

12-10-2018

Personality Profiling and Narratology: Implications for Why People Go Bad

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2018) "Personality Profiling and Narratology: Implications for Why People Go Bad," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 18 : Iss. 7 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol18/iss7/2>

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Title: Personality Profiling and Narratology: Implications for Why People Go Bad

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Why do people go bad? Personality profiling—especially the post-dictive variant wherein the bad behavior already has occurred, and there’s a dragnet for the complicit correlational and causal factors—attempts to come up with answers. Such profiling is founded on assumptions. That there are correlational and causal factors, even as some philosophies of science view this as apocryphal. That such factors can somehow be operative in future cases for the same person and different people, even as some philosophies of science view such factors as different for each individual and the same individual through time. That such factors can be deterred or modified in substance or effect, even as some philosophies of science view logical problems in demonstrating this as insurmountable. Nevertheless, if intrepid profilers continue in their applied research quest, constructs from the literary criticism construct of *narratology* may help.

Many profilers depend on individual or groups of traits, singularly meaningful events, or dispositional vulnerabilities with significant stimulus pull. But a key way forward may be identifying the life narrative of an individual within which the individual plays the starring role and other co-stars, supporting cast, and special guests. *Narratology* comprises its own constructs including the following.

First, there’s the Aristotelian distinction between *story* and *plot*. The former comprises all that has occurred, or at least all that can be known about someone’s life. The latter comprises just what is crucial in understanding, explaining, influencing, predicting, and controlling the bad behavior in question. More is not better, and what’s better is a subjective call based on the mindless compliance with some objective algorithm base on one’s subjectivity, or ambiguous constructs such as *empathy*, *negative capability*, *a priori imagination*, *objective correlative*, and so forth.

Second, the *motif*. What seems to recur in an individual’s life, especially the same sort of crisis, threat, or perceived challenge which engenders special significance and unusual cognitive-affective-motivational activation.

Third, which behaviors seem to be based on *expressive* and which on *instrumental* motivations. The former is a vehicle to experience one or more strong emotions, the latter to effect events in the external world and achieve external goals.

Fourth, the common *narrative styles* most characterizing the significant events in an individual’s life. The happy endings of the *comedy*? The sad endings of the *tragedy*? The critical absurdities of the *satire*? The great adventures of the *epic*? These are pure styles, while individual lives often may constitute combinations.

Fifth, the meanings of an individual life related to bad behavior can be related to *time coherence*—*synchronic* wherein a snapshot of a moment says it all, or *diachronic* wherein the key is a trend or pattern through time.

Sixth, as information is collected about an individual's bad behavior, and a narrative seems to emerge from the profiler's information immersion, it can be as if techniques from film theory point the way. The sudden *zoom*, as if a camera moves in or away from someone or something. The *tracking shot* as if the camera runs on a track smoothly following some life interlude. Different degrees of *omniscience* seemingly spoken by first, second, or third person narrators—and the profiler. *Shock cuts* as radically different scenes are juxtaposed. *Match cuts* cutting from one scene to a totally different one, but a specific character is in both occupying the same location in each shot's frame. *Jump cuts* in which what would have been a continuous sequence is broken in time and/or space. *Frames-within-frames* wherein stories contain stories containing still other stories as in exemplars of the storyteller *Scheherazade*—all yielding elements of plots. And *eye-line shots* wherein the profiler watches the individual watch something, then sees what the individual is watching.

Ultimately, profiling may still be founded too much on natural science perspectives with discrete, ahistorical variables deterministically linking to bad behavior. And not enough on events interpreted and re-interpreted into dynamic narratives. This may lead to profilers going bad as they seek to understand why others do.

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Keywords: A Priori Imagination. Assessment. Empathy. Epistemology. Hermeneutics. Imagination. Leadership. Narrative. Narratology. Negative Capability. Objective Correlative. Political. Profiling.

Abstract/Description: This article suggests the utility of narratology in the post-dictive profiling of political leaders.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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