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Narrative Identity among Contact versus Non-Contact Sexual Offenders

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Narrative Identity among Contact versus Non-Contact Sexual Offenders

by

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Abstract

Narrative Identity among Contact versus Non-Contact Sexual Offenders

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The current study explored narrative roles among individuals convicted of a sexual offense. Narrative roles in a criminal context are defined as personal accounts utilized by offenders to justify illegal behavior. The chosen theoretical framework recognized four primary offender roles: Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest, Professional, Victim, and Tragic Hero. Twenty-three interviews were conducted with sexual offenders ($n = 11$ contact, $n = 12$ non-contact) in order to explore and compare narrative roles between contact and non-contact offenders. Interviews were conducted using a phenomenological approach and coded via Framework Analysis, a qualitative data analytic method. Findings revealed a general pattern of narrative themes among offenders, along with a tendency for contact offenders to endorse Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative roles and non-contact offenders to endorse Tragic Hero narrative roles. Findings suggest that incorporating narrative roles into conceptualization and treatment of sexual offenders may help more effectively tailor treatments.

Key words: sexual offenders, narrative identity, narrative roles, treatment

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Chapter 1: Introduction[1]

In recent years, researchers have called for more personalized conceptualization and treatment of sexual offenders, which may help advance the current indexing and categorization of sexual offender registrants at the federal level (Ackerman, Harris, Levenson, & Zgoba, 2011; Harris & Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2010), and help reduce rates of recidivism (Abracen & Looman, 2015; Hamilton, 2017; Waldram, 2008). Specifically, scholars have critiqued the exclusive implementation of group-formatted relapse prevention approaches, wherein personal engagement can be lost due to pressures from dynamic group processes, as well as the imposition of exhaustive lists of cognitive distortions (Maruna & Mann, 2006; Waldram, 2008; Ward & Marshall, 2007). The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which individuals' person-specific motivations for offending are revealed through offense narratives, and how narrative content may be used to inform conceptualization and treatment needs. Identifying and understanding an individual's personal offense narrative, or the construction of storied accounts from memory (McAdams & McLean, 2013), may enable researchers and practitioners to better understand the offender's criminal trajectory and anticipate barriers to treatment. Narratives may also provide valuable information in differentiating between sexual offender subgroups (e.g., those at low versus high risk for re-offense; Ackerman et

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al., 2011; Presser, 2016; Robertiello & Terry, 2007). In the following sections, we briefly review offense pathways, introduce narrative identity and narrative criminology theories, discuss criminal narrative roles as an alternative to traditional offense pathway models, and present the study rationale.

PATHWAYS TO OFFENDING

Relapse prevention has traditionally been the basis of sexual offender conceptualization and treatment (Laws, Hudson, & Ward, 2000), however critics have condemned its unidimensional approach for relying heavily on negative or avoidance-based strategies (Ward & Hudson, 1998). Relapse prevention models thus bred more individualized theories of sexual offending (Hudson, Ward, & McCormack, 1999; Mann, Webster, Schofield, & Marshall, 2004; Yates & Kingston, 2006; Ward & Hudson, 1998). Subsequent theories of offending have focused on descriptions of what the offenders do and the processes by which offending behavior is enacted (Hudson et al., 1999). Specifically, etiological theories of sexual offending began to take into account the diversity of offending behavior, focusing on offenders' specific motivations and goals for offending (Hudson et al., 1999; Mann et al., 2004; Ward & Hudson, 1998; Yates & Kingston, 2006).

Broader offense pathways examined by Hudson et al. (1999), for example, consider background and proximal affect toward criminal act (e.g., negative versus positive/appetitive), type of planning (e.g., covert versus explicit), focus during crime (self- or other-focused), and post-offense evaluation (e.g., positive versus negative) to

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create eight distinct offense pathways. The self-regulation model of offending, first developed by Ward and Hudson (1998), takes into account approach versus avoidance goals (e.g., nurturing versus inhibiting desire to offend), and active versus passive strategies employed to achieve deviant goals (e.g., explicit planning versus poor self-regulation), to create four distinct offense pathways. More recently, Youngs and Canter (2012a) drew from narrative criminology theory in their development of four distinct offense pathways, or criminal "roles," based on offenders' distorted needs for potency (power) and intimacy (desire to affect another person).

Although research examining offense pathways has provided evidence overlaying sexual offender subgroups with distinct criminal trajectories (Hudson et al., 1999; Yates & Kingston, 2006; Youngs & Canter, 2012a), there has been less insight into the translation of these etiological theories of offending into treatment initiatives (Yates, 2005; Yates & Kingston, 2006). Recent research into offender desistance from crime suggests that the creation of a new, non-offending identity is essential to ensure lower rates of recidivism among sexual offenders (Harris, 2014; Farmer, McAlinden, & Maruna, 2015). This concept underpins the theory of narrative identity in a criminological context, in that the most robust rehabilitative success occurs through first prioritizing then modifying the offender's relationship to the crime, in the context of his or her global identity (Presser, 2009; 2016; Sandberg, 2010). In fact, the centrality of identity processes, specifically narrative identity, in sexual offender rehabilitation and

desistance continues to be well-documented in the literature (Maruna, 2001; Presser, 2009; Ward & Marshall, 2007).

NARRATIVE IDENTITY THEORY

The term *narrative identity* is defined as an "individual's internalized and evolving life story" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). Central to narrative identity is the theory that self-narratives provide the individual with a sense of meaning and purpose, and are sculpted and refined via fulfillment of needs, goal strivings, and selection of personal values (McAdams & Pals, 2006; McLean et al., 2007; Ward & Marshall, 2007). McAdams and other researchers have identified and explored two dominant narrative themes, agency and communion (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Agency, also termed power, autonomy, and/or potency, is defined as the degree to which the individual is able to affect change and influence others through displays of mastery, status, accomplishment, and control (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Communion, also referred to as connection, intimacy, and/or affiliation, is defined as the degree to which an individual prioritizes interpersonal connection through friendship, love, or a connection to collective humankind (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Agency and communion have been postulated as competing or contrasting content themes in self-narratives (McAdams et al., 1996; Paulhus & John, 1998; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). The concept of agency has been linked to the need for achievement, strength, dominance, independence, mastery, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & John,

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1998; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013; Wiggins, 1991). Communion is linked to the value of equality and interpersonal trust and intimacy, sharing, and belonging (McAdams et al., 1996; Wiggins, 1991). Other research has linked agency and community to friendship patterns (McAdams et al., 1996), sex-role orientations (Wiggins, 1991), and, recently, with analyses into the antecedents of offending, criminal behavior (Youngs & Canter, 2012a).

CRIMINAL NARRATIVE ROLES

Narrative criminology assumes that narratives (i.e., internalized life stories) shape the morally significant things that we do, and justifications that exist within the criminal's narrative operate to make illegal or harmful action happen (Maruna, 2001; Presser, 2009; 2016). Narrative criminology also holds that narratives are constitutive rather than representational, that is, narratives are wielded by the individual and play a role in influencing his or her behavior (Presser, 2009; 2016; Sandberg, 2010). Last, narrative criminology is relatively unconcerned with the validity of the criminal narrative and what it reveals. Rather, the information of interest to researchers and practitioners is what offenders actually *do* (Ward & Hudson, 1998), revealed in the subjective retelling of the narrative (Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Sandberg, 2010).

Narrative criminology highlights the importance of the "here and now" of criminal behavior (Presser, 2009), which has been absent from pathway formulations models (Youngs & Canter, 2012a). Offense narratives are proximally implicated in criminal behavior and offer insight into the immediate antecedents of criminal behavior

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(Youngs & Canter, 2012a). This provides a direct route to understanding motivations for offending and, subsequently, level of risk and potential treatment targets. Last, criminal narratives can be reconstructed (Presser, 2009) and play a uniquely important role in desistance from offending (Maruna, 2001).

Youngs and Canter (2012a) provide a theoretical framework for understanding immediate antecedents for criminal behavior and categorizing types of sexual offenders accordingly. Youngs and Canter (2012a) operationalized narrative processes into four distinct roles offenders employ or "act out" through their offending. It is theorized that each narrative role encompasses the offender's subjective experience and understanding of his or her behavior within the criminal context. Conceptualization of offenders using the criminal narrative roles outlined by Youngs and Canter (2012a) is unique in that the offender is at the center of his or her narrative, and personal agency is emphasized. Rather than post hoc etiological theories of sexual offending, it is postulated that criminal narrative roles themselves operate to influence criminal behavior, and therefore represent a first point of intervention (Presser, 2009; 2016; Youngs & Canter, 2012a).

Youngs and Canter (2012a) categorized criminal narratives into four distinct roles via a combination of extremes on social capital dimensions of potency (power) and intimacy (concern for others). High levels of potency reflect an offender who sees himself exerting mastery and dominance over his victims and the environment, while low potency reflects a weak offense identity, best described as a feeling of being swept along by the events (Youngs & Canter, 2012a). High levels of intimacy reflect a criminal

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motivation that values some form of interpersonal consequence; other people are relevant to the offender, most often in enabling the offender to attain the objectives he seeks, but also via a simple desire to affect the victim in some way. Low intimacy reflects an offender who is unconcerned with the consequences of his actions on others. Youngs and Canter's (2012a) criminal narrative roles are outlined as follows.

Revengeful mission/Romantic quest (high potency, high intimacy)

This type of sexual offender feels justified in his actions, operating on defending his pride and potency. Other people play a significant role in this individual's narrative; usually, this individual cites a precipitating event in which his pride was wounded. He endorses external demands, specifically social masculine norms, as necessitating his criminal behavior.

Professional (high potency, low intimacy)

This individual derives a sense of mastery from his crime. He is hyper-focused on the routine process involved in committing his offense, and derives pleasure from relaying such intricacies to others. This type of offender is low in intimacy and is unconcerned about the consequences of his actions on those around him. While he may experience a rush when committing a crime, he exudes confidence and calmness when describing the ritualized steps taken to execute his offense.

Victim (low potency, high intimacy)

This type of offender sees himself as powerless to his circumstances, and expresses helplessness and confusion toward his behavior. He most often attributes his

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crime to external pressures, past traumas, or interpersonal difficulties. Others play a significant role in the victim's criminal narrative. The victim may feel alienated by others, and he usually perceives other individuals as precipitating his criminal debut.

Tragic hero (low potency, low intimacy)

This individual sees his criminal actions as being driven by fate, and he primarily attributes responsibility to others. He possesses an inflated sense of self-importance in regards to his crime, as if his actions played out on a stage and were his "fall from grace." This type of criminal may rationalize his crime by saying he was defending his honor, however, his sense of power and concern for others are low.

It is important to note that language categorizing criminal narrative roles is independent of nomenclature used to describe the etiology of sexual offenses in both clinical and academic domains (i.e., prior victimization of the abuser, offending in the context of a professional relationship). Rather, narrative role designations such as Victim and Professional reflect unique constellations of offense-specific goals, beliefs, and characteristics (Youngs & Canter, 2012a).

THE CURRENT STUDY

Researchers and critics of relapse prevention modalities have pushed for a more personalized conceptualization of offenders that addresses unique motivations to offend and level of treatment engagement (Abracen & Looman, 2015; Robertiello & Terry, 2007; Marshall & Marshall, 2014; Waldram, 2008). Further, desistance research has called for the promotion of rehabilitative, non-offending identities in order to ensure

desistance from re-offense (Harris, 2014). A promising avenue for intervention comes with emphasizing and harnessing the self-narratives of offenders to ensure the appropriate risk factors are identified (Digard, 2014). Examining criminal narrative roles appear best-suited in identifying proximal pathways to crime among sexual offenders because these narrative processes 1) promote agency and engagement in treatment by emphasizing the offender's subjective construction of his or her crime above his or her conformity to pre-identified offender schemas, 2) represent the first point of intervention given the constitutive nature and explanatory power of narratives in predicting criminal behavior, and 3) provide a foundation for the reconstruction of the offense identity into a prosocial identity essential to desistance from crime. The purpose of this study was to explore the types of criminal narrative roles employed by sexual offenders, as well as the ways in which themes of potency and intimacy are reflected in the individuals' motivations for offending. Specifically, we compare narrative roles between contact and non-contact offenders in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of criminal motivations among a diverse group of offenders, drawing from prior scholarship supporting an association between specific offense pathway and type of sexual offense (e.g., incest offenders following an avoidant-passive pathway within the self-regulation model of sexual offending; Yates & Kingston, 2006), as well as research highlighting disparate psychological profiles (e.g., levels of impulsivity, empathy, and assertiveness) between contact and non-contact offenders (Elliott, Beech, Mandeville-Norden, & Hayes, 2009; Elliott, Beech, & Mandeville-Norden, 2013).

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Chapter 2: Methods

Participants were 23 European American men who were convicted of a sexual offense, of which 11 were convicted of a contact sexual offense (i.e., molestation, sexual assault, rape; Robertiello & Terry, 2007) and 12 were convicted of a non-contact sexual offense (i.e., internet attempted sexual assault, child pornography crimes, voyeurism/exhibitionism; Robertiello & Terry, 2007). Of the contact offender sample, two were convicted of Indecency to a Child by Contact, eight were convicted of Sexual Assault to a Child, and one was convicted of Aggravated Sexual Assault. Of the non-contact offender sample, 11 were convicted of Possession of Child Pornography, and one was convicted of Improper Photography. According to recommendations for phenomenological (including narrative) research, our samples of contact and non-contact offenders were within acceptable limits to achieve saturation of themes (i.e., five to 25 participants; Creswell, 1998).

All non-contact offenders and 54.5% ($n = 6$) of contact offenders had served time in a federal prison or state jail facility prior to data collection. The remaining 45.5% of contact offenders were given probation. All participants were currently enrolled in a court-mandated sexual offender rehabilitation program at the time of data collection. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 75 years old ($M = 40.95$ years, $SD = 14.8$). In terms of educational background, 43.5% were college-educated, while 30.5% completed high school or less. Nearly half the sample identified as single, never married (47.8%), and a

significant portion identified as divorced (30.4%). The majority of participants identified as White (91%). In relation to national data on the demographics of individuals convicted of a sexual offense (Ackerman et al., 2011; Motivans & Kyckelhahn, 2007), our sample was reflective of the general population of individuals convicted of a sexual offense.

PROCEDURES

Participants were selected based on the following criteria: a) a sexual offense conviction, b) ability to clearly delineate if the offense was contact versus non-contact (i.e., participants were asked about previous convictions and/or dual sentencing, and those who had committed both contact and non-contact offenses were excluded from the study), c) 18 years of age or older, d) currently in the mandated treatment phase of their sentence, and e) consented to have their interview audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Gender was not an exclusion criterion, however, no female sexual offenders volunteered to participate in the study.

Participants were recruited from an organization offering court mandated outpatient sexual offender treatment groups in central Texas. Participants were drawn from three separate treatment groups that met weekly. Participants varied in length of time in-treatment, with a minimum of one month and a maximum of 26 months ($M =$ 11.6 months, $SD = 7.06$). All participants had completed sentencing and/or incarceration and were on probation or parole. Prior to data collection, we received consent from this organization to recruit volunteers to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 40 and 70 minutes. The interview protocol was semi-

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structured in nature. Six overarching questions were asked to inspire free dialogue and narrative construction by part of the interviewee (e.g., *Please describe your offense, or what happened to mandate you to sexual offender treatment? What was happening in your life before your offense? What led you to committing your offense? What were you thinking while [your offense] was going on? How have you come to terms with [your offense]? What has life been like since your conviction?).* Interview questions were selected based on McAdams' (2008) life story interview, modified to focus primarily on the offense narrative. That is, we focused on eliciting participant narratives from three "life chapters": pre-offense, amid offense, and post-offense. A phenomenological approach to interviewing was chosen based on narrative criminology theoretical tenets, that the narrator's subjective construction is the analytic focal point (Presser, 2016; Schachter, 2011)

Interviews were conducted over an 8-month period. A research team was assembled to transcribe and code the interviews. Five individuals comprised the final research team: a white female doctoral student, a South Asian undergraduate female, a white undergraduate female, an Asian-American undergraduate male, and a Mexican-American undergraduate male.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the current study, interviews were conducted using a phenomenological approach to questioning in order to elicit subjective construction of the participant experiences (Giorgi, 1997). The data were coded, however, using a deductive narrative

approach as the analysis was based on a pre-existing theory within narrative criminology (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Youngs & Canter, 2012a).

The data were analyzed via Framework Analysis (Gale et al., 2013). Framework Analysis is a branch of thematic analysis most commonly used with semi-structured interview transcripts and used in conjunction with different qualitative approaches such as phenomenology and ethnography. Specifically, Framework Analysis employs a systematic "spreadsheet" approach wherein transcripts are coded based on thematic categories that 1) have been delineated by prior research and 2) are theoretically grounded. While Framework Analysis does not provide sample size recommendations to achieve saturation due to its deductive, rather than inductive, approach to data analysis, the researchers followed phenomenological guidelines in sampling between five and 25 participants (Creswell, 1998).

Framework Analysis identifies two main coding stages: 1) axial coding, and 2) final coding and interpretation. Analysis began with axial coding. Based on tenets of narrative theory as well as prior research in the field of narrative criminology, interviews were axially coded based on dimensions of potency and intimacy (McAdams et al., 1996; Wiggins, 1991; Youngs & Canter, 2012a). Within the categories, team members assigned codes of high/low potency and intimacy to each manuscript based on the interviewee's past-tense description of his crime (see Table 1 in Appendix for descriptions and examples of potency and intimacy codes). Each member then brought his or her axial codes to consensus meetings. The percent agreement among raters for the combined

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potency and intimacy ratings (one combination code of high/low potency and high/low intimacy) was .76. Independent coding produced an initial Krippendorff's alpha of .49, however, all coding discrepancies were resolved through group discussion and negotiation using a reflexive, systematic approach detailed in Framework Analysis (Gale et al., 2013). After reaching a full consensus, each transcript was assigned one final potency and intimacy score.

The final stage of framework analysis is termed *indexing*, or the systematic application of codes representative of the guiding analytic framework to the whole dataset. Within our dataset, the final application stage involved discussion of the particular criminal narrative role ascribed to each transcript based on results from the axial coding phase. That is, the potency and intimacy scores for each transcript were translated into the corresponding criminal narrative role (e.g., a transcript coded high potency and high intimacy was thus coded Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest). The final application of the framework took place after all axial coding was completed. In this way, coding team members were unaware of the concept of narrative roles during the axial coding phase, reducing the likelihood of biased coding and expectancy effects. While each profile of potency and intimacy prescribed to a certain criminal narrative role, appropriateness and general fit of the role profile was discussed as a group to ensure confidence in the coding process. In order to do this, the profiles, including the specific thinking patterns, phrases, and dispositions pertaining to each narrative role (as outlined by Youngs and Canter [2012a]), were compared against each of the coded interviews

(See Table 2 in Appendix for narrative role descriptions and examples of cognitive

distortions).

Chapter 3: Results

Results from the axial coding phase are represented in Table 3 (See Appendix). Results from the final coding phase of our analysis are consistent with Youngs and Canter's (2012a) criminal narrative roles within a sample of individuals convicted of a sexual offense. Among the total sample of participants ($N = 23$), the majority endorsed themes of high potency (65%) and low intimacy (65%). That is, a majority of the sample highlighted a drive for control and power, and little to no concern for others, when retelling their crime narrative. Among contact offenders ($n = 11$), the majority endorsed themes of high potency (82%), and equally endorsed themes of high and low intimacy (46% and 54%, respectively). That is, the majority of contact offenders cited a desire to gain power and control through their criminal act. Among non-contact offenders ($n = 12$), the majority endorsed themes of low intimacy (75%), and equally endorsed themes of high and low potency (50% and 50%, respectively). That is, the majority of non-contact offenders included little to no mention of the significance of other people (i.e., their victim[s]) in their crime narratives.

Results from the final coding stage are presented in Table 4 (See Appendix). Results indicate that among the total sample of participants ($N = 23$), the majority endorsed Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest, Professional and Tragic Hero narratives (30.3%, 35%, and 30.3%, respectively). Participants were least likely to endorse the Victim narrative (4.4%). Among contact offenders ($n = 11$), the majority endorsed Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest and Professional narratives (45.5% and 36.3%,

respectively). Among non-contact offenders ($n = 12$), the majority endorsed Tragic Hero and Professional narratives (41.7% and 33.3%, respectively). Both contact and non-contact offenders endorsed the Professional criminal narrative to a similar frequency when describing their offense ($n = 4$ for both contact and non-contact offenders). A meaningful difference arose as contact offenders were more likely to endorse a Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest criminal narrative ($n = 5$) whereas non-contact offenders were more likely to endorse a Tragic Hero narrative ($n = 5$).

MAIN THEMES

First, both groups endorsed the Professional criminal narrative role to a similar frequency ($n = 8$ total; $n = 4$ contact offenders, $n = 4$ non-contact offenders). The Professional offender exhibits high levels of potency and low levels of intimacy. Contrary to the aforementioned Tragic Hero and Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest roles, the Professional sees himself as in control of his actions, and the romantic or intimate significance of others is irrelevant to his criminal motive. Both contact and non-contact offenders appeared overly concerned with the detailed logistics of their crimes, and seemed to derive satisfaction from relaying their offenses. The Professional spoke in a formulated, matter-of-fact manner as he described his behavior, or as Youngs and Canter (2012a) described, a "calm competency." He however became stimulated in the act of recounting his crime, appearing pleased to share what he felt was his criminal prowess. Intimacy levels were low, as the offender was exclusively concerned with the pleasure and satisfaction resulting from his criminal behavior. A non-contact offender

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convicted of Possession of Child Pornography reveals his Professional role in the following excerpt:

> "I was very, very careful. I was actually aware they were after me. Because I put up various firewalls and things, and um, encrypted everything… I knew they were trying to break into my computer. That didn't stop me. My job, I was hired for my technical prowess. And that came in handy when, with the pornography." – (Edward, 69)

This offender expressed a level of excitement in reference to being sought out by the federal police. He recounted the thoroughness with which he planned and executed his crime, in the context of his technical prowess, indicating strong displays of potency as fundamental to his criminal behavior. In fact, Professional non-contact offenders ($n = 4$) unanimously offered narratives that highlighted the polished retrieval and concealment of underage pornography for the purpose of sexual gratification, with no concern for the consequences of their actions.

Contact offenders' Professional narratives were strikingly similar to those of non-contact offenders, despite the contextual differences between their offenses. Contact offenders who endorsed the Professional offense role were guided to commit their crimes purely for the sake of sexual gratification, attaching little to no meaning to the effect of their actions on others. This pattern of high potency and low intimacy is evident in the following contact offender's excerpt:

"[I was looking for] just someone to have sex with. I figured since she was younger and I acted younger, she'd be easier than someone my age. I didn't care much." – (Andrew, 23)

Further, the sense of adventure that accompanies a Professional offense role from a high sense of potency and little encumbrance by others, is evident in the following contact excerpt:

"Why did I want to assault her? Because I wanted to, because it would've been fun, I would have had some sexual gratification… Because it was a thrill, and at that point I was just walking thrill to thrill." – (Leroy, 39)

Inherent to the Professional role is the meticulous planning driven by the offender's goal striving of power and potency, well-illustrated by the following contact offenders who exerted control over their environments, disguising their carefully planned offense behavior to appear accidental:

"I wore loose shorts but then again, that's what I do all the time. I wore loose shorts and made it so that any female can look up my shorts… and since second or third grade I was, I forget what they call it, but I would try to sexually touch someone but would sneak it as a hand-slip." – (Duane, 44)

"My method for trying to deal with [my sexual attraction to underage females], or my outlet for it, was to go in public places and pretend to accidentally bump into them, and I got caught doing that." – (Philip, 44)

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In terms of responsibility-taking, Professional (high potency, low intimacy) offenders accepted responsibility for their actions, but often minimized the seriousness of their crime. Both contact and non-contact Professional offenders treated their offense as a victimless offense; for contact offenders, in standing by their behavior as a "harmless slip of the hand," for non-contact offenders, in emphasizing their incidental role in the much larger and more threatening underage pornography operation. Contact offenders who endorsed the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest (high potency, high intimacy) role similarly took responsibility for their actions, but presented a skewed and romanticized interpretation of their criminal behavior. Non-contact offenders who endorsed the Tragic Hero (low potency, low intimacy) criminal narrative role, on the other hand, deflected responsibility for their behavior on environmental variables (e.g., addiction, stress, poor marriage).

The Victim offense role was the least endorsed narrative among this sample of sexual offenders. The Victim role is characterized by low potency and high intimacy strivings. An offender who endorses this narrative is likely to be someone who feels apathetic toward and alienated from society, and, feeling confused and powerless toward a cruel and poorly understood world, commits a crime for which he never fully admits fault. One non-contact Victim offender attributed his criminal behavior to a weak identity and nostalgia for childhood:

"I think it was more that I just was not comfortable in my own skin. I had a very low self image of myself. I would look at these images and I would project, look

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at these children, they're the children that I never was. They're beautiful and flawless and perfect and I look at myself, as a child growing up, and I saw all these imperfections and all of these flaws... Did I ever think about getting help? Of course. But where does one go? I think it was me just trying to fit in with the societal norm. I hate to say it, I mean, even identifying myself as homosexual, but nobody wants to be gay. I didn't want to be gay. I was living that dichotomy... the providing husband and all these other things. Yet, I was also this person that was lurking around in the shadows of the computer monitor at two o'clock in the morning." – (Antonio, 30)

In this excerpt, high intimacy was coded based on the relevance of others, specifically a projection of personal meaning onto the images. This offender described the social alienation typical of a Victim. He similarly expressed a weak sense of self in relation to his sexual identity, a helplessness in detailing his dual life, and a halfhearted consideration of treatment options, indicating a low sense of potency. This offender described a projection of himself onto his victims in conjunction with a weak offense identity, thus warranting the Victim narrative code.

CONTACT OFFENDERS

Patterns were apparent among contact and non-contact offenders, primarily in that contact offenders tended to attach romantic significance to their offense. The Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative described offenders who were guided by both high potency and high intimacy strivings. Contact offenders were more likely to be familiar

with their victims, and were more likely to cite high levels of intimacy as a precipitating factor for their criminal behavior. Contact offenders were also more likely to cite revenge as driving their actions. For example, one contact offender retaliated against his wife for cheating on him by sexually assaulting her adolescent daughter. The following excerpt illustrates this offender's high level of potency in planning and executing his crime as well as his high need for intimacy:

> "There was revenge in there. There was also wanting a closeness that I wasn't getting from [my wife]… [my relationship] should have been one of those, you know, at the spur of the moment, you know, completely into one another. And there wasn't that closeness… I would basically fantasize that it was [my stepdaughter] instead of [my wife]… I figured if she wasn't giving me the attention then I'd get it from someplace else." – (Alan, 54)

Another contact offender sexually assaulted an ex-girlfriend after she had left him for another man. A twisted sense of romanticism appeared to be central to this offender's narrative, as he relayed that his criminal act was an attempt to win her back. In the following excerpt, this offender's need to escape humiliation and conserve potency, as well as his perceived need for intimacy exclusively with his victim, is evident:

> "I wanted to get her back but she had a boyfriend… I was trying to get back with her. It turned out to be a real bad situation. I didn't appreciate the rejection… I guess I did it more out of revenge. You're mine, you know? We made a vow together, to stay together forever." – (Byron, 48)

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Indeed, revenge themes were present among contact offenders and the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative to a higher degree than for non-contact offenders. Other contact offenders who endorsed the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative were those whose criminal rationale appeared to be relatively less sinister than offenders seeking revenge. These were three individuals who described sexual encounters with underage individuals, all of whom purported that their sexual contact was consensual and that their only crime was becoming romantically involved with an underage individual. These Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narratives belied an offender driven by high intimacy needs toward his victim, and high potency in that he recognized and was an active agent in his criminal behavior. The following excerpts demonstrate the types of themes present in these Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narratives:

"I was 21 and I hooked up with a high school girl. She was 15… we still continued to see each other… we've had this Romeo and Juliet thing going on for years. Trying to fight the system and all that." - (Cliff, 35)

"After about, let's see, three or four months of talking to each other through notes or whatever at school, I decided to meet up with her… they charged me with aggravated sexual assault of a child. I was 19 and she was 13… it was more than just sex. Um, it was definitely about the relationship… I felt cared for, I felt wanted." – (Jeffrey, 22)

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"I never considered it as a thing they did not want to do. And yet, I know now that

I was using my power over them so they would do what I want them to do." –

(Peter, 75)

Among these Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest offenders, others play a significant

role in driving criminal behavior. Intimacy needs, while sought in a destructive and

deviant manner, were essential to the criminal narratives.

NON-CONTACT OFFENDERS

Non-contact offenders conversely demonstrated a Tragic Hero narrative ($n = 5$),

endorsing low levels of potency and low levels of intimacy within the criminal narratives.

These were individuals who felt powerless to underage pornography and who used

pornography to cope with stress, depression, and/or anxiety. These offenders were also

more likely to report repeated attempts and failures (some cited addiction) to desist from

viewing underage pornography, highlighting low levels of potency. Non-contact

offenders similarly endorsed low levels of intimacy. Rather than being driven by a need

for intimate or romantic connection, non-contact offenders primarily described their use

of underage pornography as a coping mechanism, highlighting the mechanical and

virtually subconscious process of obtaining and viewing child pornography for sexual

release. Themes of low potency and low intimacy can be seen in the following non-

contact offender transcript excerpts:

"I never cared for it. The only thing I use it for is just to help me feel relieved. I

was trying to find a way to relieve myself, you know, feel relaxed and everything.

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It just is what it is… I just felt really stressed, felt very hopeless and stuff." –

(Darryl, 37)

"I lost my child at 20 years old. I went into a real depressed state. I had looked at

underaged images before on the computer, but when my son died I would stay in

the room and stay on the computer. Just at that point in my life, I didn't care what

happened to me or anything like that." – (Stuart, 62)

"I went with [the child pornography] but then the guilt got to me so I would delete

the pictures or videos and just carry on with my life. And then a couple months

down the road, sometimes six months, sometimes a year, I go back to it…

Looking back, I don't know if I would've been able to stay away. I don't know if

I could have kept from going back to them." – (Manny, 26)

Low potency is reflected in these offenders' perceptions of lack of personal

control over the illegal act. These offenders illustrate that they felt little control over their

actions, and portray a relatively weak narrative self. The offenders' low intimacy was

visible in the little concern for their victims; to them, the act of viewing underage

pornography functions solely as a method of stress relief. The illegality of their behavior

draws little significance within the Tragic Hero narratives; the emphasis rather on the

emotional state, personal difficulties, or overall "insurmountable fates" to which these

offenders believe to have fallen prey.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the criminal narrative roles employed by individuals convicted of a sexual offense. Specifically, we sought to identify personal accounts utilized to justify illegal behavior, as depicted through the offender's perceived potency and intimacy needs as well as his dysfunctional means of fulfilling them. Overall, our findings were consistent with those outlined in the criminal narrative role model put forth by Youngs and Canter (2012a). Our findings also support the theory that different offender groups endorse different motivations for offending (Mann et al., 2004), as well as support associations between criminal narrative roles and broader offense pathways. First, our findings showed that the underpinnings of the Romantic Quest/Revengeful Mission narrative were similar to the primitive appetite/perceived mutuality pathway purported by Hudson and colleagues (1999). Additionally, our findings showed that the Professional narrative role was similar to another pathway conceptualized by Hudson and colleagues, characterized by explicit planning, energized arousal in retelling the crime, and predilection for high-risk deviance (i.e., Pathway 5; Hudson et al., 1999). Further, the Professional narrative appeared to overlap with the approach-explicit pathway outlined by Ward and Hudson (1998), characterized by intentional and explicit planning strategies and good self-regulation. The Romantic Quest/Revengeful Mission narrative role was similar to the somewhat primal emotionality and skewed sense of honor and romanticism inherent in the approach-automatic pathway, characterized by impulsivity, unsophisticated planning, situational

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triggers, and ingrained offensive-supportive schemas. Finally, the Tragic Hero and Victim offenders similarly highlighted the lack of control endorsed by the avoidant-passive and avoidant-active pathways (Ward & Hudson, 1998).

A theme emerged in the data indicating that the majority of the sample endorsed the Professional criminal narrative role (e.g., high potency and low intimacy needs) in committing their offense, regardless of the type of sexual offense and the narrative role endorsed. This pattern suggests that high potency and low intimacy needs may be more likely to characterize the criminal strivings of sexual offenders, regardless if they have committed a contact or non-contact offense. While generalizations about individuals convicted of a sexual offense should be considered with caution, the tendency for individuals in this sample to endorse high potency and low intimacy strivings is notable nonetheless. Identifying this narrative is particularly important as it pinpoints treatment targets associated with highest risk for offense: power gleaned from criminal behavior and indifference toward the victim. While a consensus exists regarding sexual offending as little more than an attempt to gain power and control over an individual or situation, an examination into intimacy and potency as varying forms of power and control provides a more nuanced understanding of proximal motivations for offending. Further, the preference for high potency and low intimacy narrative themes suggests a potential starting point at which evaluators and practitioners can explore when working with new clients.

Previous research has associated the Professional role with a cold and unfeeling offender who is most likely to be at highest risk for recidivism (Ioannou et al., 2017; Youngs & Canter, 2012a). The impulsivity and thrill-seeking behavior evident among Professionals is a common predictor of criminal behavior (Canter & Youngs, 2009; Canter & Youngs, 2012; Youngs, 2004). Further, low intimacy needs include the lack of victim empathy seen among deviant offenders (Youngs, 2004). In terms of conceptualization and assessment, offenders who endorse Professional narrative may benefit from more managerial monitoring and supervision. This is consistent with recommendations made by Yates and Kingston (2006) in addressing treatment needs of offenders who display approach-explicit pathways to offending. Based on a tendency to minimize the impact of the offense, express little concern for the victim, as well as engage in impulsive and reactive behavior, treatment needs among Professionals may include inciting motivation for change (Marshall & Marshall, 2014) and increasing victim empathy (see Wakeling, Webster, & Mann, 2005).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTACT AND NON-CONTACT OFFENDERS

Although the majority of participants endorsed the Professional narrative role, there were unique and significant themes present between contact versus non-contact offenders. Contact offenders tended to endorse the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative role. The finding that contact offenders were more likely to ascribe to this particular role has particular meaning when considering the context of contact sexual offenses. First, the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest offenders highlight a subset of

sexual offenders who attach significant meaning to others, and the role others play in enabling needs fulfillment. While high intimacy needs do not make a more sensitive or emotionally-involved offender, this distinction between high and low intimacy is important when conceptualizing the offending patterns among contact sexual offenders.

The Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative also carries weight when considering that the majority of sexual assault victims personally know their perpetrator (Truman, 2011). Contact offenders in the current sample who endorsed the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest narrative each had a personal relationship with their victims, ranging from marriage to school or work acquaintance. Each of these offenders expressed a desire for closeness exclusively with the victim. These offenders were more likely to cite wounded pride, low self-esteem, or threatened masculinity, ascribed to the victim, as driving their criminal act, characteristics attributed to contact offenders by prior research (Marshall, Laws, & Barbaree, 1990; Robiertello & Terry, 2007; Youngs, 2004). This type of offense role was seen to a lesser degree among non-contact offenders. While two non-contact offenders endorsed the Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest role, these scenarios were dissimilar as they either involved romantic projection and personification onto images, as endorsed by child pornography offender Ron, or the falsely perceived romantic relationships James, the improper photography offender, assumed he was having with his filmed victims. This emotional engagement and fantasy toward remote victims was noted among non-contact offenders in prior studies (Elliott et al., 2009; Elliott et al., 2013).

Non-contact offenders tended to endorse the Tragic Hero narrative role. The Tragic Hero role describes an offender who feels he has little control over his behavior, instead believing he was simply a passenger in his criminal "happenstance." He similarly attributes responsibility for his crime to external factors. Non-contact Tragic Hero offenders in the current study were each convicted of possession of underage pornography. These offenders cited failed attempts to abstain from pornography, indicating a decreased sense of control over their behavior. These findings are partially supported by those of Elliott and colleagues (2009), which linked non-contact offenders with low assertiveness and external locus of control. A low drive for intimacy was represented by these offenders' primary concern with their own misfortunes, rather than the consequences of their actions on others. This pattern of non-contact offenders distancing themselves from internet victims is well-supported in the literature (Elliott et al., 2009; Elliott et al., 2013; Winder & Gough, 2010). Non-contact offenders appear to be more likely to deflect responsibility of their actions onto others, namely the pornography industry for making such images available in the first place (Winder & Gough, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS

Consistent with previous research that has linked distinct offense pathways to respective treatment engagement and treatment targets (Hudson et al., 1999; Ward & Gannon, 2006; Yates & Kingston, 2006), inherent to each criminal narrative role are dynamic risk factors for offending that can provide useful information in treatment.

While offense pathway research highlights the importance of receiving foundational intervention following the cognitive behavioral approach, pathways (or narratives) may be used to tailor more specific methods and level of intensity of treatment, as well as address person-level dynamic risk factors (Yates & Kingston, 2006).

In terms of conceptualization and treatment needs, specific levels of potency and intimacy can belie deviant thinking patterns to be addressed in treatment. In terms of treatment engagement among Professional offenders who gain power and pleasure from their offense and are relatively unconcerned for victims, practitioners may anticipate greater resistance toward treatment and, ultimately, desistance from crime. Practitioners might first focus on inciting motivation for change, then work toward modifying these individuals' implicit theories and offense-supportive schemas, with a focus on promoting an understanding of harm done to the victim. These treatment recommendations are congruent to those outlined by Hudson et al. (1999) and Yates and Kingston (2006) for similar subsets of offenders. Revengeful Mission/Romantic Quest offenders who possess high needs for intimacy, on the other hand, may be more amenable to treatment if framed in the context of healthy relationship education and positive emotional regulation skills-training. This is consistent with recommendations for global life skills enhancement outlined by the Good Lives Model for rehabilitation among comparable approach-automatic offenders (Ward & Gannon, 2006; Ward & Hudson, 1998).

Tragic Hero offenders, on the other hand, who are less likely to feel personally accountable for their criminal behavior may also be reluctant to engage in treatment, and

may benefit from initial responsibility-taking. Traditional programs prioritize responsibility-taking via cognitive-behavioral strategies (i.e., correcting cognitive distortions) and motivational interviewing (i.e., convincing offenders of necessary lifestyle changes; Marshall & Marshall, 2014; Ware & Mann, 2012). Recent research, however, has emphasized acceptance of responsibility not necessarily for the offender's past, but rather his future actions (Maruna & Mann, 2006; Ware & Mann, 2012). Maruna and LeBel (2003) differentiate between passive responsibility, holding someone accountable for what they have done in the past, and active responsibility, focusing on what needs to be done in order to make good in the future. Encouraging active responsibility has been linked to decreased recidivism, and may be a more palatable way to present responsibility-taking to preserve treatment engagement (Maruna, 2001; Ward & Maruna, 2007). The low levels of potency indicative of a Tragic Hero role can then be addressed through fostering a healthier identity, and practicing self-control and perspective-taking to increase awareness of the consequences of their future actions.

First, however, treatment providers would do well to encourage the sharing of all offenders' personally meaningful narratives surrounding relationship attitudes and beliefs in addition to the recognition of and atonement for cognitive distortions (Digard, 2014; Waldram, 2008). Creating an open dialogue, rather than one that operates to make alterations to the offender's private narrative encourages candid disclosure of the offender's underlying offense-supportive attitudes. This transparent disclosure is central to what treatment programs hope to accomplish in order to mitigate risk. Further,

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personalizing treatment by incorporating narrative sharing may lead to stronger outcomes, as research has shown greater investment in and agency toward rehabilitation when treatment is personalized (Schmucker & Lösel, 2015; Ward, 2010). Eliciting criminal narratives represents a first point of intervention intended to precede empirically informed, comprehensive assessment, formulation, and conceptualization of sexual offenders. Cognitive behavioral approaches have achieved empirical success in reducing recidivism rates among sexual offenders (Hanson et al., 2009; Schmucker & Lösel, 2015). The narrative approach can complement current cognitive behavioral modalities with the inclusion of an autobiographical sharing component, ideally during the first weeks of treatment to enhance treatment engagement. Instead of adopting in advance a critical lens through which the autobiography is interpreted, offenders would be encouraged to share their narrative without *a priori* assumptions. Through the course of treatment, offenders can then identify personal deviant behavioral patterns to be related back to common cognitive distortions or schemas.

Incorporating narrative identity principles may be a promising avenue for conceptualization and rehabilitation (Digard, 2014; Ward & Maruna, 2007). The incorporation of criminal narrative roles in treatment can represent a first point of intervention in identifying proximal risk factors for offending. Perhaps most importantly, narrative concepts may also promote engagement in the treatment process. Criminal roles reflect how the offender sees himself and his offending. Prioritizing the offender's subjective offense account and connecting it to treatment targets lays the groundwork for

collaborative construction of a non-offending identity essential to desistance from crime (Harris, 2014; Maruna, 2001), and may enhance overall motivation, participation, and cooperation in treatment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Findings from the current study should be interpreted in the context of a few limitations. First, the participants were sampled from sexual offender treatment groups. Their stage in the treatment process may have affected the narratives offered. It is possible that the participants were more likely to incorporate the concepts they were learning in treatment (e.g., referencing cognitive distortions). A benefit to collecting data while offenders are in treatment, however, is the increased insight participants may have into their motivations for offending. Nevertheless, future research may benefit from investigating criminal narratives from a more representative (i.e., all offense types) sample of incarcerated sexual offenders. Future research may also consider contrasting narratives among offenders pre- and post-incarceration and/or treatment.

Second, the current study relied on self-report information to guide its findings. Although recent research by Pham, Nunes, and Maimone (2016) has bolstered the use of self-report in eliciting accurate and reliable information from offenders, self-report nevertheless presents the problem of bias. Future research may benefit from incorporating collateral contact, such as police reports and/or prior forensic interviews, and more prolonged interaction with offenders in order to increase data of criminal narrative roles beyond self-report.

Last, although the sample size used in the current study was within the acceptable range for narrative studies, it was still small and therefore the conclusions drawn from our findings are tentative. While this study was qualitative and exploratory in nature, future research would benefit from drawing from a larger sample of offenders from various settings (e.g., civil commitment, federal and state correctional institutions) using quantitative methods to examine criminal narrative roles, particularly using the Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ; Youngs & Canter, 2012b). Future research should also investigate the relationship between criminal narrative roles and other variables such as actuarial risk (e.g., Static-2002; Hanson & Thornton, 2003), as well as dynamic risk factors (e.g., The Level of Service Inventory – Revised [LSI-R]; Andrews & Bonta, 2001). Finally, future qualitative research would benefit from gathering data related to participants' global identities, core values, and worldview for a more in-depth understanding of the individual's criminal narrative identity in the context of his or her comprehensive narrative identity (McAdams, 2008).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Analysis of criminal narrative roles has offered a personalized means by which to conceptualize sexual offenders. Levels of potency and intimacy needs can be extracted from criminal narratives to retroactively map the motives that led individuals to offend. For sexual offenders, certain criminal narrative roles were endorsed more than others. Our findings of patterned role endorsement for contact and non-contact offenders has conceptual and practical importance for personalized rehabilitation among a heterogeneous group of sexual offenders.

Appendix

Table 1
Potency and Intimacy Descriptions and Examples

Code	Description	Examples
Potency		
High	Strong, in-control, this person sees himself as powerful in any sense of the word	"It was like an adventure," "I was looking for recognition," "It was a mission," "It all went to plan," "I knew what I was doing"
Low	Weak, powerless, confused, this person sees himself as having little control of his behavior and being "pushed by the fates"	"I was helpless," "I was the real victim," "It was like I wasn't a part of it," "I couldn't stop/help myself"
Intimacy		
High	Other people and their reactions play a significant role in the narrative, others are significant, value is placed on interpersonal relationships	"I was trying to feel a connection," "I was trying to get closer to someone," "She/he/they belonged to me," "I was defending my/his/her honor," "I did it for her/him/them"
Low	Other people are irrelevant, this person has little concern for others, others are insignificant	"I didn't care what anyone thought," "I didn't care what happened to them," or altogether no mention of victim(s)

Appendix

Table 2

Criminal Narrative Role Descriptions and Examples

Code	Potency	Intimacy	Description	Examples
Revengeful Mission/ Romantic Quest	High	High	Sees himself as powerful and in control of his behavior, wounded pride and/or skewed sense of honor/romanticism usually precipitates criminal act, sees no other option than to commit his crime	"I was in control," "I was getting mine back," "I had to do it," "I couldn't resist," "I didn't care what would happen to me"
Professional	High	Low	Derives pleasure from committing and recounting his crime, views crime as a means to display mastery and expertise, unconcerned about the consequences of his actions on others	"It was routine," "It was a usual day's work," "I was doing a job," "I knew what I was doing," "I was just getting what I wanted"
Victim	Low	High	Sees himself as powerless to his circumstances, feels alienated from or treated unfairly by society, attributes responsibility for his crime onto others, others are significant to his narrative	"I was helpless," "I was confused about what was happening," "It was like I wasn't a part of it," "I didn't fully realize what I was doing," "I was desperate"
Tragic Hero	Low	Low	Sees his criminal behavior as inevitable, views his actions as a "fall from grace," views himself as powerless to the fates, attributes responsibility to others, others are insignificant to his narrative	"I try to stay out of trouble," "It was my only choice," "Part of me always knew it would happen," "I couldn't stop myself," "I was powerless"

Appendix

Table 3

Comparison of Potency and Intimacy Dimensions

	Total (N = 23)	Contact (n = 11)	Non-contact (n = 12)
Potency			
High	**15 (65%)**	**9 (82%)**	6 (50%)
Low	8 (35%)	2 (18%)	6 (50%)
Intimacy			
High	8 (35%)	5 (46%)	3 (25%)
Low	**15 (65%)**	6 (54%)	**9 (75%)**

Appendix

Table 4
Comparison of Criminal Narrative Roles

	Total (N = 23)	Contact (n = 11)	Non-contact (n = 12)
Revengeful Mission/ Romantic Quest	**7 (30.3%)**	**5 (45.5%)**	2 (16.7%)
Professional	**8 (35%)**	**4 (36.3%)**	**4 (33.3%)**
Victim	1 (4.4%)	0	1 (8.3%)
Tragic Hero	**7 (30.3%)**	2 (18.2%)	**5 (41.7%)**

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