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‘Normal happy girl’ interrupted: An auto/biographical analysis of Myra Hindley’s public confession

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Responding to the need to develop the range and scope of narrative criminology, this paper provides an empirical demonstration of how auto/biographical analysis can be used for criminological purposes. More specifically, the paper explores how British serial killer Myra Hindley sought to construct, (re)present and rehabilitate her own identity in the face of the ‘mad, bad, or evil’ discourse that she was typically associated with. Using her auto/biographical letter to The Guardian newspaper as the main source of data, supplemented with material taken from her prison files available in The National Archive, the paper examines how she sought to develop her own causation narrative in the face of massive public derision. It demonstrates how the ‘normal happy girl’ interrupted narrative which Hindley constructs is neither an accurate account of her life, nor an invention of her imagination. Instead, it is a product of the immediate local context which she found herself in; the conventions of criminal autobiography; the rules and regulations that govern prisoners; the redemptive requirements of the penal process; and, the generalized causation narratives of serial killers that were being reconfigured by various lay commentators for use in the ‘Moors murders’ story.

Keywords: Myra Hindley; narrative criminology; causation narratives; serial killers; psychopathy; auto/biography

Introduction

The “narrative turn” in criminology has seen a number of scholars address how the intersections between stories, culture and the self are variously realized within representations of crime and/or criminal activity (Presser 2016). Departing from what might otherwise be conventional concerns associated with “what happened”, “in what order” and “why”, narrative criminology seeks to explore how individuals and groups attempt to establish, negotiate, and manage their identities through the narratives of the self that they choose to depict. According to Presser (2016: 138), a narrative is a “temporally ordered, morally suggestive statement about event and/or actions in the life

of one or more protagonists". Narrative criminology is directed toward the critical examination of the identity work that is contained within these discourses about the self (Presser 2012). The approach has variously been used to examine narratives associated with drug mules (Fleetwood 2014), cannabis use (Sandberg 2012), drinking (Tutenges and Sandberg 2014), terrorism (Sandberg 2015), policing (Van Hulst 2012), and even the mass murderer Jim David Adkisson (Presser 2012).

The emergence of narrative within criminological contexts reflect wider traditions in the humanities and social sciences that have examined the role of narrative within everyday and professional life. A central focus of this work has been the auto/biographies through which the self is located (Bruner 1987; Stanley 1993; Erben 1998; Goddey 2000). However, and as has been recognized within the literature, there has been a paucity of research that has used auto/biographical analysis within criminological contexts (Morgan 1999; Goodey 2000; Dearey 2009; Brown and Bos 2017). Positioning itself within the broad concerns of narrative criminology generally, and auto/biographical analysis specifically, this paper explores how British serial killer Myra Hindley sought to construct, (re)present and rehabilitate her own identity in the face of the "mad, bad, or evil" discourse that she was typically associated with. Drawing on archival evidence from her prison files, it examines the local context that shaped and molded the auto/biographical account of her public confession that was published in *The Guardian* newspaper in December 1995. It makes two significant contributions to the literature. First, it responds to the challenge set by Presser and Sandberg (2015) to develop the range and scope of narrative criminology. Second, it responds to Goodey (2000) by providing a further empirical demonstration of how single auto/biographical accounts of crime and criminal activity can be used within the context of criminological research. In doing so, the paper adds to a growing literature that shows narratives are

constituent of experience *and* action.

A narrative turn toward auto/biographical criminology

Whilst the emergence of narrative criminology is relatively recent, narratives of the self have actually been an important part of criminological research for some years. Presser (2016) identifies a very general lineage that charts the emergence of narrative in the Chicago School and Clifford R. Shaw's analysis of the life-course of delinquent youths (Shaw 1930), and then through Sykes and Matza's "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza 1957), Katz's study of the seductions of crime (Katz 1988), and, more recently, in Maruna's work on redemption scripts (Maruna 2001). There are, no doubt, many other examples (see for instance, Cohen and Taylor 1972).

However, as Presser (2016) goes on to highlight, a representational view of narrative can take two forms. The first sees narrative as a more or less secure record of "what happened". Feelings, actions, and events correspond with words that can be arranged in a manner that, more or less, reflect some sort of reality. These narratives can then be cross-referenced to confirm their veracity. This is generally how qualitative criminology has treated narrative (Goodey 2000). Conditions and causes of crime are described and collected, with the narratives produced during this process being treated as a means of delivering data about meaning and experience.

The second approach views narrative as iterative depictions of self, action, and events that are fully immersed in the individual, interactional, and institutional conditions within which they are (re)presented . Given their interpretative nature, narratives are always subject to change (Presser and Sandberg 2016). The emphasis for narrative criminology, therefore, is concerned with how narratives get constructed and reconstructed with respect to the cultural genres that shape them, and those identities that choose to (re)produce them – not to mention how this changes over time. For

Presser (2016: 138), narratives are also a particular form of discourse whereby temporality and morality are foregrounded: “they explain what we did and therefore what kind of being we are”. Therefore, examination needs to be made of what stories do, and for who, not necessarily what they reveal (Presser 2009; Sandberg 2010). Moving away from methodological concerns associated whether someone is “telling the truth”, the focus for investigation is on how narratives established, negotiated, and managed with respect to the people who engage with them (Presser and Sandberg 2015).

In a relatively short space of time, narrative criminology has been directed to a wide variety of areas. However, the main proponents of the approach have been careful to not be overly prescriptive about the future direction of research, with Sandberg and Ugelvik commenting that “[f]urther expansion is necessary in terms of exploring the relationship between social practice, situational context, socio-economic structures and stories” (Sandberg and Ugelvik 2016: 132).

To this end, one potential area of development is to explore the nature of criminal auto/biographies. Some time ago, Goodey (2000) noted that criminological research could be usefully developed from single biographical accounts of life. Social issues and forces are realized within individual lives, so the examination of these personal accounts can reveal how over-arching issues are realized within contexts. In his analysis of self-penned criminal biographies, Morgan (1999: 328) also highlights that they represent “a small but persistent genre” within the field. Whilst this genre has undoubtedly grown since he was writing, he goes on to argue that the central problem for offenders writing about their lives is in confronting the dominant public discourse of offending that exists within politics and the media. This creates and sustains a framework of “common sense” through which the nature of offending and

imprisonment is perceived. Auto/biography offers prisoners a means to challenge those normative representations of the self that would otherwise subjugate their understanding and experience of themselves.

More generally, biographical research has been an interest of social scientists since the 1920s, when a number of Chicago School sociologists developed the method to explore life in the (sub)urban environments of Chicago and beyond (Denzin 1989). Whilst interest in the technique subsequently declined, there has been a resurgence of interest in the method since the late 1970s (Bertaux 1980; Stanley 1992; Stanley 1993; Roberts 2001). Indeed, the broad aim of auto/biographical analysis is to use the micro-social to explore macro-sociological issues (Stanley 1993; Erben 1998). To this end, Stanley (1992; 1993) argues that there are five conceptual components of auto/biographical analysis: the turn to textuality; the recognition of single lives as social structure (and vice versa); referentiality and lives; temporality and memory; and intertextuality.

Firstly, auto/biographical analysis involves treating texts as social products. Rather than seeing texts simply as representing and referring to real people and events, they are examined as works of artifice and fabrication that necessarily use genre conventions of structure, narrative, and authorial voice. Secondly, auto/biographical analysis rejects the view that a life can be understood as the representation of a single self in isolation from a network of interwoven auto/biographies. Any auto/biography is replete with the biographies of others and situated within them. Not only will particular auto/biographies represent a version of self (or selves), they will also be shaped and molded by the auto/biographies of those significant others. These may be the actors within the narrative, but also those who coax the narrative and the audience that

receives it. Therefore, auto/biographical analysis involves examining the relationships and contexts from which auto/biographies emerge.

Thirdly, auto/biographical sociology is concerned with referentiality and lives. According to Stanley (1992; 1993), any description of experience that refers to a life necessarily involves selection and interpretation. Therefore, any description is also theorization. However, these theories of individual experience and personal history are always mediated by the structuring processes that are used as reference points to anchor individual stories. The role of auto/biographical analysis is to examine the interaction between theories of individual experience and their situational determinants. Fourthly, whilst the conventions of auto/biography typically start with birth and end with death, analysis seeks to examine disruptions in chronicity, for instance, where the author temporally compresses the narrative in particular places in order to focus on events deemed more significant. Thus memory is important, not because of an appeal to a (positivistic) historical accuracy, but because it reveals what is being selected, compressed, or expanded.

This leads to the final point, that representation and reality are inexorably inter-twined; they are inter-textual. As Stanley suggests, "we understand the social world through the lens of prior representation, because whenever something is invoked which happened somewhere else, or in some other time, or to someone else, then representation is being utilized" (1992: 3). Stanley argues that this recognition does not privilege representation (or relativism) over reality, but instead recognizes that reality and the representations that describe it are neither inevitable nor immutable. Instead, they are shaped and molded by the individual, the audience, and the form in which the representation is given.

So, in response to Presser and Sandberg's various calls to develop the scope of narrative criminology, and following Goodey's contention that the auto/biographical should be an important component of criminological research, the over-arching aim of this paper is to provide an empirical example of how auto/biographical analysis might be used to develop the range and scope of narrative criminology. More specifically, it directs its attention toward Myra Hindley's public confession that was published in *The Guardian* newspaper (UK) in December, 1995.

Britain's 'icon of evil': Myra Hindley

Myra Hindley was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1966 for the murder of Lesley Anne Downey (aged 10) and Edward Evans (17), and of being an accessory after the fact in the murder of John Kilbride (12). She spent over 35 years incarcerated in the British Prison system and in 1986, she also confessed to being involved in the killings of Pauline Reade (16) and Keith Bennett (12). At the time of her trial she was just 23; at the time of her death she was aged 60 and Britain's longest serving female prisoner.

Within the great many media accounts of her life and crimes, Hindley is variously described as "the most hated woman in Britain", "the personification of evil", and "the icon of evil" (Murphy and Whitty 2006). In life and death, Hindley became and remains one of the most notorious folk devils of contemporary British society and is now "fixed in the public imagination as the feminine face of evil" (Storrs 2004: 14). According to Birch (1993: 46) "the tabloids, assisted by the 'true crime' pundits, have, like a latter-day Frankenstein, created a monster and labelled it Myra Hindley".

Much of the fascination with her case centers on the question, "what turned a good Catholic girl from Manchester into a woman capable of the most appalling crimes?" (*The Guardian* 2000). Drawing on explanatory narratives contained within popular culture, various experts, commentators and authors typically look for "clues" to

demarcate her from us. Differences are frequently sought in: her early experiences of life in Gorton, Manchester; her previous relationships with friends and family; her relationship with Brady; her deviant sexuality and perverse fantasies; and, within the general malaise of a permissive society (for examples, see Johnson 1967; Williams 1968; Goodman 1973; Topping 1989; Richie 1988; Staff 2000; and, Lee 2010). This irresolvable discussion is fueled, of course, by the fact that unlike her co-defendant Ian Brady, Hindley never "had the decency to go mad" (Birch 1993: 54).

Reflecting and reinforcing these popular explanations, interest in what makes a serial killer kill, is also at the heart of much academic discussion on the subject. Although little systematic research has actually been conducted into the etiology of serial killers, largely due to the problems of defining the term and very low sample numbers, a whole range of factors have been highlighted as important (see Hickey 2015, for an overview). Haggerty (2009: 169) even argues that "[a]lmost every major social, biological, psychological or behavioral factor that has been seriously suggested as playing a role in causing crime has been advanced as potentially contributing to the behavior of serial killers".

Nevertheless, as far as the popular media are concerned the causes of crime are much more straight-forward. Here, reduction and simplicity are paramount and the causes often unequivocal. Indeed, Jewkes (2003) argues that the causation narratives for extreme crimes are typically presented within a frame of severe (and incurable) moral pathology: the perpetrator is an inherently evil member of a dangerous underclass who does not share the same ideals of the moral majority. Equally common are those causation narratives that suggest severe mental pathology. The various "beasts", "monsters", "fiends" and "psychopaths" who commit these extreme crimes are mad, incurably mentally disordered and a clear danger to the public. Where women are

identified as the perpetrator in question, gendered versions of such narratives are also visible. Here, bad mothers, bad wives, black widows, sexual sadists, angels of death and evil hand-maidens are common explanatory frames (see Birch 1993; Pearson 1998; Morrissey 2003).

For the tabloid media, and much of the public more generally, Hindley is necessarily and essentially evil. She is variously described as a sexual sadist, a psychopath, or simply necessarily mad (see Birch 1993, for a review). Hindley, however, resisted these narratives and, whilst her full autobiography remains unpublished, towards the end of her life she would occasionally write letters to people in the media offering her own insight into her crimes and her life more generally. In one of these letters, she would provide what was, at the time, the most complete version of events as she had come to understand them.

Using this letter as the main source of data, but also drawing on her prison records held in The National Archives, this paper will examine how Hindley attempted to negotiate and manage her own identity in the face of public condemnation. The paper does not seek to examine the historical accuracy of the account that she offered or seek to support or refute her version of the events that led to her involvement in the "Moors murders". Instead, using the methods of auto/biographical analysis, the paper explores how she sought to construct, (re)present and rehabilitate her own identity in the face of the mad, bad or evil explanations that she was usually associated with. More specifically, it examines the local and wider context that shaped and molded the causation narrative that she ultimately offered.

The present study

Auto/biographical analysis typically draws on human documents (Stanley 1993). These are those accounts of subjective experience that reveals the writer to be an agent with

the capacity to engage with social life. They provide a perspective of human experience that is grounded in the experience of those who constitute the social world. These human documents can take many forms, including personal diaries, letters, personal documents, and, autobiographies.

In this respect, this paper draws upon two main sources of data: Myra Hindley's self-penned article in *The Guardian* (1995a), which purports to examine what made her commit the crimes that she was convicted for, and her prison records. Deemed to be in the public interest, the administrative detail of Myra Hindley's incarceration was opened to the public in June 2008 and is currently available in The National Archive (TNA) at Kew, London. Whilst the record is only very roughly indexed, and some material still remains redacted, it consists of over 500 individual files that contain a range of documents related to the management of her sentence. Reported to be over 35ft in length, the record covers material produced by Hindley herself, but also that from various professional parties and members of the public. This includes petitions for parole, official requests and complaints to the prison authorities made by Hindley, material relating to her internal review boards, official correspondence regarding various aspects of the case and her imprisonment, personal correspondence, and letters to the Home Secretary from members of the public.

Following the general tenets of Stanley's approach to auto/biographical analysis outlined above, Hindley's letter to *The Guardian* was initially coded and categorized in accordance to the themes of biographical analysis as identified by Denzin (1989). These included narrative structure, self and selves, epiphany, presence and absence, and cultural locus. The prison files were then examined with respect to these themes and to any contextual material related to the letter and its situational determinants. Beginning with a discussion of the personal and historical context of the letter, the findings detail

the over-arching structure of the narrative, before examining how Hindley sought to replace the psychopathy narrative with one of external corruption. This is followed with a discussion of how she attempted to construct her own redemption script (Maruna 2001), before locating the emergence of that particular script within the requirements of her local environment. Except where stated, all of the quotes come from Hindley's letter to *The Guardian* (1995a).

The personal and historical context of the letter

Hindley's letter to *The Guardian*, and the auto/biographical narrative it offers, does not exist in isolation. It was preceded by a somewhat shorter letter to the newspaper in which Hindley attempted to contest the representation of her as a 'psychopath' in an extract from a book by Ann Moir and David Jessel that had been published in *The Weekend Guardian* (1995). Although the book extract itself did not specifically mention Hindley, the sub-editing of the piece included the requisite picture of Hindley, with a by-line suggesting that some women "appear to seek out their male equivalents to commit crimes". This led Hindley to write a short letter that was published in the "Letters to the Editor" section of the newspaper (see *The Guardian* 1995). Anticipating her later account, sometimes word for word, this letter protests at the "gratuitous" psychopathy label imposed upon her and protests that that "there was no evidence of a mentally disordered mind" and "to be casually labelled a psychopath by two people who have never met or spoken to me flies in the face of reason".

Given her notoriety, Hindley's response prompted further letters to the editor from various parties, most notably from Ann West, mother of Lesley Ann Downey. As a result, Hindley was invited to give a fuller account by *The Guardian*, which would later highlight that "she failed to give an adequate alternative explanation" and confront one key issue: "what, all those years ago, had made her act?" (*The Guardian*, 1995b).

On 18 December 1995 the newspaper printed her 5,000-word response in full without abridgment (or payment), again accompanied by a number of commentaries.

However, the narrative that Hindley offers within the letter needs to be understood in relation to its personal, historical, and situational context. At the time of writing, Hindley was involved in a number of on-going disputes with *The Daily Mail* and *The Evening Standard*, and had complained to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and the Prison Service regarding an article that suggested close links between her and Rosemary West. Prior to this she had complained to the PCC about other articles that had appeared in *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*. During 1994 she had also officially complained to the Prison Service about repeated leaks to the press of information, accurate and fabricated, about her imprisonment. This resulted in an official police investigation to ascertain the source of the leaks. However, the "mole" remained unidentified, and Hindley would later use her perceived victimization as an argument for a transfer away from HMP Cookham Wood.

She was also making efforts to resume a task she had begun some time earlier. Although there are unauthorized biographies of Myra Hindley (see Richie 1988; Lee 2010), she herself never officially published her autobiography. There is evidence, however, that she did write it. Indeed, the idea for the book was first discussed with Lord Longford as early as October 1975. Writing to Hindley, he suggested:

> John Trevelyan would do the main work, though of course the real work has already been done by you...He would select and edit the letters. I would write a foreword and Bobby Speiaght, if he felt so disposed, an epilogue. (HO336/144: unnumbered)

Reflecting preoccupations that would reoccur throughout her imprisonment, Hindley immediately expressed concern about the impact it may have on public feeling, her own mental health, and how it might affect the reasoning of the authorities, the Home Office and the Parole Board. Indeed, for whatever reason, the project stalled until 1985 when Hindley sought, and received, official permission to write her autobiography from Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary at the time (HO336/88: extract 7). In December 1985, she was then visited by literary agent[1] who suggested that the book would consist of four parts, and a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue would be "written in the present tense" and state "the reason for writing the book and the fact that the majority of the royalties received…will be donated" (HO336/45: extract 22). Entitled "Childhood", part one would document "what it was like living with one's parents and sisters or brothers and earliest memories". Part two would detail "Adolescence", and cover her schooling, friendships, her relationship to your family, and "general attitude to life and early romantic interests". Part three would be very broadly directed toward her "Late Teens", and would cover how she met her "co-defendant", what effect he had on her outlook, her involvement in the Moors murders, the trial and how it affected her, and how she coped with the prospect of life imprisonment. Part four, titled "Prison Years" would focus on how she "adjusted to prison life" and "how she kept her sanity". It would also explore her "gradual transformation", "the idea of having children", and any books that "made [her] think about life in a new way" (HO336/45: extract 22). The epilogue would similarly reflect on "the general change in [her] outlook" and whether she felt as if she had "gained in wisdom and understanding".

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[1] The name of the literary agent has been redacted from the file.

By September 1988, the authorities believed that only two chapters of the book had been written: "the first an innocuous account of her early years and initial reception into the prison, and the second, of somewhat greater interest as she describes her early imprisonment" (HO 336/30: unnumbered)[2]. Again, the project appeared to have stalled. However, she returned to the document in 1995 with the help of a reformed prisoner who had already written an authoritative account of his own prison sentence, Mark Leech (HO336/35: extract 48). Although her relationship with Leech quickly broke down after news of the project appeared in the press, during an initial meeting with him in mid-1995, he had not only suggested a structure for the book, he also provided a familiar list of questions to address. He suggested that a clear statement should be made that the majority of the royalties for the planned book would go to worthy causes, and that the book – "written in the present tense" - should discuss the following: "Childhood" including "any experiences positive or negative that formed your early development"; "Adolescence" with reference to "early romantic interests"; "Late Teens" including "how you came to meet your co-defendant" and "what effect he had on your outlook"; "Prison Years" discussing "how one managed to keep one's sanity", and "whether you were given psychiatric tests to prove your sanity"; and an "Epilogue", reflecting on:

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[2] Whilst one chapter of the auto/biography is available in The National Archive, the one dealing with her early experiences of prison has been redacted. However, a letter from her solicitor, dated 11 November 1998, would appear to suggest that she did, in fact, eventually finish the whole document. In response to a potential collaboration with a journalist, it states: 'I was somewhat taken aback to find out that you have already supplied him with 90,000 words'. The letter is held in the private 'Crime Through Time' museum at Littledean jail, alongside what appears to be the first part of the auto/biography.

> …the general change in your outlook over 20 years and whether you feel you have gained in wisdom and understanding…and possibly a few salient comments on the nature of the gutter press and how it is capable of stirring up public prejudice and appeals to the lowest common denominator. You could even make a plea for responsible journalism and the rights of the individual to be viewed without prejudice and with understanding. (HO336/35: extract 47)

There were also some other, more immediate situational determinants of the letter and the narrative it contained, namely Standing Order 5. In August 1995, when news of the planned autobiography re-emerged, a letter written on behalf of Derek Lewis, the then Director General of the Prison Service, clarified the terms of the Order for various interested parties, including the then Minister for Prisons, Ann Widdecombe:

> [the] provisions of Standing Order 5 are designed to prevent convicted prisoners from directly publishing, or being involved in the publication of, sensational material relating to their offences….The Standing Order also prohibits prisoners sending out any material for publication if it is about their own crime or past offences…unless it contains serious representations about conviction or sentence, or forms part of serious comment about crime and the processes of justice or the penal system. (HO336/35: extract 48)

In practice, this constrained what Hindley could depict in her account. In fact, it largely ruled out the possibility of her discussing the actual details of her crimes whether she

wanted to or not. This ultimately shaped the structure and the content of the narrative that she would later present to *The Guardian*. The narrative could only be about the events leading up to the crimes, and those that occurred after – but not the crimes themselves. As a result, the victims are all conspicuous by their absence.

Narrative structure: "'Normal happy girl" interrupted

The over-arching structure of the narrative contained in the letter is directly concerned with communicating, and therefore attempting to externalize, Hindley's view of herself. This is an identity that stands in opposition to the psychopath identity and also to the bad and evil identities that she does not wish to be identified with. Essentially, Hindley does not perceive her own self-image to be the same as her public one. She attempts to rectify this by asserting her own "normal happy girl interrupted" narrative in order to represent her underlying and internal normalness. This necessarily involves the assertion of her own internal identity, as she experienced it, and the overt rejection of a categorical and external identity that has been imposed from outside (see Jenkins 2014).

To do this, Hindley plots a subjective account of her life-story in order to construct narrative that is purportedly based on personal experience. Denzin (1989: 44) argues that personal experience narratives typically have the linear structure of a story – a beginning, a middle, and an end – and attempt to describe a set of events that exist independent of the telling. However, whilst the events that they describe draw their meaning from the private experiences and understandings of the narrator, they also take their shape using the cultural forms of wider society. Indeed, personal experience narratives locate the self in a network of significant experiences and relationships. These are then given meaning by the frames that are used within the narrative, which themselves draw upon understandings taken from wider society.

To achieve these ends, Hindley presents a number of significant selves in her narrative that selectively span her life course. These different selves are then understood in relation to a series of roles that she gives herself which are, in turn, ascribed positive or negative evaluations that reflect wider societal concerns. These multiple "Hindleys" help her to establish a narrative explanation in the form of a "normal, happy girl" who has been interrupted and corrupted from outside – mainly the corrosive influence of her relationships with her father and "her co-defendant" - but also a Hindley that has eventually managed to overcome these external corruptions to "reach new insights, clearer understanding". In doing so, Hindley attempts replace one equilibrium – the psychopathy explanation of her crimes - with another; her own "normal happy girl" interrupted model that has seen her overcome external corruptions to find a higher, enlightened state. Indeed, the over-arching frame of the narrative explores a series of binary opposites: good versus evil, normal versus abnormal, victim versus perpetrator, and then versus now.

Disrupting the equilibrium: Resisting madness

Hindley's crimes are often interpreted as necessarily being evidence of some kind of underlying psychopathy: after all, surely only someone who is insane could commit such crimes? However, Hindley vehemently refused to submit to this particular narrative and, by employing legitimating characters in the guise of herself as well as other medical and psychological professional "experts", the letter is an attempt to contest her received categorical status as a psychopath – a narrative she began in her earlier letter to *The Guardian*:

> In my 30 years in prison I have met, spoken with and been examined by psychiatrists and, in particular, a senior psychologist with whom I did a series of

> tests, the results of which rules out psychopathy, schizophrenia, manic depression, episodic dyscontrol and any form of psychosis or neurosis. In a word, there was no evidence of a mentally disordered mind. (*The Guardian* 1995)

In order to add further weight to these claims, she positions herself in opposition to what she perceives as the lay understanding of her crimes. In her desire to not be labelled as suffering from some kind of disorder, she seeks to highlight her own rationality. She suggests that she is actually similar to "us", not different:

> I've so often wished that I had suffered from some affective disorder and been diagnosed accordingly. This would have provided some kind of explanation for my actions. As it is, what I was involved in is indefensible. (*The Guardian* 1995a)

However, her active and seemingly rational rejection of the psychopathy narrative is also a device that creates an explanatory lacuna. As she highlights, she is:

> …an enigma, someone whom people couldn't comprehend. And it is a fact of human nature that when people do something incomprehensible, no matter what, we apply labels to help us make sense of whatever it is that has been done. (*The Guardian* 1995a)

Having created this explanatory gap concerning her actions, a new narrative to explain her behavior must be formed. If psychopathy is not the answer to the 'enigma', what is?

The rejection of the psychopathy narrative is also a device that justifies this new understanding, her explanation:

> If I wasn't suffering any kind of mental disorder; if, from what was known of my earlier life, I'd been a "normal happy girl" who got on well with relatives and friends; if psychopathy had nothing to do with the events that led me to prison – how would I explain what led me to the things I did? (*The Guardian* 1995a)

Therefore, drawing on and responding to wider social and cultural needs to account for and understand extremely deviant behavior, the letter, and the narrative that it contains, is an attempt to find a resolution to the imbalance that she seeks to create. That is, for her to explain and account for her crimes. In turn, this allows her to attempt to establish her own rationality and resist the irrational category of madness that has been imposed upon her.

Establishing a new equilibrium: External corruption

Having created this explanatory lacuna, Hindley's personal experience narrative attempts to establish a new equilibrium to replace the psychopathy narrative: her own "normal, happy girl" interrupted narrative. She does this by attempting to describe her own underlying normalness (and thereby also establishing an identity that is in opposition to "the psychopath") but also by drawing the reader's attention to significant relationships that threatened, and ultimately interrupted, this inherent normalness.

Drawing on positive childhood narratives, she is a "normal happy child"; a "kid" who is protective of her mother; a loving friend at the "age of 13"; and even a teenager in love. However, being sure to reject escalation narratives that are also often associated

with psychopaths and serial killers, she also explicitly draws our attention to the fact that as a child and teenager she was “never cruel to animals or children”.

She then proceeds to draw attention to her own gendered form of an environmental explanation, in which she highlights the effects of her physically violent and abusive father on her emotional development. This, she suggests, taught her to be “tough” and hide her emotions. It was also the precedent that allowed her to “lead an apparently normal existence whilst being actively involved in the offences”. She is normal, but her father’s violence toward her began the process that made her susceptible to corruption.

Similarly, as a teenager, and partly drawing on established mobility narratives associated with teenage years, she also highlights that she wanted to better herself “to travel”, and to “break free from of the confines of what was expected” of her. This was, no doubt, a common experience of many young people growing up in the early years of the permissive society. Indeed, she highlights that “the things that she wanted in life were not unusual”.

She also describes falling hopelessly in love with someone called “Ian” who was described by a friend as being a tall, good looking, and intriguing man. In emphasizing the role of an anonymous friend (who could, therefore, be anyone), Hindley confronts the popular narrative that her relationship with Brady was a “match made in hell”, which was implicitly represented in the original article by Jessels and Moir. In her staging of events, she positions herself as not so different from other people of her age who also, seemingly, found Brady an attractive proposition. This recognition of an apparently positive side to Brady also serves to help to rationalize her relationship with him: after all, why would she stay in an overtly abusive relationship?

However, after representing herself as something of a typical teenager in love, Hindley goes on to juxtapose this attractive side to Brady with a darker one. She also demonizes him according to the some of the mores of contemporary society by re-asserting the narratives that had already associated him with modern archetypes of evil: he "hated black people and Jews, and had a consuming passion for Nazism".

In some ways, Hindley also begins to imbue "him" with the conventional narrative of the psychopath as a split-personality that is now common in popular accounts of serial killers, a device given credence by the fact that Brady was certified as suffering from acute paranoia and schizophrenia in 1985. To do this, Hindley juxtaposes the different sides of "her co-defendant": on one side "Ian", the aloof but intriguing romancer of many young women's fantasies; on the other, "him", the manipulative and violent instigator of cruelty and murder. In a manner that also resonates with popular accounts of how male serial killers lure (female) victims to their deaths, she also represents herself as being a victim of his actions. Deploying a hunting metaphor to demonstrate his manipulative cruelty, she suggests: "he'd guessed how I felt [about him] and had deliberately played his hand in the way that he did; drawing me in, loosening the string, then drawing me in until the trap was sprung."

Reinforcing her normalness with respect to her gender role, Hindley suggests that, if it was not for his manipulative and cruel trap, she would have gone on to fulfil the same normative domestic social obligations that many of her peers did:

> [If we] hadn't met, at least for myself, there would have been no murders, no crime at all. I would have probably got married, had children and by now, be a grandmother. (*The Guardian* 1995a)

Overcoming corruption: The redemption script

In order to reinforce her new identity, Hindley also attempts to confront another narrative: one that has labelled her not only bad, but necessarily evil. Like the psychopathy narrative, the bad and evil narratives have little resonance with her self-understanding. Hindley had firmly re-discovered Catholicism after she severed contact with Brady in the early 1970s and any representations of badness or evilness would be difficult to reconcile with her own self-image as a practicing Catholic. She chooses to resist this narrative in two ways: firstly, she attempts to challenge the authority of those who have continually labelled her bad and evil by revealing their own self-interested nature; and, secondly, by contrasting the experience of herself "then" with how she experiences herself "now" and emphasizing the change between the two. These narrative devices allow her to build what Maruna (2001) has termed a "redemption script".

Firstly, and again reinforcing the idea that she is not essentially different to others, Hindley emphasizes that she has been turned into an industry in which her "medusa like image…holds the projected hatred, fear, and fury of the nation's psyche". The reinforcement and maintenance of this image, Hindley argues, is not down to her, but instead "serves the self-interests of so many parties":

> ….tabloids need me to boost their circulation and sales. They and their readers need me to satisfy their demands for a national scapegoat. Governments need me to enable them to be seen to be enforcing their "tough stance" on crime and criminals. And the Prison Service needs me in order to retain their own credibility in a time of current criticism…I have become a political prisoner serving the interests of successive Home Secretaries who have placed political

> expediency and, effectively, a lynch-mob rationale before the dictates of basic human rights. (*The Guardian*: 1995a)

Again, like her refusal of the psychopathy narrative, Hindley suggests that she is not inherently and necessarily evil, but is instead a normal person being subjected to negative external forces. According to Hindley, her own internal state is once again being corrupted from outside.

But unlike earlier in her life, she is both defiant and resistant to this corruption: this time she will remain "true to herself". The problem, however, is that her crimes do necessarily require explanation: normal people are not ordinarily involved in the abduction and murder of children, so why was she? To answer this question, Hindley again utilizes the method that she uses to resist the psychopathy narrative. Emphasizing her own rationality, she again sides with "us": "I knew that what I was involved in was indefensible in every respect". She also reinforces this by making a distinction between "then" and "now". Drawing attention to the expert narrative that was offered by the presiding judge at her trial, Mr Justice Fenton Atkinson, she reminds us that significant others also thought she was "deeply corrupted", but also that she had not long previously been a "normal sort of girl":

> And it is true that by then I was corrupt; I was wicked and had behaved monstrously. (*The Guardian* 1995a)

This past is then contrasted with the "now", where, after "chipping away at bricks behind which [she'd] hidden [her] real self for far too many years", and "gathering the courage to examine and attempt to analyse the contents" of the "foul rag-and-bone shop

cellars of [her] mind" she has now reached "new insights, clearer understanding". In essence, she has changed. She was a "normal girl", had become wicked, but now she is enlightened. What is more, she maintains that she "will not conform to these myriad perceptions of myself, or remain trapped in the mould I've been forced into": again, she is not evil now and she will not be corrupted again.

According to Maruna (2001) a redemption script allows the person to rewrite a shameful past by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the (reformed) narrator. They see themselves as "a victim of society who gets involved with crime….to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances" (Maruna 2001: 87). However, rather than discovering a new self, the script calls for the reestablishment of a former normal self: what the narrator perceives to be their true self. In order to do this, the narrator of a redemption script typically represents a series of non-deviant selves to suggest that they were actually normal all along. In this case Hindley reverts to the "loyal and loving friend", the "normal happy school girl", the "daughter protective of her mother", and the "teenager in love". Crucially, in contrast to popular and expert discourses that examine her life history for anything that might be different in order to explain her crimes, Hindley looks to her past in order to highlight how she is ultimately similar to everyone else: how she was a "normal, happy girl". However, in recognizing that her crimes necessarily require explanation, she finds a number of external corrupting factors that allow her to protect her own internal and inherent normalness. Whilst she rejects the psychopathy narrative outright, she does engage with the "bad" and "wicked" narratives. But in order to maintain her own self-image, she suggests that this moral pathology was external to her, and, somewhat crucially, not part of her now.

'Brady made me do it': Gender and victimhood

Hindley's "normal happy girl interrupted" narrative is an implicitly gendered one (Thompson and Ricard 2009). However, this gendered narrative does not emerge in a vacuum and it has a particular history, of which Hindley was well aware, and which was being institutionally reinforced. As far back as 1966, Mr Justice Fenton Atkinson - the presiding judge at the original trial - portrayed Hindley as something of a passive and naïve individual who was led astray by the manipulative Brady. Whilst Atkinson's 5 hour, 67-page, summary[3] does not deny her involvement in the crimes or their sexual nature, in accordance with the pervading gender assumptions of the time he represents her as a subordinate handmaiden who was used by Brady to provide adulation and transportation. Similarly, in his sentencing recommendation, which Hindley also cites in her narrative, he suggested that while Brady was "wicked beyond belief" and without any hope of redemption, "there may be a possibility of reform once [Hindley] is removed from Brady's influence" (Winter 2002).

While the police chief in charge of the Moors murders case during the 1980s, Peter Topping, later cast his own doubts on the authenticity of the explanation (Topping 1989), the "Brady made me do it" narrative was still being institutionally encouraged in some quarters of the Prison Service. Since 1993 Hindley had been attending weekly counselling sessions that deliberately sought to look "at the offences and Ms Hindley's background and upbringing" (HO336/35: extract 92). In the various reports presented to her many internal reviews, a category that assessed her "Insight into offence related behavioural problems" would be a necessary component for reflection that she would have to aspire to (see, for example, HO336/35: extract 88). Essentially, she was

[3] See Goodman (1973) for an abridged version of the case and the summary in particular.

institutionally required to examine her offences and come to some-sort of understanding concerning why they occurred.

These insights were then being crystallized within her attempts to write her autobiography which were, according to one report: "primarily intended to help her deal with her offences" (HO 336/35: extract 92). In the summary of her Internal Review in August 1994, the Chairman wrote: "Myra sees a two-fold benefit from this project:- one a chance to refute the lies that have been published about her; secondly the opportunity to focus her thoughts which would become an extension of some her counselling work that has been carried out with her" (HO 336/35: extract 132). Similarly, in a letter addressed to the Governor of Durham Prison in late 1994, Hindley suggested that the autobiography on which the letter was based was not just "a sentence plan it is also a survival plan" (HO 336/35: extract 128).

Therefore, all this reflection and understanding ultimately took the form of a narrative that was shaped by the experts that operated within her local context and by the contemporary lived experience of her past, as Hindley now sought to interpret it. At one stage Hindley's letter even reproduces parts of a Life Sentence Report almost verbatim. Written in 1993 by a member of the psychiatric staff at HMP Cookham Wood, who had apparently been seeing Hindley regularly for ten years, the report states:

> She did have a latent strength of character which enabled her to resolutely cast aside her beliefs in order to identify herself completely with the man she so misguidedly loved. (HO 336/34: extract 47)

The same report also deals with the issue of psychopathy. In particular, it notes that "for a diagnosis of psychopathy there must be evidence of ongoing abnormal behaviour from a relatively early age and in her case this is absent". Similarly, "there has been nothing to suggest the personality trait of impulsiveness invariably associated with psychopathy" (HO 336/34: extract 47). The report also makes a firm and resolute assertion that Brady was the instigator of the crime:

> He was the instigator of all their offences, she was infatuated with him and also in fear of him, she had no previous offences and what she did with him was completely out of character with her sheltered upbringing and her previous life. (HO 336/34: extract 47)

This clearly anticipates the narrative that Hindley would ultimately offer in the letter and the themes that she deployed within it:

> I wasn't mad, so I must have been bad, became bad by a slow process of corruption (certainly there was a strong element of fear) which eroded many of the values I'd held and my latent strength of character obviously enabled me to resolutely cast aside my beliefs in order to identity with a man who had become my god, who I both feared and worshipped. (*The Guardian* 1995a)

Albeit in a stronger form, the implicitly gendered "Brady made me do it" narrative was also anticipated in a letter sent to the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, by Hindley's solicitor Andrew McCooey, in December 1994. In the letter, which was a

legal appeal for a review of her case with a view to her being released, her solicitor wrote:

> It is our submission that the Crown made a clear distinction between her role and that of Brady at the time of trial . . . There is clear evidence - both of an independent nature and in her confessions in 1987 - that she became involved in these offences under threat and duress, and then became unable to free herself from Brady's control over her and, to that extent, her responsibility for these offences is diminished. (*The Independent,* 1994)

Whereas the corruption in *The Guardian* letter is largely figurative, McCooey's letter to the Home Secretary suggests that Hindley was also physically corrupted by Brady. Hindley would variously claim elsewhere that in one episode Brady drugged her and took pornographic pictures of her whilst she was unconscious[4].

Conclusion

Hindley's letter to *The Guardian*, and the narrative it offers, is part of wider discourse that attempts to rationalize the self, and the behaviors and actions of individuals – particularly those identified as criminal (Morgan 1999). Just like the narratives that preceded it, the letter is underpinned by the central tenets of the meta-physics of modernism in that it is firmly written in the belief that "real subjects can be found in the real world and then relocated in texts" (Denzin 1989: 45). That is, that people, events,

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[4]She would later also claim that he anally raped her during the episode (see *The Guardian*, 2000), whilst other reports would suggest that Brady would rape her, whip her, and urinate on her during such attacks (*The Independent*, 1998).

and their explanation, exist independently of their telling and that they can be represented more or less accurately within a narrative. From this position, behavior is structured and ordered, and can be objectively understood and accounted for in a written form without corruption. The self is explainable, verifiable, and (re)presentable in a consistent and meaningful manner with action being similarly subject to the principles of rationalization. Therefore, driven by a wider need to understand and represent what we do and why, the narrative that Hindley attempts to (re)present is an attempt to know the self and understand the action that emerges from that self.

Her attempts to do this are hardly surprising. For much of her life, Hindley was the subject of "constant surveillance, scrutinized for visible signs of badness or madness which might explain the inexplicable or match – aesthetically, at least – evidence of [her] inner disquiet to [her] moral outrages" (Birch 1993: p 43). Similarly, the pressures of prison life required her to see various experts and professionals. This meant that she would inevitably have to engage in the reflexive process of examining why she did what she did.

Any account, however, does not occur in a vacuum and societies in late modernity are filled with a range of reoccurring explanatory forms. In the shape of over-arching narratives, these ways of knowing are short-hand understandings of complex and often indeterminate events that provide ready-made frames of explanation and expectation. Supported by a virulent media industry so keen to exploit these stories for their own gain, the main causation narratives that serial killers and child murderers, particularly feminine ones, are associated with are psychopathy and evil (see Jenkins 1994, for further discussion). However, although these narratives inevitably frame understandings, they are not passively received. As Stanley notes (1992: 124), "each time a reader…reads one of these forms of life writing, they place their own emphases,

make their own omissions, produce their own interpretations, draw their own conclusions…each reader of written lives is a biographer, producing their own authorised version of that life". Any narrative is also necessarily dependent on the local and wider contexts of the particular reader. Therefore, by reconfiguring these generalized stories according to the needs of the narrator, there are many different ways to understand Hindley's life course – the psychopathy narrative, with its many variants, is just one of them, as is Hindley's own. Anyone, including Hindley, can become a commentator concerning "what makes Myra run?" (Richie 1988).

As such, this paper makes two contributions to the literature. Firstly, and following Goodey (2000) and Presser and Sandberg (2015), in utilizing techniques of auto/biographical analysis it provides a further example of how narratives associated with the self can be approached and interrogated. This novel form of auto/biographical criminology specifically places an emphasis on examining intertextual narratives of the self with respect to the broader social values and structures that help to construct them. The analysis of Hindley's auto/biography presented in this paper is an attempt to demonstrate how the micro-social accounts of offenders are thoroughly intertwined with macro-structural forces. Secondly, as suggested by the wider body of work associated with narrative criminology, the paper highlights that criminal auto/biographies do not represent a reality that is independent of the narrator. Hindley's version of her life-history is not definitive, inevitable, or necessarily falsifiable. This is not to say that auto/biographical narratives are false or true (Roberts 2001). Instead, this paper clearly demonstrates that Hindley's public confession was, like all auto/biographies, shaped by a number of other structures and resources that were both implicitly and explicitly present in her local context and within society more generally. In demonstrating how Hindley's narrative was constructed and reconstructed, and in using the methods of

analysis suggested by Stanley (1993) and Denzin (1989), the paper provides an empirical example of how auto/biographical analysis might be used to develop the range and scope of narrative criminology.

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