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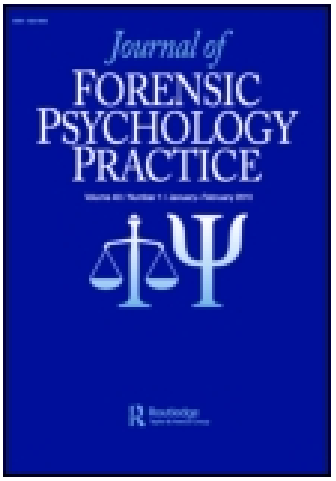

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Criminal Narratives of Mentally Disordered Offenders: An Exploratory Study

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Criminal Narratives of Mentally Disordered Offenders: An Exploratory Study

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The study explored the personal narratives of Mentally Disordered Offenders (MDOs) and the impact various mental disorders had on the structure of the offenders' criminal narratives. Seventy adult male offenders who were sectioned under the United Kingdom's Mental Health Act 2007 were recruited for the study. Participants were provided with a 36 item Criminal Narrative Role Questionnaire. Smallest Space Analysis found four criminal narrative themes (Victim, Revenger, Hero, Professional), which indicated clear distinctions in the narrative experience of MDOs. The major differences were found to be related to the vulnerability of the offender's mental disorder.

KEYWORDS criminal narratives, mentally disordered offenders (MDOs), investigative psychology

INTRODUCTION

The Mental Health Act (MHA) 2007 is the law in England and Wales that provides a framework for the requirement and treatment of Mentally Disordered

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Offenders (MDOs), with the main criteria being that the individual has a mental disorder and is a risk to others or themselves. Section 1(2) of the MHA defines mental disorder as *"any disorder or disability of the mind."* This includes: personality disorders; eating disorders; autistic spectrum disorders; mental illnesses such as depression; bipolar disorder and schizophrenia; and learning disabilities. Mental disorders can result in a number of impairments for an individual, including; poor social skills (Melamed, 2010); deficits in appropriate problem solving, coping mechanisms, and emotional impairments' (e.g., Blair, 2005; Tremeau, 2006), such as shallow affect (Hare, 1993); lack of empathy, guilt, and remorse (Mullen, 2006). Numerous studies have further documented that these impairments create a considerable burden on the functioning and quality of life of individuals with mental disorders (e.g., Andrews, Henderson, & Hall, 2001; Bijl, & Ravelli, 2000; Paykel, Abbott, Jenkins, Brugha, & Meltzer, 2000). It is, therefore, government policy in the United Kingdom that, wherever possible, mentally disordered persons should receive care and treatment from the health and social services. This policy extends to mentally disordered people who commit a criminal offense, whereby these offenders should be taken into the health system rather than the penal system in the best interests of the said individual and the public (Home Office Circular 66/90, 1990).

Although in the United Kingdom MDOs cannot be sentenced for their crimes via imprisonment, they can be subjected to compulsory admission to and treatment at secure hospitals. The majority of MDO's are therefore detained under the MHA 2007 within secure hospitals, which implement specialized treatment services that emphasize best welfare, and contribute to the prevention of recidivism while improving the offenders' mental health (Bal & Koenraadt, 2000). This process subsequently diverts MDOs from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to services where their mental health needs can be adequately addressed. Forensic mental health services, therefore, focus on stabilizing the mental disorder, enhance independent functioning and support the MDO in developing and maintaining internal and external controls to address offending behavior (Lamb, Weinberger, & Gross, 1999). This "recovery" approach differentiates from the historical and current approach to offenders within the CJS. As Knight and Stephens (2009) explained, prison "culture" is based on the principles of punishment and security; this culture conflicts with the health service's emphasis on welfare and recovery. Thus, although both establishments are designed to exert maximum control over offender's lives, secure hospitals emphasize the treatment of an offender's mental disorder to aid in the prevention of future crimes, whereas the prison environment attempts to deter criminals from future offending through the punishment of being removed from society.

It can therefore be suggested that these drastically different approaches across environments delineate the distinct variations between offenders with mental disorders and those without. Although there has been ample research

exploring the association of mental disorder and crime (e.g., Gosden et al., 2006; Montanes-Rada, Ramirez, & Taracena, 2006; Soyka, Graz, Bottlender, Dirschedi, & Schoech, 2007; Wallace et al., 1998), along with the process (e.g., Laing, 1999; Staite, 1994) and treatment of offenders with mental disorders (e.g., Knight & Stephens, 2009; Peay, 2007), there has been minimal exploration into the impact mental disorders have on offenders narrative experience of their crimes. Personal narratives provide cognitive and emotional significance to experiences; they are a means of creating mental states that provide existential significance to actions and events (Roberts, 2000). Mental disorders cause dysfunction to an individual's mental state (Stein, 2013) and thereby affect an individual's perception and construction of a personal narrative. Accordingly, considering the impact that a mental disorder may have on an offender's perception of crime is potentially vital in understanding how these offenders perceive their crimes and, subsequently, how to help these offenders understand their actions as a function of their mental disorder.

Narrative Theory

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). These "narratives" comprise an individual's unique sequence of events, their mental states, and their experiences involving human beings as characters or actors (Bruner, 1990). As such, the stories that people combine to make sense of their lives are fundamentally about their struggle to reconcile who they imagine they were, are, and might be within the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture (McAdams, 1985, 1996). Accordingly, stories are not only some of the most natural ways people describe almost everything that happens in their lives (Booker, 2005), but they also provide insight into how individuals interpret the events of their lives. For example, although Smith (2005) was referring to the mechanics of war when contending that stories have less to do with the realist struggles for resources and interests and more to do with interpretations held by the protagonists, these central concepts can be said true for any individual. We can all have vastly different understandings of life events based on how we each individually identify the relevant protagonists and antagonists, objects of struggle, and key events, these personal interpretations form the narratives of our lives.

Many leading narrative psychologists (e.g., McAdams, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988) have argued, however, that there are limitations to the range of possible structures for every life story that is told (Canter & Youngs, 2009) and that there are relatively few compelling ways of telling a story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Correspondingly, McAdams argued

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that life stories can be conceptualized by one of four archetypal story forms. Similarly, Smith (2005) contended that all war discourses display similar patterns that can be categorized into one of four narrative structures (mundane, tragic, romantic, or apocalyptic). The origins of both these proposed story structures were developed from Frye's (1957) "Theory of Mythoi."

Frye (1957) suggested a classification system for a number of classic stories ranging from ancient times to modern day; with the origins of these classifications derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*. As such, Frye stated that all stories take one of four dominant forms that he called mythic archetypes' including: "comedy," "romance," "tragedy," and "irony." Frye proposed that each story is viewed as either a hybrid of two or more of each of the archetypes, or as a pure manifestation of a single archetype. This categorization system is a representation of "ethos" and relates to how the protagonist is portrayed in respect to the rest of humanity and the protagonist's environment. Although these four dominant forms developed separately, Frye (1957) argued that each were also related to the other and proposed that the primary structure of the narrative process is "cyclical movement." Frye further suggested that classical civilizations progressed through the development of these modes and that similar progression also occurred within Western civilization during medieval and modern times. From this argument Frye (1957) developed the "Theory of Mythoi," which highlighted the fundamental form of the narrative process being cyclical movement.

That being said, Frye's (1957) narrative labels (comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony) have been slightly revised over the years to accommodate the dynamic changes of society. Examples of these dynamic changes can be shown by theorists such as Smith (2005), who extended Frye's classic narrative labels to the stories of war. More specifically, associating the romance and tragedy stories with classic war stories, while transforming the comedy story into a low-mimic structure which emphasizes the protagonist's integration into society and a journey that seeks the simple pleasures of ordinary life, and suggesting that the irony story can be illustrated through the apocalyptic nature of the War in Iraq and its impending global doom.

While Frye's Theory of Mythoi (1957) is over 50 years old, it still remains one of the most influential advocates of literary criticism. The success of pioneering research in the area of narratives and stories has led many theorists to explore beyond the objective truth of an event and, instead, to investigate an individual's subjective accounts of an event, resulting in a thorough understanding of an individual's beliefs, roles, and motivated choices regarding which details to emphasize (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). More recently, theorists have started utilizing the major formulations of the archetypal forms Frye proposed to explore criminal activity and offenders' personal narratives of their crime.

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Criminal Narratives

The narrative approach has recently contributed to the developed understanding of criminality as it helps to bridge the gap between the disciplines of psychology and law (Canter, 2008). In particular, the law seeks to identify the narrative that explains how a crime occurred, whereby offenders are viewed as active agents in their own actions. In contrast, social and behavioral sciences seek to understand the external forces, such as genetics, neurological, hormonal factors, and upbringing or social pressures, which gives rise to criminal actions, whereby offenders are viewed as passive agents within their actions (Canter, 2010). Consequently, Canter (1994) was the first to propose the implementation of the personal narrative approach within criminality to emphasize offenders as active agents in their crimes, thereby connecting with legal explorations of "motive" (Polkinghorne, 1988) and, subsequently, provide shape and significance to criminal actions (Canter, 1994).

Although most traditional criminological perspectives contend that offenders interpretation of events hold little importance to understanding the actual crime (Presser, 2012), the narrative approach seeks to explain crime as a function of the stories that the offenders interpret from their actions (Presser, 2009). This theoretical premise is based on the understanding that people's circumstances are shaped by their views and what is happening in their lives (Presser, 2012). As such, understanding what takes place in the foreground of offending and how the perpetrator interprets their crimes is instrumental (Ferrell, 1999), especially in explaining the changing dynamic features of a criminal's life (Maruna, 2001). For example, using the narrative approach, Presser (2012) illustrated the power narrative identity and how the role offenders take on within their lives becomes central to their criminal actions.

The challenge this emerging framework is confronted with is conceptualizing the notion of a criminal's personal narrative. Similar to the notion of a limited number of ways to conceptualize a narrative in the general population (e.g., McAdams, 1985; Polkinghorne 1988), Canter (1994) argued that offenders are a specific subset of the general population and their particular narratives are limited by the specific themes that underlie them. Therefore, in any criminal context, there will be a dominate role the criminal will take that relates directly to their overall narrative.

Canter, Kaouri, and Ioannou (2003) were the first to explore Canter's (1994) initial hypothesis that criminals may see their crimes in terms of certain narratives. They proposed that characterizing something as complex as a personal narrative could be achieved through the exploration of the "roles" offenders think they play during the commission of a crime. Predominantly arguing that within every unfolding story lay certain roles that act as summaries to more complex processes (e.g., an offender's perception of themselves within a particular role therefore affects the way a narrative

unfolds). Their results found that the roles played by criminals could be categorized into four distinct themes that supported a circular order of criminal roles.

Following Canter et al.'s (2003) investigation into characterizing criminal narratives through a sequence of questionnaire responses and open-ended interviews, Canter, Ioannou, and Youngs (2009) carried out a study to establish the potential for exploring the roles which offenders assign themselves during the commission of a crime. Specifically, the study developed a questionnaire exploring the role which offenders saw themselves as acting out during a crime. This questionnaire was created based on different role statements that were generated through information collected during previous interviews with offenders (Canter et al, 2003). The results of this study found four distinct patterns that offenders fell into, which correlated to four separate roles that the offenders believed themselves to play, including: irony (the victim); adventure (the professional); quest (the hero), and tragedy (the revenger). The structures of these roles were significantly related to Frye's (1957) mythoi (i.e., romance, comedy, irony, and tragedy). As such, these results illustrated a sequential structure within criminal narratives and contributed to the further understanding of criminal narratives in relation to motivation and behavior. These results also complemented Presser's (2009) notion that an offender's narrative is an immediate antecedent of offending, suggesting that narratives have a direct impact on the instigation of criminal action.

Recently, using case study interviews, Youngs and Canter (2011) extended the criminal narrative research further by articulating a more in depth understanding of the four thematic narrative roles (hero, professional, victim, and revenger) believed to be active within offenders during their criminal events. The case studies presented by Youngs and Canter allowed for direct descriptions of offender's experiences, thereby providing a more tangible conceptualization of the proposed narrative roles and creating the *Criminal Narrative Framework*. Continuing from Youngs and Canter's research, Canter and Youngs (2012) further discussed the development of the *Criminal Narrative Framework*, with particular emphasis on the importance of qualitative narrative accounts of an offenders narrative in order to enhance understanding of the more complex processes underlying the four narrative roles.

Aims of the Present Study

While the research on criminal narratives and the *Criminal Narrative Framework* continues to expand within the general offending population, insight into the narratives of MDOs has yet to be empirically explored. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the personal narratives of

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MDOs through implementing the criminal narrative framework, with it proposed that although resulting narrative roles will be conceptually similar to previous research (e.g., Canter et al., 2009), they will differ pragmatically due to the specific nature of the offending population (e.g., mentally disordered offenders).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from two Medium Secure Units (MSUs) and a residential forensic hostel that worked in partnership with the forensic mental health services in South London. The inclusion criteria for participants to engage in the study included individuals who were: adult males, aged 18 years or older; not appealing their conviction and with no other pending legal issues; mentally stable; fluent in the English language; willing to discuss an identified offense, and had been convicted (in the past or currently). Within the MSUs 69 (69%) individuals met the basic inclusion criteria, of which, 19 (27%) declined to partake in the study. Within the forensic residential hostel 46 (90%) individuals met the basic inclusion criteria, of which, 26 (56%) declined to take part in the study. In total, 70 adult male offenders, who had been convicted of an offense and were either currently residing in a MSU ($n = 50$), or a residential forensic hostel ($n = 20$), were recruited for the current study.

The participant's ages ranged from 20 to 66 ($M = 38.6$, $SD = 10.7$), with a variety of ethnicities including: Black British (38.6%); White British (38.6%); Black African (12.3%); Black Caribbean (8.6%); and Asian (2.9%). A large portion of the sample reported being single (75.7%); 13.9% reported being divorced; 7.1% were separated; and 3.3% were married. Participants also had a range of mental health problems, with a mean age of onset of 26.42 ($SD = 9.11$, range = 15–49). Participants' index offense convictions included sexual offenses 25% (e.g., rape, sexual assault), violent offenses 57% (e.g., murder, manslaughter), and acquisitive offending 18% other offenses (e.g., theft, drug offenses, burglaries, etc.).

All participants were diagnosed with either an Axis I - clinical syndrome ($n = 31$), Axis II - developmental disorders and personality disorders ($n = 19$), or undergoing current assessment for formal diagnosis ($n = 20$).

Procedure

Data was collected by a PhD student researcher from two MSUs, of which 50 participants were recruited, and a forensic hostel that worked in partnership with forensic mental health services, of which 20 participants were recruited. A randomized sampling approach was implemented within

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the recruitment of participants as the researcher presented staff at the MSUs and forensic hostel with the inclusion criteria for the study, upon which, staff identified potential participants for the study. The researcher was not involved in the selection of potential participants; this was to ensure that the sample was not biased by the preferences of the researcher or by the sample itself. Following identification of potential participants (those who met the inclusion criteria), identified staff members provided these individuals with an information sheet which informed them of the following: the purpose of the study; what would happen if they took part; what would happen if they changed their mind; what would happen with the information they gave and the importance of the research. Participants willing to engage in the research approached staff members about the research, who then introduced the researcher to the participant. The researcher subsequently asked all participants to read and sign a consent form, at which point they were also allocated a participant number to ensure anonymity. Upon signing the consent form, the participants were asked to complete the *Demographic Questionnaire* and the *Criminal Narrative Role Questionnaire*. The researcher was present for the duration of each participant's completion of the allocated psychometrics in order to assist with any reading, literacy or comprehension difficulties. Both questionnaires took approximately 30–60 minutes to complete, after which participants were debriefed verbally and thanked for their assistance with the research.

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Measures

The *Demographic Questionnaire* was a sixty-four item document which asked questions regarding: the participants' personal details (e.g., "current age," "marital status," "where were you living at the time of the offense?," etc.); offending history (e.g., "number of prior convictions," "age of first conviction," "number of times in prison/hospital," etc.); index offense details (e.g., "date of offense," "sentence length," "where did the offense occur?," etc.); and victim details (e.g., "number of victim(s)," "gender of victim(s)," "injury to victim(s)," etc.). Information provided by the participant was also cross referenced with their clinical records to verify accuracy.

The *Criminal Narrative Role Questionnaire* (Canter et al., 2009) is a 36-item measure designed to represent the type of role an offender saw themselves enacting during the commission of their offense. The role statements were developed through the researcher's qualitative study (Canter et al., 2003, 2009) considering Frye's archetypal mythoi (1957) and McAdams (1985) narrative theory. The questionnaire is based on four themes, which correlate to four different narrative roles: irony (the victim), adventure (the professional), quest (the hero), and tragedy (the revenger). Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (not at all = 1, just a little = 2, some = 3, a lot = 4, very much = 5).

Data Analysis

The technique used to explore the themes that emerged from participants responses to the *Criminal Narrative Role Questionnaire* was Smallest Space Analysis (SSA; Guttman, 1968). This specific method was chosen to examine the association and relationship of criminal narratives within MDOs. More specifically, SSA examines the association between every variable in relation to each other and displays the correlations between variables as distances in a statistically derived geometric space. Therefore, this type of analysis would enable visual exploration of whether individual items for each of the proposed roles were highly correlated. If they were, they would be configured as points closer together within the SSA and, thus, supporting evidence for distinct themes of criminal narratives.

RESULTS

SSA was carried out on the 36 items of the *Criminal Narrative Role Questionnaire* across 70 cases in order to identify the criminal narrative patterns associated with MDOs. The resulting analysis showed a coefficient of alienation of 0.22, indicating an adequate fit for this data. Each point in the SSA plot (see Figure 1) is a role statement which an offender saw themselves playing during the commission of their offense, with the variable labels in the diagram being brief summaries of each of the 36 role statements; full descriptions of these role statements are presented in Table 1. The closer any two points are together, the more likely it is that the role statements will co-occur in similar narrative themes; whereas, the further apart any two points are, the less likely they are to co-occur in similar narrative themes.

Structure of Narrative Roles

The SSA configuration was examined to investigate the regional hypothesis that narrative role statements that have a common theme will be found in the same region of the SSA space. Examination of all 36 items within the configuration in Figure 1 led to the conclusion that distinct themes could be identified. The next step in exploring the structure of the SSA was to investigate the initial hypothesis that narrative roles could be split into regions corresponding to the facets suggested in previous research (Canter et al., 2003, 2009). Four narrative roles were evident through the visual examination of the plot. These four regions were labelled *Victim, Professional, Hero,* and *Revenger*. Although these themes were conceptually similar to Canter et al.'s (2009) study, there were clear distinctions within the displayed findings (discussed in the following section).

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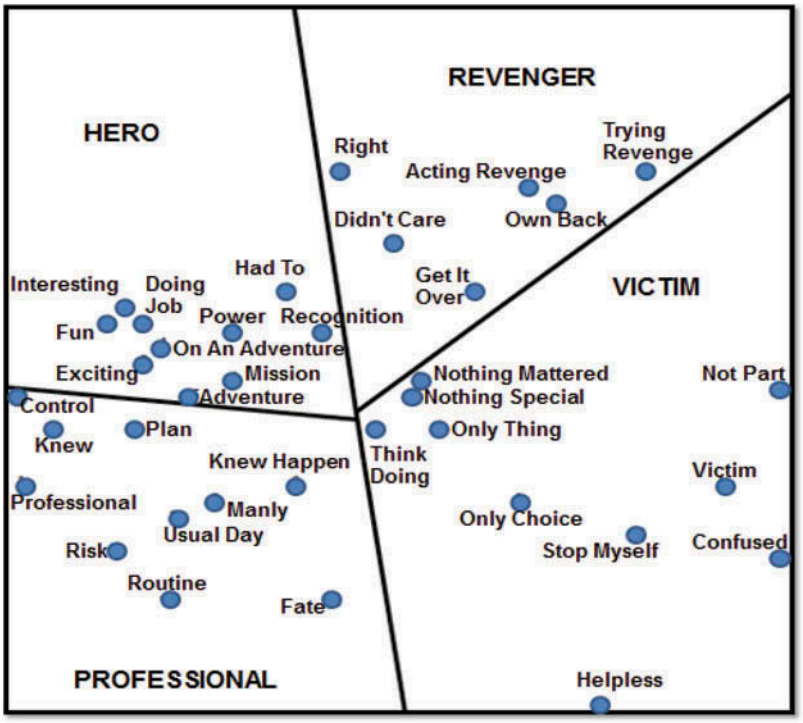

FIGURE 1 SSA-I of 36 narrative roles with set interpretation regions ($N = 70$). Two-dimensional Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) of narrative roles with regional interpretation. *Coefficient of Alienation = 0.2245*. Variable labels are brief summaries of full questions.

A scale reliability analysis, using Cronbach's alpha, was conducted for the items within each of the proposed four themes to obtain an indication of the adequacy of the split. The analyses confirmed that all scales had moderate to high internal consistency: *Professional*, $\alpha = 0.81$; *Revenger*, $\alpha = 0.76$; *Hero*, $\alpha = 0.89$, and *Victim*, $\alpha = 0.71$.

Victim

The general framework of this narrative role is extremely similar to Canter et al.'s (2009) *Victim (Irony)* narrative; specifically, both narratives view the offenders' accounts of their role in terms of confusion (*confused*), and powerlessness (*helpless*) seen in the region. An extension of this sense of powerlessness is the belief that they are the main *victim* in the event. There are, however, distinct differences between the results found in the present study with MDO's and those found by Canter et al. with offenders with no MD. Most notably, Canter et al.'s findings suggested that the feeling of victimization was the main characteristic of this role. Although this was a major contributing factor within the role found in the current population, the

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TABLE 1 Narrative Role Labels and Full Descriptions

Question Number	Full Question	SSA Label
1	I was like a professional	Professional
2	I had to do it	Had to
3	It was fun	Fun
4	It was right	Right
5	It was interesting	Interesting
6	It was like an adventure	Adventure
7	It was routine	Routine
8	I was in control	Control
9	It was exciting	Exciting
10	I was acting out of revenge	Acting revenge
11	I was doing a job	Doing job
12	I knew what I was doing	Knew
13	It was the only thing to do	Only thing
14	It was a mission	Mission
15	Nothing else mattered	Nothing matter
16	I had power	Power
17	I was helpless	Helpless
18	It was my only choice	Only choice
19	I was a victim	Victim
20	I was confused about what was happening	Confused
21	I was looking for recognition	Recognition
22	I just wanted to get it over with	Get it over
23	I didn't care what would happen	Didn't care
24	What was happening was just fate	Fate
25	It all went to plan	Plan
26	I couldn't stop myself	Stop myself
27	It was like I wasn't part of it	Not part
28	It was a manly thing to do	Manly
29	For me it was just like a usual day's work	Usual day
30	I was trying to get revenge	Trying revenge
31	It was like being on an adventure	On an adventure
32	It was the only thing I could think of doing	Think doing
33	There was nothing special about what happened	Nothing special
34	I was getting my own back	Own back
35	I knew I was taking a risk	Risk
36	I guess I always knew it was going to happen	Knew happen

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offenders' lack of understanding into their crimes was also a driving force for their offenses, with such statements as: it was the *only choice*, the *only thing* to do, and the only thing they could think of doing (*think doing*). The role of the *Victim* in the current study was also depicted by other responses which pointed to helplessness, despair and a general lack of understanding; which is demonstrated by MDO's endorsing statements including: *nothing mattered, nothing special, not part,* and *I couldn't stop myself*.

In general, the distinction between the *Victim* role as portrayed here compared to previous research lies within the offenders' lack of understanding and comprehension of their inescapable situation, and the belief that

their offenses were their only choice. These differences could be justified by the distinctive nature of the population, specifically, MDOs are deemed to be vulnerable adults under the MHA 2007, and this vulnerability has a vast impact on their social and problem-solving skills, which accounts for some of their criminal behavior (Melamed, 2010). For example, poor social problem-solving abilities and social inadequacies may lead to criminal behaviors such as violence, sexual offending, and arson, as a maladaptive attempt to solve personal or interpersonal problems (Ross, Fabiano, & Ross, 1986). These deficits in problem-solving skills may also lead MDOs having a lack of understanding in many aspects of their offending or behavior; resulting in an inability to feel in control or responsible for their actions.

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Professional

The *Professional* narrative role is rooted in concepts originally proposed by Canter et al.'s (2009) *Professional (Adventure)* narrative. Within this narrative, the offender takes on the role of a *professional* who knows what they are doing and takes necessary *risk* as a professional, with offending being seen as *routine* or a *usual day* of work and *all going to plan*. The actions within both narratives are therefore rooted in *control* and mastery of an offender's environment. Generally, the roles in these narratives are essentially associated with the positive emotions of a *professional*.

There are numerous differences, however, between the *Professional (Adventure)* narrative and the *Professional* found within the current study. For example, the *Professional (Adventure)* narrative is defined by *adventure*; whereby the individual enjoys the *power* and *excitement* from completing a job. This outlook contrasts with the *Professional* who enjoys the *manly* persona their offenses provide and believes their role is defined by *fate*. It could therefore be argued that these types of individuals regard their criminal activity as a lifestyle or *routine*, with distorted values and acceptance of antisocial behaviors explained through the specific mental disorders of the population.

Hero

The *Hero* role shows some similarities to Canter et al.'s (2009) *Hero (Quest)* narrative. Specifically, both narratives are built on the idea of a heroic quest, whereby offenders justify their actions by seeing them as part of a *mission*. However, the driving force behind the notion of a *mission* is vastly different between offenders and MDO's. The heroic voyage within the *Hero (Quest)* narrative is considered to be the driving force behind the offender's criminal actions, which is illustrated with responses such as being unable to *stop myself*, or feeling that it was a *manly* thing to do. In addition, the offender

may feel he has been dishonored; therefore, his pride now demands that there will be consequences, which is portrayed through responses in terms of *looking for recognition*. There is also a sense of bravado and nonchalance which is vital to this narrative; this theme is revealed in the offender's description of the actions as *nothing special* (Canter et al.). The *Hero* role within the current study however, is presented as an offender who sees their actions as an adventurous (*adventure*), exciting and interesting mission, and is driven by the desire for recognition (*looking for recognition*) and power. This person also feels that their adventure is part of their job (*doing job*), which they have to do (*had to*) to obtain the recognition and power they crave. Once the job is completed, the offender feels that they are in control of their environment and their actions; this sense of completion is the intrinsic motivation for what (e.g., self-esteem, confidence), which reinforces their criminal behavior.

Revenger

The *Revenger* most closely resembles Canter et al.'s (2009) *Revenger (Tragedy)* narrative. Both narratives portray a story of the unstoppable revenge of an individual who has been wrongfully treated and deprived and where the offender retaliates by seeking revenge in order to achieve what they believe is *right*.

However the difference between the two narratives lies within how the offender takes on the role of the *revenger*. In the *Revenger (Tragedy)* narrative, the offender believes that he has no choice but to take on the role of the revenger; this role is captured by offenders' responses which justify their actions, for example, assertions that it was *right* and believe that revenge was their only option. In contrast, the *Revenger* within the current study belongs to a narrative whereby the offender does not care about anything else (*didn't care*) except *getting their own back;* these offenders do not believe revenge is their only option, rather they just want to get the situation over with (*get it over*) and resolved, making their offense actions reckless in an attempt to seek revenge as quickly as possible. The reckless nature of these MDO's could be linked to their impairments in appropriate problem-solving and coping skills, whereby they become overwhelmed by negative feelings such as distress, anxiety, or anger, which, linked with their self-regulation problems and lack of adaptive coping skills, result in impulsive and reckless retaliatory behavior.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight and understanding into the narratives of MDOs through the implementation of the C*riminal Narrative*

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Framework developed by Youngs and Canter (2011). The findings lay the foundation for illustrating that not only could the C*riminal Narrative Framework* be successfully utilized with MDO's, but also that these narrative themes could be a function of specific mental disorders. Through establishing the criminal narrative framework within a mentally disordered criminal population, this study provides new insight into how these specific offenders view their crimes and themselves. More specifically, this study begins to demonstrate that while MDOs may not have the capacity to understand their actions in the eyes of the legal system, the MDOs within this study did show the capacity to process their criminal actions and identify with a narrative role during the commission of their crime. Although this research sets the groundwork for studying the criminal narratives of MDOs, additional research needs to be carried out to replicate the findings in other mentally disordered populations, thereby allowing more conclusive results to be established as to the narratives that these offenders are believed to encompass. Further research also needs to explore the link between individual narratives and specific mental disorders. While the sample size within the current study would be too small to generate significant results, future work in this area would advance the current results, thereby aiding in the theoretical advancement of the C*riminal Narrative Framework*.

Further understanding of the narratives of MDOs also elaborates the various forms of justifications and neutralizations that are often embedded within an offenders own account of their offense. More specifically, the results of this study elaborate the points of Youngs and Canter (2011), who argued that offense narratives reveal the psychological influences operating during offending and the four narrative themes clarify the range of psychological processes inherent in criminal actions. It could therefore be suggested that MDOs use stories and particular characters (e.g., *Victim, Professional, Hero,* or *Revenger*) to not only make sense of their experiences but also to justify and rationalize their behaviors, with their mental disorder having an impact on how each of the four narrative roles are interpreted and experienced. Sykes and Matza (1957) stated that any dissonance resulting from feelings of guilt and shame following engagement in criminal behavior can be neutralized by implementing cognitive techniques (e.g., denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties). These cognitive techniques are embedded within the various narrative roles. For example, the *Professional* may deny injury as they are most likely to carry out property related offenses; the *Hero* believes their actions are for the greater good and therefore appeal to higher loyalties; the *Victim* denies the account of another victim, believing that they are the true sufferer within the incident; and the *Revenger* condemns the condemner, seeking vengeance for some wrong doing.

The value of this research also extends further than expanding upon the theoretical understanding of MDOs; the results of this study can also

aid in further development of investigative psychology. For instance, Canter (1994) argued that the narrative provides insight into the motivation and intention to act; therefore, by understanding the narrative, we move a step forward in understanding not only the action, but also the unfolding series of episodes which the offender goes through to turn their narrative into action. This process can also unmask aspects of the offender's personality and other enduring characteristics that are central to the investigative psychology discipline.

Specifically, a key concept within investigative psychology is that there are associations between offenders' actions and their characteristics, and that inferences can be drawn about offenders' characteristics based on their actions. For example, the actions of the *Victim* are associated with confusion, and lack of understanding with regard to their current situation; these offenders, therefore, believe that their criminal offenses are their only choice. The actions and motives behind their offenses lead to inferences regarding their mental state: specifically, their deficits in problem-solving skills and self-awareness, their distorted perception of reality, and a consequent lack of complete understanding within their current environment. These deficits are characteristic to a number of major mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and schizoaffective.

Overall, this study has provided the first analysis of the narrative roles of MDOs, resulting in a step toward creating a systematic framework that helps in explaining crimes through offenders' own understanding. The next step is, therefore, to build upon the foundations created within this study to help build a theory of crime that is all-encompassing, focusing not only on the psychological, biological, and social elements of crime, but also on the internal and emotional processes within an offender that often drives an offense forward.

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