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The offender's narrative: Unresolved dissonance in Life as a Film (LAAF) responses.

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Additional Information:	
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If you have any potentially competing interests to declare, please enter them in the box below. If you have no interests to declare, please enter 'none'.	None
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figures and references). Please note that any papers that are over the 5000 word limit will be returned to the authors unless they have received prior permission from the Editor for the submission of the longer manuscript.	

The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments in the revisions of the article. The revisions are stated below.

Reviewer #2:

This revision of the previously submitted paper is a substantial improvement and is very nearly ready to take its place as an interesting and valuable contribution to the field. There are now better links with relevant research and theory; I'm sure the reader new to the area will appreciate the additional leads and aspects to think about. The business of the invalid chi- squares has been sorted out and overall it reads better than before. I'm a little reluctant to say this after presenting a garbled (half- altered) sentence in my original review, but there is a need for rigorous proof-reading (e.g. two errors with apostrophes and a misspelling of an author's name on the first page of the Introduction alone).

Authors' response: further proof-reading has been carried out.

On the same page (second paragraph)I was pleased to see the addition of Miller and Treacher but I had suggested this especially because my recollection was that their study also showed how readily 'delinquents' can model themselves on fictional figures (something thatappears rather consistent with the idea of engagement in a LAAF process). Also, the steer on Baumeister wasn't so much to raise issues of social support or antisocial peers as to alert to issues that arguably underlie important narrative themes. For example, even setting aside the appropriation of common cultural meanings by individuals and films alike, the need to belong could be seen as elevating the importance of acceptance (and acceptability), comparisons with others and so forth. The first sentence of this paragraph might usefully be followed by a few words and a reference acknowledging identity/ the self more generally as largely a social product.

Authors' response: paragraph has been revised.

The offender's narrative: Unresolved dissonance in Life as a Film (LAAF) responses.

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Abstract

Purpose. A growing body of literature indicates the value of exploring the accounts offenders give of their lives. This raises questions about whether offenders' narratives, distinctive from those of non-offenders, elucidate the identity and agency processes that facilitate continued offending.

Method. To explore this, 61 offenders and 90 non- offenders described their Life as a Film (LAAF).

Results. Significant differences between the two samples are revealed across content categories relating to Implicit Content, Explicit Processes, Complexity and Agency. These relate to a central focus on criminality as a dominant aspect of identity, a generally negative undertone, a concern with the materialistic within the narrative and the significant, yet problematic nature, of relations with others. These four features capture a meta-narrative of Unresolved Dissonance sustaining offending.

Conclusion. The findings open the way for the use of the LAAF in order to explore ways of resolving offenders Unresolved Dissonance, through reconstructing their narratives, complementing the Good Lives approach.

Key words: criminal narrative, narrative identity, unresolved dissonance

Introduction

A number of authors have drawn attention to the importance of the way in which offenders see themselves and their lives in supporting their criminality (Adams, Munro, Munro, Doherty-Poirer & Edwards, 2005; Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000; Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996; Bushman and Baumeister, 1998; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996), argued that violence was associated with highly favourable self-appraisals, combined with some form of ego threat. Baumeister, Bushman and Campbell (2000) further develop this argument, noting that high self-esteem also characterises many non-violent as well as violent individuals. Rather than simply high self-esteem, aggression is attributed to unstable self-esteem and narcissistic forms of identity. In another study, Adams, et al. (2005) relate criminality to a diffuse-avoidance identity processing style, characterised by uncertainty, procrastination and a tendency towards an external Locus of Control.

In contrast to the cognitive and individualistic processes criminal identity is considered to be an interpersonal rather than an intrapersonal dimension. One argument is that identity is socially constructed through the roles that people play in the society (or groups) to which they belong (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). A lack of strong attachments to others may lead to a variety of psychological and behavioural problems. For example, Baumeister and Leary (1995) discuss the importance of strong and stable relationships in reducing the likelihood of involvement in criminality. Though, a strong tie to a peer group is often considered as an antecedent to criminality. In an examination of delinquents personal construct systems, Miller and Treacher (1981) demonstrate that delinquents identified more readily with fictional characters showing a preference for the masculine and popular heroes

who were more likely to use direct action to solve their problems. Miller and Treacher concluded that delinquents were less able to identify with the adults closest to them due to poor social anchorage. The study also demonstrates that the delinquents were able to use projective processes to identify with fictional characters.

Central to these considerations of a criminal identity is the emerging emphasis on the offender's narrative (Canter, 1994; Maruna, 2001; Sandberg, 2009; Ward, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2011; 2012). In this context, narratives are considered as a tool that is used to make sense and meaning of experiences. For example, Maruna (2001) showed that what distinguished desisters from persisters, was the ability to generate a story of possible redemption for themselves; a shift in narrative. As Maruna notes *"...ex-offenders need to have a believable story of why they are going straight to convince themselves that this is a real change...The individual needs a logical, believable, and respectable story about who they are..."* (p. 86). Indeed, Ward's (2010) *Good Lives* approach to offender rehabilitation is predicated upon the notion of offenders rewriting their story to reconstruct their lives and themselves. As Ward and Marshall (2007) explain *"...The rehabilitation of offenders depends crucially on the construction of a more adaptive narrative identity...a story with characters, a set of themes (a plot) and a script that unfold across time in a relatively coherent fashion..."* (p. 280-282). The starting point for such approaches must therefore be a detailed understanding of the destructive narratives that led to, and have maintained criminal involvement.

The LAAF (life as a Film) technique, utilised in the present study asks the offenders to consider the scenario of a film being made about their lives; they are then asked to describe what the film would be. This innovative technique generates meaningful and

psychologically-rich material on the details of the narratives that run through offenders' understandings of themselves, their relations to other and their possible futures.

The LAAF Elicitation Procedure

The general LAAF technique used to elicit narrative-relevant content is presented below.

If your life were to be made into a film, what type of film would that be and what would happen?

- *Tell me more, what would happen?*
- *Who would the main characters be?*
- *What would the main events that might happen in the film?*
- *How do you think it might end?*

Responses are written down verbatim and content analysed for a number of different aspects.

The LAAF Interpretation Procedure

Responses are subjected to an interpretation procedure to derive a detailed understanding of the substantive content. The content is assessed in terms of four classes of issue:

1. Psychological complexity
2. Remit: Implicit psychological content,
3. Explicit processes used to organise content,
4. Nature of agency vis-a-vis others and the world.

This content analysis framework was developed from first principles in combination with existing narrative psychology theories and frameworks and a range of psychological concepts identified in Investigative Psychology studies as pertinent to the nature of an individual's agency in relation to criminal action.

Psychological Complexity These categories provide a basis for interpreting the accounts in terms of the richness of the narrative generated. This is considered on a substantive basis (e.g. number of distinct people; number of distinct psychological ideas) and a formal basis (e.g. account length-number of words, presence of contingent type sequences). This is an internal validation of the LAAF procedure. It shows the extent to which respondents are putting thought into their storylines and incorporating their experiences and contacts with others.

The Remit: Implicit Psychological Content. This category allows the researcher to review the narrative based on what each person describes as their LAAF. Given the open ended nature of the procedure one level of interpretation should consider the way in which the individual understands the LAAF task in terms of what to talk about. For example, the focal content of narrative is expressed through different scenes and events and the way in which that content is cast. The implicit content of the narrative may be cast in a number of formats such as the generic presentation of the LAAF which is expressed through the individual's likening of their life to a particular genre of film.

In describing their LAAF, the narrators will use a variation of tones. For example, in his discussions of fictional mythoi, Frye (1957) highlights core differences in the type of tone found in literary forms of narrative; such variations can be expressed as proactive or passive and negative or positive. In a similar vein, the resolution of the narrative will also vary among each narrator. Hankiss (1981) provides a typology of the resolution of a narrative which is differentiated according to movement between good past v bad past and good present v bad

present. Hankiss describes this movement as four narrative forms: dynastic (good past, good present); antithetical (bad past, good present); compensatory (good past, bad present) and self-absolutory (bad past, bad present). In the LAAF procedure the resolution focuses on the ending only (happy v sad) and what the individual seeks to achieve through the task. This is coded by the researcher using Sandberg's (2009) work on the implicit messages in accounts of deviant activities.

The Explicit Processes. This section of the content dictionary organises the LAAF narrative in terms of the psychologically active components. These are the psychological processes of the narrative content that are structured to produce substantive connections and movement between the components which produce the storyline. A range of psychological structuring processes that have been identified by McAdams (1993) in general narrative psychology as well as the offence-specific narrative roles identified by Canter and Youngs (2009; 2012) and Youngs and Canter (2011; 2012) are assessed. McAdams (1993) argues that themes of agency and communion are central to narrative identity. Youngs and Canter (2011; 2012) extend the role of agency and communion in order to demonstrate how modalities of agency are expressed as potency and modalities of communion are expressed as intimacy. The combination of agency and communion create four dominant narrative roles of offenders which Youngs and Canter term the hero (high intimacy, high potency), the victim (high intimacy, low potency), the revenger (low intimacy, low potency) and the professional (low intimacy, high potency) (for a review see Youngs and Canter, 2011; 2012). The content categories of the LAAF draw on these core themes of intimacy and potency alongside themes of contamination and redemption which Maruna (2001) has identified as core story plots among desisting and persisting offenders, as the psychologically active components in the narrative.

Nature of Agency. This category assesses variations in the descriptions of how the individual deals with the world. Here, the LAAF content framework draws on Bandura's (1986) work on psychological incentives to highlight core motivations for the actions that are described in the LAAF narratives. For example, how the individual views the world will include an element of locus of control, in the LAAF content framework this is assessed by the descriptions of avoidant or confrontational behaviours in the narrative.

One argument is that people are limited by their moral obligations and therefore create coping strategies when internal conflicts arise. Bandura (1990) argues that moral disengagement allows a person to avoid self-condemnation when moral standards have been violated. He proposes a set of scripts that people use to formulate reconstructions of the *self* to allow their perception of morality to not be broken. In an earlier theory, Sykes and Matza (1957) present a number of coping strategies for moral conflict in the form of a set of neutralisation techniques. The LAAF content framework includes scripts from both Sykes and Matza's neutralisation theory and Bandura's model of moral disengagement.

An important aspect of *agency* is considered in how the narrator describes the way in which they relate to others within their LAAF. For a general sense of *agency* the concept of imagoes, presented by McAdams (1993), is included in the LAAF content framework this is centralised on the imago of the protagonist and the imago of others. However, for the offence-specific *agency,* the focus is on Youngs and Canter's (2011) four forms of interpersonal identity that offenders have shown in relation to their victims. Here, the interpersonal identity is based upon combinations of weak v strong self-identity and others as significant v others as insignificant. This concept stems from Canter's Victim Role Model (Canter, 1994; Canter & Youngs, 2012); Canter posits three narrative roles of *person, object* and *vehicle* that offenders assign to their victims during their offending. The roles are underpinned by different forms of hostility towards others as well as an empathy deficit. The

LAAF content framework allows the researcher to code for these different forms of interpersonal agency within the LAAF.

Finally, Russell's (1997) work on the circumplex of emotions allows emotions to be classified into positive (aroused v non-aroused) and negative (aroused v non-aroused) categories. Youngs and Canter (2011) show how the emotional quadrants from Russell's earlier work are expressed in different ways when offenders described their crimes. These emotional quadrants are also included in the LAAF content framework.

Method

Samples

Offenders. Sixty incarcerated offenders took part in the research. They were all males between 21-61 years old; mean age 34 years (SD 9.4). Twenty-six (42%) were under the age of 30 when the interviews took place. The majority of the offenders were White (n= 49, 80%) and Black-Caribbean was the second largest ethnicity (n=6, 10%). Two percent (n=2) were of Chinese and Pakistani origin and a further 5% (n=3) did not state an ethnic origin.

The qualifications of the offender group varied from no qualifications to qualifications at a NVQ and BTEC national diploma level. The main qualification stated was GCSE level; however only 25 interviewees answered this question. Eight offenders (13%) stated having A-levels.

The average age of the first official warning was 16.8 years (age range: 8 to 60 years). The average age when first found guilty of a crime was 19.5 years (age range: 11 to 60 years). The average number of convictions the offenders disclosed was 31.4 (conviction range: 1 to over 200). The largest proportion of offenders had less than 20 convictions (n=25, 41%), five offenders had 20-40 convictions, seven had 40-50, and five had over 100 convictions.

The length of sentence served at the time of interview ranged from 3 month to life imprisonment. Fifty-six percent (n=30) had disclosed they had spent time in a Young

Offenders (YO) institute (range: 2 to 13 years); 31% (n=22) of the offenders said they had not spent time in a YO institute, and 13% (n=8) did not answer the question. Sixteen percent (n=10) had parents with convictions and 82% (n=50) said their parents did not have convictions.

Non-offenders. Interviewees were recruited from social settings as an opportunity sample. Demographic information was missing for 5 of the 90 interviewees. All interviewees were male and aged between 18 to 40 years, with a mean age of 24 years. The largest proportion (61%, n=57) were between 18 and 24 years. The next largest proportion (26%, n=22) were between 25 and 30 years, four (5%) were between 31 to 35 years, and 2% (n=2) were between 36 to 40 years.

A large proportion of the non-offenders were white 93% (n=79), 2% (n=2) Black-African, 1% (n=1) Chinese and 4% (n=3) did not state ethnicity.

Forty-one percent (n=35) had undertaken further education at the level of BTEC, NVQ or A-Level. One quarter (n=21) was educated to degree level and a further 9% (n=8) was educated to postgraduate level. GCSEs (or equivalent) had been obtained by 12% (n=10), 5% (n=4) had received practical (on-job) qualifications and 6% (n=5) had no qualifications.

The largest proportion of the sample were from a student population 37% (n=31). Around one third of the sample 33% (n=28) were in skilled employment, 21% (n=18) in unskilled employment, and 6% (n=5) were in professional employment. Finally 2% (n=2) were not in employment at the time of interview.

A large proportion had talked to the police in either a victim or offender capacity 87% (n=74). Only 13% (n=11) said they had never talked to the police. Three quarters (n=64) claimed they had committed a crime, 23% (n=20) said they had never committed any crime. One person did not answer this question. Around one quarter of the participants (n=21)

admitted to have been convicted of a crime, and 74% (n=63) said they had never been convicted of a crime.

Although the offenders and non-offenders differed in a number of important ways, the general criminal experience of the non-offenders and broadly comparable age range to the offenders facilitated a consideration of the similarities and differences in the narratives across the two groups. The comparison should, however, be treated cautiously as an initial exploration of the distinguishing features of offenders LAAF narratives.

LAAF Content analysis. The use of a thematic content analysis system has been successful in analysing narrative data and testing differences between groups in research with non-offenders (McAdams, Diamond, St Aubin & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams, 2009); and offenders (Maurna, 2001). The content analysis process included coding verbal material to assess the psychological content and complexity of the narrative data. The aim of the content analysis was to preserve the richness and meaning embedded in the narratives while still developing data that is comparable across the two sample groups.

A content analysis using the LAAF content framework (appendix 1) was applied to the LAAF interview transcripts by two independent raters. Cohens Kappa for inter-rater reliability was calculated for each section of the content framework. Based on definitions of Cohens kappa, a kappa between .40 and .75 represents a fair to good level of agreement (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney & Sinha, 1999; p. 6); the established kappa for the LAAF interviews was 0.512 which is adequate for the data set.

To determine which of the LAAF content items was significantly associated with the offenders or non-offenders; a comparative frequency analysis using Chi-Square testing was implemented. For the content items with low frequencies that violate the use of a Chi-sq test, a Fishers exact test was conducted. For the content items that included a scale measurement such as number of events cited or number of people cited, an independent t-test was carried

out. Narrative verbatim is included in the following section to illustrate the findings from the content analysis.

Results

Narrative Differences between Offenders and Non Offenders

Psychological Complexity. As can be seen in Table 1 the offenders do appear to take the whole process more carefully and thoroughly. They typically used it to generate more events with more people and a clearer structure and roles for characters than the non-offenders. This gives more psychological richness to their accounts supporting the argument put forward by Canter and Youngs (2014), that the LAAF is especially suitable for such respondents. This increases the confidence that the components of offenders' responses are of significance and the dominant aspects of them of value in understanding the processes underlying their criminal activity.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The Remit: Implicit Psychological Content. The dominant emphasis of offenders LAAF responses is criminality, expressed often in dramatic terms as a film that is of the crime or tragedy genre, as shown in the results in Table 2. This shows a marked tendency for offenders to focus on criminality and related imprisonment as central to their life as a film. Interestingly, accounts describing being a *victim of crime* were also significantly more prevalent in the offender sample.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

As Presser (2010) notes, all narrative interviews are a social interaction and have a social context. So, it seems likely the prison context of these interviews will have been salient to many of the participants. Given this, the preoccupation with criminal involvement and imprisonment is not unexpected, although these LAAF accounts do draw attention to just how central a role crime plays in the lives of many offenders and defines their self-identity. However the generic presentation as a *crime film* and the focus on being a *victim of crime* are also important to note. They imply a particularly dramatic conceptualisation of crime and all aspects of an involvement in criminality. This is illustrated particularly well in the following film accounts:

> Offender 29 "it would be a gangster film something like 'Menace to Society' [crime based US film]. There would be shootings, murders, robberies, selling drugs and loads of girls… I would sit back and get away with what I've done. I would be able to watch my daughter grow up and get away with what I'd done"

> Offender 38 "'Sin City' [film title] – action adventure. Thefts and robberies. Crazy weekends, cocaine, good though. Going out and getting off your head with the lads and a few girls, good times. I'm just that sort of person all the time... Doing a heist for millions and then lying on a yacht. I'd be the brains behind the heist but also get involved because I want to see what happens. After the heist I'd set off with a gorgeous woman and go fishing, go away with the money and lady"

The Explicit Processes. Within the Explicit Psychological Processes a strongly negative tone emerges as distinct for the offenders as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3ABOUT HERE

This is most clearly indicated as a feeling of general contamination (following McAdams, 1993 and Maruna, 2001) as illustrated in the following accounts:

> Offender 26 "I want to see my children grow up and turn out like their mum and not like me...The audience would be pretty disgusted. There would be some sympathy; I had an eye operation at twelve so I've been physically and mentally bullied. I've also self-harmed. All the worst things a human can do to their self I've done it or considered it"

> Offender 41 "Man who could have had everything, more brains than he knows what to do with, so many ideas but wasted the lot. It would be about wasted opportunities."

Agency. However, although the stories may have a negative backdrop, there is a clear sense of potency among many of the offenders that is less marked within the non-offenders as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Offenders make more reference to *self-mastery* (offenders 14%- non offenders 6%). One offender captures this self-mastery well in his account:

> Offender 25 "Once I have sorted myself out then I will feel good helping others. I've got a chance to make it better. Nothing's going to hold me back, everyone's supportive of me. I think this will be my last time. I want to give my kids someone to look up to"

Furthermore, the sense of potency extends such that the offenders differ from the non-offenders in their belief in a *happy ending* (offenders 53%-non offenders 29%). As this individual asserts:

> Offender 19 "It would end on a very, very happy note. I don't like sad endings. We would sail away into the sunset and never hear of [the prison] again."

The same conviction is clear in another account:

> Offender 32 "It would be me and my 3 lads sailing off into the sunset, I would have just done my last job and it would be it, over and done with."

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Perhaps of particular note, this sense of potency is combined with a marked tendency towards a denial of responsibility (offenders 33%- non offenders1%) as can be seen in table 5. This can be seen in the following accounts:

> Offender 46 "[What would the audience think of the film of your life?] I think they would feel quite sad. The way things go. They would understand why I have become who I am."

> Offender 49 "Being misled what is right and wrong by people around me, like gang leaders."

Agency Materialistic. A third prevalent theme distinguishing offenders from non-offenders is a preoccupation with the materialistic, see table 6.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

The offenders' stories were notably more commonly concerned with *material success* (offenders 20%- non-offenders 6%) as the focal content of their life story. Within the agency category, the offenders' actions were markedly more motivated by *material/financial gain* (offenders 26% - non-offenders 11%) than the non-offenders. As the following accounts illustrate this materialistic focus was not a vague aspiration, rather taking a very concrete and tangible form (*tangible rewards/acquisitions* offenders 21% - non-offenders 2%):

> Offender 38 "Doing a heist for millions and then lying on a yacht...After the heist I'd set off with a gorgeous woman and go fishing, go away with the money and lady."

> Offender 63 "I started selling drugs while I was still with the kid's mum. It's a different lifestyle and people associated with it – stunning girls – they were just following the money but so what? It was easy come, easy go, I used to spend £1000 on a night out, some people go out and spend £120 on a night out and are gutted the next day. I never used to drink pints, it was always bottles of champagne or shorts. Going to seedy clubs, pay for a girl, take her home – good times."

> Offender 70 "When I was successful I had A LOT of money. I'd rather not say but it was ridiculous. Me and girlfriend had an apartment in [the] town centre. Every Sunday without fail we'd go out in the day, spend five to six hundred pounds on clothes, have tea, go out."

Significant yet Problematic Relations with others. A final core theme that defines the offender but not the non-offender stories concerns interpersonal relationships, see table 7.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

These are central preoccupations for the offenders, with relationship problems providing the focal content of the accounts of nearly a quarter of offenders but only one in ten non-offenders (*relationship problem* offenders 23% - non-offenders 10%). However, this concern with their relationships with others is not typically happy or easy. Instead, the offenders spoke of *wrong done to them and theirs* (offenders 33% - non-offenders 9%) and issues like *betrayal (*offenders 3% - non offenders 0%) and *loss* (*loss of significant other* offenders 9% - non-offenders 1%*).* This is clearly illustrated in the following accounts:

> Offender 1 "I had a good friend before 1998 but since then I've been by myself as our friendship got chucked back in my face. I was nicked on charges that I wouldn't have been and since then I find it hard to trust people and now I only have acquaintances...When my family broke up when I was 3-7 years old then 7-13 my family was back together but there were lots of drinkers and it was always disrupted...I ended up cutting my wrists and every relationship since has been chaotic."

> Offender 36 "He [step-father] doesn't treat me like his own kids; I've got 3 stepbrothers and a half-sister. He [step-father] always said I'd got to jail. I used to go out and get into trouble just to piss him off."

> Offender 59 "Outside of the prison I am lonely. My relationships break down."

Discussion

Four Essential Distinguishing Themes: Offenders' Unresolved Dissonance

Four features capture the essence of the way in which the narratives of the offenders appear to be distinct. These relate to a central focus on criminality, a generally negative undertone, a concern with the materialistic matters and the significance, yet problematic nature, of relations with others.

The identification of a number of key differences with many similarities across the offender and non-offender samples supports the validity of the Life as a Film (LAAF) approach. Although having a generally lower level of educational attainment than the non-offenders, the offenders were still able to construct detailed and psychologically rich narratives about their lives. The LAAF seeks to derive the psychological essence of an individual's narrative by characterising their life in an active, plot-driven, character-focused, dramatic format, highlighting features less immediately obvious in static, standard psychological processes.

The comparisons revealed that the films described by the offenders were commonly presented as crime genre, dominated by their involvement in crime and criminality. This was presented as past crimes and imprisonment, as victims or as a dramatic finale to their stories. For many of the offenders, it appeared to be the involvement in or with crime that lent dramatic impetus to their lives. Although this emphasis on the criminal is likely to be a product of the prison context, nonetheless the predominance of crime and criminality in the life stories is a perspective that rehabilitation efforts must work with.

Relatedly, offenders LAAF accounts were typically characterised by a pervasive negativity, unlike the non-offenders. Of considerable rehabilitative potential however, were

the exceptions to this. There was an emphasis on self-mastery and potent variants of self-identity that was particular to offenders. Furthermore, offenders very commonly expressed a belief in an ultimate happy ending not found among the non-offenders. These perspectives offer potential routes for addressing the negativity that characterises offenders' views of their lives.

Alongside this, a third theme focusing on materialism, distinguished offenders stories from non-offenders accounts. Rather than simple financial success, this often took a tangible form, with specific sums of money and particular goods cited by the offenders, which was not seen in the non-offenders' accounts. At odds with this materialistic focus is the significant, yet problematic nature of the offenders' relations with others.

These four themes represent the building blocks of a criminal meta-narrative. Different individual offender narratives will emphasise some components more than others, taking a variety of specific, detailed forms. Contrasting markedly with the offender narrative themes, the non-offenders LAAF accounts were distinct in their emphasis on their lives as generally positive, as Comedies and on their role as a friend.

Taken together the themes that characterise offenders' narratives show a self-concept dominated by criminality, couched in negative terms that focus on material concerns. Yet despite this focus, relations with others are important but typically problematic and described in terms of wrong done and loss. This implies an unresolved dissonance between the need for rewarding engagement with others yet an emphasis on material gains. The unresolved dissonance is further implied in the declarations of potency, happy endings and self-mastery within an overriding negative presentation of their lives.

This fundamental unresolved dissonance emerges through use of the LAAF procedure because of its emphasis on free flowing accounts, structured by the offenders themselves. The complex interplay of concepts that produce the characteristics of dissonance has been

difficult to identify using other procedures. Research on a number of psychological constructs, from self-esteem (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006) to empathy-deficit (Covell & Scalora, 2002; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007) has not established the particular components that differentiate those involved in crime from those who are not.

Dealing directly with Unresolved Dissonance has considerable rehabilitative potential. Dissonance can lead to both commitment and resistance to change through cognitive, dispositional and environmental influences (Draycott, 2007; 2012). For interventions to be successful a commitment to change by the individual is necessary. The unresolved dissonance identified in the LAAF accounts of the offenders demonstrates aspects of the narrative that may challenge the individual's commitment to change. Canter and Youngs (2012) identify the importance of a more refined understanding of the substantive nature of offenders' narratives in developing the opportunity to use more narrative ideas in treatment; suggesting that *"..framing the therapeutic intervention within the narrative perspective is less threatening and invasive for offenders than a direct confrontation over thought patterns.."* (pg. 272).

However, offenders' narratives revealed through the LAAF do not explain how or why offenders desist from crime but rather reflect the psychological aspects of their experiences that are relevant to desistance which can contribute to rehabilitative practices. The discrepant themes revealed in the unresolved dissonance, such as criminal identity, focus on the materialistic, and problematic relationship are issues to focus on during therapeutic interventions. Ward's 'Good Lives' approach (e.g. Ward, 2010) points to the value of helping offenders to reconstruct their personal narratives. Therefore identifying what areas of the narrative need to be recast is important to making the changes which interventions aim to achieve. What the LAAF offers is a method of self-reflection that allows the offenders to organise their life-story into a meaningful narrative; a similar cognitive process to the

developmental ideas of the reflective function (Fonagy & Target, 1997; Fonagy, 2004). The reflective function is method of self-organisation, which Ansbro (2008) argues mirrors the reflective aspects of the narrative approach and is a useful tool when working with offenders.

Narrative approaches are gaining currency within psychiatric and social science discussions of human behaviour (Canter, 2012; Lewis, 2014). The Good Lives approach (e.g. Ward, 2010) has highlighted the potential of helping offenders to develop constructive 'Good Life' narratives. Complementary to this, the present paper suggests some of the particular components of the *destructive* narrative that need to be recast, such as the materialistic focus and the focus on criminality and its dramatic qualities. It offers positive features particular to offenders for rehabilitative efforts to focus on, such as, for example, the highly potent self-identities as well as the committed belief in a happy ending. But most centrally, it implies a systemic reconstruction of narratives that address the inconsistencies at the heart of the Unresolved Dissonance in offenders' life stories. The LAAF approach may be a useful tool in deriving the essential psychological details of the individual's life narratives and assessing progress in the reconstructive process. Importantly, it does seem to be a technique with which offenders and non-offenders alike can engage.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Comparisons of Psychological Complexity in LAAF Responses with t-test Results

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Distinct psychological ideas	4.67 (2.76)	3.63 (1.96)**
Distinct events cited	2.6 (2.48)	2 (1.64)***
Number of people	2.2 (1.63)	1.5 (1.56)**
Distinct beginning, middle and end components	22 (36.1%)[X]	13 (14.4%)[X]
Roles for characters	13 (21.3%)[X]	6 (6.7%)[X]

Note. **p<.01,***p<.001. [X] frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

Table 2

Comparisons of Implicit Psychological Content in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Generic Presentation		
Crime	13 (21%)	2 (2.2%) $^{+}$***
Tragedy	12 (19.7%)	3 (3.3%) $^{+}$ **
Focal content		
Doing Crime	33(54.1%)	12(26.8%) ^{X} *
Imprisonment	29(47.5%)	2(2.2%)$^{+*}$*
Victim of Crime	9 (14.8%)	2(2.2%) $^{+}$ **

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. ^{X} frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

+frequencies of occurrence tested using Fishers exact test.

Table 3

Comparisons of Explicit Psychological Processes in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Emotional content		
Negative tone	35 (57.4%)	20 (22.2%)^{X}*
Aroused negative	13 (21.3%)	4 (4.4%)$^{+}$**
Hostility towards others	9 (14.8%)	2 (2.2%)$^{+}$**
Contamination theme		
General contamination	23 (37.7%)	5 (5.6%)^{X}*
Victimisation	11 (18%)$^{+}$***	-
Disappointment	10 (16.4%)	1 (1.1%)$^{+}$***
Loss of significant other	9 (14.8%)	1 (1.1%)$^{+}$***
Physical/psychological illness or injury	6 (9.8%)	1 (1.1%)$^{+}$*

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01,***p<.001. ^{X} frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

+frequencies of occurrence tested using Fishers exact test.

Table 4

Comparisons of Agency Revealing Self-Mastery in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Agency		
Self-mastery	14 (23%)	6 (6.7%)^{X}**
Identity - protagonist		
Escapist	10 (16.4%)	5 (5.6%)^{X}***

Note. **p<.01,***p<.001. ^{X} frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

Table 5

Comparisons of the Justifications used in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Denial of responsibility	20 (32.8%)	1 (1.1%)$^{+}$***
Assume the role of victim	15 (24.6%)	6 (6.7%) ^{X} **
Diffusion of responsibility	8 (13.1%)	2 (2.2%) +*
Distorting the consequence	5 (8.2%) $^{+}$**	-
Condemnation of condemners	4 (6.6%) $^{+}$*	-

Note. *p<.5,**p<.01,***p<.001. ^{X} frequencies of occurrence using Chi-square.

$^{+}$ frequencies of occurrence tested using Fishers Exact Test.

Table 6

Comparisons of the Materialistic Components in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Material/ financial gain	16 (26.2%)	10 (11.1%)^{X}***
Tangible rewards/ acquisitions	13 (21.3%)	2 (2.2%) $^{+}$***
Material success	12 (19.7%)	5 (5.6%) ^{X} **

Note. *p<.05,**p<.01,***p<.001. ^{X} frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

$^{+}$ frequencies of occurrence tested using Fishers Exact Test.

Table 7

Comparisons of Relationships with Others in LAAF Responses with Chi-Square Result

	Offenders	Non-Offenders
Love/ friendship	15 (24.6%)	4 (4.4%)[+]***
Relationship problem	14 (23%)	9 (10%) [X]***
Caring/ help	8 (13.1%)	3 (3.3%) [+]*
Others as non-significant	5 (8.2%)	1 (1.1%) [+]*

Note. *p<.05,***p<.001. [X] frequencies of occurrence tested using Chi-square.

[+] frequencies of occurrence tested using Fishers Exact Test.