

ASSESSMENT OF OFFENSE-RELATED ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS IN OFFENDERS

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Forensic psychologists are asked more and more often to report on the attitudes an offender has concerning the offense for which he has been incarcerated. An overview of research on this issue is reported, starting from a description of the process of responsibility attribution. Empirical research on how offenders attribute responsibility is summarized, and the link between responsibility attribution and potential consequent emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, anger) is described, using the componential theory of emotion as a framework. Finally, both questionnaire and interview methods are described that can aid in the assessment of these offense-related attitudes.

Over the past few years criminological theories focussing on the position of the victim within the criminal justice system are having an increasing impact on how judicial procedures and offender therapy and rehabilitation are construed. Victimology and practical issues of restorative justice are being discussed and are leading to new interventions aimed at improving the position of victims and their families within the criminal justice system. Other often cited goals of a victim-centered approach to justice are improving recidivism prediction, supporting treatment of offenders, and preparing contact between offender and victim (see, e.g., Levrant, Cullen, Fulton, & Wozniak, 1999).

Within this international context, the Belgian Department of Justice has begun to explore the implications of a more victim-focussed justice perspective on judicial procedures and correctional work. A strategic plan "for a national victim-centered policy" was published by the Belgian Department of Justice in 1996 (Van Kerckhoven, 1996), discussing how attention to the needs of victims could be strengthened within the criminal justice procedures, ranging from crime prevention to punishment and detention of offenders. Following this strategic initiative, a new procedure was worked out to involve victims in formulating advice concerning the conditional release of "their offender". When child molesters (either intra- or extrafamilial), child murderers, offenders of crimes resulting in severe trauma for the victim, and offenders of which the victim has notified the authorities of his/her needs,

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are eligible for conditional release, the psychosocial service within the prison has to report on the attitude of the offender towards his crime, the pain and damage he caused, and his attitude towards paying his civil compensation. This report is then used to contact the victim (or his/her family) and discuss their feelings about the offense, and their wishes and fears with respect to a possible conditional release. Out of this, victim-centered conditions are formulated that could and often are included in the conditional release contract. Negative or unfavorable attitudes can in principle be used as a contra-indication for conditional release.

In 1998 a project exploring victim-offender mediation was funded by the Belgian Department of Justice, and is currently running in six prisons. This research project focuses on how procedures can be fine-tuned to the needs and concerns of victims, how material, immaterial, and/or symbolic restoration (see Wright, 1996 for a discussion of basic issues), can be stimulated, and on how the psychosocial services can help motivate offenders to participate in restoring (as far as possible) the consequences of their criminal behavior.

For forensic psychologists working within correctional settings, this evolution has many practical implications for planning their interventions with offenders, not only with an eye on possible conditional release, but also on the possibility of indirect or direct contact between offender and victim. As these expectations are new, it is not always easy to find ways of doing this in a scientifically sound way, using methods that are reliable and valid.

As a first step in providing both theoretical background and practical information with respect to this issue, I focus in this paper on the process of responsibility attribution by the offender, and on the feelings that can result from this process (specifically guilt, shame, anger). Ways to assess these issues are discussed. Of course, the idea of restorative justice, and its implications for understanding the relationship between victim and offender implies a number of other assessment questions. For example, is the offender capable of entering a "restorative relationship" with the victim, both with respect to his personality and his (lack of) interpersonal skills? That is, not only should the presence of specific attitudes and emotions be assessed, but also an offender's personality structure, and his social skills (including empathy). Describing such an assessment battery is impossible within the scope of this article. However, in a final section more general assessment issues will be briefly touched upon.

The Responsibility Attribution Process

The attitude an offender will have towards his offense depends on whether he thinks himself responsible for the negative consequences of his

actions. According to Weiner (1986, 1996), the process of responsibility attribution depends on two major decisions: in how far does the person assume that his actions resulted from a situational (impersonal) vs. personal cause, and in how far could he have controlled the outcome. If an event is perceived to have come about by an impersonal cause, no responsibility is attributed. If the cause is personal but uncontrollable, no responsibility is likely to be attributed. If the cause is personal and controllable, responsibility is attributed. Mitigating or aggravating circumstances, however, can attenuate this responsibility.

Weiner (1986) also stresses other variables that can be involved in the process of responsibility attribution: stability, globality, and intentionality. Stability refers to the period in which the causes of an action are present (e.g., "bad character" is a stable predictor of negative outcomes). Globality refers to the way in which these causes are localized or spread over most or all activities of a person (e.g., having a bad character when my wife is present, or with all women). Intentionality, finally, concerns the way the negative outcome of an action was deliberately aimed at.

A different perspective is possible when the question of intentionality is made the central issue (e.g., Rule & Nesdale, 1978). Following a negative outcome or event, the question is posed whether it was intended or not. If not, it is asked if the outcome was foreseeable or not. If the event was intentionally brought about, the issue is whether it was justified. Responsibility is then attributed when the outcome was intended and unjustified, or not intended but foreseeable. As pointed out by Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) and Tedeschi and Felson (1994), this difference in perspective is less a theoretical one than a discrepancy between how actors and targets (or third party observers) attribute responsibility (or blame). However, whatever the nature of these two different perspectives, it is important to take all five factors into account when assessing responsibility attribution.

According to the attribution theory of Weiner (1986, 1996; Anderson, Krull, & Weiner, 1996), the attribution of responsibility is an automatic process. Weiner (1986, p. 163) states that "when the outcome [*of a person's action*] was unexpected or negative, a causal search is undertaken to determine why the outcome occurred". This attributional activity is an ideosyncratic process in that a person can construct a myriad of reasons (or cognitive distortions) why he should or should not feel responsible.

If the offender attributes his crime to a situational cause, anger may be the major affective consequent (e.g., "I'm innocently imprisoned", or "I did it, but it was someone else's fault"). If the offender attributes his criminal action to a personal but uncontrollable cause, the consequent feeling may be shame. Finally, If the offender thinks he is responsible he may feel guilty. Weiner (1986,1996) here differentiates between self-generated and other-

generated emotions. The first kinds of emotions are, for example, guilt and shame. Examples of the second group of emotions are anger and pity.

However, no obligatory link between the result of the responsibility attribution process and feeling guilty, ashamed, or angry should be assumed. It may well be that an offender accepts responsibility, but that he thinks he had a right to act as he did. For example, he may be the prototype of the rational criminal (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), and consider his criminal actions simply as his way of living.

The responsibility attribution process is intimately tied to the formulation of accounts of the negative outcome (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schönbach, 1990; Tavuchis, 1991; Harvey, Weber, & Orbach, 1991; Wallace, 1994). The sources cited offer definitions and account classifications (for example, distinguishing excuses and justifications). I will briefly discuss these under the section "measuring responsibility attribution".

When considering in how far an offender takes or avoids responsibility for his offense, one should take into account factors that can influence the formulation of a specific attribution. Two such factors are self-serving bias, and the concept of locus of control. First, it is a well-known phenomenon in attribution research that people tend to take responsibility for actions with a positive outcome, and to attribute negative outcomes to external factors (see Nisbett & Ross, 1980). This self-serving bias should be assessed as a general base line. However, while it can be expected that offenders will have a higher self-serving attributional bias than non-offenders, this should not necessarily be considered a deviant observation, as it follows directly from the fact that they are evaluated for specifically negative outcomes. Second, whether an offender has an external or internal locus of control (Rutter, 1966) is an important psychodiagnostic element. Rotter (1966) defined locus of control as the belief that an action will or will not influence the attainment of its goal. If an offender has in general an external locus of control, this will influence if and how he will be able to take responsibility.

The importance of these moderating variables in assessing responsibility attribution and feelings of guilt will be clear. As both self-serving attributional bias and locus of control are more trait -than state-like (Weiner, 1992), knowing an offender's way of responsibility taking for a specific action will have to be modified with respect to their level on these variables, and clinical interventions should be directed at these general response styles first, before it is concluded that an offender is unable or unwilling to take responsibility.

Empirical Evidence Concerning Responsibility Attribution of Offenders

A number of older empirical studies testing the criminological theory of neutralization exist which offer insight in how offenders account for their

offense. This theory started from the observation that many offenders don't seem to hold unconventional values and norms, but still commit crimes. Neutralization theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Matza, 1964) answers this question by stating that offenders use rationalizations defining their antisocial behavior as situationally appropriate. These rationalizations (or techniques of neutralization) come in five forms: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim ("they get what they deserve"), condemnation of the condemners ("judges are unfair or corrupt"), and appeal to higher authorities (e.g., "the crime was committed out of loyalty to friends").

Using a Neutralization Inventory (Ball, 1973), a number of studies were conducted showing a positive relationship between acceptance of neutralization and delinquency (e.g., Minor, 1980, 1981). Others, however, argued against such a relation (e.g., Ball, 1983). A partial resolution of these contradictory findings was offered by Agnew and Peters (1986) who showed that prior research did not satisfactorily differentiate neutralization acceptance and the perception that a given situation allows for the application of a neutralization technique.

Within an attribution theory framework, Saulnier and Perlman (1981a) showed that adult offenders, contrary to research with adolescent offenders reported by Wells (1980), offered more external and unstable attributions for their offence(s) than prison staff who more often attributed the crime to internal and stable factors, and that, as a consequence, offenders tended to ascribe lower probabilities to reoffending than prison staff did.

Saulnier and Perlman (1981b) studied offenders' attributions about the causes of their crimes. They found that recidivists (prisoners with previous criminal records) tended to offer more stable (and internal) attributions, offenders acting alone made more internal attributions than offenders who had acted with accomplices, and the more severe the crime the more diverse justifications were given.

Henderson and Hewstone (1984) analyzed violent offender's accounts of their crime, looking at how they attribute responsibility of interpersonal violence. They found that, as expected from the actor-observer bias, offenders formulated more external (the victim or the situation bears responsibility) than internal attributions. Most offenders offered justifications, therefore accepting but minimizing/rationalizing responsibility and but little excuses, with more excuses offered when severity of the crime increased. Henderson and Hewstone (1984) explained discrepancies between their results and others from the previous inability to distinguish attribution of causality vs. attribution of responsibility.

Fondacaro and Heller (1990) observed that juvenile offenders made more external attributions in ambiguous situations, and that external personal attributions related significantly to aggressiveness. This latter finding was descri-

bed in Dodge, Pierce, Bachorowski and Newman (1990) as "hostile attributional bias", observed specifically with offenders involved in interpersonal reactive aggression.

Palmer and Hollin (1997), finally, found that self-reported delinquency in a sample of students was predicted by their causal attributions, which were most often based on temptation and mental instability.

Besides these general studies, there exists an extensive literature for specific types of offenders such as sex offenders, mainly because a majority of this group of offenders deny or minimize their responsibility (Marshall, 1999). Research on sex offenders' cognitive distortions (cognitive schemata which justify the sexual offense—e.g., "the sexual abuse occurred because the child wanted sex") offers insight in how offenders attribute responsibility (see Vanhouche & Vertommen, this issue). While this research was originally rather unfocussed, recent theorizing has started to explain these distortions within a more systematic social psychological framework (e.g., Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997; Johnston, & Ward, 1996).

Within an explicitly attributional framework, Gudjonsson (1990) showed that the presence of cognitive distortions correlated with external attribution of responsibility. Garlick, Marshall, and Thornton (1996) found that rapists externally attributed responsibility for their relationship problems, while child molesters made internal attributions for their problems in relationships.

McKay, Chapman, and Long (1996) studied causal attributions of 50 child molesters (CM), and compared these to the attributions of rapists (R), property offenders (PO), and violent offenders (VO). CM attributed their offending to internal, stable, but uncontrollable causes, while R and PO attributed theirs to stable external, and uncontrollable causes. CM attributed their sexual arousal to internal, stable and uncontrollable causes, the other groups to external, unstable and controllable causes. Larsen, Hudson, and Ward (1995) equally observed that preferential child molesters attributed their offense(s) to more stable, more global, and less controllable causes than did situational child molesters (see also Hudson, Ward, & France, 1992).

Another group of offenders that have been investigated are substance abusers. For example, Loza and Clements (1991) studied attributions of blame with incarcerated alcoholics and rapists. Significant differences were found between groups. Kelly and Campell (1997) found that in a group of alcohol users attributions of responsibility was related to severity of the negative consequences of their alcohol-related offense. Other offender groups studied with respect to responsibility attribution are traffic offenders (McLaughlin, Cody, & French, 1990), and wife assaulters (see Dutton, 1998, for a review of research).

Overall, these results show that offenders' process of responsibility attri-

bution does not deviate from theoretical expectations. None of the results reported suggest that certain aspects of the attribution process are modified or absent in offenders. Of course, there is a predominance of external attributions, but with the exception of a possible "hostile attributional bias" in (repeatedly) violent offenders, this observation follows logically from the fact that explaining one's offense will elicit a self-serving bias, and that the often severely negative consequences of the offense will pressure the offender towards external attributions.

Measuring Responsibility Attribution

There exist several general *self-report measures* of attribution style (for example, Miller, Smith, & Uleman, 1981; Anderson, Horowitz, & deSales French, 1983). Here I will limit myself to a description of the *Causal Dimension Scale* (CDS; Russell, 1982), because its format can be easily adapted to other applications than the achievement context for which it was originally devised (see for such an example, McKay et al., 1996).

CDS includes 9 semantic differential scales, measuring three attributional dimensions: locus of causality (external vs. internal), stability, and controllability, scored using a 9-point Likert scale (e.g., "is the cause(s) something that reflects an aspect of yourself (score 1) or an aspect of the situation (score 9). Original alpha's reported are 0.87, 0.84, and 0.73 for each of the three scales. Subsequent research (see Russell, McAuley, & Tarico, 1987) for a summary) showed that the scale has satisfactory reliability and validity, with the controllability subscale being the least reliable. Note, however, that it does not include the dimension of personal/impersonal cause, or the intentionality dimension.

Besides general instruments, a number of scales for the assessment of responsibility attribution have been devised for use with offenders.

Ball's (1973) *neutralization* scale can be considered the first scale to tap the attribution of responsibility by offenders. It describes 4 situations (e.g., Jack gets involved in a gang fight), after which the offender has to answer 10 questions per situation on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (e.g., People should not blame Jack this time *if he was trying to protect himself*). In addition, there are 68 other background questions asked about the behavior of the respondent (e.g., At times I have very much wanted to leave home).

While a number of studies used this scale, little psychometric data can be found in these articles. Ball (1965) reported high reliability as measured by Kuder-Richardson coefficients. Convergent validity was reported to be in the desired direction (having acceptable correlations with, amongst others, a scale from the MMPI). Construct validity, however, was mixed.

A problem with the original scale is that it offers no option for responsibility taking, and that the response options are not systematically related to one of the five neutralization techniques. Minor (1980) adapted the neutralization scale, reducing the number of situations to 3, and giving for each situation 5 response options corresponding to the five neutralization techniques. No psychometric data were reported, however.

While the underlying differentiation of ways of denying/minimizing responsibility is interesting and useful, its measurement lacks clarity. No clear reliability estimates were reported, nor was the validity ever systematically investigated. For this reason, it seems best to let this specific scale rest in peace (but see McCarthy & Stewart (1998) for a recent application of the neutralization scale). However, the goal of distinguishing excuses and justifications is an important one, and should be incorporated in new measures.

The *revised Gudjonsson's Blame Attribution Inventory* (GBAI-R; Gudjonsson & Singh, 1989; originally described in Gudjonsson, 1984) is a self-report measure containing three subscales: external attribution (15 items; blaming the crime on external factors), mental element attribution (9 items; attributing responsibility on mental illness or poor self-control), and guilt feeling attribution (18 items; expressing regret and remorse about the offense).

With respect to the attribution of responsibility process, the GBAI-R assesses whether an offender appraises his criminal actions to be controllable and personally caused (guilt feeling attribution), whether he says his actions were situationally caused (external attribution), and whether he thinks his actions were personally caused but uncontrollable (mental element attribution). However, the scale does not offer an analytic assessment of responsibility attribution in terms of locus, stability, controllability, intentionality and globality, and mixes responsibility attribution with guilt feeling.

The original article reported a test-retest reliability after 2-4 months of 0.85 (external attribution), 0.73 (mental-element attribution), and 0.78 (guilt-feeling attribution). The underlying three-factor structure was found to be satisfactorily close to the hypothetical subscales. Guilt feeling attribution correlated positively with mental element attribution, and negatively with external attribution. The convergent validity of the subscales is acceptable. For example, in the offender sample external attribution correlated moderately with Eysenck's psychoticism scale and a measure of external locus of control. Guilt feeling attribution correlated with neuroticism and introversion. However, the mental element attribution scale did not correlate with any personality measure.

There is but little research published with the GBAI-R. Dolan (1995) investigated the relation between GBAI-R scores and the presence of per-

sonality disorders and mood. He found that guilt feeling attribution correlated with e.g., schizotypy and dependence, that external blame attribution correlated with borderline, passive-aggressive and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders (but not with the presence of antisocial personality disorder), and that mental element attribution related to the presence of avoidant personality disorder. Gudjonsson (1990) investigated the relation between blame attribution and cognitive distortions of child molesters, finding that scores on the Abel and Becker pedophile cognitions scale correlated with external blame attribution. Finally, in a study of custodial interrogations, Gudjonsson and Petursson (1991) found that guilt-feeling attribution correlated with a measure of confessionary defensiveness, and that both guilt-feeling attribution and mental-element attribution correlated with a measure of internal pressure to confess—implying that guilt-feeling can both lead to defensiveness and publicly taking up responsibility.

An experimental Dutch translation of the GBAI-R is available and preliminary psychometric data from a sample of sex offenders and non-sexual offenders are forthcoming.

Quite recently, Powell, Rosen, and Huff (1997) reported on research investigating the association between avoidance of responsibility and disruptive behavior disorder (DBD) symptoms. As part of this research they developed the *Avoidance of Responsibility Scale*, starting from 50 items, each describing a style of responsibility avoidance, and derived from relevant research on the topic. These items were evaluated on their appropriateness by mental health professionals. The items reflected 5 responsibility avoidance styles: denial, minimization, blaming others, playing the victim, rationalization, and lack of empathy.

Following a principal components analysis, 22 items were deleted from the scale. 9 factors were identified: affect rationalization (3 items; avoid responsibility by attributing negative outcomes to emotional states), lack of remorse (3 items), blaming (4 items), victim role-past (3 items; avoid responsibility by referring to one's own previous victimization), absence of personal responsibility (3 items), misunderstanding (4 items; other people overreact to or misunderstand my behavior), playing dumb (3 items), victim role-others (3 items; attributing inappropriate behavior to others who have victimized the offender), and immoral attitude (2 items; avoiding responsibility by lying or not getting caught). Although the PCA identifies more components than intended when constructing the scale, they quite nicely correspond in meaning to the 6 *a priori* components.

While the authors do not link these scales with a clearly identifiable theory of responsibility attribution, most scales have a clear, although not an analytic, relation with components of the responsibility attribution process.

Powell, Rosen, and Huff (1997) report an overall Cronbach alpha of .78,

and subscale alphas ranging from .37 (immoral attitudes) to .78 (affect rationalization), with most subscales having an internal consistency of .50-.60.

Powell, Rosen, and Huff (1997) found discriminant validity between high and low DBD subjects as theoretically expected: high DBD showed more avoidance of responsibility than low DBD—the correlation between avoidance of responsibility scores and DBD scores was also significant. Significant differences between males and females on a number of subscales were also reported—for example, males were more likely to use blaming and to be less remorseful than females.

While the instrument seems promising, both theoretically and empirically, its validity is unclear and should be investigated in more detail. Moreover, the reliability of the subscales is moderate at best. Further research will be needed to assess if the nine-factor structure can be replicated with other samples. It seems likely that items will have to be added to improve the psychometric properties of the scale. An experimental Dutch translation was, however, included in a pilot study which was recently run to assess responsibility attribution of offenders as compared to community controls (Gunst, 1999).

Finally, Di Fazio, Kroner, and Forth (1997) constructed an *Attribution of Blame Scale* with as original scales victim, offender, alcohol and societal blame. A principal component analysis resulted in a two-factor structure of external and internal attribution. As more detailed information concerning this scale was not available when writing this article, interested readers are directed to the original report.

Eight measures of cognitive distortions (and various ways of attributing responsibility) with sex offenders are discussed in Vanhouche and Vertommen (this issue). Items in these scales offer various ways in which sex offenders minimize, justify, or deny responsibility. Specifically within an attribution theory framework there exists an Incest Blame Scale (Jackson, 1983; McKenzie & Calder, 1993). To my knowledge, however, this scale has not been tested with sex offenders, but only with community controls and students.

Fincham and Bradbury (1992) developed a *relationship attribution measure* (RAM), which measures how spouses attribute responsibility and causality for actions occurring in an intimate relationship. It briefly describes 10 situations occurring in an intimate partner relation (e.g., "Your husband/wife doesn't give you the support you need") which have to be evaluated on six items referring to locus, stability and globality of causal attribution, and to intentionality, underlying motivation and blameworthiness of responsibility attribution, labeled "Her fault", "Stable in the future", "generalizes", "Intentional", "Selfish Motives", and "Blameworthy".

Alphas for the six subscales are acceptable (ranging from 0.6 to 0.85).

Two composite subscales, labeled the causal (locus, stability, and globality) and the responsibility composite (intentionality, motivation, blameworthiness) have an alpha of 0.86 and 0.91 respectively. The validity of the RAM, as reported in Fincham and Bradbury (1992) is promising: For example, it correlates in the expected way with attributions for real spousal behavior and observed affect, and marital satisfaction. It has also been used in research on wife assaulters by Dutton and research associates (see Dutton, 1998, for an overview).

To measure locus of control, Rotter's (1966) scale can be used. A Dutch translation exists (Andriessen, 1974), which has acceptable psychometric properties. A test-retest correlation (within a period of 3 months) of 0.86 was reported. Kuder-Richardson coefficients calculated for different samples range between 0.68 and 0.86. The validity of the original scale supports the underlying theoretical concept (see e.g., Weiner, 1992). Validity studies using the Dutch translation are scarce, but point in the expected direction (Andriessen, 1974).

A potentially major problem with these questionnaire methods that has not been addressed in the research reporting them, is the potential confounding influence of social desirability. As will be clear from other contributions to this thematic issue, social desirability is an important obstacle in forensic assessment (see e.g., Vanhouche & Vertommen, this issue; Knight & Cerce, this issue; see also Rogers, 1998). As no information concerning social desirability bias is available for the instruments described above, it is to be recommended to include such a measure in any forensic assessment procedure. Possible instruments are the Marlowe and Crowne Social Desirability Inventory (Crowne & Marlowe, 1966), its shortened, homogeneous, version (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972), or the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991). Experimental translations for these scales exist, and a number of studies are currently investigating their psychometric properties within a population of incarcerated offenders.

Besides these self-report measures, *interview and file information* will be useful in determining the way an offender thinks about his crime. They will often yield information that is more fine-tuned to the idiosyncratic belief and motivation structure of the offender than self-report measures, and may decrease the probability of sustained and rigid social desirability bias.

The offender's statements during trial as officially documented, his denial, excuses, rationalizations, justifications etc. will show in how far and in what way responsibility is attributed. A semi-structured interview in which the offender is asked to give an account of his offense(s), and which is afterwards coded with respect to his responsibility attributions, can yield a detailed view on how an individual offender attributes responsibility. To analyze this interview information one can take a number of approaches.

One possibility to objectify these data, is to use the *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (Hare, 1991). This 20-item scale is scored using interview data and file information to assess the possible presence of psychopathy. A number of items, however, explicitly look at the ways an offender habitually takes responsibility for his actions. For example, item 6 "lack of remorse of guilt" describes an individual "who shows a general lack of concern for the negative consequences that his actions ... have on others" (Hare, 1991, p. 20). It then describes how this can be assessed, e.g., by a "failure to appreciate the seriousness of his actions ... by arguing that his victims... really are to blame" (Hare, 1991, p. 20). Other relevant items are items 8 "Callous/lack of empathy", and 16 "Failure to accept responsibility for own actions".

The psychometric qualities of the PCL-R are excellent, with alpha's for the total scale ranging between .83 and .91, and with a test-retest reliability of .94. Validity studies show an impressive picture, both with respect to content validity, concurrent and predictive validity, and construct validity (see Hare (1991) for details). Inter-rater reliability for items 6, 8, and 16 is 0.60, 0.52, and 0.42 respectively. As the PCL-R is an instrument that is more and more used within correctional settings, both as the standard for assessing psychopathy and as one indicator of dangerousness, using these items as part of the assessment of responsibility attribution seems an obvious choice.

There also exist a number of classifications of accounts, which can be used to analyze how an offender speaks about his offense and his (lack of) responsibility. The seminal work of Scott and Lyman (1968) and Sykes and Matza (1957) started the analysis of account giving which has been elaborated by other researchers (Schönbach, 1990; Tavuchis, 1991; Harvey, Weber, & Orbach, 1991; Wallace, 1994). For example, Wallace (1994) differentiates excuses into four subtypes: (1) excuses referring to inadvertence, mistakes, or accidents, (2) excuses referring to unintentional bodily movements (e.g., sleepwalking), (3) excuses based on the presence of physical constraint, and (4) excuses referring to coercion, necessity, and duress. Furthermore, he distinguishes excuses, which function locally (that is, they are tied to a specific action), from exemptions which operate globally (e.g., insanity).

A very extensive and empirical *account taxonomy* has been developed by Schönbach (1980, 1990), who defined the concept of account episode as a sequence consisting in a failure event brought about by an actor, followed by a reproach phase initiated by an opponent. This in turns leads to an account phase by the actor, and ends in an evaluation phase by the opponent.

Accounts, the verbal description of the failure event and how/why it came about, come in four kinds: Concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals. A *concession* is "an admission of a violation of some normative expectations

held by others ... and at the same time an explicit or implicit admission of the actor's full or partial causal responsibility for the failure event" (p. 78). An *excuse* is any account "which admits the occurrence of a failure event and some involvement of the actor in it, but pleads for mitigation in judgement ... and hence reduced causal responsibility" (p. 79). *Justifications* are accounts in which the actor accepts responsibility but holds that it was legitimate or permissible under the given circumstances. Finally, a *refusal* is either outright denial, or an explanatory statement offered in support of "refutations of any right to question or reproach the actor or as an explanation of a denial of any further comment or account" (p. 80).

Starting from these four types, a detailed coding taxonomy has been devised. For example, refusals are divided into 9 subcategories, such as "refutation of allegation of a failure event or of actor's involvement in such an event", or "denial of the right to question or reproach in view of limitations, negative traits or misdeeds of other persons". Moreover, these subcategories are also divided in various specific accounts.

The taxonomy was devised using a number of studies with students, and is clearly a valid way of coding accounts of negative events (see Schönbach (1990) for a detailed review of studies using the categories; also Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994). No reliability results were reported, but experiments reported in Schönbach (1990) using this coding scheme show its value in explicating how actors and observers give and deal with accounts.

To my knowledge, the account taxonomy has not been used with offenders, although research exists using the account perspective with offenders' attitudes towards their crime (e.g., Felson & Ribner, 1981). Its systematic classification, however, could permit a better analysis of how offenders talk about their offense(s). As such, it deserves to be tried out in forensic assessment situations.

Finally, there exist schemata for classifying ways in which sex offenders talk about their offense. Salter (1988, p. 98) offers a table detailing a variety of ways in which sex offenders deny their offense. She identified 5 denial components: denial of the act itself, denial of fantasy and planning, denial of responsibility, denial of seriousness of the offense, denial of internal guilt for the behavior, and denial of the difficulty in changing abusive patterns. Other formulations of sex offenders' excuse syntax can be found in Barbaree (1991) and Hogue (1994). Although interesting and useful, these specific classifications are less analytic than Schönbach's taxonomy, and focus too much on denial at the expense of other ways of accounting for one's behavior.

Response Style Following Attribution of Responsibility

In discussing the nature of offense-related attitudes, the responsibility attribution process is only a part of a complex psychological episode. Within a componential theory of emotions (Frijda, 1987, 1993; see also Oatley & Jenkins, 1996), such an episode consists at least of the following major components following antecedent conditions: situational appraisal, psychophysiological reactions, subjective experiences, emotional expression, action tendencies, and regulation processes. For example, a negative behavioral outcome is followed by the appraisal of the factors that lead to that outcome, and an "explanation" is construed. This leads to a specific affective state (e.g., feeling guilty) which can be behaviorally expressed (e.g., crying), and which can be followed by a certain action tendency to restore the damage caused. Processes regulating the transition and evolution of the episode control this sequence.

Within such a componential theory of emotion, the responsibility attribution process belongs to the situational appraisal component following a negative behavioral outcome, and occurs in a number of emotion episodes—typical ones which are guilt, shame, anger, regret, or remorse.

Within the psychological (and philosophical) literature this group of emotions has been given various labels. Strawson (1962) used the term reactive attitudes. Others have described them as emotions of self-assessment (Taylor, 1985), self-conscious emotions (Tangney & Fischer, 1996), existential emotions (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994) moral sentiments (e.g., Wallace, 1994), or complex social emotions (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). All these terms point to important aspects of this emotion type. They imply (some amount of) reflexivity, and the comparison between a given situation or behavioral outcome and a norm or expectation defined as being interpersonally relevant.

Although definitions of guilt and shame differ between theoretical perspectives (both in the philosophical and psychological literature), they share the following characteristics. Guilt is generated when a person believes himself to have violated an expectation that one holds oneself to, and leads, under normal circumstances, to action tendencies such as public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, striving to avoid similar wrong-doing, expecting indignation and blame from others, and seeking reconciliation or restoration. *Shame*, on the other hand, implies the belief that one has violated an expectation that one holds oneself to, but which one is unable to realize. Typical action tendencies following shame can be expecting disdain and contempt from others prompted by a belief of general inadequacy that cannot easily be amended by the acknowledgment of any specific, localized wrong-doing (see e.g., Wallace (1994) and Williams (1996) for illuminating discussion of

these issues). As a result, hiding or obscuring oneself will often be a typical behavioral outcome.

Responsibility attribution is a crucial part of both emotions, with guilt presupposing attribution of the negative event to an internal/personal and controllable cause, and shame depending on attributing the negative event to an internal/personal but uncontrollable cause.

It is especially the action tendency component of guilt and shame that is the focus of attention when policy makers are becoming interested in assessing offense-related attitudes and emotions. Shame is assumed to lead to an action tendency of escaping from the situation one is in, while guilt should result in a willingness to restore and atone. Note that the definitions above imply a meshing of emotional (individual) and social (interpersonal and normative) responses to a negative behavioral outcome (Gibbard, 1990), and that guilt is directed at the negative outcome, while shame is directed at the self as actor of the negative outcome (see especially Tangney (1996b) for discussion of this crucial difference between guilt and shame). Guilt, therefore, should not be considered a "negative" emotion, but as an affective state which is inherently directed towards healing and restoring.

As mentioned above, the fact that an offender takes responsibility does not necessarily imply that he will have affective or behavioral consequences that are offense-directed. A rational criminal may have no problem stating that he is responsible for his offense, and at the same time have no feeling whatsoever for the consequences for the victim. That is, for the appraisal component of moral emotions to lead to a complete emotion episode (including behavioral expression and realized action tendency), the offender not only has to attribute responsibility to internal/personal and controllable causes, but also—and at the same time—has to accept (or at least find important) the norm/expectation he has violated.

For example, one could expect empirically that the higher one's attributed responsibility, the more guilt one will be experiencing. McGraw (1987), however, reported research indicating an inverse guilt-intent relationship. In her studies, harmdoers reported higher levels of guilt following accidental as opposed to intentional transgressions, suggesting that when a harmdoer attributes the consequences of his action to a personal but unintended cause, he will feel more guilty than when it is attributed to a personal and intentional cause. Also, Russell, McAuley, and Tarico (1987) found that, using the causal dimension scale, only locus of causality correlated with the presence of both anger and guilt.

In general, although the psychological literature on moral emotions (see Tangney & Fischer (1996) for a comprehensive review) tends to stress typical action tendencies as "normative", one should not expect to see a certain action tendency as soon as an emotion is elicited. For example, an offender

may feel guilty about having committed his offense, but instead of this guilt resulting in an action tendency towards restoration or reconciliation, anger may be evoked. This, of course is not a hypothetical illustration but a frequent observation in prison, where offenders ward off ego-threatening attributions and emotions by becoming angry.

Anger can in this context be defined along similar lines as guilt and shame, as "the observation that another person has violated a norm/expectation", and will result in asking for retribution from the offending party. By become angry, the offender in a sense externally attributes responsibility so that he will be able to "forget" his own responsibility. Anger can specifically appear as an emotion episode following shame, and could in a number of cases be regarded as a defense reaction against ego-threatening shame (see Tangney (1996b) for discussion).

Other emotions can also be generated following a responsibility attribution process. Examples are resentment, "ressentiment" (defined by Wallace, 1994, as "the evaluative thought that one lacks some characteristics that one values and wants very much to possess", indignation, and embarrassment. The psychological literature contains very little on most of these emotions—but see Mosher and White (1987) and Lewis (1996) for research on embarrassment). The reader interested in these emotions should consult Wallace (1994), or other philosophical works dealing with taking responsibility (see above).

Measures of Guilt, Shame, and Anger

Both Tangney (1996a) and Tangney and Fisher (1996) overview available measures of shame and guilt. To my knowledge, most of these are unavailable or difficult to obtain in Dutch. One should consult these references for more information on various methods used in the assessment of guilt and shame, and the controversies concerning the best way to measure these emotions. Importantly, most of the available measures have not been used with offenders.

Here, I focus on the *Test of Self-Conscious Affect* (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989), as it has become something like a standard measure. Moreover, its Dutch translation is currently under intensive investigation (Fontaine, Corveleyn, & Luyten, 1998; Luyten, Fontaine, & Corveleyn 1998), and their experimental translation was included recently in a pilot study investigating responsibility attribution by incarcerated offenders (Gunst, 1999).

TOSCA is a scenario-based questionnaire in which respondents are presented with 15 scenarios (e.g., "You make a big mistake on an important project at work. People were depending on you and your boss criticizes you").

For each of these situations they have to answer (using a 5-point scale) four or five questions measuring shame, guilt, externalization, detachment/unconcern, and alpha-pride and beta-pride. The two pride-scales refer to a theoretical distinction between feeling pride for one's action (alpha-pride), and feeling pride for oneself (beta-pride). The empirical value of the distinction, however, is unclear.

Cronbach's alphas (for the Dutch translation) range between 0.76 and 0.59, which is acceptable but not really excellent. Test-retest reliability as reported for the original scale, however, tends to be high (between 0.85 and 0.74 over a 3-5 week interval). Validity has been extensively researched (see Tangney, 1996a, 1996b; see also Luyten, Fontaine, & Corveleyn, 1998) for a brief overview, and generally supports the value of the instrument.

TOSCA measures shame- and guilt proneness, and is thus a trait (not a state) measure. This implies that assessing emotions following a specific event such as an offense with TOSCA may not always be very efficient, but may function primarily as a base line. Finding that an offender is guilt-prone does not imply that he feels guilty about his crime, but only that there is a higher probability that he does.

As reviewed in Tangney (1996a), measures for state-guilt or state-shame are scarce. Tangney (1996a) briefly describes a State Shame and Guilt Scale, but reports no psychometric properties. However, she also refers to Mosher and White's (1981) adapted *Differential Emotions Scale*. This scale asks respondents to think about a negative situation, after which they have to rate 36 adjectives (measuring 12 emotions) on a 5-point scale. For example, the items measuring guilt are "repentant", "shame", "embarrassment"; items for shame are "ashamed", "humiliated", and "disgraced"; for embarrassment "embarrassed", "self-conscious", "blushing". No psychometric properties were reported.

However, Gudjonsson's GBAI-R includes a subscale "guilt feeling attribution" which assesses guilt concerning one's offense. Using TOSCA and GBAI-R in combination could be a valid way to tap both guilt-proneness (as an individual base line) and guilt feeling following a specific transgression.

Many measures of anger exist. The most widely used are the Buss and Durkee (1957) *Hostility Inventory* and its recent revision (Buss-Pervin, 1992), the *Multidimensional Anger Inventory* (Siegel, 1986), Spielberger's *State-Trait Anger Inventory* (Spielberger et al., 1983), and Novaco's (1975) *Anger Inventory*. I will not review these measures here, but only note that all of them are susceptible to social desirability bias and that one should include a control measure when using any of these with offenders.

With the exception of Spielberger's STAI, these scales are trait-measures, and should be interpreted with care when assessing offense-related attitudes. Spielberger's recent *State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory* (Spielberger,

1988) also seems a promising instrument for use with offenders, as it includes not only trait and state anger subscales, but also subscales assessing what the respondent does when he is angry. (see Dalton, Blain, & Bezier (1998) for an example of its use with sexual offenders).

Another potentially interesting assessment method, based on extensive interviewing within Kelly's (1966) personal construct theory framework, is described in Houston (1998). Within this framework, assessing shame and guilt presupposes that the offender is capable of awareness "of dislodgment of the self from one's core role structure" (Houston, 1998, p. 17), while anger is understood as "the continued effort to extort validation or evidence in favor of the type of social prediction which has already been recognized as a failure" (Houston, 1998, p. 18). Personal constructs theory can be used to both assess current feelings of guilt, anger, or shame, and to induce a change in self-concept and avoidance of responsibility. Interested readers should consult Houston (1998) for illuminating discussion of how to use personal construct theory with offenders.

Obstacles for the Assessment of Offense-Related Attitudes

Assessing and working with offenders' offense-related attitudes is important in many respects. It conforms to current evolutions in criminological theorizing and judicial proceedings. On a psychological level, it can help to better understand the offender, yield handles to personal growth and change, and help to work towards a better reintegration in society. Nevertheless, a number of problems and possible obstacles connected with this evolution should be mentioned (see also Levrant, Cullen, Fulton, & Wozniak, 1999).

Taking responsibility for one's offense presupposes some problem insight, but does not necessarily imply the presence of moral emotions. The fact that an offender shows no feelings of guilt or shame does not imply that he is unable or unwilling to take up responsibility. Therefore, absence of moral emotions should not be taken as a safe-set contra-indication of, for example, conditional release.

Furthermore, as the responsibility attribution process comes *after* a negative behavioral outcome, it may be wrong to take absence of responsibility attribution as an indicator for a higher risk for reoffending. Again, a rational criminal may take responsibility, but have no difficulty to take that responsibility again and reoffend. Or an offender having committed a passion crime may attribute responsibility to the character of his wife, but still have a zero chance at reoffending. In general, results from the assessment of responsibility attribution should be handled with extreme case in making a prognosis. Of course, this clearly does not mean that lack of responsibility attribution does not have practical implications, nor that it could in a number of cases

be an indicator of higher recidivism risk. As said before, responsibility attribution presupposes some problem insight, and an observed lack of insight will be a criminogenic need that has to be addressed.

One important implication of viewing the responsibility attribution process as outlined above concerns its automatic and idiosyncratic character. The attribution process can be driven by a myriad of highly individual reasons, influences, and motivations. One robberer will attribute his offenses to poverty, and a discriminating society. Another will attribute it to a compulsive illness or helping behavior towards his family. Personal motivations will be self-servingness, defensiveness, social desirability or other self motives (see Tesser & Martin, 1996).

Moreover, the ability or willingness to attribute responsibility to oneself is conditional on having a number of cognitive and emotional capabilities. Some amount of reflexivity has already been mentioned. But other competencies, such as empathy, the possibility of some emotional depth, and a self-concept that can handle such a potentially ego-threatening process will influence how, and in how far an offender can begin to accept responsibility for his offense, and therefore, to make room for some sort of restoration or reconciliation (however indirect). Therefore, in a number of cases it may be best to work at ego-strength, defense mechanisms and coping style, before tackling responsibility attribution, all this within a broad social and personality assessment procedure aimed at finding strengths and weaknesses of the offender.

Finally, its automatic character suggests that helping an offender to accept responsibility will take time. Walters (1990), for example, clearly formulates the idea (termed "mollification") that for a number of "life-style" criminals dodging responsibility by rationalizations and justifications is so deep-seated that it may be hard to change them. When assessing the attribution of responsibility and consequent moral feelings, these specific aspects will have to be taken into account.

Clinical practice also shows that both offenders and forensic case managers find this change towards a more restorative justice and its practical implications difficult.

Offenders tend to prefer not taking about their offense (often because the emotions it generates) and act as if "by-gones are by-gones". Moreover, as forensic case managers have to report to official authorities, offenders distrust situations that go beyond the emotional surface out of fear that what they say will be used against them.

Case managers, on the other hand, tend to avoid stirring things up, and feel that assessing offense-related attitudes are too intrusive, and will tax an already heavy caseload. Even more importantly, assessing an offender's

offense-related attributions implies a shift from an offender-centered perspective towards a more balanced offender-society-victim stance.

However, as experience within the restorative justice project running in a number of Belgian prisons shows, with a little prompting and follow-up by motivated case-workers a number of offenders are relieved that room is made to talk about their offense, and manage to give the psychologist or social worker enough trust to work through this.

An important reason why forensic case workers and prison governors shy away from entering a restorative relationship with the offender, is the implied relationship between assessment of offense-related attitudes and ethics.

There are at least two reasons for this. First of all, restorative justice concepts are embedded in an often-implicit ethical discourse, which is quite difficult to explicate or operationalize into specific research or clinical strategy. Second, because the concepts are moral, many will feel that the question of taking responsibility and feeling guilty should not enter in a clinical-forensic field, because it would to some seem to reintroduce a quasi-religious approach to criminality, in which a confession metaphor would again take precedence over a psychological perspective in working with offenders.

I think these qualms about discussing the issue of responsibility and the feelings it generates in offenders are misguided. Correctional work and rehabilitation planning does necessarily involve questions of responsibility. It does not help to dodge the question. Moreover, in as far as the conception of the moral emotions outlined above is correct, working towards the experiencing of guilt can generate the benefit of positively-valenced action tendencies directed toward restoration and reconciliation. It will certainly be better than to let anger reign, or to shame offenders into an escape from social norms.

One should, however, be aware of this negative attitude to "morally-sounding" aspects of forensic psychological work, and try to operationalize both the concepts used and their possibly practical implications for rehabilitation and risk assessment. Much theoretical and clinical research needs to be done in this area.

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