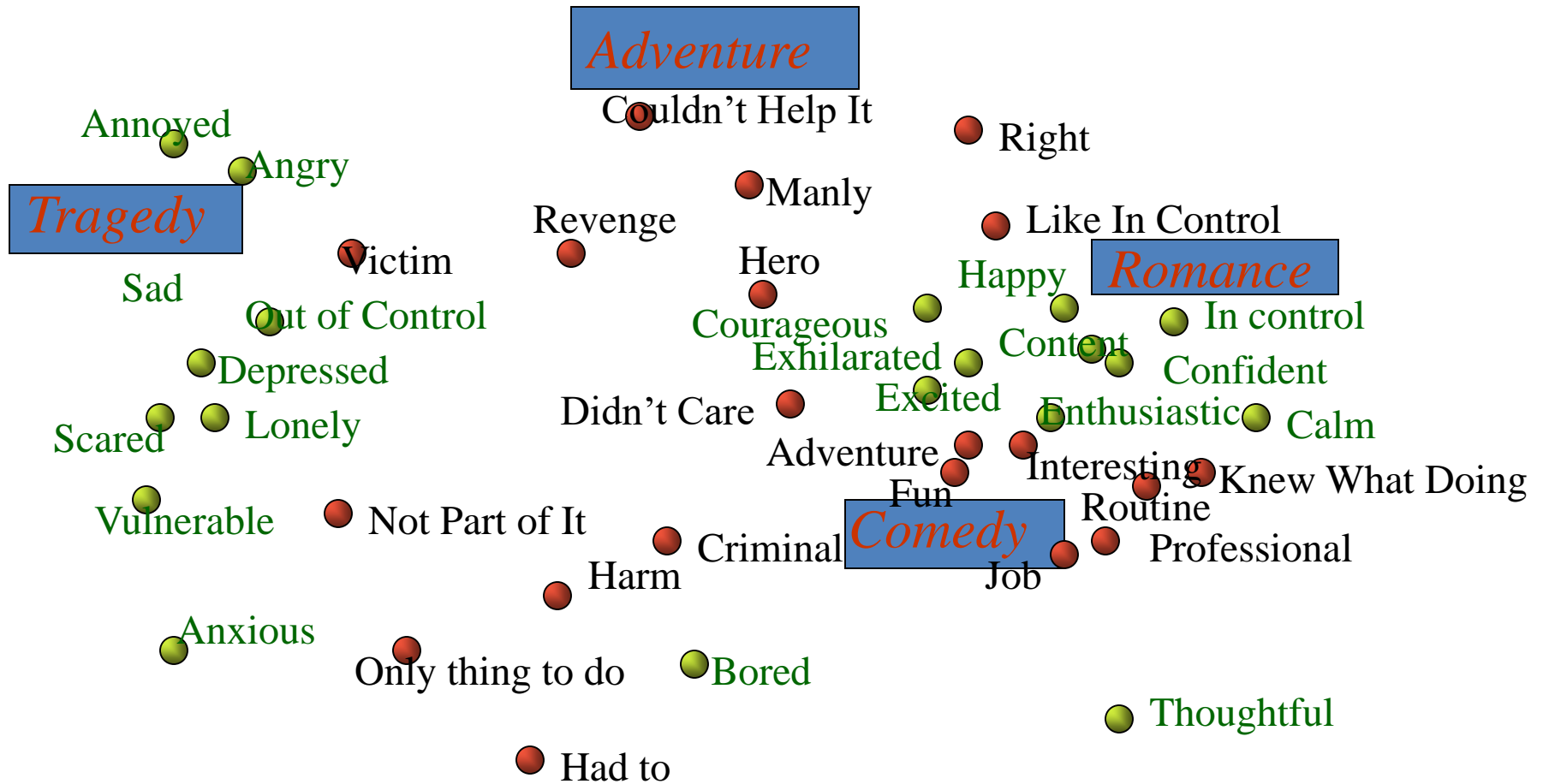


# SSA of Emotions Experienced by 78 Offenders During a Crime



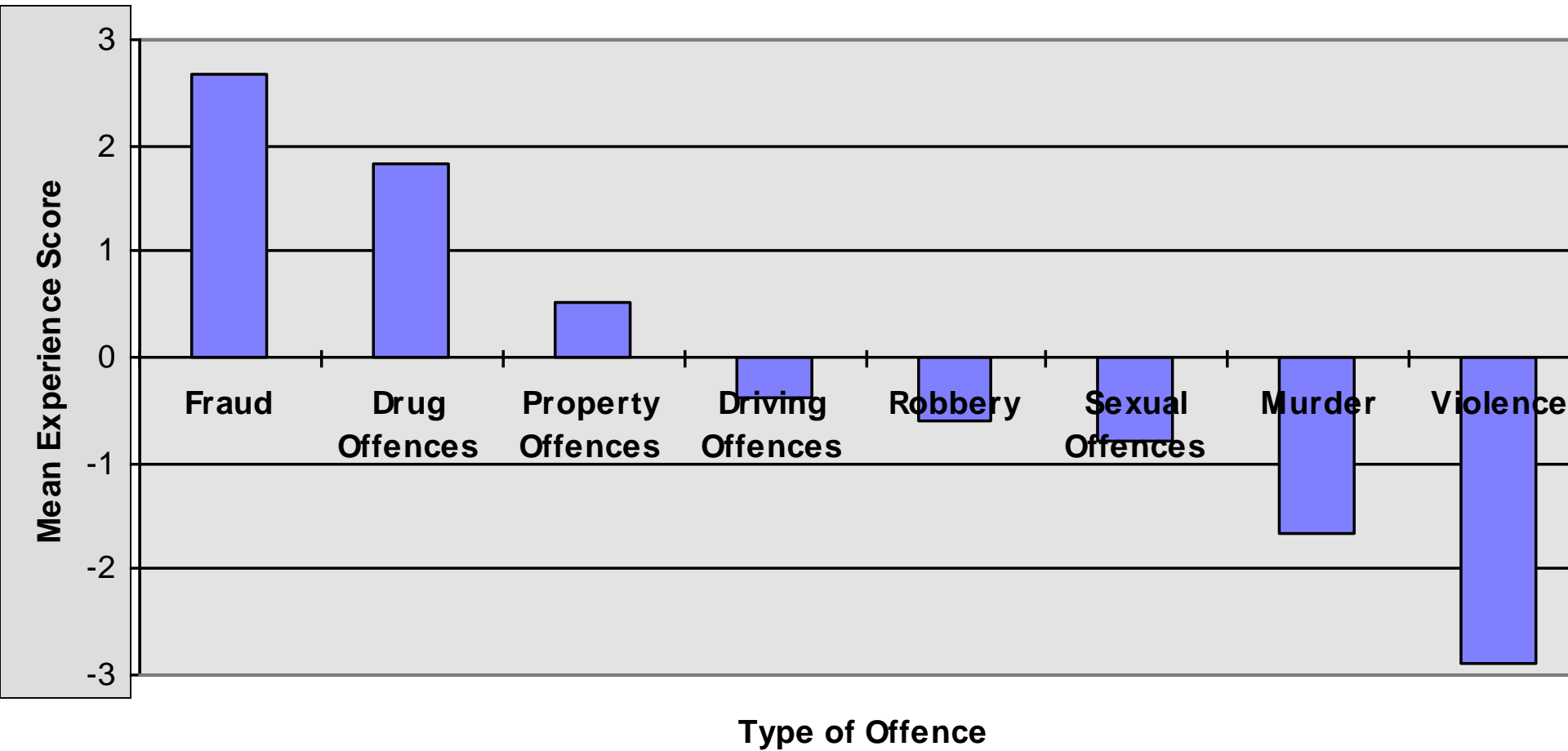


# Roles and Emotions



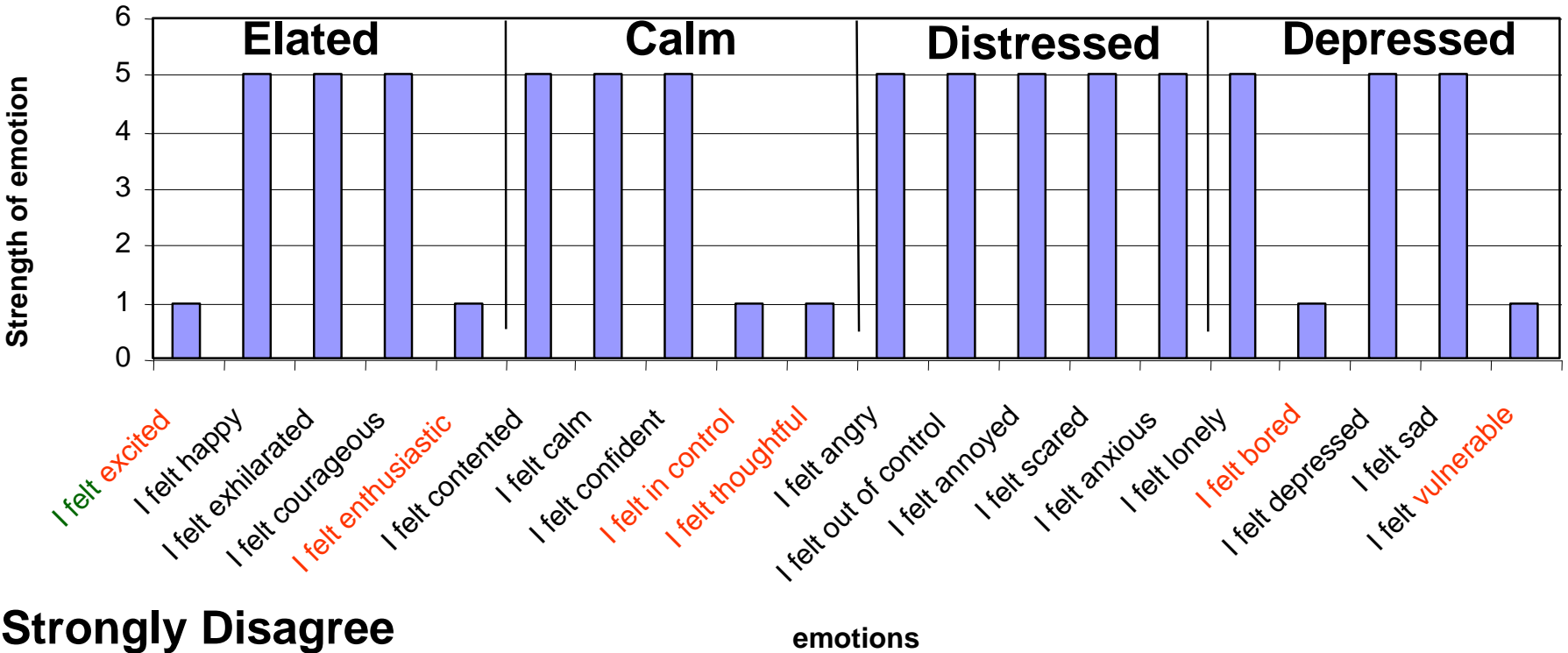
● Roles    ● Emotions

## Mean Experience Score for each Offence Type



# Case study of emotions of the 'Torture Wife'

Strongly agree

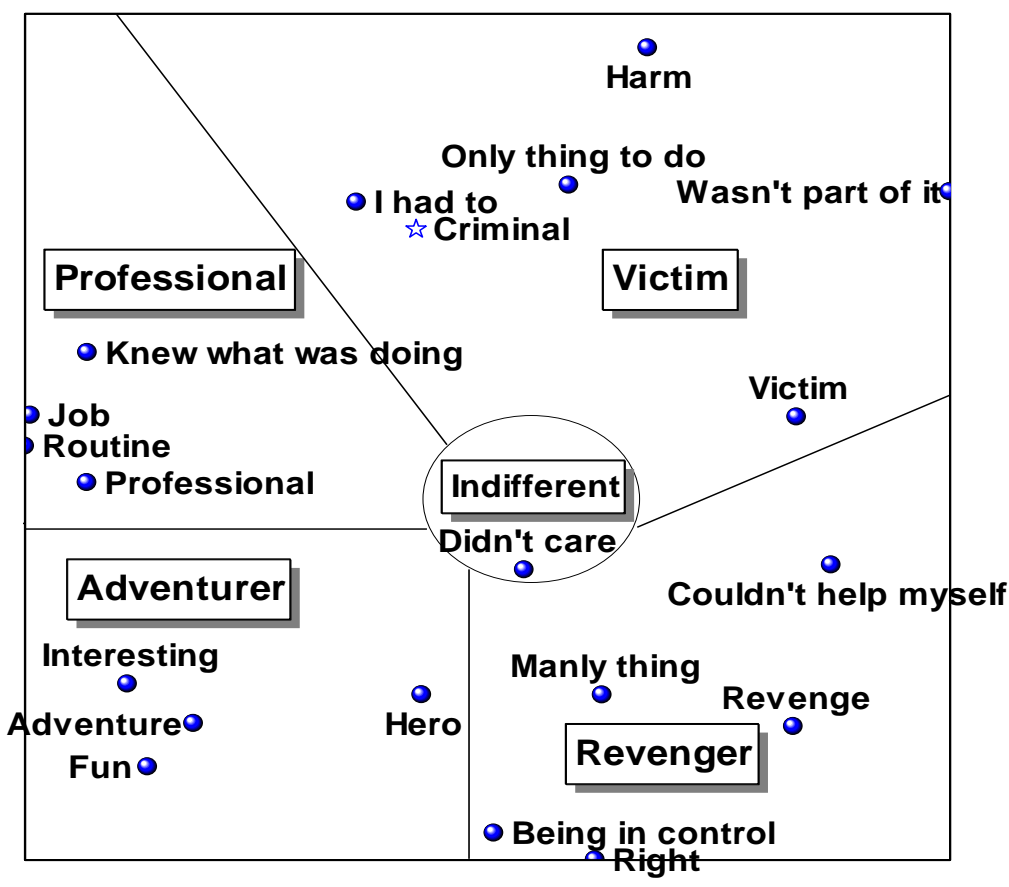


Strongly Disagree

# Total 161 offenders (aged 16 – 77 years)

Type of offence	No. of offenders	Type of offence	No. of offenders
Burglary	23	Indecent exposure	2
Robbery	30	Affray	1
Drugs offences	21	Arson	3
Indecent assault	7	Assist move body	1
Murder	20	Attempted rape	1
Rape	10	GBH	1
Assault	4	Kidnapping	1
Fraud	10	Manslaughter	1
ABH	3	Firearms possession	1
Violence	9	UTMV	2
Theft	5	Driving offences	5

# Role statements



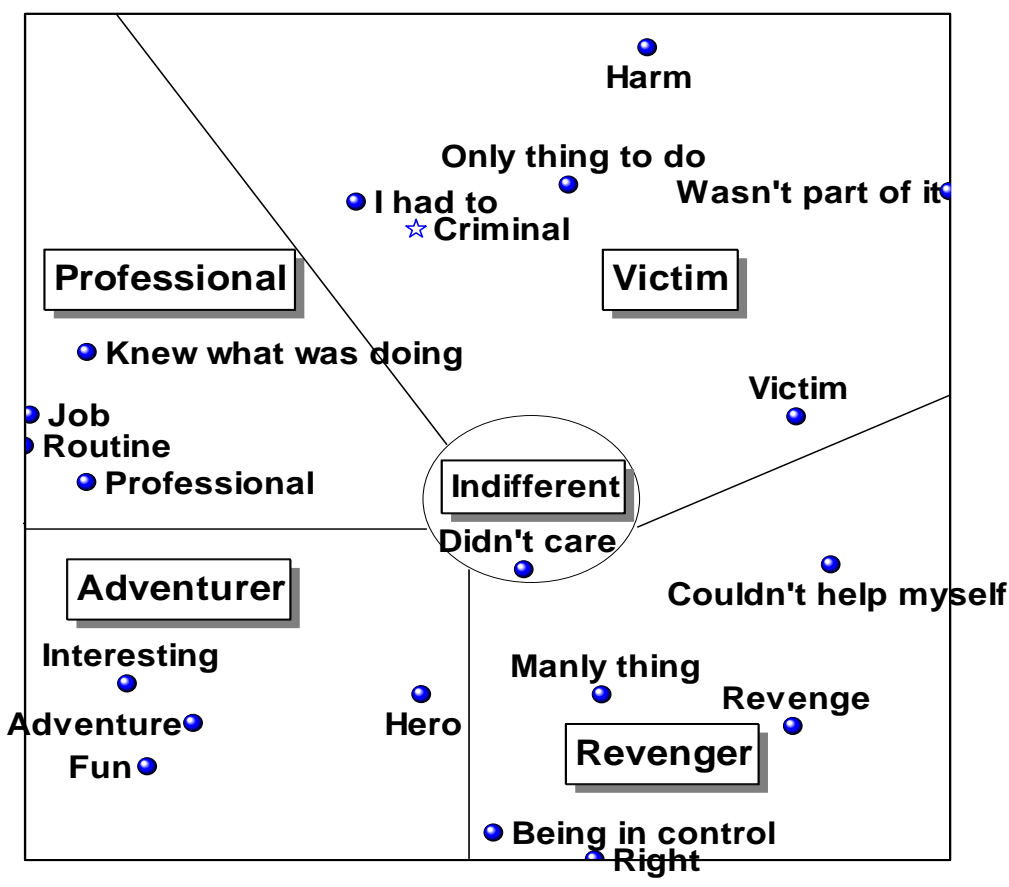
# Adventurer

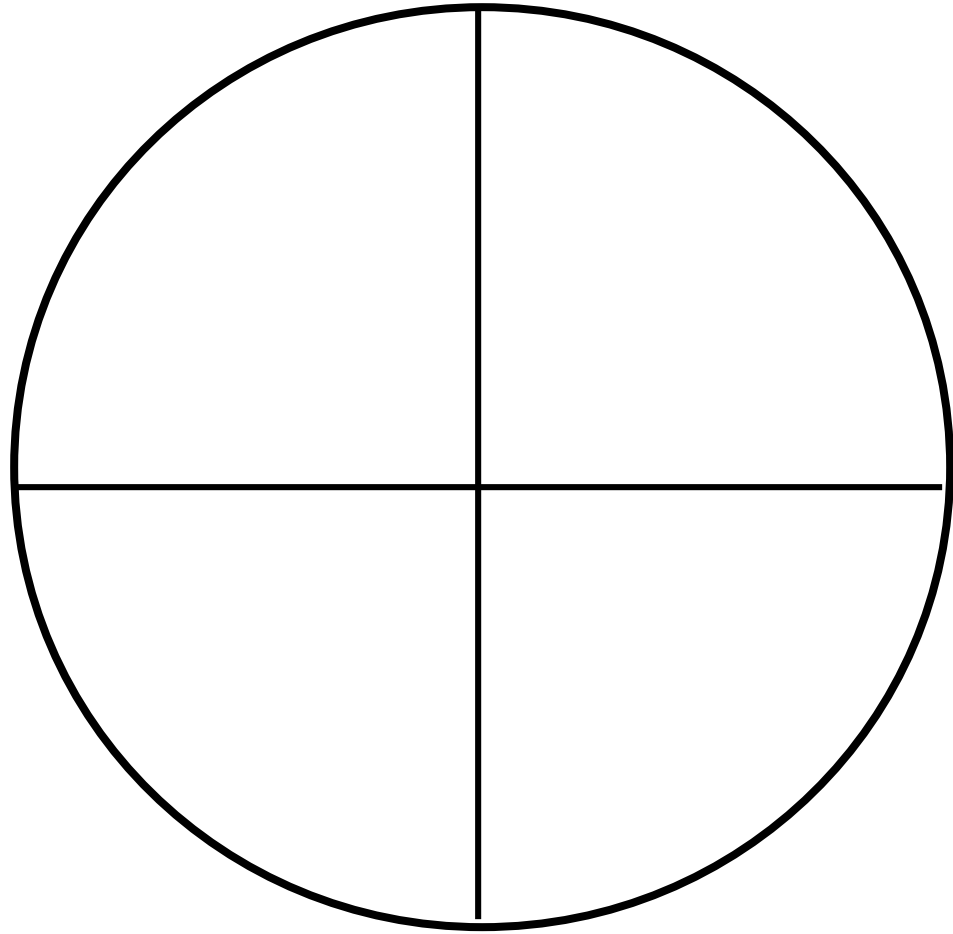
Revenger



Victim

Professional





# Justifications of Violence

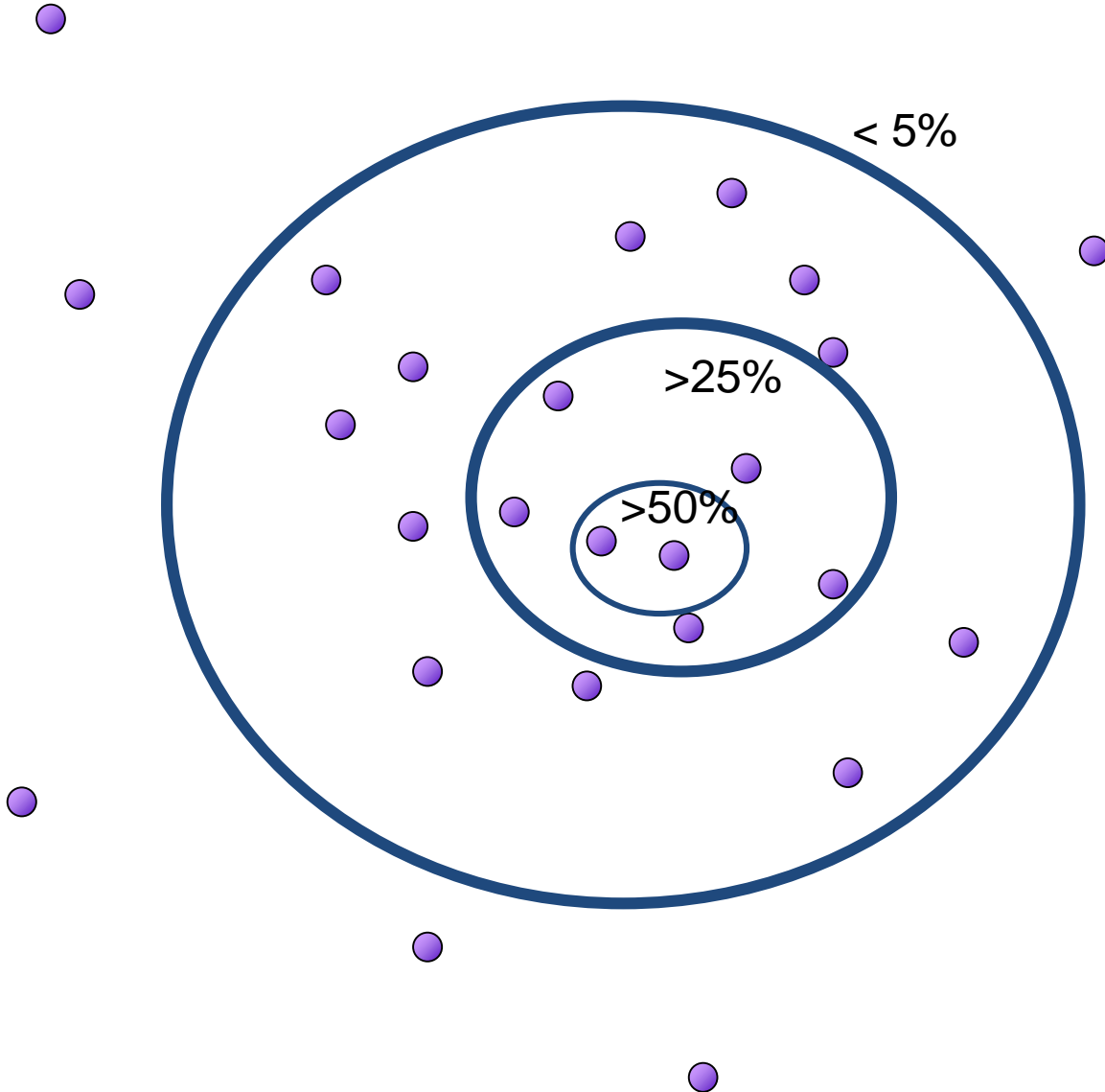
# Accounts of Violence (Barrett 2001)



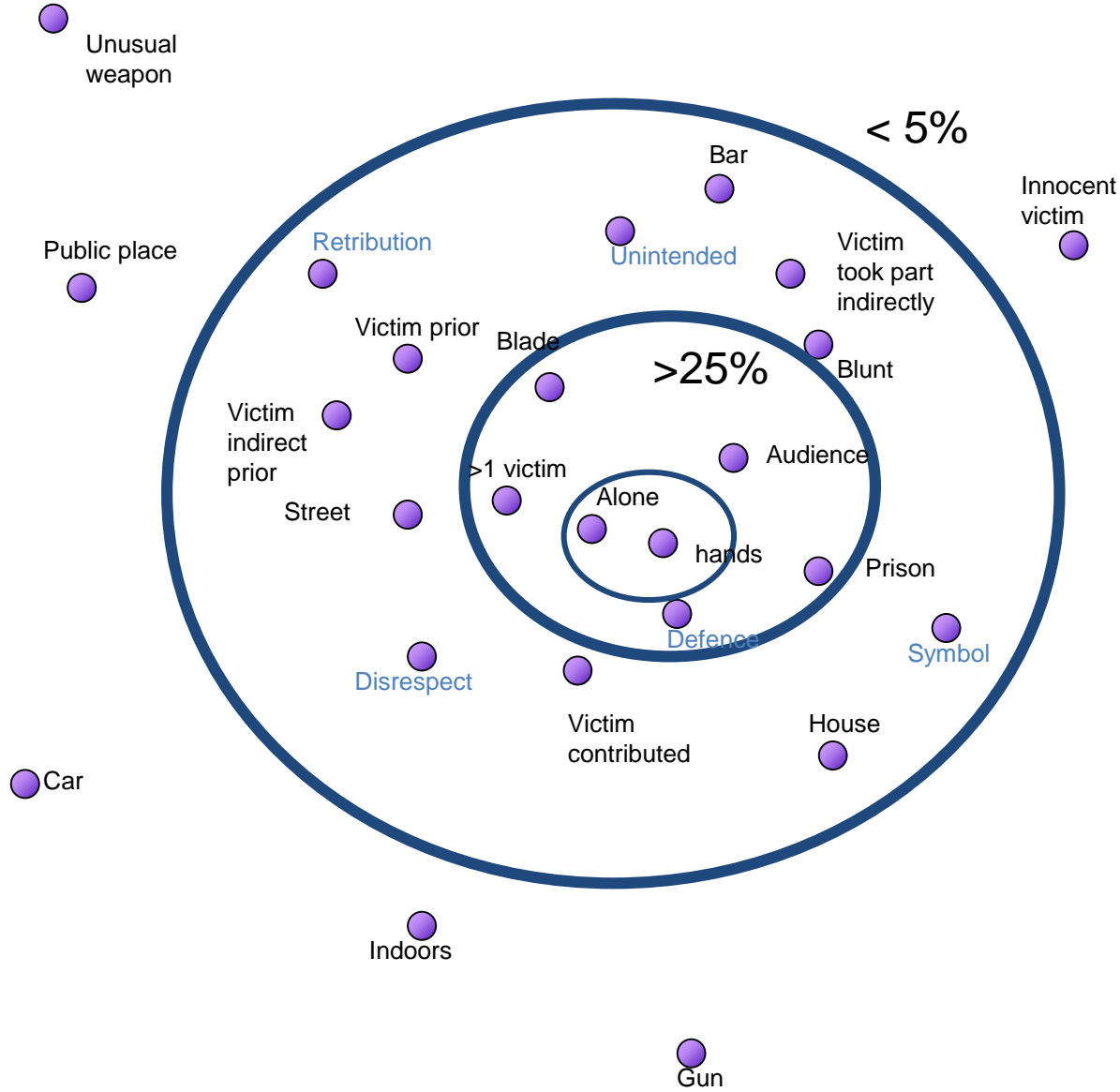
104 violent incidents  
drawn from 4 criminal  
autobiographies

2 D SSA coa = 0.23

# Accounts of Violence (Barrett 2001)

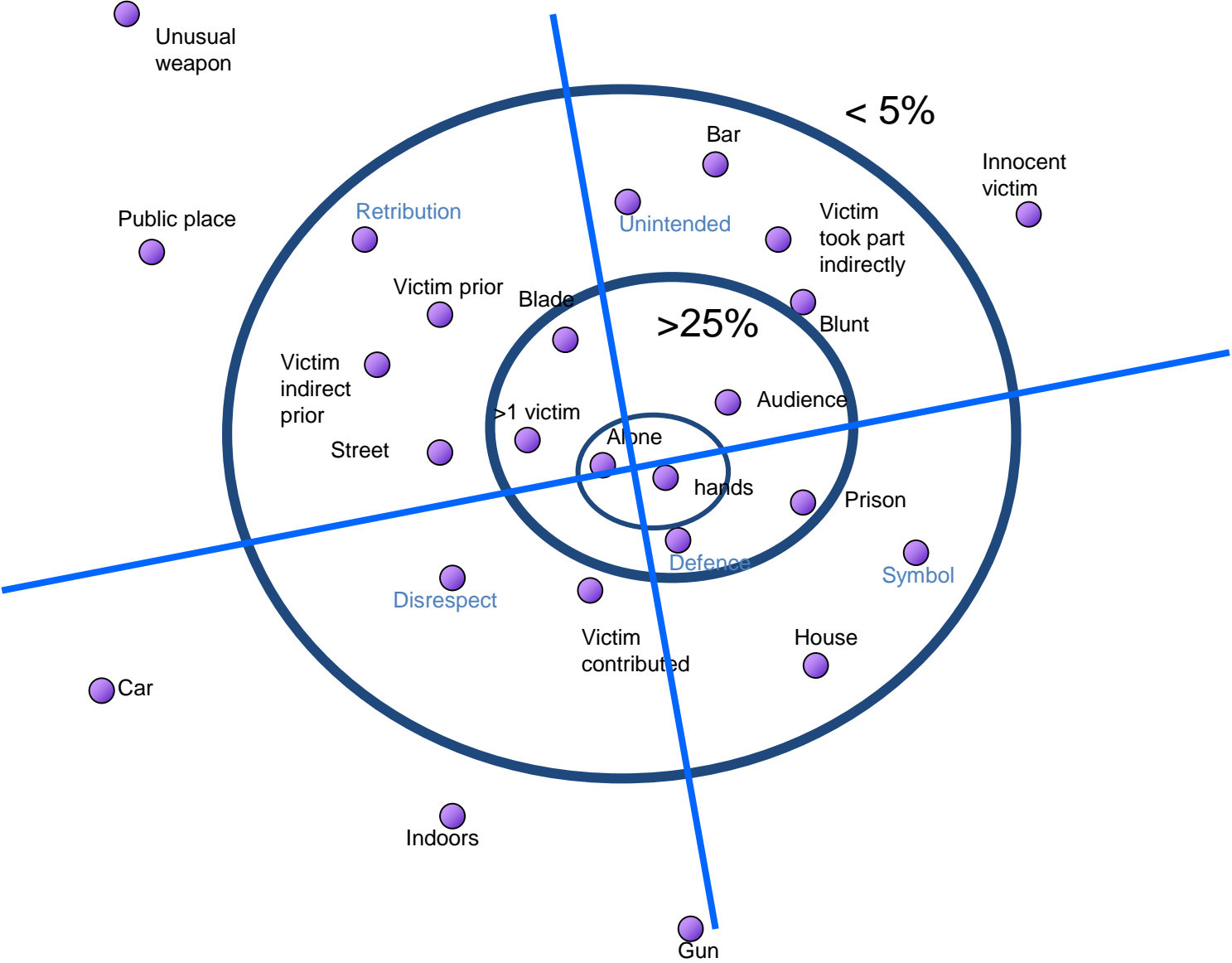


# Accounts of Violence (Barrett 2001)





# Accounts of Violence (Barrett 2001)



# Some Questions