

**Women offenders' criminal narrative experience**

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Although there is a vast array of theories on crime, one area that is largely under-represented is that of the actual experience of the offender engaged in criminal acts. The main aim of this study was to examine the individual and phenomenological experiences of crime amongst women offenders.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The sample consisted of 128 women who had committed a criminal offence, with an average age of 36.40 years ( $SD = 11.12$ ). Participants were recruited to take part in the study by answering a questionnaire exploring the emotions and narrative roles they experienced during commission of a crime. From this participants Criminal Narrative Experience (CNE) was determined.

**Findings:** Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) analyses revealed emotional experiences and narrative roles were thematically associated and when both were subjected to SSA analysis two main themes of CNE were identified: *Avenging Angel* and *Choiceless Victim*. The Choiceless Victim experience was the most representative of women's experiences in this study.

**Practical implications:** The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed. Future directions for research are also outlined.

**Originality/value:** The findings offer an alternative perspective and theoretical framework for examining women offenders' criminal experiences.

**Key words:** Women offenders, emotions, roles, narratives, criminal narrative experience (CNE).

## **Women Offenders' Criminal Narrative Experience**

### **Women Offenders**

Historically, theories of criminal behaviour were largely developed without consideration of gender. However, in the last few decades this inaccuracy has been highlighted and the importance of gender specific approaches have begun to develop. Research has outlined important variances amongst men and women and their engagement within society, and consequently the influence these have on offending behaviours (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1992). Subsequently, for individuals involved in offending appreciation of such differences have been highlighted as key to understanding patterns of women offenders (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Multiple research has demonstrated that women have discrete needs that need to be recognised when examining offence behaviours. These include domestic abuse, victimisation, substance misuse, abuse, and traumatic childhood experiences (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Corston, 2007; Covington & Bloom 2006; de Vogel, de Vries-Robbe, Van Kalmthout & Place, 2012; Prison Reform Trust, 2014b, Rossegger et al., 2009; Salisbury, 2007; Scott & Dedel, 2006; Thompson, 2014).

As a result of these complexities research highlights repeatedly, when questioned about their experiences of crime women report feelings of victimisation, powerlessness and helplessness (Alarid, & Cromwell 2006). The premise of victimisation has been replicated in a wide range of studies including female gang members (Haymoz & Gatti, 2010; Miller, 2001), perpetrators of violent crime (Faedi Duramy, 2014) and drug smugglers (Bailey, 2013). Previous victimisation, particularly in childhood has indicated an increased risk of committing violent offences (de Vogel, de Vries-Robbe, Van Kalmthout and Place, 2012; Rossegger et al., 2009) and such adverse experiences have been highlighted as key in recidivism with past

trauma dominating current offending decisions (Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio & Epps, 2015; Levenson & Socia 2016; Wolff, Baglivio, & Piquero, 2017). Moreover, when women are violent, it has been found that it is more likely to be within the family or relationship compared to men whose aggression is more commonly out of personal relationships (Monahan et al., 2001). Whilst there is mounting evidence to suggest that victimisation is a key factor in the perpetration of crime, it is important to note that this alone cannot be attributed as being directly responsible for offending patterns (Smith, 2017). Furthermore, there are many victims who have suffered abuse who do not perpetrate crime, similarly there are many men who are also victims of abuse/trauma so previous victimisation cannot be attributed as a solely female issue. Moreover, the focus of women as 'victims' in criminal justice settings have been criticised arguing that such approaches exaggerate the premise of victimisation. As a result, this can lead to the removal of agency and accountability from the offender, thus leading to the offender determining themselves as helpless (Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Wolf, 1993).

Whilst there is overwhelming support for the importance of the 'victim role' in women offenders there are other avenues of research that suggest alternative explanations for offending behaviours. For example, a body of research suggests offending is a result of 'necessity' and becomes routine to feed families, (Byrne and Trew, 2008), as a result of financial problems (Rettinger and Andrews, 2010; Verbruggen, Apel, Van Der Geest & Blokland, 2015), to feed a drug habit (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999; Huebner, DeJong, & Cobbina, 2010), or because of pressures from other individuals (Scott & Dedel, 2006). This premise has links with historical developments of strain theory, where individuals are faced with a gap between their responsibilities and their current circumstances, strain occurs (Merton, 1957). This notion is echoed by Sharp, Marcus-Mendoza, Cameron & Daniel-Roberson (2016), who highlight that failures in societal systems contribute to the problems amongst women offenders. However,

contrasting bodies of research suggest that weak family bonding and high levels of family strain were poor predictors of criminality amongst women perpetrators (Cernkovich, Lanctôt and Giordano, 2008).

Contrastingly, other areas of research have outlined more positive motivations for offending behaviours amongst women. Findings suggest that women are more empowered in their offending actions and make informed choices to follow criminal lifestyles (Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Maher, 1997; Miller, 2002) or they perpetrate for the thrills and excitement and a sense of belonging that comes with offending (Ajzenstadt, 2009; Brookman, Mullins, Bennett & Wright 2007). The discussed research offers several insights into offending motivations, however there is a need to test these premises further to more clearly determine women offender's typologies.

### **The Experience of Crime**

Traditionally crime theories have focused on a wide range of factors such as social issues, opportunity, biology, and personality as key to explaining the cause and persistence of offending behaviours. An alternative perspective that has been proposed, highlights the potential of examining criminal acts from the viewpoint of the offender. Bernasco (2010), highlights the value of this approach positing that offenders are 'experts' in notions of criminal behaviour, as they are the ones undertaking such crimes. It is argued therefore, that when developing theories of crime, it is crucial that those involved are able to offer their phenomenological insights and experiences. One logical way of exploring this is to ask offenders to share their life stories and experiences of crime utilising narrative psychology.

### **Personal Narratives**

Narrative theory suggests that to make sense of the world individuals develop a story, or narrative, in which they put themselves as the central character (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Within the story narrative identities are formed through interactions with various characters, situations, and events. Life experiences are crucial in helping individuals to form their identities, narratives assimilate, and events are internalised from all aspects of their lives including historic, current and anticipated future events (McAdams, 2001). It is suggested that narratives develop through varying stages and continue to progress throughout one's life (McAdams, 1988). The importance of adolescence is highlighted by McAdams (1988), in determining whether a well- adapted narrative view of oneself is developed during a time when there are continuous changes in settings and situations. Canter (1994), reiterates the view that adolescence is key in the development of narratives and links the fact that individuals encounters, or avoidance, with a life of crime usually begins in their teenage years.

In order to understand criminal actions, it is crucial to appreciate significant events the individual has experienced. Recognising the narrative experience the offender is drawing on to provide meaning to their life can help reveal the underlying themes relating to their offences. Narrative psychologists have suggested that there is a limit to the different types of narratives that individuals can portray and have attributed important links with the studies of literature as explanations for the limited types of narratives represented (McAdams, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988). There are varying approaches regarding the different types of narratives, with some proposing seven main plots (Booker, 2004) and others up to as many as twenty (Tobias, 1993). Whilst there are many perspectives on the variations, there is one clear pattern in all literature, that the stories are either positive or negative (Youngs & Canter, 2012). One of the most prevalent links to literature as an explanation for structured life stories relates to the four classical story forms Frye (1957) presented in his influential text *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye's

“Theory of Mythos” outlined a number of commonalities in the most prominent narratives and as a result proposed four fundamental story types, known as; *comedy, romance, tragedy* and *irony*.

### **Criminal Narrative Roles**

Whilst McAdam's (1988), and others work focused largely on the narrative experiences of the general population, a body of research is developing exploring offender's narratives. Presser (2009), reasoned that offender's narratives are key to understanding each act of crime. She postulates that offending is the enactment of a narrative and that narratives are key in helping individuals to form their identities and to understand the world around them (Presser, 2012; Presser & Sandberg, 2015). Similarly, Canter (1994), proposed that the principles of narrative theory can be useful when applied to understanding offender's personal stories and the roles these individuals utilise during their crimes. It is important to note that the terms '*narrative psychology*', '*narrative criminology*' and '*narrative analysis*' are used interchangeably in this paper and these will be utilised throughout. Whilst narrative psychology and narrative analysis can refer to a wide range of disciplines including but not limited to forensic/offending/criminology, narrative criminology is solely focused on explorations of narratives in a criminological context. To offer clarity when referring to these phrases Presser's (2009) definition offers a valuable grounding '*...narrative criminology is poised to clarify the nature of both criminal behavior and criminalization—including court decisions, media accounts of crime and scholarly analyses of crime... Narrative is a temporally ordered statement concerning events experience by and/or actions of one or more protagonists...*' Presser (2009), pg. 178.

The utilisation of narrative analysis in a criminal context has been widely used as a tool to explore a range of offences and offending behaviours. These include the following; white-

collar crime (Klenowski, Copes & Mullins, 2011), terrorist offences (Joosse, Bucerius & Thompson, 2015; Sandberg 2013), rewriting of criminal narratives amongst violent women offenders (Africa, 2015), drug dealing (Sandberg, 2009; Sandberg 2016; Sandberg, Tutenges & Copes, 2015), and cocaine trafficking amongst women (Fleetwood, 2015). Traditionally, explorations of narratives have utilised largely qualitative approaches. Presser (2016), highlights the importance of ensuring narrative research remains interdisciplinary and by utilising both quantitative (Youngs & Canter, 2012) and qualitative (O'Conner, 2015) analysis, ultimately understanding of the discipline will be enhanced. The benefit of adopting a phenomenological approach to the exploration of individuals narrative experiences provides a natural fit as both phenomenology and narratives have the experience of the individual at the core of their concepts. The main premise of phenomenology is '*...the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view . The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions*'. Smith-Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (2008).

As outlined, there are a varying methodologies and approaches to examining narratives, however all have provided a range of insights into offending behaviours. Furthermore, Sandberg & Ugelvik (2016), argue that it is important that as a discipline narrative criminology integrates multiple perspectives and methodologies, to ensure production of wide ranging approaches and conclusions. Not only can narrative methods provide hypotheses of agency in individuals, they can reveal much deeper-rooted issues of social inequality, social structure and economic biases, as a result the findings from these life stories can be explored and developed to have practical impact (Fleetwood, 2016; Sandberg & Fleetwood, 2017).

The empirical exploration of narratives has been developed in Investigative Psychology and quantitative explorations of male offender's crime narratives has revealed four discrete themes: *Hero*, *Professional*, *Revenger* and *Victim* (Canter, Kaouri, & Ioannou, 2003; Canter & Youngs, 2009; Canter & Youngs, 2012; Ioannou, 2006; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs 2017; Ioannou, Canter, Youngs, & Synnott, 2015; Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014; Youngs & Canter, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2013). These themes have been defined taking into account the works of Frye (1957) and McAdams (1988). The idea of a 'victim' narrative has also been replicated in the work of Rajah, Kramer & Sung, (2014), who found that this life story was the most predominantly reported amongst incarcerated youths. It is important to note that to date that whilst these studies provide a great grounding and framework for exploration of criminal narratives, currently these examinations have all been undertaken amongst incarcerated men. Therefore, it is unclear whether the same patterns can be generalised and applied to the women offender population.

### **Affective Importance in Experience**

As discussed, utilising the narrative approach to explore offending behaviours has offered many promising results. It is hard to imagine then that in these rich stories the absence of emotional links. Emotions are involved in every aspect of human interactions and form the basis of all our experiences (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). Explaining an event, story or significant life event always evokes some emotional resonance whether positive, negative or apathetic. Thus, including the emotional aspect of a crime as a means of explaining one's experience is crucial. Katz (1988), posits that affective states are central when exploring crimes.

Explorations of the structure of emotions have caused much debate. Several theorists have however demonstrated the presence of two major bipolar dimensions, highlighting that

these dimensions are connected in an orderly way, opposed to being discrete dimensions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Russell, 1979; Daly, Lancee, & Polivy, 1983). Pleasure-Displeasure (including sentiments such as happy, enthusiastic, content vs. afraid, sad, fear) and Degree of Arousal (excited versus relaxed) have been recognised as the two core quantifications of emotion (Watson & Tellegen, 1985).

Russell (1980, 1997), developed this framework further and proposes a circular order of emotions, a circumplex, that integrates the two bipolar axes, whilst identifying that all emotional states amalgamate into one around the boundary of the circumplex. There are four groupings of temperament represented in the circumplex: *distress*, *elation*, *calmness* and *depression*. There is growing evidence in support of the circumplex structure of emotions (Feldman, 1995; Fisher, Heise, Bohrnstedt & Lucke, 1985; Plutchik, 1962; Remington, Fabrigar & Visser, 2000; Russell, 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985).

Examinations of emotional structure between men and women have highlighted variations cross-culturally regarding emotional experience. Men described more dominant moods such as anger, contrastingly women specified more helpless feelings such as sadness and fear (Fischer, Rodriguez, Vianen & Manstead, 2004). Regarding intensity, women described more undesirable and intense affective states connected to pain when explaining shame. However, men defined shame as an inevitable emotion evoked due to adhere to public perceptions, yet they did not report any links to pain with this affective state (Norberg, 2012).

Whilst there is a sizeable body of research on the examination of emotions amongst the general population, there is much less exploration within criminal groups. There have however been some preliminary studies exploring the emotional aspects of offending. Research

amongst young women convicted of violent offences reported feelings of anger and aggression, as a result of previous experiences of abuse and violence within their family (Batchelor, 2005). Indermaur (1993), found similar themes of anger among violent property offenders when they were questioned about their emotional states relating to their offences. Contrastingly, other research has found that offenders view their offences as quests and exciting when questioned about their emotions whilst committing crimes (Åkerström, 1999).

Research utilising Russell's (1997), Circumplex has commenced exploring affective encounters amongst offenders. Preliminary results indicated commonalities with the structure of the circumplex when male offenders explained their affective experiences during the commission of an offence. Interestingly, individuals reported more powerful discrepancies between pleasant and unpleasant emotions when compared with everyday law-abiding encounters (Canter & Ioannou, 2004). Similarly, Ioannou's (2006), thesis represented the entire range of Russell's (1997), Circumplex when exploring emotional experience in male offender samples indicating the four emotional themes: *Distress*, *Depression*, *Calm* and *Elation*. Correspondingly, similar patterns have been found amongst women offender samples (Ciesla, Ioannou, & Hammond, 2018). Thus, suggesting the Circumplex model offers a significant starting point for examining offender's experiences of crime.

### **Criminal Narrative Experience**

The Criminal Narrative Experience is a term that has been developed from combining the research on offenders' emotions and narratives. There is an obvious link between the emotions experienced and the narrative roles utilised during the commission of crime. Previous research has attempted to explore the relationship between these two concepts in providing a theoretical framework to explain the individual experiences of crime.

Ioannou (2006), subjected both emotions and narrative roles to multidimensional analysis via Smallest Space Analysis and identified four themes of Criminal Narrative Experience (CNE): *Elated Hero*, *Calm Professional*, *Distressed Revenger* and *Depressed Victim*. This framework has also been replicated in a range of other studies, thus suggesting further support for the importance of the Circumplex of Emotions (Russell, 1997), Narrative Theory (McAdams, 1988) their link with Frye's (1957) Theory of Mythoi, and their association and importance in explaining CNE (Goodlad, Ioannou, & Hunter, 2018; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2017; Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe, & Tzani Pepelasi, 2018).

### **The Present Study**

Phenomenological aspects are crucial in the initial engagement and continued involvement in crime, therefore a better understanding of the internal processes that are utilised would be invaluable in developing effective theories for studying criminal actions. To date this approach has not been utilised in a systematic way amongst the women offending population.

The main aim of this research is a development from prior explorations with male offenders, and endeavours to examine the encounters of offence commission amidst women offenders. Exploration of emotions and individual narratives will be utilised to try and establish a framework for women offender's criminal experiences. The main objectives of the study are:

1. To examine relationships between emotions and narrative roles experienced by women offenders, and to determine whether these represent distinct themes.

2. To determine whether the CNE outlined in male offenders is also reflective of women offender's criminal experience in terms of the four themes: *Elated Hero*, *Calm Professional*, *Distressed Revenger* and *Depressed Victim* that have been illustrated in male offender samples.

## METHOD

### Selection of the sample

The women in this study were a mixture of incarcerated inmates and women from a wide range of rehabilitative community projects. In all instances the researcher approached the keyworkers/staff at each site to recruit willing and able volunteers to take part. All women able to participate at each site were offered the choice to take part, but it was entirely their decision to do so.

### Participants

**Age.** The participants consist of 128 women aged 18-70 years old who have committed a crime. The mean age of the sample is 36.40 years ( $SD = 11.12$ ). Table 1. highlights the offences reported and their frequency within the sample.

**Number of Convictions.** Table 2. illustrates the number self-reported convictions. More than half of the women (60.20%) have less than 10 convictions, however 22.6% have between 10 and 50 convictions and 13.30% have more than 50 convictions. This split is likely to be due to the fact there is a combination of incarcerated participants, with a greater number of convictions, and those in the community.

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### **Material used for Data Collection**

A questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, these were:

**1. Description of Crime.** This included a list of twelve questions enquiring about the events leading up to the commission of the crime, what occurred during the crime, anything they did to avoid arrest and what they did after the crime. The main purpose of this section was to enhance the details of the crime participants were recalling to enable better description of how they felt when committing such acts. Narrating and explaining the offence in detail would allow the memories associated with the whole event to be stronger.

**2. Emotions Statements.** This section of the questionnaire included twenty-five statements signifying the full range of emotions highlighted by Russell's, (1997) circumplex. This was developed from previous research that examined convicted offenders' feelings when asked to describe the emotions they experienced whilst committing a crime they could clearly recall, results from this highlighted clear emotions that were utilised to help the participants make sense of their crimes and behaviour (Oldale, 1997; Cross, 1998; Murray, 1998; Canter & Ioannou, 2004). The statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale which measured the extent to which participants experienced each emotion during the commission of their crime, ratings ranged from, "Not at all" (1) to "Very much" (5) with "Some"(3), being the mid-point. The utilisation of such a scale allowed greater understanding of participants answers and the extent to

which the emotions were felt rather than just indicating whether the emotion was present or not. Examples of the statements included: "I felt lonely", "I felt enthusiastic", "I felt confused", "I felt calm" to name a few.

**3. Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ version 1).** The third section of the questionnaire included a list of thirty-two statements representing the different types of roles participants were acting out during the crime. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, to identify the extent to which the participants related to the statements, whilst considering their roles when committing their crime, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much" (5) with (3) being the mid-point "Some". The use of varying scales for each role statement was preferred to establish the extent and intensity to which each role applied, as opposed to just indicating if the role was present or not. Examples of the roles statements included: "I had to do it", "I was like a professional", "I knew what I was doing", "I was in control" and "I was a victim" etc. The NRQ was developed taking into account Narrative Theory (McAdams, 1988) and the presence of narrative roles highlighted through pilot work amongst male offenders (Oldale, 1997; Cross, 1998; Murray, 1988; Canter, Kaouri & Ioannou, 2003). Since its establishment, The NRQ v.1 as well as subsequent versions have been utilised in a wide array of studies, validating its benefit in determining key narrative roles amongst a wide range of crime types and offenders (Ioannou, 2006; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2017; Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015; Youngs & Canter, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2013).

### **Procedure**

Questionnaires were completed on site at the various projects, in all instances a private and confidential room was made available for completion of the questionnaires. As outlined all participants volunteered to take part in the study and were asked by either

their keyworker or the researcher if they were interested in taking part. Once participation had been confirmed participants were taken to the private room and the nature of the research was outlined. The researcher explained that they would be asked questions about their experiences of crime. It was highlighted again that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without question if they wished. The researcher also reiterated that the information provided in the questionnaire would be kept completely anonymous and confidential to ensure participants were as open and honest as possible.

Once participation had been confirmed the women were asked to think of a crime they had committed and that they could remember clearly and then provide a clear description of this and complete the questionnaire. The women were given as long as they needed and were left to recall freely the events of their crime following the questions in the first part of the questionnaire.

The second part of the questionnaire involved reading through a list of emotions and roles statements describing how they may have felt whilst committing their crimes. The women were asked to indicate to what extent the statements were reflective of their feelings during the crime they had described. It was emphasised that these feelings must relate to how they felt at the time of the crime, not how they felt before or after.

The third part of the questionnaire involved reading through a list of roles statements the participants felt they were acting out during the commission of the crime. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent the statements were reflective of the roles they saw themselves acting out at the time of the crime. Again, it was emphasised that the roles they related to must have been relevant during the commission of the crime,

not how they viewed themselves before or after. Where participants reported literacy issues either the key worker or researcher would read the questionnaire to the women and explain each section and listen and record the responses to each question accordingly. In this sample there were nine women who required assistance. Once the questionnaire had been completed, the researcher debriefed the participants, thanked them for their help and answered any questions they had relating to the research.

### **Analysis**

**Smallest Space Analysis (SSA).** The data in the study were analysed using SSA-I (Lingoes, 1973). Tziner defines Smallest Space Analysis as '*a non-metric multivariate scaling procedure that geometrically represents a 'correlation matrix' based on the order of the inter-correlations among variables*' (Tziner, 1987, p.39). SSA is similar to other multidimensional scaling models such as factor and cluster analysis, however it strengthens visual representation of relationships. Moreover, it also allows for the comparison of every one of the variables to every other variable within the data set. This allows the researcher to study both the components within the domain, and also the relationships between the components to help make clearer inferences from the data studied, and helps inform potential future hypotheses that could be explored.

SSA is so called as it accounts for the smallest explanation of dimensionality, as it ranks the original correlations rather than their absolute values (Guttman, 1968). The SSA program calculates and ranks in order the correlations between each item explored which are then presented in an association matrix displaying the correlation of each variable with each other. From this matrix the coefficients are then used to present a visual representation of the data. Each point on the SSA graphic characterises the

variables explored and is calculated by repeated comparison of the rank order of correlations with the distance between each point and their contrary relationship. Therefore the closer the rank orders of distance and correlation, the healthier the visual representation to the original data matrix. This has been described as lower 'stress', to enable lower 'stress' the process is repeated until the least 'stress' is achieved. This 'stress' process is finalised by using a coefficient of alienation to highlight the degree to which each variable is linked to the other via their corresponding relationships on the plot, the smaller the coefficient of alienation the greater the correspondence to the original correlational data. A value of zero would be a perfect fit, and a coefficient smaller than 0.15 considered a good fit, and a coefficient between 0.15 and 0.20 reasonably good (Guttman, 1968). However, Borg & Lingoes (1987), suggest that it is often too simplistic to determine how 'good' or 'bad' a representation is as other factors such as the amount of variables, the logical theory behind experimentation and error will have an impact. Therefore, within an SSA arrangement the closer the variables are within the visual representation the higher their correlation.

To further explore the variables that are plotted within the same region an approach called Facet Theory is utilised (Shye, 1978). This allows the correlated variables to be explored further by postulating hypotheses to explain the nature of the relationship and add more depth and systematic investigation to strengthen empirical assertions. Therefore, variables that are within the same 'facet' will have a stronger correlation and be visually closer on the SSA representation, whereas those that are not within the same facet group will be in a different region of the multidimensional space. The propinquity of variables is known as the 'regional hypothesis' stating that those facets with similar themes will be found in the same region of space, whereas points further away from a

boundary will be more discrete. To expand further, once specific regions have been identified that correspond to a similar theme boundary lines are often then added to help define the specific facets.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Results of the SSA Analysis on Emotions and Roles**

To investigate the relationship between the emotions and roles themes the 25 emotion statements and the 32 roles variables were combined together into an SSA analysis, to try and determine different criminal experiences. As previously outlined emotions variables that are closely associated to roles variables will occur in the same region of the plot and represent similar themes. The three-dimensional SSA has a Guttman- Lingo coefficient of alienation 0.13387 in 14 iterations, showing a good fit between the Pearson's coefficients of emotions and roles variables and their corresponding geometric distances in the configuration. The three-dimensional representation was adopted as it highlighted a satisfactory coefficient of alienation. The projection of vector 1 by vector 2 of three-dimensional space is displayed in Figure 1. the labels included in this depiction are summaries of the full questions, however the full questions can be seen in Table 3. for ease of interpretation.

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**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

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### **Regional Structure of the SSA**

On initial examination of the plot, taking the emotions first it is clear that the unpleasant emotions are clustered to the left of the plot i.e. 'lonely', 'scared', 'upset', 'worried', 'depressed', 'annoyed', 'angry', 'sad', 'confused', 'miserable', 'irritated', 'unhappy' and 'pointless', whereas the pleasant emotions are to the right i.e. 'exhilarated', 'confident', 'pleased', 'calm', 'safe', 'enthusiastic', 'thoughtful', 'excited', 'relaxed', 'delighted', 'courageous', and 'contented'. This depiction reinforces the strong division of emotions in regard to criminal experiences. Furthermore, even with the introduction of the roles variables the pleasure-displeasure axis is still there.

However, when the roles are introduced there is less of a clear distinction, the area to the left of the configuration can be linked with *victim* role including key variables in this theme. The top right of the configuration includes roles relating to the *professional* and below these variables roles relating to the *hero* theme can be identified. The *revenger* role statements however are much more interspersed throughout the plot but again fall to the right of the configuration. Therefore, overall when combining the roles and statements the four distinct themes of criminal narrative experience (*Elated Adventurer*, *Distressed Revenger*, *Depressed Victim* and *Calm Professional*) could not be clearly determined. However, it is still clear that the women clearly distinguish their offences as either clearly pleasurable or not, with little in between these two extremes.

### **Themes of Emotions and Roles**

The four dominant themes of Criminal Narrative Experience were not found to apply to the women in this sample. However as has been highlighted the regional

hypothesis states that items with a common theme will be found in the same region of space, what is clear on examination of the SSA configuration is that there appears to be two dominant themes that can be differentiated for women's Criminal Narrative Experience. The two themes are clearly split in regards of those themes and emotions that are positive compared to those that are negative. The two themes have been termed 'Avenging Angel' and 'Choiceless Victim', case studies will be utilised to illustrate these two themes.

**Avenging Angel.** In this theme, there are thirty-three elements that are conceptually linked, these are:

1. Thoughtful, 2. I felt safe, 3. I was looking for recognition, 4. Calm, 5. Relaxed, 6. Enthusiastic, 7. Delighted, 8. Excited, 9. What was happening was fate, 10. Contented, 11. Courageous, 12. Pleased, 13. Exhilarated, 14. It was like an adventure, 15. Confident, 16. It was fun, 17. It was exciting, 18. I was like a professional, 19. It was interesting, 20. I was doing a job, 21. It all went to plan, 22. I couldn't stop, 23. I was trying to get revenge, 24. It was mission, 25. I was in control, 26. For me it was a usual day's work, 27. I guess I always knew it would happen, 28. It was routine, 29. I had power, 30. Nothing else mattered, 31. I knew what I was doing, 32. It was right, 33. I knew I was taking a risk.

The individuals in this region can be described as those that deem their offences as a positive experience, with feelings of exhilaration and excitement. Similarly, individuals in this region perceive their crimes as part of life, normalising their actions and likening events to going out to work, their crimes are planned and a necessity to meet their needs.

In the same vein subjects in this theme feel justified in their actions on a path of revenge, asserting power and taking risks to ensure that those who had wronged them met their justice. The term Avenging Angel was determined as a result of traditional and historical stereotypes relating to the perception of women who do not conform to societal expectations. The clear revenger aspect within this theme formed the 'avenging' element. Moreover, Christian Biblical references portray Avenging Angels as powerful and frightful individuals gifted with wisdom, thus as a result of these historical references the name for this theme was determined as the connotations seemed apt.

*Case 55:* In this case the individual reports being homeless and using drugs. She describes going to a shopping centre where there were lots of opportunities to shoplift. She remembers taking perfumes and removing the alarms off the bottles so she didn't get caught. She reports after she had taken the items she needed, walking out and catching a bus to the nearest city. During the crime she reports feeling confident, pleased, calm, enthusiastic, delighted and excited that she had completed the crime. She describes feeling like a professional, that it was fun, like an adventure, that she knew what she was doing, on a mission, that she had power and she knew she was taking a risk.

**Choiceless Victim.** In this theme, there are twenty-four elements that are conceptually linked, these are:

1. Lonely,
2. Confused,
3. Scared,
4. It was my only choice,
5. Upset,
6. It was like I wasn't a part of it,
7. Worried,
8. Helpless,
9. Depressed,
10. I was a victim,
11. Annoyed,
12. There was nothing special about what happened,
13. Angry,
14. Sad,
15. Confused,
16. Miserable,
17. Irritated,
18. Unhappy,
19. Pointless,
20. I was getting my own back,

21. I had to do it, 22. It was the only thing to do, 23. I didn't care what would happen.  
24. I just wanted to get it over with.

The Criminal Narrative Experience for individuals in this theme reported negative statements relating to their crimes. There is a lack of autonomy in their lives, feeling they have no control over their actions and feeling that committing a crime is their only choice. Feelings of despondence over events is strong including feeling confused, scared, lonely and miserable. As well as helplessness, feelings of anger and frustration are also dominant and individuals report themselves as victims of their situations.

**Case 5:** The subject in this case describes assaulting a security guard at hospital, she reports excessive drinking to numb her feelings of stress from events in her life. The participant reports feeling detached from the situation and feelings of fear, upset, loneliness, worry, anger and depression. During the assault, she reports feeling like it was her only choice and not caring what would happen. Along with confusion and helplessness she states the event was like a dream. After the event, she reports feelings of pointlessness and going to her friend's house to cry.

### **Means of Emotions and Roles Variables**

The variables that make up the two Criminal Narrative Experience themes are displayed in Table 4. with the means and standard deviations for each role and emotion statement for the sample of participants questioned. Mean scores highlight that statements reflect the offenders experience. The highest averages were represented in the *Choiceless Victim* theme with variables such as; unhappy (3.91), depressed (3.96), worried (3.83), sad (3.80), and angry (3.71) scoring the highest. Overall the region with

the highest distinct set of averages was also the *Choiceless Victim* Criminal Narrative Experience, with the *Avenging Angel* theme representing much lower averages overall.

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**INSERT TABLE 4 HERE**

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### **Scales of Emotions and Roles Themes**

Within the two themes for narrative experience that have been outlined it is proposed that each is representative of a distinct theme. Therefore, suggesting that in each theme the roles presented combine to measure an underlying dimension. Within the questionnaire responses were measured on a scale including “Not at all” (1), “Just a little” (2), “Some” (3), “A lot” (4) and “Very much indeed” (5) and these were used in the analysis. To examine the reliability coefficient for each emotion and role theme Cronbach’s alpha was utilised. The roles and emotions and the  $\alpha$  for each theme are given in Table 5. As displayed in Table 5. the alpha coefficient for *avenging angel* was .92 and for *choiceless victim* .90 indicating a very high degree of association between the variables in each of the themes.

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**INSERT TABLE 5 HERE**

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### **Testing the Framework**

Whilst the SSA analysis highlights two criminal narrative themes, it does not categorise the offenders themselves. An offender may report narrative roles from more than just one SSA region, although because these regions represent distinct themes, it would be expected that the majority of roles taken would fall into one particular region.

To explore this further each of the 128 cases were individually examined to ascertain whether they could be assigned to a specific theme on the basis of the role they reported whilst committing their crimes. Each case was given a percentage score to determine the proportion of variables present for each of the two themes, *Choiceless Victim*, and *Avenging Angel*.

The criteria for assigning a case to a theme was that the dominant theme had to have a greater number of variables than the other themes. Percentages were used rather than actual numbers as each of the themes did not have an equal number of variables attributed to them (Avenging Angel = 33, Choiceless Victim= 24). Cases were not classified if they contained an equal number of variables from each theme, or if there was no predominant theme.

Utilising this method, the prevalence of each narrative theme is displayed in Table 6. A total of 96.9% (124 out of 128) cases could be classified into one of the two criminal narrative experience themes. Exploring the cases further, the most prevalent narrative theme employed in this sample was overwhelmingly the *Choiceless Victim* with 86.7 % (111 cases). Only 10.2 % (13 cases) reported the *Avenging Angel* theme, and 3.1 % (4 cases) were *non-classifiable*.

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**INSERT TABLE 6 HERE**

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **Criminal Narrative Experience (Emotions and Roles)**

The main objective of the study was to examine the relationships between the emotions and roles experienced by women offenders. Results of SSA analysis of emotions and roles in

Figure 1. indicate two main themes of Criminal Narrative Experience (CNE) in this sample. The first theme, labelled as *'Avenging Angel'*, represents individuals who perceive their criminal experiences as pleasurable with feelings of exhilaration and excitement. Similarly, participants in this theme reported criminal actions as part of their day to day life, normalising experiences and likening events to going out to work. Another aspect of this theme is the notion of revenge, subjects report feeling justified in their actions of vengeance, asserting power and taking risks to ensure that those who had wronged them met their justice.

Participants in the second theme, classified as *'The Choiceless Victim'*, reported unpleasant and despondent feelings relating to their experiences of crime. Statements such as 'lonely', 'scared', 'confused' and 'helpless' indicate the lack of autonomy they believe they have over events in their life. As well as helplessness, feelings of anger and frustration are also dominant in wanting to get their own back over situations in which they feel they are the victim.

The two themes identified are unique to this research, and vary from previous findings relating to male offenders which revealed four distinct themes of criminal narrative experience; *Elated Adventurer, Distressed Revenger, Depressed Victim* and *Calm Professional*. These four themes highlighted correspond to Russell's (1997) Circumplex of Emotions, Narrative Theory (McAdams, 1988) and link with Frye's (1957), Theory of Mythoi, (Canter & Youngs, 2009; Canter & Youngs, 2012; Ioannou, 2006; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2015; Youngs & Canter, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2013).

It is not surprising that different CNE were identified for women, as discussed there is vast literary and empirical evidence suggesting that men and women offenders differ significantly in their criminal interactions and encounters (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). The

clear bipolarity of experiences being either positive or negative makes sense in regard to the two CNE themes outlined. For women, offending is seen as necessity, for example shoplifting to feed a habit is perceived as positive as the offence has met their needs. Contrastingly, on the other side of the spectrum offending is a result of feeling trapped and helpless in the world and is viewed as the individuals' only option.

Characteristics of the 'Avenging Angel' theme are consistent with previous research on female offenders. For example, the reason that the 'revenge' variable is associated with positive experiences could be related to the fact that as previously discussed violence amongst women has been linked to previous traumatic experiences such as abuse in childhood (de Vogel, de Vries-Robbe, Van Kalmthout & Place, 2012; Rossegger et al., 2009). Furthermore, research has also demonstrated that when violent acts are committed by women they are often within romantic, personal or family relationships and often as a result of some previous issues within those relationships in comparison to males whose aggression is more commonly out of personal relationships (Monahan et al., 2001).

The 'Choiceless Victim' criminal narrative, is overwhelmingly the most prevalent experience in this data set, 86.7% (111 cases) This is not unexpected as many of the aspects within this theme are consistent with the literature that state involvement in offending is a negative experience for many women. Research has suggested that whereas men experience more powerful emotions, women report more powerless emotions such as sadness and fear (Fischer, Rodriguez, Vianen & Manstead, 2004). Similarly, the presence of remorseful emotions such as 'worried', 'scared', and 'upset' supports previous assertions detailing greater intensity of negative emotions amongst women, particularly those linked to pain in relation to feelings of shame as a result of societal expectations (Norberg, 2012). The Avenging Angel

theme is much less representative with only 10.2% (13 cases) reporting this criminal narrative experience. Again, this is consistent with the literature that suggests for only a small percentage of women offenders their offending experience is positive.

### **Implications**

The results from this research highlight the value in exploring experiences of crime from the perspective of the offender and offer an alternative framework to help inform and advance theoretical knowledge in the field of criminology and forensic psychology. Utilising basic concepts of emotions and personal narratives open a wealth of knowledge and insight into offending behaviours.

As well as theoretical advancement, the findings can also offer practical uses for practitioners and experts within the justice system. Police officers working with women offenders could utilise the findings to enhance their knowledge of women offenders. Understanding the complex processes involved in offending actions can be invaluable in the engagement of women throughout the criminal justice process, potentially enhancing the rapport and determining the most appropriate ways of interacting. Similarly, magistrates could benefit from the same understanding of criminal narrative experience to help better inform and implement sentencing/treatment options.

The findings from the CNE can also be beneficial in informing therapeutic interventions. As highlighted the majority of the women in this sample reported negative emotional experiences of crime, largely reporting feelings of helplessness and lack of autonomy over their lives. Utilising this knowledge to provide more targeted interventions could be invaluable. Employing emotional regulation therapeutic methods and using interventions aimed at rewriting narratives, could be highly effective in helping women to feel more empowered in

their life and regarding their offending decisions. Similarly, when determining appropriate rehabilitative programmes interventions could be targeted at helping women to build their confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness. The use of co-production in women specific community rehabilitation programmes have proved beneficial in allowing women to feel more in control and involved in programmes they are involved in. Carroll & Grant (2014), highlighted in a review of women centred services that: *'People's needs are better met when they are involved in an equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals...working together to get things done.'* pg. 11.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As this research is the first exploration of women offender's motivations utilising the CNE methodology, there are limitations that need to be highlighted. Generalisability issues relating to range of offences, variation between crime type and cross-cultural application need to be acknowledged. Similarly, issues relating to the self-report methodology need to be acknowledged such as potential memory biases due to the retrospective nature of recall as there were variations between time offence and recall and this was not controlled for. However, it was stressed that only offences that were clearly remembered should be recalled. Likewise, further limitations relating to potential participant fatigue with biases relating to length of the questionnaire also need to be recognised. Similarly, the theme distributions represent overwhelming a clear majority being assigned to the CV theme, whilst this could be valid and truly representative, further explorations are needed to validate this finding further. Another factor that needs to be outlined is the concept of 'criminal careers', all individuals evolve and develop as they mature and because of interactions with the world. Consequently, narratives are also likely to evolve as a result of such factors. Therefore, although results may represent a certain narrative experience for an individual at the time they are questioned, this same CNE

may not be the same in future instances. Similarly, the experience may not be the same between offences, for example one may have a totally different narrative experience when committing a theft offence compared with murder.

To address the outline limitations and improve generalisability, further research could be undertaken on larger samples, amongst varying cultures and amongst a range of crime types both between the same offender and comparing different offenders. For example, previous research amongst male offenders, highlighted that criminal narratives depend on whether the offence is against a person or property, (Ioannou, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, exploration of the narratives and emotional experience of offending behaviours amongst women offenders is vital. The insight these 'stories' provide highlight a range of factors that can be invaluable in understanding offending behaviours, providing individuals and professionals with the tools to improve self-awareness, target more effective interventions and potentially prevent future recidivism. Whilst this study is an introductory exploration, the results offer useful grounding and insight for further examinations of offending behaviours and implementation of future strategies and procedures.

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Table 1.

*Number of Participants Interviewed For Each Offence Type*

<b>Type of Offence</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Type of Offence</b>	<b>No.</b>
	<b>Offenders</b>		<b>Offenders</b>
Violence	36	Driving Offences	6
Theft	34	Drunk and Disorderly	4
Drug Offences	9	Robbery	3
Burglary	7	Criminal Damage	5
Arson	6	Receiving Stolen Goods	1
Fraud	7	Neglect of Animals	1
Sex Offence (Adult)	1	Neglect of Children	2
Truancy of Child	1	Attempted Infanticide	1
Cruelty to Children	1	Sex Offence (Child)	3

Table 2.

*Number of Convictions*

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<b>No. of Convictions</b>	<b>Percentage of Sample</b>
None	3.90
Less than 10	60.20
10-20	5.50
21-30	7.00
31-40	7.80
41-50	2.30
More than 50	13.30

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Table 3.

*The Emotions and Roles Analysis Labels*

Question No.	Full Question	Analysis label
1	I was like a professional	Professional
2	I had to do it	Had to do it
3	It was fun	Fun
4	It was right	Right
5	It was interesting	Interesting
6	It was like and adventure	Adventure
7	It was routine	Routine
8	I was in control	Control
9	It was exciting	Exciting
10	I was doing a job	Job
11	I knew what I was doing	Knew doing
12	It was a mission	Mission
13	Nothing else mattered	Nothing mattered
14	I had power	Power
15	I was helpless	Helpless
16	I was my only choice	Only choice
17	I was a victim	Victim
18	I was confused about what was happening	Confused
19	I was looking for recognition	Recognition
20	I just wanted to get it over with	Get over with
21	I didn't care what would happen	No care
22	What was happening was just fate	Fate
23	It all went to plan	Plan
24	I couldn't stop myself	Not stop
25	It was like I wasn't part of it	No part
26	For me it was like a usual days work	Work
27	I was trying to get revenge	Revenge
28	It was the only thing to do	Only thing
29	There was nothing special about what happened	Nothing special

30	I was getting my own back	Own back
31	I knew I was taking a risk	Risk
32	I guess I always knew it was going to happen	Knew happen
33	I felt lonely	Lonely
34	I felt scared	Scared
35	I felt exhilarated	Exhilarated
36	I felt confident	Confident
37	I felt upset	Upset
38	I felt pleased	Pleased
39	I felt calm	Calm
40	I felt safe	Safe
41	I felt worried	Worried
42	I felt depressed	Depressed
43	I felt enthusiastic	Enthusiastic
44	I felt thoughtful	Thoughtful
45	I felt annoyed	Annoyed
46	I felt angry	Angry
47	I felt sad	Sad
48	I felt excited	Excited
49	I felt confused	Confused 2
50	I felt miserable	Miserable
51	I felt irritated	Irritated
52	I felt relaxed	Relaxed
53	I felt delighted	Delighted
54	I felt unhappy	Unhappy
55	I felt courageous	Courageous
56	I felt contented	Contented
57	I felt pointless	Pointless

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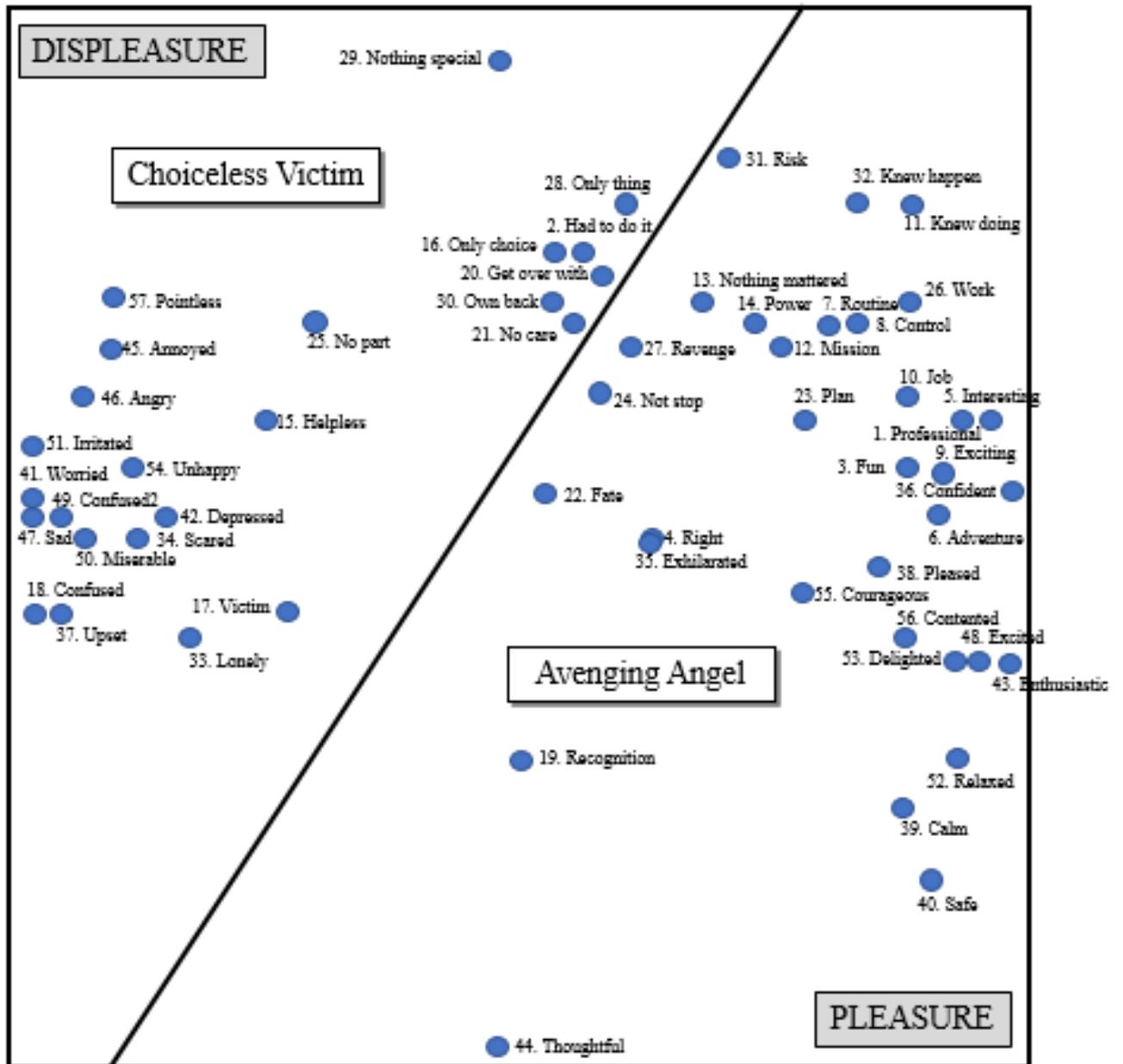


Figure 1. 1 by 2 Projection of Three- Dimensional Smallest Space Analysis of Emotions and Roles with Regional Interpretation (pleasure-displeasure axis).

Coefficient of Alienation = 0.13387

Table 4.

*The Emotions and Roles Making up the two regions of the SSA with Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses)*

ITEMS							
AVENGING ANGEL			CHOICELESS VICTIM				
Thoughtful	1.63 (1.22)	Risk	3.20 (1.71)	Lonely	3.25 (1.71)	Didn't care	2.55 (1.69)
Revenge	1.63 (1.29)	No matter	2.65 (1.70)	Had to do it	2.89 (1.82)	Get it over	2.79 (1.79)
Exhilarated	1.97 (1.42)	Mission	2.08 (1.54)	Own back	1.66 (1.33)	Only thing	2.59 (1.68)
Fate	1.85 (1.42)	Job	1.88 (1.48)	Scared	3.67 (1.60)	Pointless	3.02 (1.74)
I felt safe	1.59 (1.15)	Control	1.85 (1.36)	Helpless	2.78 (1.68)	Annoyed	3.44 (1.62)
Enthusiastic	1.52 (1.08)	Routine	1.88 (1.51)	Angry	3.71 (1.58)	Only choice	2.87 (1.73)
Excited	1.54 (1.16)	Adventure	1.45 (1.11)	Upset	3.72 (1.53)	Worried	3.83 (1.50)
Delighted	1.38 (1.00)	Interesting	1.38 (0.96)	Depressed	3.86 (1.52)	Irritated	3.55 (1.51)
Confident	2.04 (1.43)	Right	1.52 (1.14)	Sad	3.80 (1.49)	Unhappy	3.91 (1.48)
Courageous	1.59 (1.15)	Fun	1.34 (0.95)	Confused	3.34 (1.55)	Miserable	3.65 (1.57)
Exciting	1.48 (1.14)	Relaxed	1.32 (0.75)	Confused2	2.97 (1.64)	No part	2.53 (1.62)
Power	2.01 (1.57)	Calm	1.68 (1.17)	Victim	2.41 (1.60)	No special	2.08 (1.64)
Plan	1.56 (1.21)	Professional	1.49 (1.16)				
Recognition	1.53 (1.13)	Pleased	1.59 (1.14)				
Knew happen	2.29 (1.64)	Content	1.44 (1.04)				
Work	1.78 (1.46)	Knew doing	2.87 (1.62)				
Not stop	2.87 (1.67)						

Table 5.

*Scales of Roles and Emotions Themes (with Alpha if Item Deleted in Parentheses)*

ITEMS	THEMES					
	AVENGING ANGEL			CHOICELESS VICTIM		
	Thoughtful (.92)	Recognition (.92)		Lonely (.89)	Own back (.90)	
	Revenge (.92)	No mattered (.91)		Confused2 (.89)	Had to do it (.90)	
	Exhilarated (.92)	Mission (.91)		No part (.89)	Only thing (.90)	
	Fate (.92)	Knew doing (.91)		Victim (.89)	Get it over (.90)	
	I felt safe (.92)	Job (.91)		Scared (.89)	Didn't care (.90)	
	Enthusiastic (.92)	Control (.91)		Upset (.89)	Worried (.89)	
	Excited (.91)	Routine (.91)		Depressed (.89)	Annoyed (.89)	
	Delighted (.92)	Adventure (.91)		Angry (.89)	Sad (.89)	
	Confident (.91)	Interesting (.91)		Confused (.89)	Miserable (.89)	
	Courageous (.91)	Right (.92)		Irritated (.89)	Unhappy (.89)	
	Exciting (.91)	Fun (.91)		Pointless (.89)	Helpless (.89)	
	Power (.91)	Professional (.91)		Only choice (.89)	No special (.90)	
	Plan (.91)	Relaxed (.92)				
	Risk (.92)	Calm (.92)				
	Knew happen (.92)	Contented (.91)				
	Work (.92)	Pleased (.91)				
	Not stop (.92)					
<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>33</b>			<b>24</b>		
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>.92</b>			<b>.90</b>		

Table 6.

*Distribution of Cases Across Criminal Narrative Experience*

<b>Narrative Theme</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
Choiceless Victim	111 (86.7%)
Avenging Angel	13 (10.2%)
Non- Classifiable	4 (3.1%)