

FORENSIC SCHEMA THERAPY

Offence Mapping with

THE RIDDLER

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Forensic Schema Therapy (FST) was developed out of the need for more effective treatments for high-risk forensic patients with personality disorder. A key difference between forensic and clinical contexts is the need to **make sense of criminal behaviour**, as an important objective of psychological interventions within these contexts is the reduction of so-called risk of re-offending. The concept of schema 'modes', which refers to an emotional state or 'part-of-self' that temporarily dominates a persons' awareness, is key to mapping offending behaviours, and to **understanding the underlying reasons and 'function'** (i.e., needs met) of specific offending. 'Modes' can be understood as **copng strategies** that emerge in challenging childhoods whose function is get needs met.

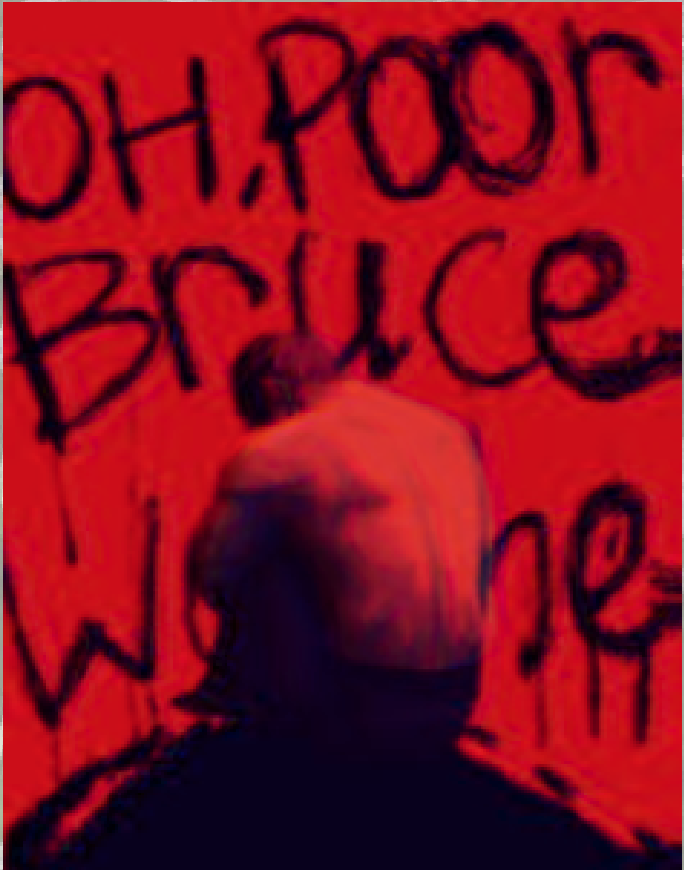


It is well documented that the typical childhoods of many forensic patients are difficult and painful. These patients do not expect to be cared about, understood, or treated with kindness. To them the **world is a dangerous place** where you can only rely on yourself, **never show weakness**, and, the end justifies the means, whatever that may entail. Indeed, in this world, it is the **overcompensating modes that reign supreme**, because these modes tend to 'get on the front foot' in response to problems utilizing a 'shoot first - ask questions later' type of algorithm.

OFFENDING RARELY OCCURS IN A VACUUM. A CLOSER ANALYSIS REVEALS A SEQUENCE OF REACTIONS THAT CULMINATES IN OFFENDING.

SO WHAT'S THIS OFFENCE MAPPING?

Offence mapping' is the process of identifying sequences of behaviour, thoughts and feelings to assist with recognizing repetitive patterns, early warning signs, and of course, changing things that may contribute to these problems. In FST offending is similarly understood as an unfolding sequence of schema modes, though usually triggered by the activation of vulnerable ones. A recent study by Keulen-De Vos and colleagues (2016) supports the use of schema modes in this way and found in a sample of 95 offenders a characteristic mode sequence to offending. An offence was usually preceded by the activation of vulnerable modes (such as the vulnerable and lonely child modes), as well as states of intoxication (detached Self-soother mode). This is then followed by a spiraling pattern of anger and impulsivity (Angry and Impulsive child mode), eventually culminating in the activation of an overcompensating mode and offending, such as, instrumental aggression (Predator mode) and intimidation (Bully and Attack mode).



THE RECENTLY RELEASED BATMAN MOVIE IS A USEFUL STARTING POINT FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT OFFENCE MAPPING AND SCHEMA MODES.

A Mode: Refers to an emotional state or 'part-of-the-self' that temporarily **dominates** a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (Rafaeli, et al., 2011)



"Do you know what being an orphan is? It's thirty kids to a room, twelve years old and already a drophead, you wake up screaming with rats chewing your fingers, and every winter one of the babies die because it's so cold."

The Riddler to Batman

"The Batman" tells the story of Edward Nashton (the Riddler) who grew up in the Gotham Orphanage. A gifted prodigy with a knack for solving puzzles was at stark odds with the orphanage life. From an early age Edward was shunned by peers and **invisible to the world**. The death of Bruce Wayne's parents led to the bankruptcy of the orphanage, the only home Edward had ever known and despite his fraught childhood, a **source of stability and comfort**. The loss of funding forced the orphans, including Edward, to live in poverty for the rest of their childhoods. An experience that **embittered him**, feelings that were amplified by the outpouring of concern for orphaned - Bruce Wayne. These experiences inoculate in him a **deep mistrust and resentment** of others and a powerful desire for **vengeance** against the people he identified as responsible for his circumstances.

AS THE ORPHANAGE BURNS, WE OBSERVE THE EMERGENCE OF OVERCOMPENSATING MODES INTOXICATING, POWERFUL AND INVULNERABLE.

Eleven years on, having secured work as forensic accountant, and incidentally driving past the orphanage he decides to burn it down. This experience was unexpectedly unsatisfying for him though represented a transformational moment in the story. His work had exposed him to the corruption that remained in the city and that had been the cause of his difficult childhood.

As the orphanage burns, we observe the emergence of overcompensating modes - intoxicating, powerful and invulnerable. Edward recognizes that what he really craves is power, recognition, and retribution for the injustices done to him and the emotional scars that he still carried (Vulnerable Child Mode). His subsequent crimes are meticulous and ruthlessly planned to cause suffering in the victim and gain notoriety (Obsessive Over-controller, Conning Manipulator, and Predator mode). He invites attention, gloats, and belittles the police, obviously revelling in a sense of superiority and notoriety (Self Aggrandizer and Bully and Attack Modes). Yet the Riddler feels an affinity with Batman believing that they have a shared goal of ridding Gotham of corruption and crime.

In one of the final scenes, they eventually do meet, and learning that he had been wrong about Batman, he becomes distraught and then briefly inconsolable (vulnerable child modes), though realizing that Batman had not uncovered his grand plan, he flips into a cold, calculating and superior mode, obviously reveling in his sense of power and control as he sings 'Ave Maria' as one final riddle for Batman to solve.



THE FORENSIC MODES

(BERNSTEIN, ET. AL., 2007)

SELF-AGGRANDIZER: FEELS SUPERIOR, SPECIAL, OR POWERFUL, AND ENTITLED

BULLY AND ATTACK: USES THREATS, INTIMIDATION, AGGRESSION TO GET

WHAT HE WANTS

CONNING AND MANIPULATIVE: CONS, LIES OR MANIPULATES TO ACHIEVE A SPECIFIC GOAL

PREDATOR: FOCUSES ON ELIMINATING A THREAT IN A COLD CALCULATING MANNER

SO WHY THE RIDDLER?

The Riddler's **backstory** is a familiar one to many forensic patients. He grew in unsafe and unstable circumstances, there was **little love to go around**. He was rejected by peers, ignored by parental figures, and felt cast out by the wider community. These **emotional wounds**, or Schemas, remained unresolved and led to the formation of a range of overcompensating modes (**Predator, Conning Manipulator, Self-Aggrandizer, Obsessive Over-Controller**) which became dominant and then drove his offending behaviours. Notably, underlying his apparent motives for his offending, appears very much to have been his unmet emotional needs - safety, justice, and autonomy.

The FST model presents a framework for understanding and conceptualising offending behaviours. By focusing on schema modes, it allows offence-mapping that identifies risk factors that can be targeted. **Schema modes can be understood as risk factors that increase likelihood of offending.**



Still interested check out:
Bernstein, D. P., Clercx, M., & Keulen-De Vos, M. (2019). **Schema therapy in forensic settings**. In The Wiley International Handbook of Correctional Psychology (pp. 654-668). Wiley Blackwell.

Keulen-de Vos, M. E., Bernstein, D. P., Vanstipelen, S., de Vogel, V., Lucker, T. P., Slaats, M., & Arntz, A. (2016). **Schema modes in criminal and violent behaviour** of forensic cluster B PD patients: A retrospective and prospective study. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 21(1), 56-76.

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