

A narrative approach to women's lawbreaking

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Abstract

This paper argues for the value of narrative criminology for feminist explanations of women's lawbreaking. Contemporary theories note the significance of material gendered inequalities, however narrative offers a way to include discursive aspects of gender. Drawing on recent developments in narrative criminology, this article analyses how women may 'talk themselves into' lawbreaking. Analysis draws on interviews with three women with diverse experiences in the drug trade, and shows how drug trafficking was narrated as impossible, meaningful, and inevitable. A narrative approach therefore offers ways to understand how for some women, under some circumstances, lawbreaking may become meaningful. Narrative criminology offers ways to incorporate both material and discursive facets of gender into contemporary explanations of women's lawbreaking.

Keywords: narrative criminology, theory, aetiology, gender, women's lawbreaking.

Introduction

The 1980s saw a flurry of empirical and theoretical work on women's and girls' lawbreaking prompted by the feminist critique of criminology (Bowker 1978; Heidensohn 1968; Smart 1976; Klein 1973). Explaining women's offending was high on the agenda (Carlen 1988; Cook 1987; Leonard 1982; Heidensohn 1985; Simon 1975). Some thirty-odd years later, feminist research on women's victimisation and their experiences of and in criminal justice institutions as victims, offenders and employees proliferates (Heidensohn and Silvestri 2012; Renzetti 2013; Barberet 2014), yet their lawbreaking receives comparably little attention.

This paper argues that explanations for women's offending have stalled. In general, material aspects of gender are privileged, with limited consideration of gender as a discursive

or category. Lack of consideration for both aspects of gender has arguably led to an impasse in the development of feminist criminological theory (Daly and Maher 1998). Narrative criminology offers a way to overcome this impasse. Narrative analysis forefronts the storied nature of social life (Bruner 1991, Plummer 1995; Polletta et al. 2011), especially the role of narratives in motivating and sustaining action. Narrative criminologists explore how people may 'talk themselves into' harmful, or law breaking behaviours (Presser 2009; Presser and Sandberg 2015).

The structure of this paper is as follows: firstly the current state of sociological explanations of women's offending is discussed with particular attention paid to the impasse between 'real women' and 'women of discourse' (Daly and Maher 1998). Next, narrative approaches are summarised, with special attention to their usefulness for understanding women's lawbreaking. The second part of the paper offers a narrative analysis of three women involved in the drug business. Examining interview data, not as a record of events but as narratives, shows how respondents talked themselves into (and in one case out of) drug trafficking. Social structure, and individual agency can be heard in women's narratives. Analysis demonstrates that discourses are not free of social structure, but intricately bound up with it. This paper concludes by arguing for the value of narrative theory for feminist explanations of women's lawbreaking actions.

Explaining women's lawbreaking

Feminist criminology has reached a theoretical impasse. Daly and Maher note that two approaches have been employed in understanding women's offending: 'real women' and 'women of discourse' (1998). The 'real women' approach is characterised by empirical research on the material factors of women's existence and lawbreaking (such as poverty), and to a lesser extent how women construct their worldview (i.e. Maher 1997). In contrast, the 'women of discourse' approach prioritises deconstructing the category of 'woman', usually through socio-legal analysis (i.e. Smart 1995). Daly and Maher claiming that this division lead to an impasse in

feminist criminological theory (Daly and Maher 1998). While there is broad consensus that research and theory must take into account gender as both culturally and materially constituted (Jackson 2001), feminist explanations of women's lawbreaking have struggled to do so.

Most research on women's lawbreaking could be described as fitting the 'real women' approach (Daly and Maher 1998). For example, the 'pathways' approach examines the material and social-structural circumstances that often lead to women's offending (Daly 1994): including patriarchy, economic marginalisation, the feminisation of poverty, histories of abuse, and drug addiction (Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2013; Gelsthorpe 2004). Establishing causality is complex, however. While Daly's work on 'pathways' was foundational (1994), she acknowledges the 'black box' between background factors and women's lawbreaking (1998; also Gelsthorpe 2004). Contemporary examples in this journal explore these connections quantitatively (Parker et al. 2008; Jones et al. 2014; Wattanaporn and Holtfreder 2014). Quantitative approaches, by their nature, can offer limited reflection on gender as a discursive category.

The structured action approach makes important contributions about gender beyond material, social structural conditions. Gender is understood as continually accomplished in social action, according to 'situated normative beliefs about masculinity and femininity' (Miller 2002: 434). Messerschmidt contends that men may 'do' crime as a way to do gender (1997). With regard to women's offending, Miller examined how women 'gender-cross' (2001). Although researchers examine how respondents 'did' gender in the actions *described* by *respondents*, they did not consider the ways that offenders' accounts might *themselves* be gendered performances through storytelling.

Research shows the significance of discourses about gender in women's lawbreaking. In *Women, crime and poverty*, Carlen explores the significance of gender 'ideology' in women's lives. Respondents rejected the gender, and class deal in their lawbreaking behaviour, and were often criminalised as a result (1988). More recently, Batchelor examines how women negotiate gendered stereotypes ('one of the boys', or 'sex objects') in their participation in neighbourhood

fighters (Batchelor 2011: 125).¹ Phoenix' research on women in prostitution is the most explicitly discursive approach (1999, 2000). Without denying the material limitations on women's choices, she shows the centrality of narrative in managing the contradictions of prostitution through the construction of a 'prostitute identity'. Given the importance of cultural ideas about gender for women, work needs to be done to understand gender as a discursive category in theories about women's lawbreaking.

Doing so necessarily involves an encounter with post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is broadly concerned with deconstructing the connections between power and discourse, following Foucault (Smart 1995, 1990; Daly and Maher 1998). This involves recognising that the term 'woman' is at once real (in that it has real effects), but also denying that the category has any essential meaning (Carlen 2008). Deconstructing gender is central to feminist perspectives in criminology, from early feminist deconstruction of criminological discourses about women (Heidensohn 1968; Smart 1976, 1977; Naffine 1987), to contemporary research deconstructing how gendered, racist and heterosexist ideologies are employed by criminal justice agencies (Carlen 1983; Gelsthorpe 1989; Sharpe 2009; Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008; Pasko 2010). Concerns with deconstructing discourse are quite developed in some sub-fields (Carrington 1998), yet to a much lesser extent with regards to women's lawbreaking. Possible problems with post-structuralist approaches are considered in the conclusion.

Combining 'real women' and 'women of discourse' approaches is complex: both draw on distinct ontological assumptions and theoretical approaches to gender (Daly 2010). Comack proposes that standpoint theory offers a way forward, since 'women's standpoint(s) will be very much informed by their social context (what happens in their day-to-day lives), their histories (what has happened to them in the past) and their culture (modes of thought available to them)' (1999: 294). Whilst standpoint theory is not without merit, Scott's intervention is prescient. She problematizes the authority of experience and therefore its status as the basis for theory (1992). Influenced by post-structuralism, she explains that: 'experience is at one always

¹ See also Batchelor 2007, 2009, 2011.

already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation' (1992: 37). Drawing on Foucault, she argues that discourses are historic, position subjects and therefore produce experience (ibid). This is not to devalue experience, but rather to draw attention to the role of discourse in making some kinds of experiences knowable. Her position is not completely at odds with Comack's since both draw attention to the role of culture and social context in how women construct personal histories, events and circumstances. Thus, situating women as producers of discourses offers a way to overcome Daly and Maher's impasse (1998).

In sum, gender has been mainly understood as a material inequality; post-structuralism had a limited impact on research and theory about women's lawbreaking. Doing so entails considering how women's experiences are structured by discourses, and how women negotiate these discourses in their lawbreaking. Whilst this theme has been explored to a greater or lesser extent (Carlen 1988, Phoenix 2000, Batchelor 2011), narrative criminology offers theoretical tools for thinking through the ways that women receive and produce discourses about gender. as well as, of course, sexuality, ethnicity/race and class, and so overcome the 'impasse' between 'real' and 'discursive' women in feminist theory.

Narrative criminology

A narrative is a story told by an individual (or group), with a beginning, middle and end (Presser 2009: 179). Narratives are selective account of past events, oriented to the present listener (whether real or imagined), which make some point about the narrator (ibid). Narrative analysis is now an established approach in sociology, psychology, history, philosophy and even economics (Plummer 1995: 18). Criminology comes late to the 'narrative turn', even though offenders' biographies are a mainstay of the discipline (Goodey 2000; Gelsthorpe 2007). Presser's article *The narratives of offenders* set out a new agenda drawing on narrative theory (2009). Whilst narrative criminology has forerunners in Wright Mill's 'vocabulary of motive' (1940) and Sykes and Matza's 'techniques of neutralization' (1957), the contemporary iteration is premised on a *constitutive* view of narrative: 'one that effectively blurs the distinction

between narrative and experience by suggesting that experience is always known and acted upon as it has been interpreted symbolically' (Presser 2009:184). It is the idea that:

We organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narratives – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing and so on.

Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally... (Bruner 1991: 4)

Since we experience the world narratively and interpret it as 'the protagonist of an emerging story' (2009: 184), narratives can be understood antecedents to action, including criminal, lawbreaking or harmful actions. Since 'people talk themselves into engaging in some behaviour even as they also talk after doing it.' (Presser 2012: 9), narratives are not mere post-hoc justifications. The sense of one's self in the story, 'narrative identity', is at the heart of individual narratives (McNay 1999b). Narrative identity need not be unitary, or cohesive, and is understood as an individual's creative appropriations of culturally available subject positions and discourses (ibid). Narratives reflect both structure and agency: they are the outcome of individual creativity (the outcome of individual reflection and crafting), but are also socially structured, since social positioning and experience make available particular kinds of discourses (Sandberg and Pederson 2009). Individual narratives can thus be understood as 'agency conditioned by context' (Presser and Sandberg 2015). Narrative criminology also draws attention to the social life of stories: when, why and how stories come to be told, heard and which resources speakers can draw upon (Sandberg 2010; Gubrium and Holstein 1998).

The potential of narrative theory for understanding how harmful actions are motivated and sustained discursively has been demonstrated through empirical and theoretical work on violence (Presser 2008; Presser 2012; Brookman 2015), lone wolf terrorism (Sandberg 2013), drug dealing (Sandberg and Pederson 2009; Sandberg 2009a, 2009b), white collar crime (Klenowski et al. 2011), drug use (Copes et al. 2008) and drinking (Tutenges and Sandberg 2013). Surprisingly little attention has been given to women's narratives. Klenowski et al.

examined how middle class men and women 'did' gender in neutralisations about committing fraud (2011) drawing on the 'doing gender' approach, and Sykes and Matza's 'techniques of neutralisation' (1957). Women drew on a narrower range of neutralizations than men, such as being more likely to claim necessity. Klenowski et al. attribute this difference to the interactional context of storytelling (2011). In other words, men could credibly tell a wider range of stories about fraud than women. Nonetheless, in drawing attention to the circumstance of the telling, they downplay the role of social structures in making available particular discourses to women. Close attention to the role of social structure in shaping women's narratives is needed to properly bridge the gap between material and discursive aspects of gender.

Narrative criminology, gender and women's lawbreaking

Narratives bridge the gap between social structure and individual agency. Sandberg and Pederson invoke Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in their ethnography of drug dealers in Norway (Sandberg and Pederson 2009). They note that although an 'orthodox' Bourdieuan framework would consider an individual's linguistic practice, it would be given less attention than the economic and social conditions of its production (2009: 35). They combine a Bourdieuan framework with a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse as a set of historically and culturally specific meanings that make available different subject positions (2009: 36). This conceptualisation of discourse draws attention to the role of institutions in legitimating some kinds of subject positions (i.e. the welfare state). Instead of imagining that discourses become available in the social space exterior to the individual, I propose a slightly different reading that understands discourses as part of the habitus.

The habitus is a set of: 'internalized structures, common schemes of perception, conception and action which are the precondition of all objectification and apperception' (Bourdieu 1990: 60). It structures how a person experiences and interprets their social world so that 'the most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of

immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue out of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied, and to will the inevitable' (ibid: 54). In this way, possibilities for action are 'infinite yet strictly limited' (ibid: 55). As a generative structure, it shapes how one evaluates the possibilities for action, weights up the probable outcomes, differentiated along class, race, and gender lines. This process is instinctive, and pre-reflexive, summed up by Bourdieu as a 'feel for the game' (1990). Habitus is acquired through experience, and so is the product of an individual's social environment; this process is dynamic and open-ended (McNay 2004). Bourdieu applied his logic of social practice to language, but not to narrative (1992), however, the idea of a 'narrative habitus' can be imagined here as a socially structured capacity for evaluation and reflection, through language (see also Frank 2010).

Some adjustment is necessary. The concept of the habitus is sometimes considered deterministic. McNay argues that social structures are mediated by the individual's agency as the capacity for reflection, which is itself socially structured by the habitus (2004: 178). This process is a double one: people are always already positioned by social structures that shape possible interpretations and projections of future action, through discourse, which make available particular subject positions and interpretations (McNay 2004). Social structures operate at the level of individuals' 'narrative identity' (McNay 1999b). Thus, individuals' capacity for reflection is itself socially structured (Bohman 1997). In this way: 'individuals act in certain ways because it would violate their sense of being to do otherwise' (McNay 1999a: 318). At the same time this process is creative since 'even shared meanings are subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation, often in ways that contest current identities and practice' (Bohman 1997: 176). Thus, from a narrative perspective, women's lawbreaking actions can be understood as the outcome, not only of social structures that constrain individuals, but of subjective perceptions and meanings which are themselves the outcome of social structural processes.

Gender is a particular kind of social structure in that 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to have a socially meaningful existence outside of the norms of gender' (McNay 1999a: 322; also

Butler 1990). Furthermore, female subject positions have a 'deep historical resonance and durability' (McNay 1999a: 323). Their stability is not simply the result of powerful imposition through patriarchal institutions, but also due to re-tellings by individuals who incorporate such discourses into individual narratives (Jackson 1998; McNay 1999a). Although gender is a particularly important kind of structure, it is always co-constituted by a myriad of other social structures, including ethnicity, sexuality, age and so on (Crenshaw 1994; Burgess-Proctor 2006; Daly 1997; Henne and Troshynski 2013), enabling a variety of narrative possibilities. And while individuals cannot escape being gendered, the significance of gender varies according to the situations in which individuals find themselves.

Methodology

Analysis draws on interviews with three women involved in drug business, drawn from two research projects. Although all three women came across the opportunity to traffic drugs internationally as drug 'mules',² they are not representative. Interviews illustrate the value of narrative theory for explaining women's conformity and lawbreaking and examine contrasting experiences – Emma's story is about conformity; Rosa's tells of a life long involvement in drug business and Marta's narrative sits somewhere in the middle. Respondents came from different social circumstances and are diverse in age, ethnicity, and nationality.

Interviews are inevitably shaped by the circumstances of their telling, since narratives are the outcome of interpersonal relations and situations (Presser 2005; 2010). Whilst autobiography is often considered a spontaneous mode of self-expression, women (especially poor women) have historically been required to give an account of themselves by state organisations (Stanley 2000; Steedman 2000; on accounts, Scott and Lyman 1968).³ In undertaking this research I was cognizant that storytelling is underpinned by inequalities of power and voice. There is only space for a brief discussion. Marta was interviewed during

² The term 'mule' is used here to describe a person who carries drugs across international borders for someone else.

³ Feminist scholars also draw attention to the gendered nature of language, and its relationship to power (Spender 1998; Spivak 1988; Weatherall 2002).

extensive ethnographic immersion in an Ecuadorian women's prison as part of a project on women in drug trafficking (Fleetwood 2014a). Whilst potential for exploitation must be acknowledged, ethnographic research has great potential for challenging power inequalities (cf. Stacey 1988). Long-term presence made possible collaborative reflections about the conditions of storytelling in prison, as well as space to tell/listen to stories that were not institutionally supported, for example the pleasures of deviance. Emma and Rosa were interviewed just once. I met Emma through mutual friends in Ecuador; she is from the UK and we shared nationality and ex-patriot status. We had similar experiences of travelling round Ecuador and were of similar age. Rosa was interviewed as part of a project on women crack cocaine dealers in England (Fleetwood 2014b), also through a mutual friend who vouched for me. In keeping with these connections and contexts, interviews were conversational and informal, and as respondent directed as possible.

Interviews aimed to elicit subjective interpretations in addition to facts, although there is no strict distinction between the two in post-positivist research (Reissman 1993: 2). To provoke narratives, interviews began with an open-ended question (Reissman 1993; Presser 2010), in this case: 'tell me how you got involved in selling/trafficking drugs?'. As an imprisoned drug mule, Marta had no difficulty producing a narrative (Presser 2010: 436), however interviews with Emma and Rosa involved a greater degree of prompting. Prompts encouraged respondents to say more, and reflected the story back to check my interpretation (Kvale 1996: 145). Consent and confidentiality were discussed in advance, and permission was given to record the interview. Tapes have since been destroyed. Real names and identifying details have been omitted.

Interviews were transcribed in full and analysed holistically. Analysis considered 'why was the story told *this way*?' (Reissman 1993: 61), seeking to draw out the subjective meanings of drug trafficking, and 'hear' the different discourses at play. This is done through attention to particular words, phrasing and grammar, as well as embedded values (Presser 2010). Analysis was double checked through re-reading for alternative interpretations. Throughout, I reflected

on whether my interpretation was faithful to the speaker's account, and if they would recognise my interpretation of themselves. Respondents are quoted extensively.

Respondents' narratives are presented in the following order: Emma was offered a chance to traffic drugs by a fellow backpacker, but declined, demonstrating the importance of narrative in her conformity. Marta worked as a drug mule, but not the first time the opportunity arose. Her narrative shows how narratives are not fixed, but subject to change. Finally, Rosa carried a small quantity of cocaine internationally without giving it a second thought. Their accounts variously describe drug trafficking as impossible, unappealing then meaningful, and inevitable.

Emma: "I'm not going to do that kind of thing"

Emma is English, white, middle-class and had been in Ecuador for several months volunteering and backpacking before we met. Her narrative is about adventure, and reflects her habitus as a young, middle-class woman from a developed nation. Emma came across the opportunity to traffic drugs when she was in a notorious party town on the Ecuadorian coast where cannabis, cocaine, and indigenous hallucinogenic drugs were commonly sold and used. She'd been hanging out with a fellow backpacker:

He'd been talking about taking some [cocaine] back and what a good business it was and how much money you'd make and how if you get away with it you could make loads n it'd be brilliant 'n he wouldn't have to do as much in England and he could travel and all this sort of stuff. So he'd been talking about it 'n we'd just been like yeah, yeah, yeah 'n then he just came out with it in the email, and he was like 'how d'you fancy smuggling drugs in a surf board? I'll give you 50%.

Despite having partied with drug dealers at home, and being drug savvy Emma rejected the offer outright:

I was like, I'm 19, that's not my line of work. I'm going to go to University 'n get a job n
I'm not going to do that kind of thing!

Her narrative identity is central: she rejects trafficking on the basis that it does not fit with her present, and future self-stories. Prompted as to why trafficking drugs was not 'her line of work', she offered a farcical anecdote about her would-be collaborator:

I think he was just – was scared to do it but he liked the idea of it n wanted to find someone stupid enough to do it – cause he knew the risk... He took some back with him. I think he had about 50g I think. And he got through with it, but he never did the surfboard idea (laughs)... He carried it under his balls, like he sello-taped it (laughs) under his balls!

Farce frames trafficking as absurd, further rendering it illogical. Next, her interview took a more serious turn. Emma carefully distinguished herself from 'desperate' women, hinting at the discourses that could make meaningful:

I can see why people do it in desperate situations... but I just thought it seemed really greedy 'n really... Pointless, when you've got a house 'n things to live 'n just to go through that, I just don't think....

JF: You don't think you need that? That money?

No, you know. I'd like to have money but there's other ways of getting money, I mean I can live n' that's... I wouldn't risk anything like that for a bit of money to spend on rubbish.

Whilst she had been working in a minimum wage job, and anticipated several years as an impoverished student, she struggles to make discourses about economic need fit her experience. Although she could have drawn on discourses of entrepreneurship, these do not figure either. She also differentiates herself from the 'adrenaline seekers':

I don't mind getting high or whatever when I'm out having a nice time but the thought of walking through an airport with a surfboard full of drugs scares the shit out of me, I'm not like... I don't get off on adrenaline rushes or anything like that... But I know that even if I had like a drop in my pocket I would freak – so it's not something that I would ever do.

Emma's narrative plays with possible discourses (wanting/needing money, enjoying the adrenaline rush) and rejects them as incompatible with her narrative identity. Trafficking simply doesn't fit with her ongoing narrative, which is mainly about enjoying the present, taking advantages of new different opportunities, including getting high. It reflects her middle class, western, habitus in her expectation to avoid negative consequences in the long term, and her anticipation about going to University and getting a job. Interestingly Emma's narrative identities (backpacker, student, worker) are more about age, class and nation than gender, contrary to feminist theories about women's conformity. For Heidensohn, dominant discourses of femininity mean that for most women, involvement in crime is a potentially damaging path to take (1985: 195). This is not to deny that Emma can avoid gendering her account, but to draw attention to the positive draw of conformity and its central role in her narrative identity. In this way, conformity is more of a habit, than the outcome of a rational choice. And although her narrative includes an element of practical reflexivity (in weighing up the situation), her evaluation of the situation draws on available discourses, and in particular her narrative identity to do so.

Narrative analysis shows that Emma's subjective interpretation of the chance to traffic cocaine is shaped by narrative habitus which reflects her class, age and nationality. Emma's narrative identity is central: although she can identify potential discourses which suggest trafficking as meaningful, they do not fit and so drug trafficking fails to make sense as a potential plot for action. The opposite was true for Marta and Rosa.

Marta: "It was never something I wanted to do"

Marta came across the opportunity to traffic cocaine twice, shedding light onto how drug trafficking can become meaningful as a way to enact narrative identity. Marta described herself as upper middle class, saying "I've always lived around money". She is white, and lived most of her life in the Caribbean. When we recorded a series of interviews she was nearly halfway through an eight-year sentence for trafficking cocaine. Despite her well-to-do background and employment, Marta chose a different kind of life: hanging out in the ghetto, rather than in the yacht club. She described the life of the well-off as 'havoc', preferring instead the company of people who lived a more 'normal' life. She recalls her early twenties:

I loved the ghettos! All my boyfriends were ghetto men... I was smoking [crack cocaine]. This was when I was smoking after my dad [died]... All my friends were gangsters, every single one.

She met various people involved in criminal schemes in the 'ghetto'. The first time she came across the opportunity, she rejected it outright despite her commitment to ghetto lifestyle:

This one guy, he was a dealer of mine... and he was like, do a trip for me! And I was like, 'you're fucking crazy, man!' The day I do trafficking is the day I go with 20 kilos because I'm not so stupid to do it, you know. It was always a joke; *it was never something I wanted to do.*

Although the opportunity to make money from drugs was familiar (after all, she had chosen to surround herself with people who made money from, and/or smoked crack cocaine and marijuana), trafficking did not fit her narrative identity. She was working, could afford her drugs, and rejected a moneyed lifestyle. She jokes that it was not worth her while to carry anything less than 20 kilos, hinting at the fact that she could probably have raised money from family, or even a bank loan, had she needed to. Like Emma, she could draw on few discourses that could make trafficking meaningful.

Then Marta's circumstances changed, giving trafficking a different set of meanings. Her relationship with her family deteriorated, due to several things, but in particular due to her adopting a toddler (who was black, much to her families' disapproval), and her drug use becoming known. After a series of events (she split up with the love of her life, got involved in house breaking, was arrested) she was deported to her 'home' country, although she had never lived there as an adult. Despite being a qualified professional, she could not practice her profession. She describes arriving 'home' after being deported:

I went to go to my aunt's house... but my sister had called to tell her 'do not accept Marta, she was using drugs'. So, what more can I do, Jennifer? I've got a four-year-old daughter, I *had* to go and stay with these guys. *It wasn't like something I wanted to do.* I went to go and try and get help from my aunt, just to get on my feet, a job with her, get my own apartment, you know, but what else could I do?

Without family support or the prospect of a job, the narratives that she had previously lived by became unrealisable. Her attempts to draw on family support are undone by her being labelled as a drug user. Marta got involved in fraud scams, mainly calling overseas and trying to persuade people to share bank details so she could transfer her 'millions' to them for safe keeping. Nonetheless, scamming was not a long-term strategy, or a route to independence:

I felt like a worthless mother actually. I felt like I couldn't provide for her... Being a mother costs money and it really hurts when you can't give them what you want. Before, in a way, yeah, I could buy her toys, not everything but like when I would get paid I'd buy her some clothes or whatever and she always had what she needed. I kind of felt helpless, insecure. Everything in one.

Against this background - not having her own place to live, having exhausted the alternatives and feeling like she was failing to provide for her daughter – trafficking drugs started to fit with her narrative identity – as a financially independent woman, and a mother. Her narrative identity reflects her affluent, middle class upbringing, for example her expectations to be able to comfortably support herself and provide for her daughter not only in terms of care, but also financially. Interestingly, her status as a criminal deportee and drug user do not feature in her narrative, despite their importance for her current situation. Discourses about financial independence and the need to provide for her daughter imbue trafficking with a sense of inevitability. Marta states: “I *had* to do something, to get our own apartment: it was just a way to be independent”.

Whilst her narrative self underpins her evaluation of the situation, she also weighs up her chances of success, drawing on available discourses/storylines. She trusted her boyfriend, and having seen others return successfully, making it possible to ‘story’ working as a mule as a real possibility:

He told me the cops are paid off in Ecuador. I mean, I'd seen the deals go through in Brazil, I believed it.... He'd been doing this for years....

Like Emma, having the opportunity did not necessarily lead to trafficking. Action was the result, not solely of opportunity or financial need, but of having a meaningful narrative. In

this way, it was not purely a rational calculation, but an evaluation drawing on available stories (and this process is open ended – note how Emma learns to story trafficking in a new way). Furthermore, the possibility of being an independent mother and being able to build a future gives trafficking, in turn, emotional force.

Marta's involvement in drug trafficking is undoubtedly the outcome of material poverty: unemployment and responsibility for her daughter figure heavily in her account. However, narrative analysis shows how Marta's narrative habitus shapes how she understands her current circumstances and acts upon criminal opportunities. Although Marta states several times that 'it was never something that she wanted to do', her narrative also reveals the way that trafficking became something that she *had* to do, driven by her narrative identity as mother and provider. Importantly, Marta's narrative identity is durable and deeply held (reflecting the way that social structures become embedded in habitus). Her material circumstances as a mother mean that she cannot simply choose to adopt a different kind of self-story. And so, as her circumstances change and she can no longer enact the kinds of storylines her habitus would lead her to expect, trafficking cocaine becomes meaningful.

Rosa: "then I carried on doing what I know what to do best"

Rosa had been involved in selling drugs her "whole life" as part of the family business: "There's not a member of my family that doesn't." Selling drugs, and even rarely carrying them across borders, were part of Rosa's biography, habitus, and narrative identity. Rosa is from Europe and self describes as 'gypsy'. She was in her early twenties when we spoke in a fast food restaurant. Her story began with the family business: she had been selling cannabis and then cocaine in the family business when she was about ten. Cocaine came 'from Colombia' though family connections; she was not involved in importing since importing was men's business. She moved away from her family in her late teens. This could have ended her drug-selling career but she quickly built a network of contacts, eventually buying cannabis, cocaine and crack cocaine directly from importers. She explains that she simply "carried on doing what I know what to do

best.” In her narrative, drug business was not a decision or choice, but part of her ‘feel for the game’, apparent when she spoke about her daughter. Rosa is *not* inferring that her daughter will join the family business (this is explained below), but her narrative gives a strong sense of the inevitability of drug business:

That’s what I got brought up with. It’s not like, even if I was to not... do it, she’s going to get introduced to it because I’ve got nine uncles and each and every single one of them do it. Her grandfather does it. Her great-grandma has got kilos sitting at home. It’s not like she’s gonna...

JF: -- It’s in the family. I see what you mean. It’s not like, if you suddenly stopped, it’s not like it would keep her...

Away from it... So...

Although the family was mainly involved in drug sales, family members smuggled drugs internationally. Her mother carried kilo amounts into Europe from North Africa. Rosa recalls doing the same:

I put it in my hmmhmm [vagina], but I didn’t swallow it.

JF: How much did you?

R: Um, last time I done it, I bought back 20 grams

JF: How did you decide to carry that amount? Was it just what you had?

R: I’ll tell you why. Um. I never dare do it, I bring back like 50 Euros worth of pollen because I like to smoke the pollen, for *me* to smoke. But then I was like, do you know what yeah, I bring pollen back but what if I get caught? I might as well have some coke as well. Basically in England, dope is shit. It is shit! [from] a gram [in Europe], I can make, what, 4 grams to sell in England and, *and* it’s a hit.

JF: So... 20 really becomes 80 [grams]!

R: There you go. And, and, *and* everyone is saying oh this is niiice, everyone is buying it quick.

JF: So it's off your hands.

R: Yeah so it's a quick money-maker plus yeah, I only had the money for that amount there, so I just thought I'll just do it quickly.

Carrying a relatively small quantity, compared to her mother, was opportunistic: 20 grams was simply what she could afford on that occasion (she hints that she has trafficked small amounts of cocaine on multiple occasions). At a rough estimate, Rosa probably made \$3000 at most. An orthodox Bourdieuan analysis would understand her actions as the outcome of her 'feel for the game': she knew how to conceal drugs, and knowledge about drug quality informed how far she could 'cut' the cocaine. Recognising the opportunity is the result of her habitus, which makes even a small amount of cocaine into a money-making opportunity. However, a narrative analysis also shows that carrying drugs internationally came to make sense since drug business was part of her narrative self. Her narrative identity, as drug entrepreneur, is a long-standing and habitual one that she maintains, even as her circumstances change. For example, at the time of interview, Rosa had stopped selling crack cocaine and cocaine, and instead started selling cannabis only to three young men who were vendors. 'I've got money I might as well put it into that and even if it's making little money, it's better than *no* money. Note that Rosa repeats the phrase "I might as well" from earlier, hinting at the way that drug business is part of her taken-for-granted narratives about who she is, and what she does. It is unremarkable, and requires little explanation.

Yet, making money is not an end in itself. Rosa explains, drawing on two narrative identities in which she is deeply invested: as someone who provides the best for others, and as a successful professional participant in the drug business (she had never been arrested):

JF: What do you spend the money on?

R: ... Whatever. On my house at the moment, I'm finishing the whole of my house.

R: My TV is worth about £100 [\$150], my sofa is worth a grand [\$1500], my fridge is worth 2, my cooker is worth £700 [\$1000].

JF: So, it's all nice.

R: It's *nice*. But obviously, do you know what I mean, I've spent my money on that.

Obviously, I've had her (baby). She only wears *made* clothes... When she was first born she had a new set of clothes every single day for 3 months [taps on table to emphasise her point]. She never repeated clothes. Vest, top, shirt, trousers, shoes.

JF: Are you pretty proud of that?

R: Yeah, everything, everything. I bought, everything, everything. No-one was having to buy me *nothing* because I bought everything, everything. I've done it all by myself, do you know what I mean. I've had to buy everything....

Rosa's narrative reflects western, consumerist discourses about providing for one's family (Illouz 1997). Achieving these hold particular relevance for Rosa, who explicitly rejects dependence:

I enjoy the fact that I don't depend on anyone. I depend on myself. I like the fact that I ain't gotta be like 'oh, can you give me twenty pound [\$30] please' 'oh please give me twenty pound, oh I need twenty pound'. (puts on a weak voice but then suddenly sounds very firm). NO. I can't do that.... I think it's because I've gone through so much when I was little. I like the fact that I've got something that's mine.

JF: I don't want to delve too much into your childhood but do you want to give me a hint about what that was about?

R: My dad was on crack, my mum was, do you know what I mean, my mum was trying to get him off of it. My dad used to beat my mum. There was never money, there was never...

Rosa explained that, as a gypsy, she was expected to adhere to the proper female role: staying at home, being chaste, and so on. She was taken out of school when she was thirteen and took care of younger brothers and sisters. In some senses, her narrative is about rejecting the 'gender deal' (Carlen 1988). Like Carlen's respondents, witnessing domestic violence at home made apparent the contradictions of accepting the gender roles on offer. Yet it is not just that: she rejects passive domesticity, but reinvents motherhood and self-sacrificing femininity by providing for others through her drug business. Rosa describes how she takes the risk to provide for her sister, who she would not allow to be involved in drug business, and her boyfriend who was at risk of deportation should he be arrested:

My sister is my pride and joy... she don't touch none of that... If she wants money, I give it to her, if she wants a new pair of trousers I buy it for her, if she wants a new phone I'll buy it for her...

Everything you see my man's wearing, clothes, trainers, everything, the tobaccos that he's smoking, the money that he's spending, the beers that he's drinking, it's because I bought it! No-one can tell me they bought me nothing because no-one's bought me nothing.

At the same time, self-sacrifice co-exists with great personal pride in her business: she also described never taking drugs from others on credit, and running her business how she chose (see Fleetwood 2014b).

Rosa's narrative gives a rare insight into the significance of narrative for someone who had not been arrested. Since it is not practiced, there are moments of hesitation, yet it fizzles with veracity: she repeats words and phrases to make sure that they are heard. Her narrative carries emotional weight and conveys a clear sense that providing for her sister has been a long-

term strategy and perhaps even part of an internal stream of consciousness. In this way, her continuous involvement in drug business is not simply the result of a rational choice, or even a 'feel for the game', but is the outcome of ongoing narratives embedded in habitus which she draws upon to make sense of emerging opportunities. Thus, Rosa's narrative reflects her biography, class, ethnicity and gender which make available discourses through which she constitutes her on-going narrative about herself. Yet she also reflects on the stories about womanhood that she grew up with and reinvents them, assembling a femininity that is independent, moneyed and in control. In this way, doing drug business was not only inevitable, but also meaningful.

Discussion

The analysis above demonstrates the value (and arguably, necessity) of a narrative approach for understanding women's lawbreaking. Interviews show the role of narrative in women's evaluations of the chance to traffic cocaine. Their narrative identities, as the protagonist in the tale, were the basis for whether trafficking could be emplotted in their on-going stories about themselves. Emma could identify discourses that could make trafficking meaningful, but could not adopt them as they did not fit with her experience. Conversely, it was hard for Rosa to imagine *not* being able to support herself and her significant others through her drug business. Marta's experience sits somewhere in the middle: it is only when she cannot realise her narrative identity that trafficking becomes meaningful. For all women, trafficking cocaine was not the outcome of a rational choice, but rather an evaluation the opportunity drawing on discourses made available due to their social position (and embedded in their habitus). Narrative is at work in two ways: firstly as a way of understanding the way in which social structure operates upon the individual (enabling and constraining at the level of the habitus); and secondly in the ways that narratives themselves provoke or sustain law-breaking actions. Whilst narratives are not fixed, but may be multiple, and even changeable, they are nonetheless shaped by social structure at the level of the habitus.

Importantly, the meaning of trafficking cocaine was not fixed. In spite of political discourses depicting drug traffickers as macho and dangerous, drug business had different meanings for respondents. Whilst this could be read as an attempt to minimise deviance, an alternative reading is that the meaning of drug business is mutable. In this way, narrative approaches usefully treat both crime and gender as having no essential meanings. Doing so is vital if the trap of gender essentialism is to be avoided (Carlen et al. 1985; Cousins 1980). Yet it is the meanings that gender and crime are assigned that provoke action. Including discursive aspects of gender need not come at the cost of attention to social structure since a narrative approach to women's offending takes into account the way that social structure operates through the habitus in making available particular discourses. Nor is social structure determining since speakers' agency features in their capacity to creatively construct self-narratives from available discursive resources. In this way, narratives take into account women's 'real' lives as well as how they are produced by, and produce discourses. Furthermore, and in contrast to most theories of offending generally, narrative analysis can take into account time, opening up ways of thinking about why lawbreaking may become meaningful at a particular moment. Time is absolutely central to an adequate theorisation of agency (McNay 2000).

Gender is always at play, but may not always be the most significant social structure, and a narrative approach can take this into account, for example, Emma forefronts other aspects of her identity other than gender. Nonetheless, narrative selves are often gendered, and Marta and Rosa's narratives reflect socially sanctioned women's roles, especially as mothers, and girlfriends. However, narrative analysis can take into account the ways that respondents' narratives reflect multiple, contingent and intersecting social structures. In this way, a narrative approach is open to how women may do gender in distinct and varied ways. Importantly, the meanings of gender are not entirely open to re-signification: 'we are not [solely] trapped by the structuring effects of the habitus into which we are socialized, but by processes of cultural and political exclusion from interpretive processes over which we do not have sufficient control or

input.' (Bohman 1997: 184).

Conclusion

Narrative criminology forefronts the subjective processes of meaning making which inspire action, whilst holding in view the structural circumstances that shape women's lives and the ways that women make sense of them. In this way, it draws richly on the material and discursive conditions in which women 'make a life' (Carlen 1988). The narratives above reveal that women act with creativity and intention in their evaluation of possibilities. This does not mean that women were agents, or *only* agents. They were active meaning makers, and whilst meanings can be adapted, women did so under the shadow of gendered ideologies/discourses. These, in tandem with material gendered inequalities play a profound role in the aetiology of women's law-breaking. Whilst previous research has paid attention to the important role of gender ideology in women's lawbreaking, narrative criminology offers tools for conceptualising and researching the complex ways which gender (as both material and discursive) shapes women's lawbreaking. Rather than seeing discourse as located outside the individual, understanding it as embodied in the habitus makes clear the ways that gender ideology works through the individual in their interpretations and evaluations of their social world, including making lawbreaking meaningful.

Post-structuralist approaches of course have their detractors. Critics note that the fragmentation of the subject has the potential to erode the basis for the feminist project, however this is a concern that was addressed long ago by black feminists (hooks 1983). Others, such as Nancy Fraser, warn against overemphasising cultural or symbolic aspects of gender at the cost of underlying issues of economic advantage (Fraser 1995), she also recognises that gender is constructed along both material and symbolic dimensions (McNay 2000). The analysis shown here hopefully demonstrates that attention to narrative/discourse need not come at the cost of attention to social structure.

Narrative criminology offers a way to overcome the 'impasse' between 'real women' and

‘women of discourse’ described by Daly and Maher (1998), by connecting personal agency and social structure through attention to personal narratives, and public discourses about gender and crime. The results are perhaps surprising – respondents drew on traditional, even mainstream ideas about femininity and womanhood. Instead of constraining offending, discourses about womanhood, they may even support it. This is potentially rich territory that this article has only begun to explore. Carlen, in an article calling for post-structuralist perspectives in studying women’s lawbreaking notes the need to theorise ‘women’s criminal careers in the fullness of all their contradictions and specificities’ (2008:185). Arguably narrative theory offers just the tools to undertake this ambitious task.

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