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Narrative Analysis in Criminology

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ABSTRACT

Crime is both storyable and storied, and narrative analysis is thus essential for criminologists. In this article I present four different ways of doing narrative analysis: thematic, structural, performative and dialogical. These forms of analysis have different research questions and are associated with very different research traditions. Narrative analysis varies depending on whether researchers are interested in the content of what is told, how it is done, who is narrating and where it is done, or what narratives are at play in a story. The article describes the methodological process of these different approaches and exemplifies their specific application in an interview with a violent offender. It discusses the many advantages, but also the limitations of each of the narrative analysis traditions. Furthermore, it presents the narrative work stories do, such as entertaining, identity and boundary work, and processing and integrating—and argues that it is essential to understand these to capture the role of stories for crime.

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Introduction

Narrative analysis delves into the content and form of stories, such as the roles or characters of the story, which plot is being played out, what boundaries are drawn together, and what genre the story is in. Through narrative ethnography, the social context of storytelling can also be studied, such as how place, narrator, and audience influence interpretation and effect. Stories grow out of objective social and economic structures and must be understood based on variables such as gender, class, and ethnicity. At the same time, they also influence these structures. Stories or narratives are held together by recognizable patterns of events and are characterized by having a beginning, middle and end (Sarbin, 1986). A narrative can be long or short, a story that summarizes a long life or some sentences that retell a specific episode.

Narratives can be understood in many ways, but most emphasize *temporality*, one event after another, and *causality*, one event leading to the next. As a whole, the events form the plot that gives the story meaning (Polletta, Chen, Gardner, & Motes, 2011). Stories are just one of many discursive forms, argument or dialogue are examples of others, but narrative analysis views stories as being particularly important. Stories entertain, convey knowledge and process trauma by organizing our

experiences and giving them meaning. They selectively draw on experiences and reflect and construct the identity and self-understanding of the narrator (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Stories come in many forms, but are characterized by a special structure, a plot, and a limited set of roles.

This article emphasizes the methodology of narrative studies and shows how a narrative analysis in criminology may be carried out.¹ Such work has often gone under the label of narrative criminology (e.g. Fleetwood, Presser, Sandberg, & Ugelvik, 2019; Presser & Sandberg, 2015a; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016), but narrative analysis in criminology has, and can, also be carried out outside of this framework. The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate four types of narrative analysis and traditions. I do this primarily by engaging in detail with an interview with Fredrik and his many different stories of violence (see also Presser & Sandberg, 2015b). The narrative approaches demonstrated are the same for larger data sets and other kinds of stories and offenders. The hope is that showing narrative analysis in detail will inspire more narrative work in criminology than writing general advice.

Fredrik's story(ies)

Fredrik was interviewed in a Norwegian prison as part of a larger project on drug dealers. He was 28 years old, an ethnic Norwegian, and had been involved in crime since he was young, especially fighting. Illegal drugs were an important part of his life, especially amphetamines, ecstasy, GHB, and cannabis. Fredrik had bad experiences with the police and did not trust them. He was also well-known to the police and enjoyed telling dramatic stories about his encounters with them. The last time he was wanted by the police, he said "they arrived at my place brandishing MP5 machine guns and riot shields. They abseiled down from the roof on ropes to my living room window." Fredrik had many dramatic stories like this one, commenting: "I reckon I could tell 40 to 50 stories that were like that, exactly the same kind of thing. I might not have been involved in all of them, but..." His narrative repertoire consisted of stories about himself, but also about friends and acquaintances. Storytelling was important to him, and when he spoke, he was intensely present, upset, angry, and immersed himself in the stories he told. It was as if he travelled back to the situation and relived them. He was boastful, but also used the stories to understand himself and explain who he was to others.

The psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) distinguishes between paradigmatic and narrative knowledge. While paradigmatic mode is characterized by *the argument* and the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation, the narrative mode is characterized by *the story*. Here, the point is not so much verifiability and logic, but rather good stories and gripping drama, which should be believable. While the paradigmatic logic conveys knowledge through systematic reasoning, narratives convey knowledge by placing insights into specific experiences. Stories provide an opportunity to convey experience, knowledge, and insight without formal logical

¹Parts of this paper has previously been published in Danish: Sandberg, S. (2018): Narrativ Kriminologi – tematisk, strukturel, performativ og dialogisk analyse. pp. 233–260. In Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Ed.) *Metoder i kriminologien: Kilder, teknikker og tematikker*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

reasoning. Narrative knowledge is thus an ambivalent form of imparting knowledge that allows audiences to identify with experiences they themselves do not share, without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing (Polletta & Lee, 2006). Stories are central to all social classes and groups. They reflect cultural background and class, but are also an opportunity to transcend these. Such characteristics makes stories and narrative knowledge a particular important resource for groups that have marginalized opinions and experiences. For Fredrik for example, storytelling was a way to both entertain and convey knowledge about his own life and the environment he was a part of.

Elements of the story

The linguist William Labov (1972) has outlined the six elements of a story. He describes how many narratives begin with an *abstract* that summarizes the entire story in a sentence or two. This is then followed by an *orientation* that gives context to the narrative and says something about who is involved. It also states the location, time, and other relevant background information. The *complicating action* is a key element of the plot and introduces a new event or conflict. *Evaluations* may occur at any time during the story and are assessments that give a hint as to why the story is worth telling. A complete narrative also offers a *resolution*, which is the other main element of the plot. This tells you what happens at the end and resolves the conflict. Finally, the narrative has a *coda* or conclusion that gives the story general meaning. The elements of the story do not necessarily have to take place in this order, and some of them may be missing altogether, but according to Labov, they are explicitly or implicitly present in all stories.

Fredrik's stories were closely intertwined and were he told one story after another. One story about a confrontation with an alleged pedophile was particularly important. Fredrik began by saying, "I can't be bothered telling the whole story." Without stopping, however, he went on to give a detailed description of what had happened. Fredrik told the story without the interviewer interrupting him or asking questions, and it had the familiar structure of a story. Following Labov's (1972) narrative elements, it began with a synopsis consisting of two sentences, followed by the background of the dramatic events:

Abstract

... We then went after a pedophile in this small town.²

Orientation

A female friend of mine who was supposed to go to that guy's house, a 55-year-old called Kjetil. ... He'd bought her some of that sexy underwear with an open crotch, you know, the stuff you can buy at Rabbit Shop. She thought she was going to meet one of her girlfriends at his house to make some food and watch a movie and stuff.

Complicating action

Well, she gets there, and the underwear is lying on the table. He asks her to put it on and stuff. When all this happened, she wasn't more than 18–19 years old.

²Some sections have been omitted to ensure anonymity.

Evaluation

I think it's a bit, you know. It's a bit nasty.

Complicating action

And then there's the other girl who was there, the one she thought was a good friend, she's sitting there with that Kjetil guy, and they sit and start shooting up heroin together. Sitting there and masturbating in front of her and that. She went to the bathroom, and then she calls me and says she's such-and-such a place, she's terrified, and they're going to inject her and stuff like that. The thing is, she injects herself sometimes, uses amphetamines, but she doesn't use heroin. And when there's brown stuff in the one they've got, it's pretty clear what he's trying to get her to do."

Resolution

So, I say, 'Just book a cab and get over here right away'. Then she says she can't afford it. Then I say: 'I'll pay for the cab, just get over here right away'.

Orientation

So, when she arrived, she just sat for an hour and looked straight ahead. I tried to talk to her, she was just totally apathetic, just like that.

Complicating action

Then, as the night went on, I found out what had happened.

Resolution (of a story)/complicating action (of new story)

The next day, I go down there, took her with me and said, 'You just go in, just ring the doorbell like normal. You go in, I'll come in a minute after you'. So, she goes in there, and a minute passes. Then me and a buddy of mine go in. We go in after her. Well, he's sitting there in some little panties in his lazy boy recliner with that girlfriend of his, you know. Then I knock on the door frame, stand in the entrance and then he sees me, and he starts getting nervous as hell. Then I say, 'How are you doing?' 'Yes, yes—I'm fine and that. How are you doing?', he asks me. Then I say, 'Well, put it this way, I think things are going a lot better for me than they are for you'. So, then I tie his head to the door handle with a thin rope. He tried to struggle free for a while. So, ... yes, there were bruises all over his body, had been tied up for a while. If some people hadn't turned up, he'd probably have looked a lot, lot worse than what he did.

Evaluation/orientation

"He reported it to the police. I stole a camera from him. I knew he had done it to many girls. I found pictures where he undresses girls that are no more than 12-13 years old. I got so mad when I saw those images that I deleted them, instead of showing them to the police. I should have gone to the police. There were so many pictures in that camera. I just watched the first seven, that was enough, then I deleted them. I don't know what was in the rest, it was really stupid of me, not to show them to the police.

Fredrik's story is about how he confronts Kjetil, a sleazy guy who exploits his friend and other young girls. The story has two complicating elements (underwear and needle), and only hints were given in relation to the sexual assaults committed. This is a common feature of stories: the listener must fill in the missing pieces. Fredrik's story also contains some evaluations and descriptions of Kjetil that justify the violence he is subjected to (he is a pedophile). The story has two resolutions. One is when Fredrik gets his female friend to book a cab, and the other is when he goes after Kjetil to avenge the abuse. The latter is the most important regarding the story's plot.

Avenging the abuse is also the beginning or the complicating element of a new story in which Kjetil hires someone to get back on Fredrik. This story followed straight away, intertwined with the first story:

Complicating element

He paid them about 90,000³ to come and pick me up, and drop me off in the woods, because there were others there waiting to take over. I was sitting inside my apartment with a buddy, sitting with a knife under the couch cushion, and three of them came in. And they were walking around and talked on the phone, saying: 'Yes, he's sitting here, yes, yes, we'll take him with us'. And then he says, 'You're coming with us'.

Resolution

Then I say: You guys are not coming in with your shoes on in the living room, go out into the hallway and take off your shoes. Then they went into the hallway and took off their shoes. Then I took out the knife, put it on my lap. When they came back in, I was sitting with the knife on my lap. Then I said: I'll come with you guys on one condition, and that's that you do it at your own risk. Because I'll guarantee you that there will be fewer people in the car when we get there than there were when we left. So, in the end, they chose not to take me away. They'd been given 90,000 to take me on that road trip, drive me 25 miles.

Coda

So, yes, it was ... It was a crazy time, sort of. And yes, I probably had a reputation for being a little crazy back then.

In the second story, Fredrik is the victim. He gets out of it by threatening to use violence. In both stories, Fredrik appears to be a cold and calm tough guy. First, he confronts a pedophile, then he stands up to some other criminals, and later we will see how he stands up to the police.

The different narrative elements drive the story forward. The orientation introduces place and context, new events make things more complicated, these are explained, and then they are resolved. We can see that there are several such sequences in the stories, which are resolved in a common coda for both stories. This returns the story to the audience and places it into a larger context. In this story, the coda relates to Fredrik's background of being violent and out of control ("a little crazy"). The story also has a future perspective, describing violence as a potential opportunity for him. Although he describes it as a thing of the past, the story shows that he possesses the ability to commit excessively violent acts also in the present.

There is good reason to believe that he is exaggerating, and the quotes that Fredrik spices the story up with should be taken with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, they say something important about values, identity, and culture in the environment in which is a part (Sandberg, 2010). There is a special form of masculinity that dominates his storytelling, and violence is important. Men must expect violence, stand up to potential insults and be able to defend themselves. Fredrik's story conveys this culture and identity, regardless of how true the story or details of the story are. The elements of a story are absolutely crucial to understanding the structure of a story, and thereby how values are conveyed and transferred through narratives (Luger, 2014).

³Norwegian kroner, about 9000 US dollars.

Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish the different elements of stories, and they occasionally merge into each other. Language, however, always has a given structure, which enables but also limits the conveyance of meaning. Everyone must relate to pre-existing stories and the recognizable structure of a narrative when narrating. Those who break too much with established stories and genres risk not being understood. In this way, stories make certain actions more accessible than others.

Forms of narrative analysis

Narrative analysis sometimes studies complete stories, as shown above. Other times, it only looks at parts of the story, such as the complicating element (action) or evaluation and coda (meaning) (Lieblich, Rivka, & Zilber, 1998). Sociologists Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (2009) distinguish between studying *what* is being told and *how* it is done. The first is the dominant approach in social science, while the second is more common in linguistics. Narrative analysis is typically concerned with the combination of the content and form of the language. For example, a narrative form can reinforce the content or steer it in specific directions.

Sociologist Cathrine Riessman (2008) divides narrative analysis into thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual analysis. Table 1 below is based on this division, but distinguishes between dialogical and performative narrative analysis, and excludes the slightly more peripheral visual analysis. My model also includes associated academic traditions to provide some scholarly context:

Table 1. The relationship between forms of narrative analysis, research questions and methodological traditions.

Form of analysis	Questions	Associated traditions
Thematic	What	Narrative content analysis
Structural	How	Sociolinguistics, narratology
Performance	Who, when, why (concrete)	Narrative ethnography
Dialogic	Who (abstract)	Dialogical narrative analysis

Forms of narrative analysis are related to different research traditions that pose different research questions. In what follows, I will go into detail on these traditions by showing how Fredrik's story can be analyzed and interpreted in different ways depending on the interests of researchers.

Thematic narrative analysis

Thematic narrative analysis revolves around the question of what the story is about. The content of what is being told is central to the analysis, such as the meaning and the point/coda. Thematic analysis rarely looks at language, form, or interaction, and therefore resembles thematic analysis or thematic coding more generally in qualitative methodology. The main difference is that the full stories are usually included in the analysis, and it is the themes from these that are theorized across the cases (Riessman, 2008; Sandberg, Tutenges, & Pedersen, 2019). A thematic analysis of Fredrik's story for example, will identify what the researchers understand as the most relevant overall

content of his story. Arguably, two themes stand out. The first theme involves the descriptions of how he masters these violent situations using expertise and skill. He does not become fazed and is superior to his opponents. The second theme is of a more ethical/moral nature and concerns justifying the violence.

The first theme can be seen in the descriptions of how Fredrik takes on the role of a leader and gives commands ('Just book a cab') and the episodes leading up to the statement "So in the end, they chose not to take me away." Throughout the entire story, he demonstrates that he is not afraid of violent confrontations, and that he masters what is often described as street culture (Ilan, 2015). Kjetil and Fredrik both belong to a violent subculture, where it is important to have a "crazy" reputation to avoid being subjected to violence. Therefore, an important theme in the story is that Fredrik is potentially violent, and that he acts calmly in violent situations where others would have panicked. He also knows how to act, knows the rules of this environment, and is not afraid of anyone. This theme can also be seen when Kjetil wants revenge. He avoids involving the police and chooses instead to hire someone get back at Fredrik.

Stories of violent episodes both use and clarify cultural ideas in a violent subculture. Many of the statements in Fredrik's narrative could have been coded thematically as street culture (Bourgois, 2003) or street code (Anderson, 1999), and seen in light of the long tradition of subculture studies regarding violent environments. One could argue that the stories transfer street culture between people and groups (Lauger, 2014). A thematic narrative analysis would go into detail on this theme to identify the characteristics, rules, and norms of this cultural universe.

While street culture is most evident in the action (orientation and complicating element), the theme of morality/justification is more evident in the evaluations ('I think it's a bit, you know. It's a bit nasty'), and in the descriptions of the villain ('pedophile'). This is another important theme of the story, where many of the statements, as well as the whole story, can be seen as an example of narrating moral violence. The story is about how Fredrik protects women in his circle of friends and how he can go to great lengths to defend them. This can be interpreted as a variant of certain patriarchal cultures, where men are expected to stand up for and defend women. Together, these themes describe how traditional patriarchal concepts of honor are woven into street culture. A thematic narrative analysis can identify these two and other themes in the story and discuss how they shed light on different dimensions of the people and the phenomenon under study.

For most researchers doing thematic narrative analysis, it will be important that the themes identified are not unique to one story or one individual, but represent something greater. The interview with Fredrik was one of 40 interviews involving incarcerated drug dealers. In studies using a narrative approach from this data set, we identify the different stories of violence more generally among drug dealers (Sandberg, Tutenges, & Copes, 2015), the role of humor in these stories (Sandberg & Tutenges, 2019), and sum it up in what we describe as the narrative repertoire of street culture (Sandberg & Fleetwood, 2017). Often, a thematic narrative analysis will similarly identify the central themes of stories in a data set and use it as a starting point for findings and discussion.

Structural narrative analysis

A structural analysis emphasizes the form of a story. The question asked is how a story is organized. Structural narrative analysis is inspired by sociolinguistics and narratology. It is more concerned with the small building blocks of the story than with the societal context, institutional constraints, power relationships and greater cultural discourses. Therefore, it often faces criticism from narrative traditions that are more associated with the social sciences. At the same time, it is through details and concrete narrative techniques at the micro level that stories work, and thereby gain societal significance.

In Fredrik's story, I have already described Labov's (1972) narrative elements. Another common approach in the structural tradition, based on the work of the linguist and folklore researcher Vladimir Propp (1968), is to identify characters. These broad character types were initially identified in Russian folk tales, but are surprisingly easy to find in most stories. The most important roles are the hero, the villain, the donor, the dispatcher, the helper, the princess, and the false hero. A story does not necessarily require all of these different characters being present, but some of them usually appear. Fredrik, for example, is the hero of his own story, which is common, but he is also the dispatcher. The villain is Kjetil, the alleged pedophile, and the helper is the friend ('buddy'). Characters do not necessarily have to be people, they may also be objects or characteristics. The princess describes some form of reward that heroes receive if they manage the mission. For example, it might be honor, respect, or money. The reward in Fredrik's stories is closely related to his friend, which has princess-like characteristics. He goes on this mission to protect her honor and win her respect.

Narrative form and structure are fundamental to how we understand ourselves and are perceived by others, and therefore has major consequences. For example, many economically or socially marginalized criminal offenders will find it difficult to talk about themselves as anything other than "heroes" in a violent subculture or "victims" of an oppressive society (Sandberg, 2009). This is also typically how society at large perceives them, which limits their possibility to be integrated into a more law-abiding lifestyle. Had the stories they were surrounded by been open to other or more complex roles, this could have been avoided.

Cultural sociologist Philip Smith (2005) points out the surprisingly simple cultural resources that give the world meaning. Narrative genres are a crucial cultural structure that frames stories and produces meaning. Genre can describe the content of a variety of similar stories (and thereby resemble themes), or describe typical stylistic, structural, and narrative forms of a group of stories, such as comedy, romance, tragedy, or irony (McAdams, 1993). Fredrik's story is a typical romance, characterized by a hero with idealistic motives who overcomes a series of obstacles, challenges and evil enemies who get what they deserve. It has a "happy ending" and a narrative mode that leaves listeners with a good feeling, even though the story might shock them along the way. In the same way as characters, narrative genres can also restrain culturally marginalized groups. They are often trapped in the genre of tragedy, where the characters are left without agency and have little room for maneuvering their social world.

There are a number of other interesting aspects regarding narrative form. Linguist Patricia O'Connor (2000) has conducted a thorough structural narrative analysis of inmates' stories. Here, I only have room to point out the most striking feature of Fredrik's story, namely the use of indirect speech or quotes:

Then I say, 'How are you doing?' 'Yes, yes—I'm fine and that. How are you doing?', he asks me. Then I say: Well, put it this way, I think things are going a lot better for me than they are for you.

The use of indirect speech gives the story a dramatic and almost cinematic element, and Fredrik's "one-liners" stick to the audience's memory. Indirect speech also gives stories more authenticity, in that the situation is played out and authority is shifted from the narrator to the person being quoted. This also applies when the person quoted is the person themselves (Shuman, 2012). When indirect speech is used, the story no longer appears as the narrator's words and interpretation, but as actual statements in a specific situation. A structural narrative analysis will look at narrative techniques such as the elements, characters and other narrative techniques, forms and mechanisms and discuss the impact they have on the storyteller, story, and the reception by the audience.

Performative narrative analysis

Riessman (2008) describes dialogic/performative narrative analysis as the study of how speech is created in interaction and through dialog. In this approach to narrative analysis, a close reading of the narrative context is important, and the interaction in which narrating takes place is considered crucial regarding which narrative is told and how it is understood by the audience. Storytelling is seen as a performance, with an audience, and one or more storytellers who have a purpose or aim when telling a story. In the dialogic/performative tradition, the question is not so much what the story is about or how it is told, but who speaks, when and why. In Riessman's version, it is also important that stories are ambivalent and open to interpretation, and one often examines the different *voices* in each individual story.

In her account of dialogic/performative analysis, Riessman (2008) merges two narrative traditions that may become clearer if we separate them. The performative tradition is best illustrated by what Gubrium and Holstein (2008) describe as narrative ethnography. This approach studies the environment of storytelling and storytelling as practice. For example, one might look at how institutional context governs stories and the understanding of them in special directions. In the interview with Fredrik, the prison is an important context, and the interview must be understood in light of what Donileen R. Loseke (2007) calls organizational or institutional narratives. For example, one might imagine that prison interviews will bear the mark of post-rationalizations and legitimization, that the narrators associate the interviewer with public institutions and adapt the story to what they think the "system" wants to hear, or that the stories will be influenced by a particular culture that exists among the prisoners.

However, prison is not the only institutional context at play in the conversations with Fredrik. A research interview is also an institutionalized practice that influences stories. Fredrik is aware of this and at one point interrupts one of his stories by saying,

"This is going to be used as research now, I can tell you stuff." In this way, the prison context is in contrast to the interview context. In the above quote, it is as if Fredrik reminds himself that the research interview takes precedence and that he can tell things he would not otherwise share with authorities in prison. For others, conducting the interview in prison may be more important, and they may be more reluctant. In qualitative interviews long, more elaborate, and detailed stories are also a natural consequence. In a normal conversation, talking for long periods of time without letting others participate in the conversation would be perceived as being rude. However, many of Fredrik's stories are long monologues, probably encouraged by the researcher and the research interview context.

Another important part of performative narrative analysis is to look at social interaction and how the conversation proceeds (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). If the audience, for example the interviewer, shows an interest in a theme or story, it will often be embellished. In addition to more explicit "probing" (asking questions in different ways), it is a common way of steering the interview in the direction one wants. If one laughs at a funny story, there is a high likelihood of getting a new humorous story, and similarly, it is likely to come a new sad story if listeners show that they are affected by the first. A performative analysis could for example, emphasize that the reason Fredrik tells so many stories, in these particular ways, is because he finds that they affect, entertain and are of interest to his conversation partner.

In narrative performance analysis, the temporal dimension is also important. For example, parts of Fredrik's account of the attack on the alleged pedophile, such as carrying a knife and being a bit "crazy" and a "helper" was introduced earlier in the interview. In this part of Fredrik's storytelling, the interviewer played an important role:

Interviewer: One often thinks that drug scene violence is linked to business, sales and major deals that quickly get out of hand and things like that.

Fredrik: Yes, perhaps. But I reckon it's more about people staying awake for too long. People start imagining that situations are a bit different than they really are. People become really fucking unstable. Methamphetamine, if you take too much methamphetamine for a couple of years, it absolutely destroys people's minds in a way that it... But I always have buddies who get involved in some kind of nonsense, and then threats start to come in from here, there and everywhere. And the reason I carried a knife was because things started to get really messy. Buddies who got themselves caught up in things. All that kind of stuff. I wandered around, I lived on a couch here and there. Basically, it was really messy and crazy. The most important thing I had was that knife, you know.

Interviewer: Was your role to help if ...

Fredrik: Yes, always.

Interviewer: ... it got messy, as you say.

Fredrik: I always did it, you see. Everyone knew I was crazy if things like that happened, you know.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had a bit of a reputation for being a person who could ...

Fredrik: Yes, because I ...

Note how the narrative develops in close interaction and through what conversation analysis describes as “turn-taking” (Sacks, 1992). This is also the most common way in which stories come about. The conversation partners collaborate on the story. The interviewer has a special narrative in mind (“violence is linked to business, sales”). This is not confirmed, and together they develop another story about how the violence is related to drug-related chaos, disorder and how Fredrik is the helper or good buddy. The interviewer helps Fredrik to progress by summarizing what he has said (“it got messy, as you say”) and suggests possible interpretations or evaluations (“so you had a bit of a reputation for being a person who could...”). It is only after this common interpretation that the story about the attack on the pedophile emerges. Here, Fredrik needs less “help.” However, the background is that the interviewer has suggested an evaluation or truth about Fredrik’s life (he was a person that sorted things out for other people), which the story about the attack on the alleged pedophile confirms.

Qualitative interviewers influence data through “active interviews” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This is inevitable and can be a resource. Researchers can steer data collection in the direction they want, but they must still be aware of this when they later interpret the stories that emerge from the interviews. How much information should be included regarding the course of the conversation/interview, the actors, and the time/place/space of data, is a constant consideration when writing out research. While this is a crucial factor in understanding the stories told, it may also remove the focus from the content or form of the story, in cases where that is the focus of research. Gender, age, and ethnicity play a role, but it is just as often about the dynamics of the interview. There is a limit to how many stories a person has in their narrative repertoire, and it is difficult to make up new stories during an interview (see also Damsa & Ugelvik, 2017). For example, it is likely that Fredrik has told the story about the alleged pedophile many times before, and that he will tell it again outside of interview situations. In such cases, dwelling too much around the context of the interview may take away the attention from more interesting aspects of storytelling.

Dialogical narrative analysis

While ethnographically inspired studies of narrative performance ask specific questions about who speaks, when they speak, and why they speak, what I choose to describe as dialogical analysis asks a more abstract question about the different voices that can be found in stories. Sociologist Arthur W. Frank (2010, 2012) has developed what he calls dialogical narrative analysis influenced by, among others, the philosopher and literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s (1981) theories of intertextuality. His approach has much in common with performance analysis, but he also asks about the more overarching voices that can be heard in a story.

Frank suggests that dialog exists not only in meetings with the audience, but also in the narrative itself, and describes an “individual voice as a dialog between two voices” (Frank, 2012, 35). For example, Fredrik’s story can be interpreted as containing at least three different voices or cultural narratives (Loseke, 2007). We have already discussed the first two in the section on thematic narrative analysis: The subcultural

narrative of violence and street masculinity in which respect is important, and a moral narrative that is typically highlighted in studies on neutralization (Maruna & Copes, 2005). There is also a third voice in his stories. This is a voice that is entertaining and funny, involving quick-witted remarks and drama. This grows out of popular culture, such as action movies, and imitates this genre in oral narratives. The genre makes the narrator appear funny, outgoing, and entertaining. In these stories, the hero of the story (often the narrator) appears heroic, but also possesses a coolness during the dramatic situations that is fascinating to the audience.

In total, there are at least three voices in Fredrik's narrative, and dialogic narrative analysis looks at how these autonomous, independent voices are combined into a new entity. They oppose each other, are combined, but also create new narratives. The ambivalence created by this intertextuality allows the audience to choose which one they wish to focus on. Different people will probably hear different narratives. Some will be shocked by the violence and thus let the street subcultural narrative overshadow the others. Some will see his stories as "excuses" and thus reduce everything to neutralization. Others, meanwhile, may focus on the funny and dramatic elements and place it into a more entertaining genre, where the level of truth is subordinate to the seductive character of the storytelling. Dialogical narrative analysis emphasizes that stories are fundamentally ambivalent. They are open to interpretation and enter into dialogue with the audience about possible meanings.

Narrative work

Both performance and dialogical narrative analysis are concerned with what stories are used for in social interaction. This is sometimes described as the narrator's strategies, which may exaggerate the cognitive element of storytelling. We usually tell stories because it is expected in certain contexts, without having deliberate strategies or goals when doing so. Other times, the story's functions are described in the same manner, which is also problematic. We should be open to the fact that many stories do not have any explicit functions, at least none that can be directly linked back to sustaining the societal context of the story in the mindset of structural functionalism. Frank (2010) is critical of such perspectives on storytelling and suggests that we rather look at the work stories do in social situations. This encapsulates some of the thinking behind strategies and functions, but without assuming anything very specific about the actors or devoting oneself to functionalism.

One common way to do narrative analysis is to try to identify the narrative work that stories do. This means interpreting what possible consequences stories might have for the storyteller and environments where they are told. As opposed to other parts of narrative analysis (e.g. structural and thematic), but in line with performative and dialogic narrative analysis, there is more room for the researcher's subjective interpretation when analyzing the work of stories for individuals and in social contexts. There is not one way to validate stories' work, but extensive knowledge and a feel for storytellers and the social context they occupy, aided for example by narrative ethnography is helpful (Fleetwood & Sandberg, 2021). Many criminologists will be particularly

interested in the societal impact of narratives and studying the work stories do has therefore been important in this discipline.

The most obvious thing stories do is to report on things that have happened and legitimize it afterwards (Maruna & Copes, 2005). Because crime is highly storyable and needs justification, this narrative work is particularly important in criminology. Stories also arouse crime and harm (Presser, 2013, 2018), which has been a particular emphasis in narrative criminology (Presser & Sandberg, 2015a). However, stories also do a whole host of other things. They entertain, frighten, fascinate, create, and sustain identities, process and integrate experiences, and convey and explore emotions. Below, I will briefly go through some of the work that stories do. This is only intended as some illustrations, and the list could have been much longer. The work that stories do depends on social situations, place, time, space and not least the researcher's interpretations.

Stories entertain

On several occasions, we have discussed how Fredrik's stories have an underlying, entertaining dimension. In one of his other stories of violence, this was even more explicit:

The police were following us. We were going to visit a friend, and a police car was tailing us. No matter where we drove, they followed us, we realized that at some point, when we stop the car, they'll probably want to talk to us. We almost got to the place we were going, then the driver turns onto a forest road, a tractor road into the forest, he just drives to the end, then he says to me: When we get to the end, we all jump out, and we'll really give it to them. So, I took the baseball bat that was in the back of the car. Drove to the end. Got out of the car with the baseball bat. Stood behind some trees. All of a sudden, the police car stopped. They knew exactly what was going to happen, because both of our car doors were open. Then they started reversing. We jumped back into the car and reversed as fast as we could, started chasing the police. Then the police tried to get away!

Entertaining stories often revolve around something unexpected, where familiar situations are turned on their heads (Sandberg & Tutenges, 2019). In Fredrik's story, it is the police who are suddenly forced to flee, and the "criminals" are the ones who chase them. It is a good story—as there is a point to tell—because it is the opposite of what one would expect. So far I have used narrative and story interchangeably (following Polletta et al. 2011). However, some argue that there is a difference between a narrative and a story; narrative is structure with temporality and causality, while stories break with the expected (De Fina, 2003). There is nothing more boring than a story everyone has heard before, without breaks or unexpected events. However, if there is something sensational about the story, audiences can hear it again and again.

Humorous stories often leave listeners wondering whether they should laugh or cry (Tutenges & Rod, 2009). Fredrik's story, for example, is funny, and everyone laughs along the way, but he still ends up with the conclusion: "It's so stupid, it's so stupid, really. Thinking back to it in sober state. How stupid do you have to be?" Such a conclusion reflects both the context of storytelling and how much the narrator has matured. This is typical of life stories in research interviews, where conclusions and evaluations are drawn in the direction of the current position of the storyteller and

what the interviewer and the interviewee can agree on. Such conclusions or codas makes it possible to tell an entertaining story without it being linked to an assessment of who the narrator is today.

Stories are identity- and boundary work

Stories are fundamental to how people understand themselves and are seen by others. Psychologist Dan P. McAdams (1993) argues that we get to know people through the stories they tell. Through stories, we say something about who we are and who we want to be. We present our identity, or at least our desired identity. Among young partygoers, drinking stories are a popular way of presenting themselves (Tutenges & Rod, 2009). Stories of violence are similarly popular in street culture and among many inmates. They were central to Fredrik's self-understanding and an integral part of his life story. We have already discussed how the stories of violence presented him as someone who should be feared, and thus treated with respect. But the stories also portrayed Fredrik in other, alternative ways.

The story about the police who came abseiling through the window ended like this:

The only person they meet inside that room is almost the kindest man in the world. I was actually sitting on the couch when they came in, with my hands behind my back, because I knew they were going to handcuff me. So I just sat there like that when they came into the living room. I had two friends visiting. And the girl sitting there, she suddenly shouted: The police are here! The police are here! And then she gets up with her hands on her head: They've got guns! She shouts. Then I say: Just sit down and relax.

Here, we see a different Fredrik. It is not the aggressive one who is so "crazy" that he even attacks the police, but a more calm, stoic Fredrik who remains composed when others panic. The story shows that he is able to master potentially violent and dramatic situations. The violence that is sometimes triggered is therefore not done in anger, but is more a result of an assessment of what the situation requires. As part of establishing different identities, Fredrik is able to take on several different roles in his stories. He is the helper, the avenger, the protector, and in the story below, he also takes on the role of the calm negotiator.

In narratives, identities are often constructed through symbolic boundary work (Copes, 2016; Lamont & Molnár, 2002); meaning that a story often says something about who someone *is* by saying who they *are not*. In the story above, Fredrik is the opposite of the hysterical woman. His calmness must be seen in relation to her panic. In the main story of this paper, Kjetil represents everything Fredrik is not. In addition to being a pedophile, he is unable to defend himself when confronted and unable to do anything about it afterwards. He must hire help, and even when he does so, he fails. In sum, he is without honor in a street culture where it is crucial to be able to stand up for oneself.

Stories process and integrate

Stories also express emotions, while enabling a search for a greater meaning in life and integrating lives through reducing complexity. Several of Fredrik's stories can be interpreted as attempts to process and integrate important events in his life.

Experiences of violence are something most people must process through stories, they are dramatic and sometimes traumatic experiences closely related to self-understanding and identity. Fredrik's stories can be seen as being connected in a longer life story that is conveyed in the interview. Life stories link events that have occurred over a long period of time, and give them meaning (McAdams, 1993). For example, towards the end of the interview, it became clear how Fredrik was constantly working on his own story. Towards the end, he summarized insights from life and his views upon the future:

What scares me about all of this, is that things are getting so nasty. I'm starting to get scared for those growing up today, and that they'll maybe get mixed up in all this stuff ... It's become so nasty. There's loads of new drugs, that GHB stuff, all sorts of things. So much rape because of that GHB stuff, people wake up and don't know what's happened or anything. Things won't get any better, put it that way.

All stories reflect the narrator's identity, but life stories do this in a more fundamental way. It is the closest we get to a self or a desired identity. In life stories, individual episodes are interpreted in light of other episodes in life. Through storytelling, chaotic and diverse lives are integrated, and episodes that need explanation are put into context. For example, the last part of the interview integrates Fredrik's previous subcultural narratives into new reform narratives (Presser, 2008). Both individual stories and life stories integrate and process, creating new meaning. Arguably, this is the most important work that stories do.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have emphasized concrete analysis and shown how stories can be analyzed in four different ways, depending on whether we look at what is told, how it is done, who is narrating and where it is done, and what voices we can hear in a story. Narrative analysis is particularly relevant in criminology because criminal acts are "storyable." Crime breaks with the conventional and hence invites storytelling. They are often dramatic events that need to be explained, and traumatic events that need to be processed. Stories are good at doing this. For example, the article has shown how stories entertain, draw boundaries, create and sustain identity, process experiences, and integrate lives.

Stories instigate actions, such as crime, by making them *accessible*—one had not thought about the possibility—and *attractive* by linking them to a particular culture, identity, or life story (Presser & Sandberg, 2015a). School massacres, serial killings and terrorism are exceptional events that have become stories and thus motivated new acts. More stable forms of crime such as gang-related violence and the use of illegal drugs are continuously sustained through stories, in contexts where this behavior is common. We often see that harmful actions are stagings of familiar stories. As Isaac Babel points out: "Life itself tries with all its might to resemble a well-crafted story." Narrative analysis in criminology can also look at which stories keep people away from crime.

In contrast to sociolinguistics and narratology, narrative analysis in criminology is not concerned with the description and systematization of stories for their own part. Still, an

in-depth understanding of a society or subculture depends on an overview and understanding the stories at play. In most societies, crime plays a very special role in such stories. It is used to draw boundaries between “us” and “them,” to convey values and norms, but also to entertain and fascinate. Cultures and subcultures are created, sustained, and disintegrate through stories. Narrative analysis in criminology can both look at society’s stories of crime and the stories of “criminals.” Usually, these are closely related.

Narrative analysis has many advantages. Stories and languages are fundamentally social, but are told by people. Therefore, narrative analysis is both a study of a person acting in a given situation and a study of environments, cultures, and groups. It connects individuals to groups and anchors culture in something concrete that can be studied (Presser, 2009). There are also some analytical advantages. Crime is rarely observed directly in research. This also applies to register data that reflects system narratives and self-reported survey data. Narrative analysis provides researchers with a method that is specifically adapted to the data they possess. Narrative methods are not a technique one can learn that does the analysis for the researcher, but it provides tools and concepts that may be useful.

Narrative analysis also has its limitations. Traditionally, it has been more concerned with stories and the independent power of discourse than “objective” variables and socioeconomic structural conditions such as social class and inequality. Perhaps this is because tradition grows out of linguistics and symbolic interactionism. Nothing stands in the way of describing stories as being central to the formation and sustenance of capitalism, patriarchy or fundamental to ethnic or class-based oppression (Fleetwood, 2014, Sandberg and Pedersen 2009). Critical discourse analysis does this (Fairclough, 1995). Nevertheless, discourse analysis and narrative analysis will always be oriented towards language. For researchers who are primarily interested in other aspects of reality, other methods and forms of analysis may be better. It is still important that classes, ethnicity, and socioeconomic structures are continuously created and sustained in narrative processes, and researchers are also limited by language when they write about them. Therefore, narrative theory and analysis can contribute to reflections on the nature and boundaries of research and empirical data. The perspective is also crucial to understand storytelling, and how it creates, uphold and reproduce society.

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