Criminal Narratives of Mentally Disordered Offenders

Presenter: Elizabeth Spruin

Belinda Coulston, Professor David Canter and Dr. Donna Youngs

International Research Centre for Investigative Psychology – University of Huddersfield, UK

Overview

- Background
  - Criminal Narratives
  - Mentally Disordered Offenders (MDO)

- Aims

- Method

- Analysis
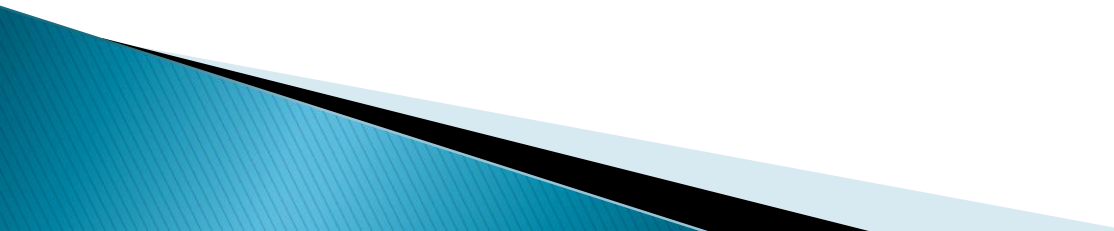
- Results

- Benefits

- Future Direction

Background – Criminal Narratives

- Canter (1994)

- Canter, Kaouri, Ioannou (2003)

- Canter, Youngs, Ioannou, (2009)
  - <u>4 Criminal Narratives</u>
  - The Victim (Irony)
  - The Professional (Adventure/romance)
  - The Hero (Quest)
  - The Revenger (Tragedy)

- Youngs and Canter (2011)

- Canter and Youngs (2012)

Background – MDOs

- The vast majority of research suggests that there is an association between mental illness and crime

- MDOs are a distinct population of offenders

- Despite the specific risks MDOs pose there has been no research into how MDOs understand their criminal actions

Aims

- To investigate whether similar narratives as identified in prior research (e.g., Canter et al., 2003; Canter, Youngs & Ioannou, 2009) would be replicated within a MDO population.

- To explore whether certain diagnoses would be associated with certain narratives
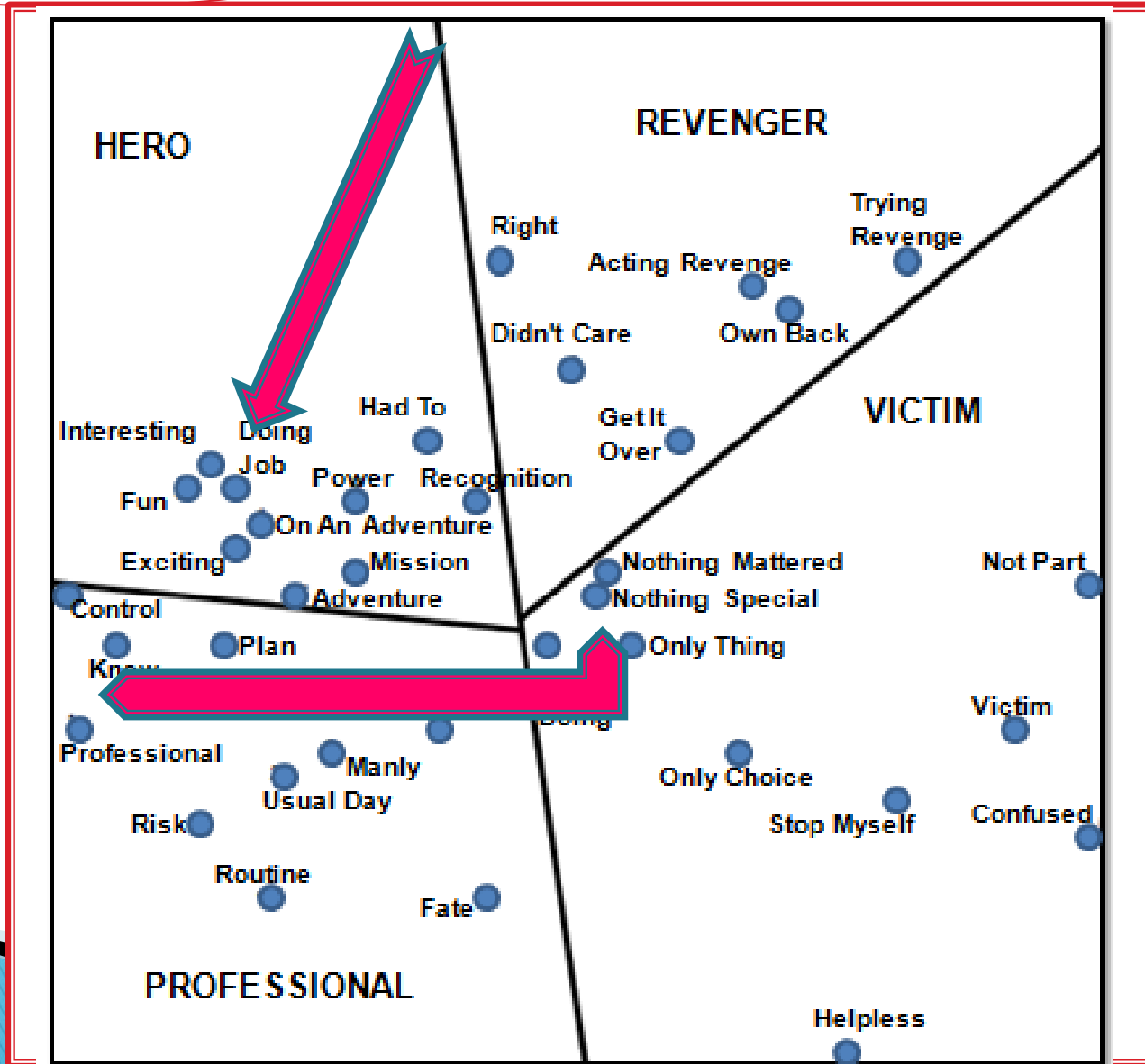
Method

- 70 adult male offenders

- Convicted of a sexual, violent or acquisitive offence

- Diagnosed with either Axis I, Axis II or No formal diagnosis

- Placed at either a Forensic Medium Secure Unit or community forensic residential hostel

- Focused on index offence to answer questions in the study

- Narrative Role Questionnaire (Canter, Youngs, Ioannou, 2009)

Narrative Role Questionnaire

Results

- **Victim**
  - Offender is confused and feels powerless
  - Believes they are the main victim
  - Lack of understanding and comprehension of their situation leads to their offending
  - Significantly more likely to have an Axis 1 diagnosis

- **Professional**
  - Sees their offending as routine and a usual day
  - Actions are rooted in control and mastery of environment
  - Endorses criminal values therefore see crimes as a lifestyle
  - Most likely related to offenders with no formal diagnosis (PD traits) – lack of emotional element

Results

- **Hero**
  - Justify actions by seeing them as a mission or adventure
  - Actions are driven by the need for recognition and power
  - Behaviour is conditioned through positive reinforcement
  - Most likely to be associated with offenders without mental health problems.

- **Revenger**
  - Offender retaliates by seeking revenge
  - Offender is reckless in their attempt for revenge as nothing else matters
  - Most likely associated with Axis II diagnoses

Benefits

- **Theoretical contributions**
  - Indications that MDOs show awareness into their experiences of crime and are able to illustrate this criminal experience in a coherent manner.
  - Elaborates on the various forms of justifications and neutralizations that are often embedded within MDOs offence accounts

- **Therapeutic contributions**
  - Extends current treatment methods (e.g., CBT, Good Lives Model)

Future Direction

- Further research on forensic psychiatric populations to establish present findings
  - Larger and more detailed population

- Develop therapeutic implications

- Development of an offenders criminal narrative