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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE OBJECT RELATIONAL  
PATTERNS OF VIOLENT MALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS.**

**Jean-Philippe Arzul**



**A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MPsych  
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Key Words: Violent Crime, Homicide, Rape, South Africa, Male Juvenile Offenders,  
Psychopathy, Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Social Cognitions & Object Relations  
Scale (SCORS), Object Relations, Personality.

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## ABSTRACT

Although deficits in object relations patterns have been identified in populations of violent offenders, few studies have examined the object relations of male juveniles incarcerated for violent crimes. The present study examined four dimensions of object relations, as measured by the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and Westen's (1985) Social Cognitions and Object Relations Scale (SCORS), with a sample of eight male juvenile offenders incarcerated for violent crimes at De Novo and Eureka Youth Care Centres. These dimensions are complexity of object representations, affect tone of relationship paradigms, capacity for emotional investment in relationships and understanding of social causality. Violent male juvenile offenders displayed complex object representations, a tendency to attribute simple but logical motivations to others, a malevolent object world and a relative incapacity to invest in others in a non-need-gratifying way. The above levels of object relations are illustrated with TAT excerpts and comparisons are explored between the results and literature findings. Finally, recommendations and therapeutic implications are outlined.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. JUVENILE VIOLENCE**

Limited scientific information exists on the prevalence and patterns of juvenile violence in South Africa. For instance, despite the Department of Correctional Services' (DCS) acknowledgment that the prison population is "becoming increasingly younger, with about 42 percent of the offender population under the age of 25", the crime categories of juvenile offenders are not noted (DCS, 2005: 24). Instead, crime categories for the overall prison population, including females, are presented. Much of the information pertaining to juvenile crime presents itself in the parliamentary forum, or at public meetings addressed by relevant ministers. These forms of information make their way into the public domain primarily via the written media, necessitating a reliance on this medium to assess current trends of juvenile violence.

A number of horrifying homicides and sexual offences committed by South African juveniles in recent years have begun to draw increasing attention to local juvenile crime. The gang rape and repeated stabbing (53 times) of Valencia Farmer in Eerste River in 1999 resulted in a prison sentence of 23 years for a 17 year old male; the longest sentence to be imposed on a juvenile (Barday, 2001). The fatal stabbing of John Rubithon, a well known political activist and photographer, in his Woodstock home by a 14 year old male burglar in 2000, also received a fair amount of media attention (Article 40, 2000). Some of the incidents gracing our front pages during the course of 2004 included the sexual molestation and drowning of a 12 year old boy by his male juvenile friends in Belhar, the assault and



drowning of an 8 year old boy by three boys of 7, 8 and 9 years of age, the kicking to death of a homeless man by male children in Tygerberg, and an adolescent's murder of his mother in Pretoria (Die Burger: 6 May, 2004; Die Burger: 10 July, 2004).

Further gruesome acts of violence committed by male juveniles during the course of 2005 included the well publicized murder of a 6 month old baby, the stabbing of a 17 year old male 30 times, and the serious injury of a 10 year old boy following the stoning of a moving vehicle (Die Burger: 11 July, 2005; Die Burger: 20 September 2005). One of the more publicized cases involved the murder of an unknown man by the "Waterkloof-four"; all 16 year old males at the time of the murder (Die Burger: 15 June, 2005). The fatal shooting by a 15 year old boy of his father, the fatal stabbing of a juvenile by a 13 year old boy, and the arrest of two 17 year old boys for the murder of a 9 year old child caught in cross-fire between two groups of youths have also attracted much publicity (Die Burger: 11 April, 2005; Die Burger: 5 September, 2005).

## **1.2. JUVENILE SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Statistics reveal shocking increases in sexual violence on schoolgrounds in recent years; 20 charges were reported in 2001 contrasted against 111 between January and October 2004 (Die Burger: 7 October, 2004). A report by Chisholm & September (2005) revealed that 24% of sexual offenders, who are primarily male, were between 7 and 14 years of age and steadily increasing. Evidence of these statistics revealed themselves in the recent rape of a 7 year old girl by a school-worker and two boys of 8 and 9 years while at school (Die Burger: 13 April, 2005). Even more worrying is the single rehabilitation centre for young sex-

offenders within the Western Cape Province, as well as the practice of generally not prosecuting or rehabilitating sexual offenders under the age of 14 due to the young age of the accused and limited medical evidence in substantiation of the purported crime (e.g. the lack of semen in the victim's vagina) (Wood, 1998).

### **1.3. ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS & LEARNERS**

Physical assaults on teachers by learners appear to be increasing in South Africa, with a quarter of teachers in Free-State schools reporting assaults on themselves (De Wet, 2005). The Western Cape schoolgrounds paint a gloomy picture after ranking highest in school levels of violence. Incidents involving weapons amounted to 22%, assaults to 18%, and fights with weapons to 14.4% (HSRC, 2005). Statistics such as these go some way in explaining a Western Cape teacher's recent court action after an assault by a learner in her classroom (Die Burger: 15 June, 2005). Another report detailed the physical assault on a pregnant teacher by a pupil in Belhar, while two teachers were injured in protest action by learners in Fishhoek (Die Burger: 18 March, 2005; Die Burger: 28 February, 2005).

Assaults on fellow learners have increased dramatically in recent years according to the Minister of Education: 12 charges were laid in 2001 contrasted against 99 between January and October 2004 (Die Burger: 7 October, 2004). Juvenile male-learner on juvenile male-learner school violence during the course of the year saw fatal stabbings in Athlone and Khayelitsha, the fatal beating of a 15 year old by a classmate, the near fatal stabbing of a learner in Langa, and the stabbing of a 17 year old learner by five youths between 16 and 18 years of age while on his way home from school in Mannenberg (Die Burger: 24 August,

2004; Cape Argus: 18 January, 2005; Die Burger: 6 May, 2005; Die Burger: 22 July, 2005). A friend of the deceased was also stabbed a number of times in the back, precipitating discussions with the Department of Community Safety regarding the deployment of security personnel at 35 schools in high-risk areas (Die Burger: 9 August, 2005). Statistics reveal that 90% of all South Africans between the ages of 11 and 14 have witnessed violence, while 47% have been assaulted. Even more disturbing are the 14% of South Africans between the ages of 16 and 25 who have witnessed a murder, totalling some 4 million persons (Mistry, 2004).

#### 1.4. CRIME STATISTICS

The frequent under-reporting of crime to police services results in difficulty deciphering crime statistics. Homicide statistics are however one of the more accurate measures of crime levels as murder is the most likely crime to be reported to the police (Thomson, 2004). The 2002/2003 South African Police Services (SAPS) Annual Report reassuringly cited a continuing decrease in overall murder rates since 1994, although the 2004 average national figure of 43 murders per 100 000 citizens unfortunately compares with the murder rate of the most dangerous urban area in the United States – Washington D.C.. South Africa's incidence of murder is undoubtedly still serious when one compares our national homicide rate of 43 per 100 000 to Albania's murder rate of 28 per 100 000, Russia's of 21 per 100 000, Brazil's of 19, the U.S.A. of 5.6 and most of Europe at 4 (Thomson, 2004). Murder remains the second highest cause of death after Aids in South Africa (Rustomjee, 2005).

More worrying is the the Western Cape's status as the only province with an increase of 34% in murder levels since 1994/1995. The Western Cape boasted South Africa's highest murder rate of 85 murders per 100 000 citizens in 2002/2003, exceeding Gauteng's average of 59 murders per 100 000, and far outdoing Colombia, the “murder capital of the world”, whose homicide rate averaged at 66 murders per 100 000 for the same period (Legett, 2003: 62; Legett, 2004a). This figure has fortunately decreased by 25% during 2004 to 60 murders per 100 000, reportedly due to more visible policing and specific operations, although the figure still remains alarming (Du Plessis & Louw, 2005). In addition to the highest murder rate in the country, the Western Cape is experiencing the worst overall crime problem nationally (Legett, 2004a). Khayelitsha seems to have been a hot spot for some time now, as evidenced in the escalation of robbery with aggravating circumstances by 306% between 1998 and 2001 (Die Burger: 12 April 2005). The Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula, recently declared Khayelitsha as having the highest levels of murder, attempted murder, rape, and attempted rape in South Africa. The Minister went on to attribute much of the criminal activity to ten groups of gangs with 60% of members under eighteen years of age and many under twelve years of age (Die Burger: 26 May, 2004). Similar concerns have been identified in Mannenberg, with two-thirds of the male population between the ages of 10 and 30 involved in gang activity (Legett, 2004b). Legett (2003: 5) explains the need for “intense attention” in the Cape if the situation is not to “swing entirely out of control”.

## 1.5. JUVENILES IN PRISON

Statistics provided by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) revealed an increase of 159% in the number of children serving prison sentences between January 1995 and July 2000. This contrasts to an increase of only 33% for 18-20 year olds, 25% for 20-25 year olds, and 16.25% for prisoners older than 25 (Muntingh, 2001). The Annual Reports of the DCS between March 2001 and January 2004 do however indicate a more or less stable juvenile prison population (sentenced and unsentenced) of approximately 4000 inmates (DCS, 2001; DCS, 2002; DCS, 2003; DCS 2004). Male juveniles awaiting trial as at 31 March 2004 amounted to 2 166, while the female juvenile population totalled 66. The sentenced male juvenile population stood at 1 890, while the female equivalent came in at 36 for the same period. The overall juvenile prison population, both sentenced and unsentenced, thus stood at 4158, with male juveniles significantly outweighing their female counterparts (DCS, 2003; DCS, 2004). Crime categories for the juvenile population do not exist, although the overall escalation of sentenced offenders for aggressive crimes over the last three years would suggest a similar increase in the juvenile population (DCS, 2003; DCS, 2004; DCS, 2005). Proportionately, violent crimes account for 33% of all crimes in South Africa (Du Plessis & Louw, 2005).

The apparent stabilization of the juvenile prison population may in part be attributable to the increasing use of diversion programmes to reduce the number of children in prison, stem the tide of prison overpopulation, and rehabilitate young offenders (Muntingh, 2003). During the course of 2003 the National Institute of Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NICRO) handled the diversion of 17 724 offenders, while 6000 offenders were

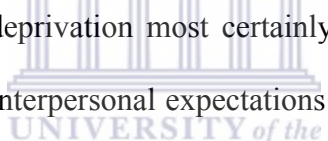
managed by other institutions. Overall, 50 000 offenders have been diverted to date (Sekhonyane, 2004). Further reductions in the juvenile prison population took place during 2005, with 1000 children being released in an amnesty bid that aimed to stem the tide of 4 out of every 1000 South Africans living behind prison bars (Fagan, 2004). In addition, the 1, 389 children awaiting trial since January 2005 had been reduced to 885 by June of the same year (Die Burger, 14 April, 2005; Die Burger: 2 July, 2005). It nevertheless remains unclear whether successful rehabilitation occurred prior to these releases. This does however seem highly unlikely given the recent court action by the Prison Care and Support Network regarding the "unlawful" and "unconstitutional" conditions in prisons that include ritual anal rape, high HIV-Aids rates, overpopulation by 300% and corrupt officials (Die Burger: 16 September, 2005).



Most sentenced and awaiting trial juveniles find themselves located in sections of adult prisons as only four Youth Care Facilities exist nationally. Youth Care Centres (previously known as “Reform Schools”) are unevenly spread nationally, with one facility in Mpumalanga and three in the Western Cape. Sentenced male children in the Western Cape may find themselves placed at Faure, Eureka or De Novo Youth Care Centres. Each of these Facilities caters for 120 juveniles, explaining the large number of children held in adult prisons (Blose, undated).

## 1.6. CONCLUSION

The high crime levels in the Western Cape are baffling criminologists who link crime to deprivation, as the province enjoys the lowest unemployment levels in the country, has a more equitable distribution of income than any other province, and the lowest percentage of informal housing and households without water (Legett, 2004a). Increased migration and urbanization, substance abuse, overpopulation, taxi-violence, and gangsterism partially explain spiralling trends in crime, although these sociological phenomena do not adequately address why other areas with analogous social experiences are not similarly affected (Legett, 2004a; Legett, 2004b; Thomson, 2004).



While various forms of social deprivation most certainly have a contributing role in the development of juvenile crime, interpersonal expectations shaped by past experiences have been shown to influence pervasively the current processing of social information (Westen, 1985). The formation of such interpersonal expectations of self and other, known as object relations, can be understood as “momentarily activated schemata that reflect current situational cues, ... developmental history and characteristic ways of processing social information” (Westen *et al.*, 1991a: 407). These internal working representations do include conscious components, although they are understood to be “largely unconsciously activated and inaccessible to self-report” (Westen *et al.*, 1991a: 407). Accordingly, the diminishment of social deprivations may not result in a decrease of antisocial behaviour if accompanying social representations remain malevolently skewed. And while more research into current social circumstances contributing towards increased levels of juvenile crime certainly is required, a dearth of material exists regarding the personality characteristics contributing

towards adolescent distress and dysfunction (Westen & Chang, 2000). Given the increase in juvenile offending in South Africa, an examination of the personality attributes of male juveniles incarcerated for violent crimes is sorely needed to provide insight into the psychological dimensions of the spiralling levels of crime in South Africa, and particularly the Western Cape.





## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. THE DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is often understood as a distinct and homogeneous developmental phase occurring between childhood and adulthood, with frustrated attempts at defining a sense of identity, self-concept and self-esteem often leading to emotional and behavioural difficulties, including Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, and juvenile delinquency (Osborne, 1996). This “at-risk” phase is characterised by a multitude of changes, including pubertal development, cognitive development, affective changes, school transitions, changing social roles, and the emergence of sexuality (Gacono & Meloy, 1994: 45; Westen & Chang, 2000). In addition, a marked shift of focus from concrete and external attributes to internal thoughts, feelings and personality dispositions has been noted (Westen, 1985). The complexity of the adolescent phase thus makes the understanding of accompanying psychopathology all the more complex.

The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) curtailment of diagnosing personality pathology before eighteen years of age further complicates the clinician's understanding and treatment of violent juvenile offenders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). While attempting to protect the premature closure on personality development, this seemingly arbitrary distinction stands in stark contrast to a number of studies demonstrating the possibility of Personality Disorder diagnosis in adolescence and its continuity into adulthood (Bernstein *et al.*, 1993; Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Lewinsohn *et al.*, 1997; Westen *et al.*, 1990b; Westen & Chang, 2000). Despite this evidence, until recently, little research

appears to have been conducted on the underlying working representations of clinical or non-clinical adolescent samples (Westen & Chang, 2000).

## **2.2. DILEMMAS IN DIAGNOSIS OF JUVENILE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY**

The APA's diagnostic criteria for Conduct Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder almost exclusively focus on a behavioural checklist to the exclusion of personality variables, hinting at the poverty of material on this subject (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Hare, Hart & Harpur, 1999). For instance, Conduct Disorder criteria include aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, and a serious violation of the rules (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Widespread criticism has been levelled at this means of categorisation, including a lack of empirical proof of categories and criteria, excessively high rates of co-morbidity suggesting a lack of discriminant validity, artificial dichotomization into present/absent, the inability to weigh criteria, failure to consider personality strengths, the omission of a range of personality pathology found in patients, an arbitrary categorical conceptualization in place of a continuum approach, limited clinical utility and poor validity. (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Hare, Hart & Harpur, 1999; Westen & Shedler 1999; Westen & Chang, 2000). In addition, an externally based and categorical means of evaluation, while arguably practical, ignores the highly heterogeneous nature of adolescent Conduct Disorder (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Westen & Chang, 2000). For instance, it has been argued that adolescents diagnosed with Conduct Disorder may demonstrate personality characteristics ranging from callous, remorseless and psychopathic, to high-functioning, and able to maintain loving and intimate relationships. This essential distinction has been identified as distinguishing serious

character problems from underlying personality conflict (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Westen & Chang, 2000).

Sugarman (1980) seems to have identified this anomaly in Rorschach protocols of severe Conduct Disordered individuals many years previously, distinguishing between adolescent borderline pathology and adolescent borderline features, with the latter grouping demonstrating less severely disturbed responses. The identification and vital distinction between adolescent-limited and life-course persistent antisocial behaviour further emphasises the importance of unravelling essential differences within the broad category of Conduct Disorder. In essence, current diagnostic criteria fail to distinguish between psychopathic adolescents and those whose actions mask less disturbed personality features such as depression, neurotic conflicts, and other normative and non-normative adolescent concerns, thereby severely limiting treatment and recommendations (Moffitt, 1993; Westen & Chang, 2000).

The inherent difficulty in diagnosing adolescent personality pathology according to APA criteria has resulted in juvenile “character problems” being relegated to Axis 1, suggestive of a hopeful developmental flux (Gacono & Meloy, 1994: 46). At 18 years of age, Personality Disorder diagnoses appear on Axis 2, reflective of their chronicity and the stability of character traits. In addition, the predictable movement of 25% of Conduct Disorder diagnoses in childhood to Antisocial Personality Disorder at 18 years of age does little to unravel underlying psychological attributes and offers the clinician negligible therapeutic utility. And while only approximately 8% of Conduct Disordered children are estimated to be at risk for primary psychopathy later in life, evidence has shown the

extreme and unremitting frequency of crime committed by a small number of psychopathic males (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Moffitt, 1993; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Raine et al. (1990), have gone so far as suggesting a subgroup of adolescents with clinical and neuropsychological features similar to those found in adult psychopaths. The possibility of identifying the intrapsychic risk factors of adolescents vulnerable to developing psychopathy thus seems worthy of attention.

### **2.3. RESEARCH INTO ADOLESCENT AND ADULT PSYCHOPATHOLOGY**

#### **2.3.1. Fantasy & Aggression**

The primary theme of projective research into violent juveniles in the 1950's and 1960's seems to have centred around rival theories in explaining the role of fantasy in aggressive behaviour (Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1982). Direct Expression Theory proposed that individuals with hostile fantasies were more likely to engage in aggressive and damaging behaviour. Accordingly, individuals with aggressive fantasies were understood to enact their internal worlds through violent behaviour (Mussen & Naylor, 1954; Kagan; 1956). In contrast, Substitute Expression Theory suggested aggressive fantasies to have a substituting or defensive function, rendering hostile impulses manageable through the role of symbolic satisfaction (Murray, 1943; Sanford *et al.*, 1943; Feshback, 1955; Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1982). In addition, anxiety was suggested to play an inhibiting role in the overt expression of aggressive thoughts (Kagan; 1956). Cowden *et al.* (1969) introduced a slightly different perspective, suggesting assaultive delinquents lack a symbolic function and consequently act out their hostile feelings. Much of the research during this period thus focused on

proving or disproving the relationship between fantasized and overt aggression.

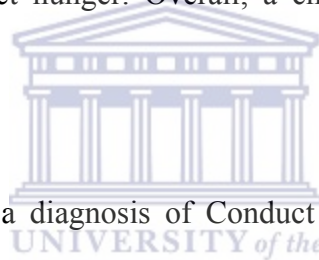
### **2.3.2. Fantasy, Aggression & Punishment**

An evolution of the above theorisations concerned the relationship between aggressive behaviour, fantasies of aggression and imaginings of external or internal punishment (Kagan, 1956; Purcell, 1956; Lesser, 1957). Purcell (1956), using TAT responses, found elevated themes of aggression among antisocial draftees and lowered themes of internal and external punishment. In contrast, Shore *et al.* (1964) demonstrated increased internal punishment or guilt in TAT protocols of delinquent adolescents. Lesser (1958), in a similar vein, found themes of aggression to be associated with narratives of external punishment. The differences in these findings seem in part attributable to the varying ages of subjects and loose definitions of antisocial behaviour (Schaefer & Norman, 1967). Schaeffer & Norman (1967: 237), in a comparative study of “anti-social” male juveniles and normals using the TAT and other projective tests, found similar themes of aggression among both groups, although the “anti-social” group followed violent narratives with depictions of external punishment. It was thus speculated that punishment by external authorities would reinforce defensiveness and reduce guilt related to anti-social behaviour.

### **2.3.3. Rorschach Studies**

A number of studies assessing personality structure on the Rorschach have contributed towards a greater understanding of the internal dynamics underpinning the personality structure of violent males (Sugarman, 1980; Gacono & Meloy, 1992; Gacono & Meloy,

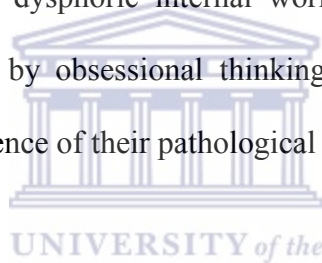
1993; Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Gacono *et al.*, 2000). Sugarman (1980) identified a preoccupation with maintaining self-other boundaries, part-object attachments, idiosyncratic qualities, primitive modes of relating, and aggressive imagery among severely Conduct Disordered adolescents using Rorschach protocols. Gacono and Meloy (1994) administered Rorschach protocols to 100 Conduct Disordered adolescents. Results revealed no expectation of co-operative interactions with others, shifting identifications between aggressor and victim, social isolation, lowered and fantasy-based relational attitudes, part-object representations, a primitive relating response, narcissistic mirroring, boundary disturbance, violent symbiosis, poor maternal object identification, and absence of a capacity for attachment or affect hunger. Overall, a chronic emotional detachment was noted.



A case study of an adult with a diagnosis of Conduct Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder with Narcissistic features and a history of robbery and homicide revealed a strong identification with the aggressor, secondary identification with the victim, a primary object relation marked by violent attachment, poor modulation of affect and absence of unpleasant emotion, fusion of aggressive and sexual drives in the context of the self as an injured object, borderline personality organization and psychopathic character formation (Gacono & Meloy, 1993). Psychopathic character formation was understood to entail chronic anger, emotional constraint while incarcerated, identification with the aggressor, a sense of omnipotence, perceptual unconventionality, relatedness to others as part-objects, unmodulated affect and severely impaired reality testing (Gacono & Meloy, 1992). Aggression was understood to be managed by the defensive operations of devaluation, projection and projective identification, while splitting and denial facilitated the use of

sadism to achieve the conversion of passive into active, the law of revenge, momentary pleasure through the infliction of pain, the omnipotent control of the aggressor, and the projection of the injured self (Gacono & Meloy, 1993).

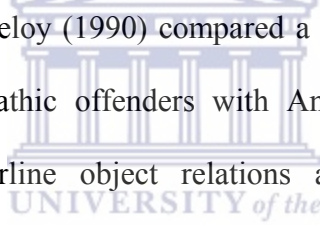
Gacono *et al.* (2000) innovatively attempted to ascertain the personality attributes of psychopaths, sexual homicide perpetrators and paedophiles. Results indicated reality testing deficits, pathological narcissism, and formal thought disorder among all three groupings. The psychopathic group demonstrated little interest in others and a lack of ego-dystonic internal conflict. Both the sexual homicide perpetrators and paedophiles showed an interest in others and an exaggeratedly dysphoric internal world. In addition, sexual homicide perpetrators were characterised by obsessional thinking and a denial of their wish for contact with others as a consequence of their pathological narcissism.



#### **2.3.4. Conduct Disorder, Psychopathy & Personality Disorder**

Valuable research has explored the relationship between psychopathy, as measured by the Revised Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R), delinquent behaviours, Conduct Disorder, and Personality Disorders (McManus *et al.*, 1984; Hare *et al.*, 1990; Myers *et al.*, 1995). The PCL-R is a 20-item instrument covering the following areas: superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, need for stimulation, pathological lying, conning/manipulativeness, lack of remorse or guilt, shallow affect, callousness/lack of empathy, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioural controls, promiscuous sexual behaviour, early behavioural problems, lack of realistic long-term goals, impulsivity, irresponsibility, failure to accept responsibility for actions, many short-term marital relationships, juvenile delinquency, revocation of

conditional release, and criminal versatility (Myers *et al.*, 1995). Previous studies among adults had found positive correlations between PCL-R scores and Antisocial, Narcissistic, and Histrionic Personality Disorders (Hare *et al.*, 1990). Myers *et al.* (1995), using the Structured Interview for Personality Disorders-Revised (SIDP-R) and the PCL-R in a study of thirty adolescent inpatients, found significant relationships between elevated PCL-R psychopathy scores and delinquent behaviours, Conduct Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder. This may however be in part due to the overlay between these disorders with respect to feelings of entitlement, a need for attention, lack of empathy, exploitativeness, and a grandiose sense of self.



Using the PCL-R, Gacono & Meloy (1990) compared a group of severe (PCL-R>30) and moderate (PCL-R≤30) psychopathic offenders with Antisocial Personality Disorder on Rorschach measures of borderline object relations and primitive defences. Severe psychopaths produced a greater number of borderline object relations, although both groups relied on similar borderline defences of splitting, projective identification and devaluation. In a further study comparing psychopathic (PCL-R≥30) and nonpsychopathic (PCL-R<30) inmates diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder to outpatients with Borderline and Narcissistic Personality Disorder diagnoses, Gacono *et al.* (1992) found similar borderline object relations among psychopathic antisocials and borderlines. In a similar vein, McManus *et al.* (1984) found half of incarcerated adolescents diagnosed with Conduct Disorder to meet criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder. This would therefore suggest severe psychopathy to be equated with borderline object relations and primitive defences.

In summation, previous studies seem to have identified a link between Psychopathy,



Conduct Disorder, Borderline and Narcissistic Personality Disorders. These findings indicate the heterogeneous nature of Conduct Disorder and Psychopathy, as well as the importance of assessing personality characteristics due to the very different origins and manifestations of these diagnoses.

### **2.3.5. Hostile Attributional Bias**

Social cognition theorists and researchers have made invaluable contributions in the unravelling of aggressive children's personality characteristics. Much of the research has centred around demonstrating the association between a child's interpretation of a peer's intention, referred to as “attribution behaviour” and the child's response (Dodge & Somberg, 1987: 214). For instance, a child who perceived a peer to have acted with hostile intent would feel justified in retaliating aggressively, whereas a child who believed the peer to have acted with benign motivation would react without hostility (Dodge *et al.*, 1984; Rule *et al.*, 1974). Aggressive children were shown to interpret ambiguous conflict situations with increased negative attributions, thereby resulting in aggressive responses. (Nasby *et al.*, 1979; Dodge *et al.*, 1984).

In a study involving the introduction of a potential threat of conflict among 32 aggressive and 33 non-aggressive boys between the ages of 8 to 10 years, Dodge & Somberg (1987) discovered the aggressive boys to have less skill in accurately interpreting peer intentions, lowered predictability of response and increased hostile attributions. These hostile attributions were understood to be largely unconscious “cognitive structures”, or templates, existing as “organised representations of prior experience” that processed information via

screening and coding (Dodge & Somberg, 1987: 221). The stimulation of these cognitive structures was understood to evoke negative affective states, prompting the defensive mechanism of externalised blame so as to to relieve internal discomfort and thereby justify retaliatory action. The stage was thus set for further exploration of the cognitive and affective structures of violent juveniles.

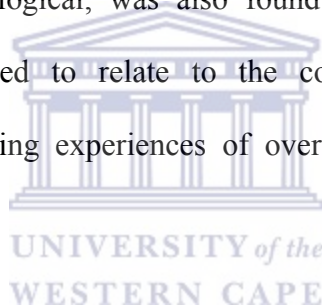
### **2.3.6. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) & The Social Cognitions & Object Relations Scale (SCORS)**

Much of the recent research on the personality characteristics of clinical adolescent samples has involved the use of a multidimensional measure developed by Westen (1985), the SCORS, for the clinical assessment of object relations using the TAT. The measure is derived from clinical experience, object relations theory and research, extensive investigations in developmental social cognition, and previous efforts to measure related dimensions with the TAT and other scales (Westen, 1991b; Westen *et al.*, 1985; Westen *et al.*, 1990b). The scale has been extensively validated in both clinical and nonclinical populations (Ornduff *et al.*, 1994; Westen, 1991b; Westen *et al.*, 1991a). A brief outline of the scale will follow so as to facilitate discussion of recent research findings (please refer to Appendix A for Synopsis of Scales).

#### **2.3.6.1. Complexity of Representations**

In an innovative synthesis of various object relations theorists, Westen (1985) developed four interdependent cognitive and affective dimensions of internal working representations,

each with five levels ranging from least to most mature levels of functioning. The complexity of representations dimension measures the extent to which others are viewed as multidimensional beings with complex motives and subjective experiences. Levels of functioning range from a poor differentiation of the multidimensionality of self and others – a profound egocentric embeddedness in one's own point of view – to a rich, complex, subtle and psychologically-minded understanding of personality and subjective experience. Westen (1989: 338) illustrates this dimension in a Borderline patient's inability to distinguish an aspect of her “problematic” functioning from her entire self; an essential conflating of parts with the whole. An extremely egocentric and poorly bounded sense of identity, hypothesised as pathological, was also found among sexually abused female adolescents. This was presumed to relate to the cognitive disruption and identity disturbance produced by recurring experiences of overwhelming affect (Westen *et al.*, 1990e).



#### **2.3.6.2. Affect Tone**

The affect tone of relationship schemas dimension refers to expectations and attributions concerning the affective quality of people, relationships, and the world. This dimension ranges from a malevolent, threatening, painful and capricious viewpoint with little hope of comfort or kindness between people, to an expectation of relationships as benign, enriching, positive and consistent. For example, Ornduff *et al.* (1994) found a negative and punitive affect tone in the interpersonal expectations of sexually abused children, while Westen *et al.* (1990e) found a malevolent object world among sexually abused female adolescents. Interestingly, the sexual abuse primarily occurred in latency, suggesting the influence of

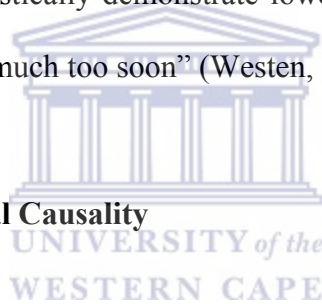
post-oedipal events on object relations (Westen *et al.*, 1990e).

### **2.3.6.3. Capacity for Emotional Investment in Relationships**

The capacity for emotional investment in relationships and moral standards dimension measures the degree to which others are treated as ends rather than means. Lower levels of functioning are characterised by a need-gratifying and self-soothing orientation towards the social world, while more mature scores indicate a commitment to relationships based on values such as mutual sharing, interdependence and respect for others. Research indicated Borderline patients to characteristically demonstrate lowered levels of functioning on this dimension, often investing “too much too soon” (Westen, 1989: 340).

### **2.3.6.4. Understanding of Social Causality**

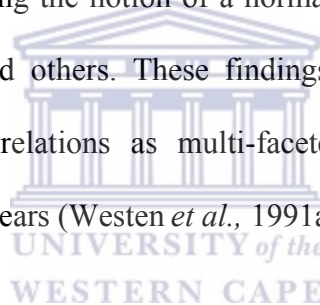
The understanding of social causality dimension measures the comprehension of causes underlying the actions, thoughts, and feelings of others. Levels range from idiosyncratic, illogical and distorted, to complex, accurate and abstract with an understanding of possible internal motivations. Severely personality disordered patients have shown low levels of functioning on this dimension, indicating illogical and inaccurate attributions regarding the causes of behaviour (Westen, 1991c).



### **2.3.6.5. Research with the TAT & SCORS**

#### **2.3.6.5.1. Adolescent Object Relations**

In a groundbreaking piece of research, Westen *et al.* (1991a) demonstrated different levels of object relations between children in 9<sup>th</sup> (approximately 14-15 years) and 12<sup>th</sup> (approximately 17-18 years) grades. 12<sup>th</sup> graders were found to demonstrate higher mean scores for complexity of representations, emotional investment, and social causality than 9<sup>th</sup> graders (Westen *et al.*, 1991a). Interestingly, the affect tone of relationship paradigms showed a random pattern, refuting the notion of a normative progression from malevolent to benevolent views of self and others. These findings demonstrate the importance of considering adolescent object relations as multi-faceted, as opposed to unitary, and developing beyond pre-oedipal years (Westen *et al.*, 1991a).



#### **2.3.6.5.2. Adolescent Borderline Object Relations**

Research on object relational patterns of clinical adolescent populations is unfortunately still in its infancy, reflected in the limited availability of data (Westen & Chang, 2000). Using TAT material, Westen *et al.* (1990a) compared the object relations of adolescent Borderline inpatients (diagnosed with the well-validated Diagnostic Interview for Borderlines(DIB)) with a non-Borderline adolescent psychiatric comparison group (DSM III diagnoses included Mood Disorders, Eating Disorders and non-Borderline Personality Disorders) and normal adolescent subjects (screened using a questionnaire and the DIB). Adolescent Borderline inpatients demonstrated significantly lower-level functioning than

psychiatric and normal comparison subjects on affect tone, indicating a greater malevolent object world and view of relationships. They also evidenced the lowest mean score on emotional investment, reflecting a need-gratifying orientation in relationships. Both patient samples scored significantly lower than normal comparison subjects on social causality, indicating greater idiosyncratic and illogical attributions of causality in understanding human interactions. Borderline subjects also evidenced more pathological responses, scored as Level 1 responses, on all scales, reflective of a poor differentiation of representations, a malevolent object world, a need-gratifying orientation towards others, and grossly illogical attributions. Most surprisingly, Borderline subjects evidenced the highest mean score on complexity of representations. These results suggest adolescent Borderline representations of others to be relatively normal, although they may at times be shallow and poorly bounded. It was speculated that the nature of Borderline pathology could at times incline such adolescents to over-attribute complex motives and enduring traits to others, while simultaneously struggling with object differentiation in moments of affective arousal (Westen *et al.*, 1990a).

#### **2.3.6.5.3. Adult Borderline Object Relations**

In further research, Westen *et al.* (1990c) compared the object relational patterns of adult Borderline patients with major depressives and normal subjects using the TAT and SCORS. Results indicated borderlines to have lower mean scores on affect tone and emotional investment, and to produce more pathological responses on all scales in comparison to the major depressive group. The Borderline group also produced lower mean scores and greater pathological responses on every scale when compared to normals. Westen *et al.* (1990b)

have further investigated the developmental differences between Borderline adolescents (DIB diagnosis) and adults (DSM III diagnosis). Results indicated similar object relational disturbances among both groups relative to normal and clinical comparison groups, even though certain aspects of object-relational patterns appear to mature between adolescence and adulthood (Westen & Chang, 2000).

#### **2.3.6.5.4. Developmental History & Object Relations**

In a most interesting research study exploring the relationship between actual developmental history events, as assessed by chart review, and object relational patterns of female adolescent inpatients (diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, Mood Disorder, Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia, and other Personality Disorders) using the TAT and SCORS, Westen *et al.* (1990e) identified the maternal relationship as crucial in the shaping of object relational pathology. Maternal psychiatric illness was found to best predict pathological object relations on all dimensions except complexity of representations, while maternal separations, alcohol abuse, and mother surrogates appeared to negatively impact on all object relational dimensions. In addition, early separations were associated with greater pathological levels of object relations. Surprisingly, maternal physical abuse and inappropriate parental behaviour were both associated with more high-level responses on complexity of representations. A myriad maternal difficulties, pre-oedipal risk factors, disrupted attachments and sexual abuse were associated with lowered affect tone, indicating difficulty with the formation and retrieval of benign and benevolent representations. The duration of sexual abuse correlated with Level 1 scores on each of the dimensions, as well as significantly suppressed scores on complexity of representations. A history of neglect

was associated with illogical attributions and a lowered affect tone. While no single pre-oedipal risk factor distinguished Borderline from non-Borderline psychiatric patients, the amount of risk factors predicted diagnosis, was highly correlated with affect tone and capacity for emotional investment, and slightly less significantly correlated with complexity of representations and understanding of social causality. Most significantly, a near zero correlation existed between post-oedipal risk factors and the various dimensions of object relations, highlighting the importance of the pre-oedipal period in childhood development.

The significance of the above study lies in its ability to demonstrate the interface between actual reality and psychic reality, with the type of early trauma significantly impacting on later object relational patterns. It still remains to be ascertained whether these internal patterns and expectations of others remain static or are momentarily activated under conditions of strong negative affective arousal, thereby disrupting cognitive processes and evoking archaic and malevolent representations.

#### **2.3.6.5.5. Object Relations of a Serial Sexual Homicide Offender**

Porcerelli *et al.* (2001), in one of the few studies investigating the object relations of an incarcerated serial sexual homicide offender using the TAT and SCORS, uncovered a malevolent affect tone and a need gratifying orientation towards others. Most interestingly, scores on complexity of representations indicated an ability to view others in complex ways, although a difficulty was demonstrated in maintaining consistent boundaries. This was proposed to facilitate a projection of hated and rageful aspects of the self onto others, thereby requiring the sadistic control and elimination of these malevolent external objects.



Westen (1991c: 441) attributes Antisocial Personality Disorders' elevated scores on complexity of representations to their associated “psychological acuity” and interpersonal cunningness, combined with a lack of affective-motivational investment in others. In a similar vein, social causality was often understood in both complex and illogical ways, suggestive of a disturbed and idiosyncratic understanding of cause and effect. Westen (1991c) speculates on this distortion as reflecting the Antisocial Personality's awareness of causal impact, while simultaneously enjoying the infliction of pain.

## 2.4. CONCLUSION

The link between object relational patterns and violent behaviour alluded to by Porcerelli *et al.* (2001) is tenuous, with a theoretical link more established than an empirical one. Gacono & Meloy (1990), in their Rorschach studies of violent offenders, do argue for similar characterological features among violent offenders. Understanding violent behaviour requires a multidimensional understanding, including but not restricted to social, political, economic, and psychological factors. Criminologists are however finding inadequate explanation for the elevated levels of crime in South Africa, and particularly the Western Cape, and even fewer explanations for increases in violent juvenile crime (Legett, 2004a). And while none of these factors can singularly predict violent behaviour, understanding the object relational patterns of violent male juvenile offenders presents itself as a worthwhile area of research into the intrapsychic factors that may render certain juveniles susceptible to violent behaviour.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. STUDY DESIGN**

Much of the research on juvenile offenders and criminal activity occurs within a behavioural perspective (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Gacono & Meloy (1994) have highlighted the importance of understanding personality factors underpinning criminal behaviour. Object relations theory and methods of evaluation have successfully been deployed in attempts to ascertain personality characteristics and prototypal patterns of violent offenders (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Porcerelli *et al.*, 2001). The present study adopted an object relations theoretical framework as its conceptual lens. The research design was composed of a number of instruments, including the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and the Social Cognitions & Object Relations Scale (SCORS). The purpose of the design was to assess and compare object relational patterns from TAT narratives.

### **3.2. PROJECTIVE TESTING**

A burgeoning interest in the role of unconscious wishes, motivations and internal conflicts prompted the development of projective assessment methods in the early 1900's. The first projective test dates back to Herman Rorschach's experimentation with ambiguous inkblots in approximately 1910 (Atkinson *et al.*, 1985). The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) represented a further significant contribution to the field of projective testing. The TAT, consisting of thirty ambiguous pictures and one blank card, was developed by Murray and Morgan at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in 1943 (Sugarman, 2000). The fundamental

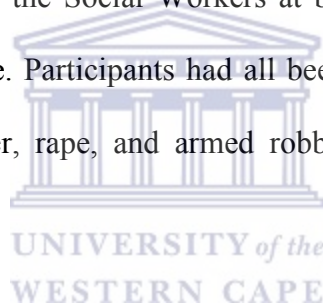
tenet of projective tests rests on the presentation of ambiguous stimuli, be they in the form of Rorschach inkblots or pictures from the TAT. The ambiguous nature of the stimulus is understood to invite the participant to organise and associate the material, thereby presumably reflecting implicit motives (Masling, 1997).

Interpretation of psychometric tests initially rested on the thematic analysis of content. This means of analysis was to acquire a dubious reputation due to the plethora of cookbook interpretations offering "wildly specific and detailed dynamic interpretations", as well as the recognition of the importance of structural aspects of the personality (Sugarman, 2000: 6). An emphasis on validity and reliability ushered the development of quantitative means of projective analysis. Actuarial methods of assessing projective results have dominated published literature for the last thirty years or so, with a number of scoring schemes appearing for the Rorschach (Masling, 1997). Test scores are understood to give precision to underlying theoretical components and allow a comparison with other measured personality constructs, thereby facilitating an evaluation of the structural aspects of the personality (Appelbaum & Mayam, 1974). The analysis of content has not however been relegated to the archives. Complementary approaches attempting to assess both structural dimensions and thematic qualities of object relations have emerged (Sugarman, 2000). Westen's (1985) SCORS represents an attempt to integrate these two perspectives, bringing both greater reliability, validity and a heuristic value to projective testing.

### **3.3. METHOD**

#### **3.3.1. Characteristics of the Sample**

Eight participants were selected for the research study using the following criteria: (1) they were male, (2) under 18 years of age, (3) had been found guilty of committing a violent crime by a South African court of law, (4) and were serving a sentence. The 8 male juvenile offenders were incarcerated for violent crimes at De Novo Youth Care Centre in Kraaifontein and Eureka Youth Care Centre in Rawsonville. Potential participants were identified with the assistance of the Social Workers at both institutions and ranged from fifteen to seventeen years of age. Participants had all been found guilty of violent crimes, including murder, man-slaughter, rape, and armed robbery, thus constituting a selected convenient sample.



#### **3.3.2. Recruitment & Procedure**

Written permission for the research study was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department, followed by written and telephonic communications with the Principals of De Novo and Eureka Youth Care Centres. Informed and voluntary consent of the participants was obtained, as is recommended in socially sensitive research with juveniles (Jenkins-Hall & Osborn, 1994). The purpose of the research and the procedure to be followed was explained to all the potential participants by a staff member, followed by the researcher. Individual confidentiality was guaranteed and participants were advised of their right to refuse participation in the study. It was further made explicit to the potential participants

that participation or non-participation in the research study would in no way advantage or disadvantage them. The research was emphasised to be independent of the management of the institution and as having no impact on their periods of sentencing. Potential participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the interview and encouraged to avail themselves of the limited counselling available should the interviews upset an emotional equilibrium or result in any emotional discontent.

Voluntary participation was requested by the researcher. None of the identified participants declined to participate, although one interview at De Novo Youth Care Centre was terminated by the researcher after the participant declared an inability to construct a story, claiming it impossible to know what characters in the TAT cards might be thinking or feeling. Each of the interviews was conducted one-to-one and face-to-face in a private office at either De Novo or Eureka Youth Care Centres. All of the interviews were tape-recorded after receiving permission to do so by the participants. All participants, apart from the one terminated interview, participated enthusiastically and appeared to enjoy the opportunity to construct their own stories. Many of the participants, after having narrated a story, emphasised a parallel between their constructed narratives and personal life experiences. Counselling was recommended by the interviewer in a number of instances.

In addition, the interviewer reviewed all available documents, if possible prior to the interview, to verify the nature of the offences and court verdict. These included legal dockets, police reports, victim and witness statements and Social Worker reports.

### **3.3.3. Research Tool**

The TAT is a psychological projective technique developed at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in 1943 (Wesley, 2002). The original test comprised 30 picture cards and 1 blank card that act as stimuli for evoking stories from participants (Osborne, 1996). Participants are usually asked to tell a story about the picture, including what is happening in the picture, what led up to it, the outcome, and what the characters are thinking and feeling (Westen *et al.*, 1990a). Brief prompts such as "How does this story end?", "Tell me the thoughts and feelings of the characters in this story", or probes for unclear or confusing information may be used (Osborne, 1996: 4; Westen, 1985). This method of administration is endorsed by Bellak *et al.* (1949). The ambiguous nature of the interpersonal situations depicted on the cards provides an excellent source for eliciting underlying cognitive and affective structures and themes of meaning. These are in turn understood to reveal how relations and interactions are experienced, constructed, and made sense of (Osborne, 1996; Ornduff *et al.*, 1994; Westen *et al.*, 1990a; Westen *et al.*, 1990b).

The TAT is a well established tool for use with adolescents - 63% of clinicians reported its usage, making it the 4<sup>th</sup> most popular psychological instrument used in standard test batteries with this age group. This has been attributed to the test's creative quality, as well as its indirect, informal, and non-structured approach (Osborne, 1996). While the bias of verbal productivity was initially of concern, it has conclusively been shown that the number of words produced does not change the pattern of findings or levels of significance (Westen *et al.*, 1990a).

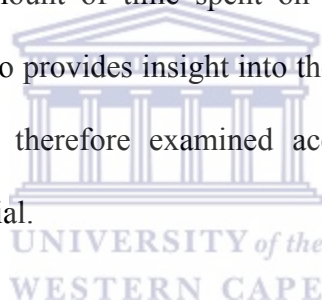
The TAT method in this study follows the procedure outlined by Westen (1985). Accordingly, ten TAT cards were chosen so as to yield internal consistency. The following pre-selected TAT cards were administered in a standardized sequence: Cards 1, 6BM, 12M, 7BM, 4, 3GF, 18BM, 8BM, 13MF, and 14. The above cards were chosen due to their elicitation of relational and emotive themes (Bellak, 1949). Standard clinical administration was followed and interviews lasted approximately 1 hour each.

#### **3.3.4. Data Analysis**

TAT narratives were professionally transcribed and thereafter verified by the researcher. The protocols were scored using Westen's (1985) SCORS scale that has been extensively validated in both clinical and nonclinical populations. This involved analysis of the four previously described dimensions of object relatedness (Complexity of Representations, Affect Tone, Capacity for Emotional Investment, and Understanding of Social Causality) according to a five level scoring system ranging from least to most mature levels of functioning, with each level including numerous scoring criteria. Assessment of these dimensions required extensive and labour-intensive training with the coding manual, including: (1) familiarisation with the aims and theoretical background of the measure, (2) multiple readings of the detailed scoring criteria for each of the five levels, (3) scoring two practice protocols and (4) scoring one reliability protocol. In total, this amounted to scoring seventy five sample TAT stories against scoring rationales and corresponding scores (Westen, 1985). All sample narratives were analysed on a single dimension at a time, as advocated by Westen (1985), due to the complexity of the scales and so as to yield internal consistency. Analysis of the four dimensions necessitated the scoring of these seventy five

sample narratives four times, elevating the number of stories scored to three hundred.

The eight participants produced lengthy responses to the TAT cards. A total of eighty narratives, ranging from twenty to fifty typed A4 pages, were produced. Seven of the eight interviews were conducted in Afrikaans. These were translated into English by the researcher, a second language Afrikaans-speaker, prior to scoring so as to ensure a common language base. Stories were analysed and scored on each of the four dimensions separately, totalling three hundred and twenty narratives. The large number and length of narratives, translation, and an intricate scoring manual requiring extensive familiarisation and training contributed to an inordinate amount of time spent on data analysis. Although SCORS details a quantitative score, it also provides insight into the qualitative dimensions of object relation patterns. Results were therefore examined according to descriptive data and illustrated with qualitative material.



### **3.4. LIMITATIONS & DELIMITATIONS**

Delimitations included restricting the participants to eight juvenile males incarcerated for violent crimes as the majority of violent crimes appear to be committed by males (DCS, 2002; DCS, 2003; DCS, 2004; DCS, 2005). The sample size was restricted to eight participants due to the lengthy scoring procedure of SCORS, as well as wishing to remain within the parameters of a Clinical Masters in Psychology mini-thesis. The limited number of participants does however limit the generalizability of findings. No intergroup or cross-dimensional statistical comparisons were possible due to the sample size. As a result the data was not subjected to a t-test or chi square analyses. More specific delimitations may



have included grouping participants according to socio-economic background, race, and/or an intelligence score.

### **3.5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

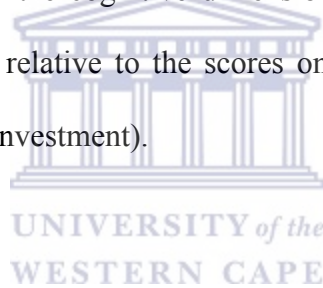
It was hypothesised that violent male juvenile offenders would demonstrate low scores on affect tone and capacity for emotional investment, while displaying relative elevations on complexity of representations and understanding of causality.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 depicts the object relations scores of the participants. The table shows the number of subjects, minimum and maximum total scores, mean scores and the standard deviation. As can be seen from the table, the initial hypothesis was supported: mean scores for complexity of representations and social causality demonstrated relative elevations when compared to affect tone and capacity for emotional investment. Participants thus demonstrated elevated scores on the cognitive dimensions (complexity of representations and understanding of causality) relative to the scores on the affective dimensions (affect tone and capacity for emotional investment).

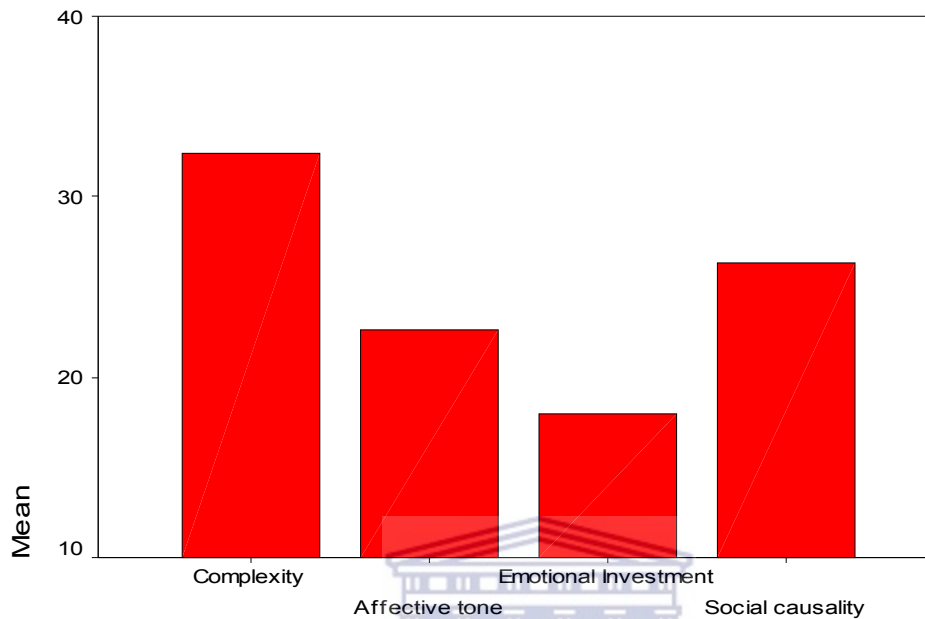


**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Complexity of representations	8	18	45	32.38	8.911
Affective quality of representations	8	18	33	22.63	4.984
Investment in relationships	8	16	20	18.00	1.604
Social causality	8	20	37	26.38	6.255
Valid N (listwise)	8				

**Table 1**

## 4.2. MEAN SCORES ACROSS ALL DIMENSIONS



**Figure 1: Mean scores across all dimensions**

Figure 1 depicts the mean scores across all dimensions. As can be seen from the table, participants scored highest on complexity of representations, followed by social causality, affect tone and emotional investment.

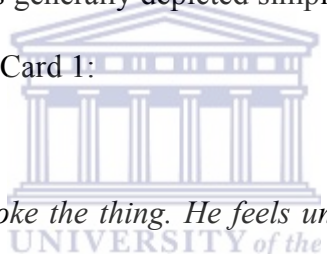
### **4.2.1. Complexity of Representations: Mean Scores**

Scores for complexity averaged Level 3 (please refer to Figure 1), reflecting an ability to “make inferences about subjective states in addition to focusing on behaviour” (Westen, 1985: 4). The understanding of psychological processes and subjective states at this level of object relations is however rather superficial, unidimensional, generalised and lacking in

subtlety. People are therefore generally not understood or expected to act out of character or experience psychological tensions. Level 3 scores nevertheless represent an average level of maturation. The participants thus demonstrated an ability to infer basic psychological states of others, suggestive of the social acuity characteristic of the psychopathic personality structure (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Westen & Chang, 2000). A number of recurring themes occurred on this dimension.

#### 4.2.1.1. TAT excerpt: Simple traits - Just Bad

Inferences about subjective states generally depicted simple and malevolent character traits, as reflected in MW's response to Card 1:



*"He is heartsore, because he broke the thing. He feels unhappy and heartsore and down. Now he's sitting now and thinking what his mother's going to do with him; mother or father, because he broke the thing".*

Likewise, MW, on Card 6BM, depicted the following scenario following a mother's discovery of her son's involvement in illegal activities:

*"Now he's thinking, she doesn't want to talk you see, she looks cross. The mother is cross with the boy and the boy, he doesn't worry about the mother now. He doesn't feel so happy. He doesn't feel so happy. He feels unhappy, and his mother is totally unhappy about what he did."*

In a similar vein, RP, on Card 3GF, described unidimensional characteristics of a woman feeling "*heartsore*", "*bad*" and "*tearful*" following the ejection of her unfaithful husband, while RT described a woman as simply "*heartsore*" following her husband's infidelity on the same card.

#### **4.2.1.1.1 Commentary on TAT excerpt: Simple traits - Just Bad**

While participants demonstrated insight into the psychological complexity of others, these were generally in simple and malevolent ways. This echoes Westen's (1990d) finding of Borderline patients demonstrating highest-level attributions on human figures depicted as malevolent, while depressives and controls did so on benevolent figures. The ability to infer psychological states, however superficial, is likely to support the non-egocentric capacity to "read" and manipulate others, characteristic of the psychopathic personality structure. In addition, in moments of duress or object provocation, the psychological complexity of others may be simplified into a malevolent representation, prompting a violent outlash in an attempt to quell internal discomfort and promote object cohesion.

#### **4.2.1.2. TAT excerpt: Antithetical traits - The Good & the Bad**

Participants demonstrated insight into the mental lives of the characters depicted, although these were often characterised in simple and antithetical ways. For instance, in response to Card 12M, KF described an overwhelmingly hostile relationship between an "*evil dark man*" and a boy described as a "*saviour*":

*"He's some evil dark person, who's got evil man ... evil powers. He's trying to possess him; to bring the evil spirit inside of him ... so that he can use his powers for bad. The boy wakes up. The man gets scared or something and the boy gets cross and maybe he finds his unhidden power and uses it against him and the man dies or blows up, or turns into dust or something. And the boy fulfils his destiny and saves the world or something from evil."*

HB also depicted this dichotomised style of thinking in Card 8BM that involved a story of murder, cannibalism and the trading of body parts:

*"The boy's thinking yeah, I've got the bucks for killing this man, but there is guilt; he must have guilt. He's thinking to himself yey this is wrong. Look what they doing to this man; chopping him up. The men just want what they want. They're not worried about other people. They don't have feelings. All the sin and all the bad things they have done makes them so blind they don't feel anymore. They have a cold heart. They after money or power."*

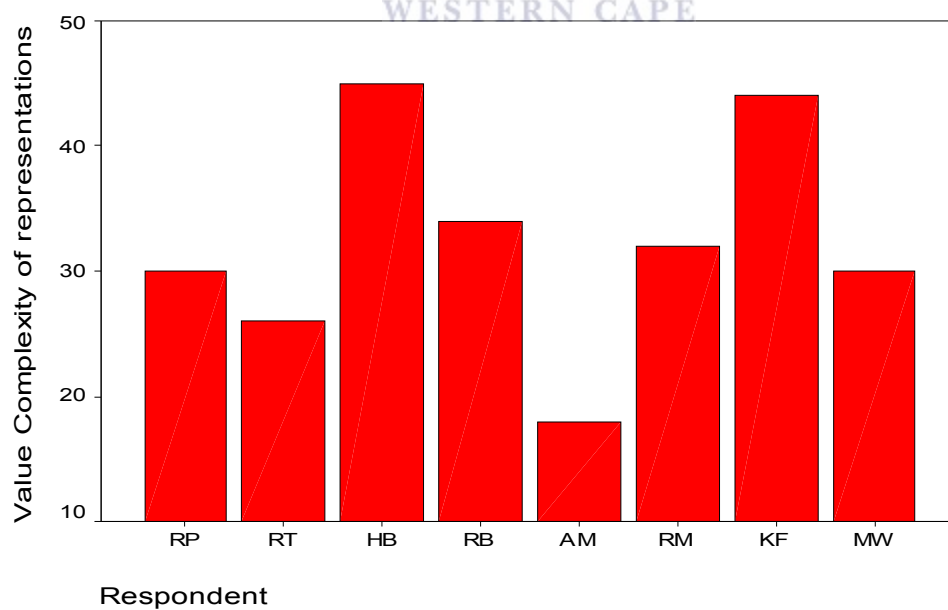
#### **4.2.1.2.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Antithetical traits - The Good & the Bad**

The failure to integrate ambivalent representations and the continuation of split representations beyond oedipal years, perhaps in an attempt to protect the object from rage, reflects Kernberg's (1975) borderline pathology organization and an egocentrism in the understanding of others' thoughts. This style of split representation of self and other, as previously shown in Rorschach studies (Gacono & Meloy, 1994), is likely to facilitate the projection of hated parts of the self as the complex composition of others is reduced to an all-or-nothing disposition. It may well be that during periods of intense emotional arousal,

the complex representations of others are overwhelmed by the ascendancy of malevolent representations. The escalated intensity of these malevolent representations is likely to prompt projective defences in order to alleviate the pressure of a charged object world, ultimately requiring the destruction of the external object so as to restore internal cohesion.

#### **4.2.2. Complexity of representations: Individual Mean Scores**

Participants varied in their mean scores on complexity of representations, as can be seen in Figure 2. Four of the participants scored Level 3 or below, two between Levels 3 and 4, and two between Levels 4 and 5. In addition, participant AM demonstrated multiple Level 1 and 2 responses. Examples of high (Levels 4 and 5) and low (Levels 1 and 2) scores will be given to illustrate the full range of responses.



**Figure 2: Complexity of representations**

#### 4.2.2.1. TAT excerpt: Complex representations

Both KF and HB demonstrated a number of complex representations in their narratives. For instance, on Card 13MF, KF described the murder and rape of a young woman by her classmate and the response of her innocent partner:

*"He doesn't know how to control it, he doesn't know what to do. He just covers his face in shame and thinks maybe he came a little bit too late, maybe he could have stopped it. But now he feels ashamed. That's why he's covering his face. He's ashamed and he's angry. He's busy thinking who could do such a thing. Why wasn't I here. It's all on him, but it's not his fault."*

HB's complex and enduring understanding of dynamic psychological process is reflected in the following narrative to Card 8BM that centres around an organ transplant and the differing responses from team members:

*"I think she gave the instructions. She actually made the decision. She said to them they must take the heart out. She's thinking about her salary. She feels nothing. She just thinks about the money. And I think she's thinking about the food on the table at home this evening. She's going to sit back and put her feet on the table and drink a cup of tea. The Doctor is thinking also just hey must I again cut someone's flesh. But the money is there. I can't put food on my table without having money. He's thinking can't I get another job. But he thinks, this is the only work he's good at. I don't think the other Doctor worries about what he does cause he sees it like the person is already dead. We can cut and dig in him as*



*we want to. He really doesn't care. The Doctor gets her money, the one that gave the orders. Sits at home with her feet on the coffee table. Sits and drinks tea. And I think the assistant is in a bar. He's drunk. And this Doctor, is at home, this doctor, the older man, helps his grandchildren with schoolwork, homework."*

#### **4.2.2.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Complex representations**

HB's narrative reflects an ability to differentiate characters, ascribe varying motivations, describe differing mental states and extend these traits in concrete and enduring ways. His ability to view people in complex ways highlights some of the variation among violent male juvenile offenders' personality structure. Thus while mean scores for complexity of representations averaged at Level 3, both HB and KF stood out as scoring between levels 4 and 5. Interestingly, both these participants also showed elevated scores on the understanding of causality (please refer to Figure 5), possibly reflecting their heightened understanding of these intellectual dimensions. Nevertheless, HB was found guilty of murder while KF was incarcerated for armed robbery. Thus despite an ability to infer the psychological states of others in highly complex ways, both these participants failed to consistently hold these representations, effectively reducing their victims into objects requiring subjugation or eradication.

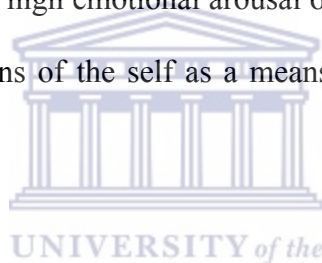
#### **4.2.2.2. TAT excerpt: Pathological representations**

In stark contrast to the above, AM often struggled to differentiate characters on Card 7BM, depicting them as sharing the same thoughts and emotions:

*"They were both got up to bad things. They were both gruesome. He's thinking the same. They feel happy now because they now have a new life. They turned over a new leaf."*

#### **4.2.2.2.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Pathological representations**

AM, in what Westen (1985) calls "twinning", struggled with defining characters in clearly bounded ways. Persons were often described as sharing the same situations, thoughts, feelings or intentions, reflecting a failure to recognise the independence and separateness of characters. The inability to recognise the separateness of others is likely to facilitate overidentification in moments of high emotional arousal or duress, prompting an impetus to eradicate the perceived extensions of the self as a means of restoring and preserving less threatening object relations.



These findings iterate the importance of understanding the heterogeneity of object relational patterns within a grouping of violent male juvenile offenders (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Westen & Chang, 2000). Some of these individuals may therefore understand others in multidimensional ways, while a number of them would appear to struggle with a confusion of points of view. Thus while the present sample were generally able to make inferences about psychological states, these did fluctuate from simple to highly complex.

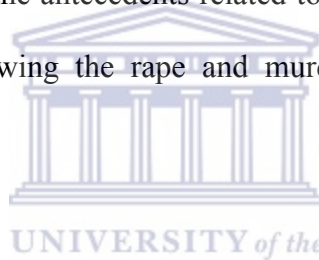
#### **4.2.3. Affect Tone: Mean Scores**

Scores for affect tone averaged Level 2, indicating a predominantly hostile, empty and capricious view of the world (please refer to Figure 1). Level 2 scores indicate tremendous

feelings of loneliness, coupled with experiences of others as unpleasant and uncaring (Westen, 1985). The participants thus demonstrated a malevolent view of the world with little expectation of interpersonal co-operation. A number of recurring themes occurred on this dimension.

#### 4.2.3.1. TAT excerpt: A Violent & Aggressive World

Participants often depicted hostile and aggressive characters existing in a threatening world filled with victims and victimisers. For instance, KF, on card 13MF, while demonstrating a psychological understanding of the antecedents related to violence, nevertheless depicted a grossly malevolent world following the rape and murder of an innocent young man's girlfriend:



*"... he has this guilt inside of him and then he becomes like a person that's always looking for trouble with people, always trying to get all that anger out of him. And he takes it out on other people. Like maybe he walks past someone, someone bumps into him. He got maybe a knife in his pocket. Starts stabbing."*

RP, also in response to card 13MF, depicted a vindictive view of the world:

*"... and then he realised she was playing with his feelings. He was just going to kill her. The children must now grow up without a mother and live on the street. They beg and sleep in a bin."*

AM described an unambiguously malevolent representation on card 8BM involving a surgical operation on a soldier:

*"Now the Sister does not want to help him. She's thinking, no wait, leave him, let him die. She does not like him. He probably did something ugly or something hurtful that's now sitting in her heart. It's probably an ugly word that he said to her. When he's better and sees the Sister then he's going to say to her: 'yes, you, you pig', or something like that. 'You did not want to help me'. Then the sister said: 'yes, I won't help you. You should have just died, you pig!'"*

#### **4.2.3.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: A Violent & Aggressive World**

The above seems to support Direct Expression theorists' position of hostile fantasies reflecting a greater propensity to engage in violent and destructive behaviours through the enactment of an aggressive internal world (Mussen & Naylor, 1954; Kagan; 1956). The lowered and violent nature of affect tone similarly echoes Sugarman's (1980) discovery of aggressive imagery among severely Conduct Disordered adolescents using Rorschach protocols. The participants' strong and split identifications with both the aggressor and the victim are common in primitive object relation patterns (Gacono & Meloy, 1994). Identifications with the aggressor may indicate a desire for omnipotent control, while secondary identifications with the victim possibly reveal an injured sense of self resulting in a preoccupation with physical vulnerability.

It therefore seems feasible to propose that violent male juvenile offenders' aggressive

actions may in part be attributed to the immobilisation of the cognitive ability to infer the psychological states of others by malevolent affect-based perceptions in periods of intense emotional arousal. A desire to restore a semblance of omnipotent control may in all likelihood prompt violent actions, thereby restoring a primary identification with the aggressor and control over a malevolent world. The participants' relational world thus appears to be construed less in terms of affectional ties and more in terms of skewed power relations.

#### 4.2.3.2. TAT excerpt: A Capricious & Painful World

Participants often depicted a capricious world involving the infliction of sudden and unexpected hurtful actions. For instance, in response to Card 3GF, RT described a woman as extremely *"heartsore"* following the unexpected termination of her marriage:

*"He maybe went out to another woman and came home smelling of perfume. They fought. Her husband left her. She's wondering: 'How can he do that. And he never did that before; we got on so well together. He probably got bored of me and walked.' She feels very heartsore at that moment. Standing in the door. Standing and crying 'cause her heart is broken."*

In a similar vein, HB described an attempted suicide following a man's discovery of his wife's infidelity on Card 18BM:

*"He opened the door and found his wife and another man in bed. And they're married"*

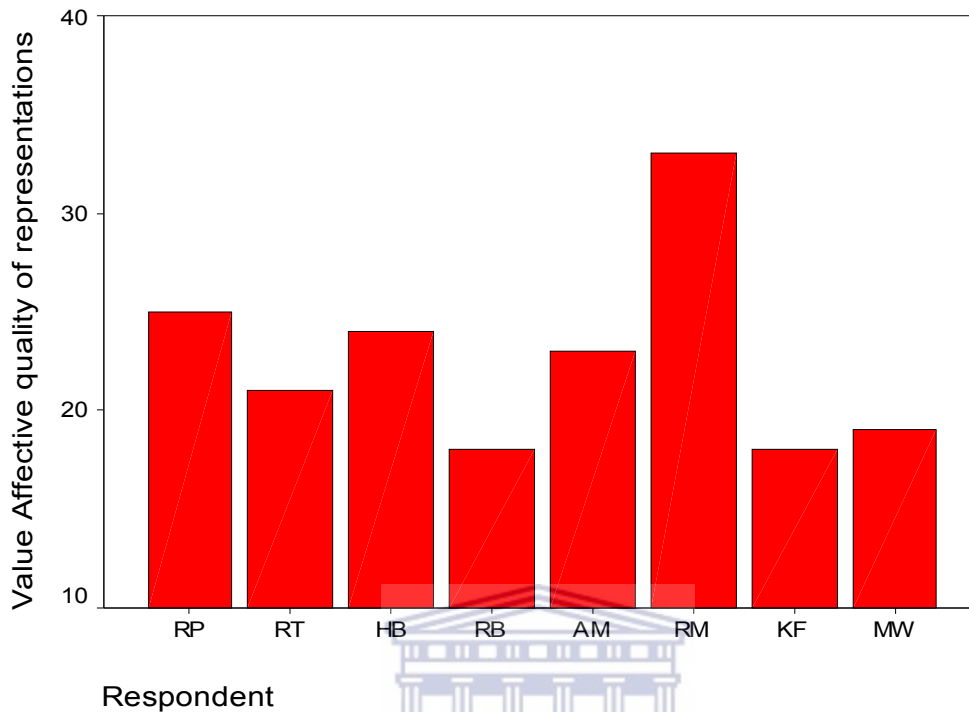
*maybe five years or so and he can't take it. What he saw there goes to his head and from his head to his heart and he tries to kill himself. He feels heartsore. He feels his heart is broken. He asks himself the question: Why does his wife do it? He asks himself if the love that he gave to her was not enough."*

#### **4.2.3.2.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: A Capricious & Painful World**

In line with research on Borderline patients (Westen 1990b), sexually abused female adolescents (Ornduff *et al.*, 1994), sexual homicide perpetrators and paedophiles (Gacono *et al.*, 2000), the participants were found to demonstrate similarly dysphoric internal worlds. Violent male juvenile offenders do therefore not appear to demonstrate the chronic emotional detachment characteristic of psychopathic character formation, but an object world filled with painful, aggressive, capricious and threatening emotions (Gacono & Meloy, 1994). It may further be speculated that difficulty in regulating these affective processes during times of duress may result in the treatment of others in ways likely to evoke intense anger or desertion, thereby confirming their fantasies of a cruel world and justifying retributive action.

#### **4.2.4. Affect Tone: Individual Mean Scores**

The majority of the participants scored below Level 3 on affect tone, as can be seen in Figure 3. Three of the participants scored between Levels 1 and 2, four between Levels 2 and 3, and one between Levels 3 and 4. Excerpts from RM's responses will be shown to illustrate higher level (Levels 4 and 5) responses on this dimension.



**Figure 3: Mean Affect Tone**

#### 4.2.4.1. TAT excerpt: Variations in Affect Tone

RM, in response to card 7BM, described predominantly positive interactions between a grandfather and his grandson:

*"Looks to me like the man fought at work and came to tell his grandpa. And the grandpa takes him by the neck and says to him: 'my son, don't worry. Everything will come right. Just be strong'. And the grandpa sees how badly he (the grandson) feels cause he also experienced something like this and it's very sore in your deepest insides."*

Similarly, on Card 8BM, despite a schoolboy's witnessing of a murder, RM described a

number of supportive relationships:

*"And his mother also saw that when he came out of school he didn't look like he always looks. He looks otherwise. And his mother saw that evening when they were sitting and eating at the dinner table that he's not speaking; he's sitting dead still. And his father asks his mother what's going on with the child tonight ... And the next day there was someone who came to speak at their school. And this man told them that if you've got something to say to someone and you don't just trust anyone, you can go to your school teacher, or your mother, or father or the police or someone you can trust. The meeting was finished and he asked his teacher if he could talk to her one side."*



#### **4.2.4.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Variations in Affect Tone**

While RM demonstrated an elevated score on affect tone in relation to other participants, his responses were nevertheless characterised by affectively mixed representations of a mildly negative tone (Westen, 1985). Thus even the variations in affect tone of relationship paradigms indicated a dysphoric object world, lending further weight to the hypothesis that states of negative emotional arousal may permit the ascendancy of a dysphoric, capricious and painful affect tone that overwhelms cognitive dimensions and prompts vengeful retaliation.

#### **4.2.5. Capacity for Emotional Investment: Mean Scores**

Scores for emotional investment averaged Level 2, indicating a pathologically narcissistic



orientation to the world (please refer to Figure 1). These low scores echo similar findings in studies of Conduct Disordered adolescents, Psychopaths and Borderlines (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Gacono *et al.*, 2000; Westen *et al.*, 1990a). At this level, a basic awareness of the conflict between the needs of the self and others is recognised, although the satisfaction of one's own wishes remains paramount. An elementary distinction between right and wrong is understood, although adherence to morals occurs primarily as a means to avoid punishment. Friendships are viewed as interchangeable and usually occur within the context of a shared activity (Westen, 1985). Participants described a number of recurring themes on this dimension.

#### 4.2.5.1. TAT excerpt: A Need Gratifying Orientation

Participants often described a need gratifying orientation towards others in their narratives, as evidenced in RB's response to Card 13MF:

*"He killed the woman. He's standing there and crying; looking on. 'My wife is now dead. Where am I going to get another wife?'"*

RB, in response to Card 3GF, described a narcissistic course of action following the beating of a woman by her husband on suspicion of infidelity:

*"The man leaves and feels nothing. He has nothing to do with the woman. He leaves the woman just like that and goes looking for another wife to raise his children."*

#### **4.2.5.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: A Need Gratifying Orientation**

The above narratives demonstrate a pathological narcissism that has long been associated with psychopathic character formation (Gacono & Meloy, 1994). Despite elevated scores on the cognitive dimensions, low scores on the affective dimensions indicate an impoverished emotional quality among the participants. In a circulatory fashion, a narcissistic orientation would seem to foster deficits in the capacity for mutual relatedness, thereby limiting meaningful interactions with others and encouraging the view of the world as unsafe and unloving (Porcerelli *et al.*, 2001).

It may be speculated that rageful and hated affective components become mobilised under periods of duress or hyper-arousal, immobilising the cognitive ability to infer the psychological states of others. Pathological levels of narcissism are likely to defeat any residues of empathy in order to fulfil their need gratifying orientation, thereby assisting in the fulfilment of grossly aggressive actions. The sample of violent male juvenile offenders thus appears unable to cathect in others, thereby limiting intrusions into their fragile inner world and simultaneously facilitating the sadistic control of others.

#### **4.2.5.2. TAT excerpt: Violence with No Remorse**

Participants' responses often included deleterious acts with no sense of remorse. HB, in response to Card 4, described a character's rage at the approach of his girlfriend by another man:

*"He's thinking just about one thing. He's thinking about the person that did him wrong. He's thinking he must get that person back. He can't help that he's cross. He feels cross. He feels hateful. He just wants to kill."*

RP also described a scene of impulsive aggression with no sense of remorse in response to Card 18BM:

*"He maybe stood now by the shop or came out of the shop and they watched him maybe taking lots of money out of his pocket or buying. And when he comes out of the shop going to his car then they hit him from behind. The man can die unless other people come quickly to help him. Maybe he had a small child with him. Then they just take his child okay. Kidnapping. Make it dead."*



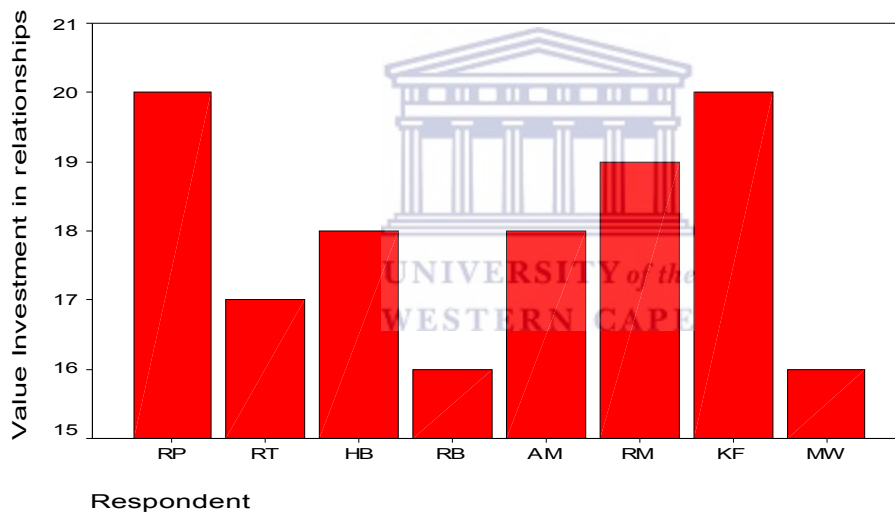
#### **4.2.5.2.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Violence with No Remorse**

Participants thus appeared to construe relationships primarily as vehicles for gratification and security, with good and bad simply viewed in terms of the hedonistic implications of action. The internalisation of moral standards, let alone abstract forms of moral reasoning, are starkly absent. Others do not appear to be valued as independent entities, but simply as a means of achieving personal satisfaction. It may well be that a recognition of the independence and value of others represents an imminent threat to their fragile and narcissistic sense of selves, prompting the sole investment in their own satisfaction. The absence of moral reasoning, coupled with the drive for narcissistic self satisfaction and a malevolently skewed perspective of the world are likely to congeal into a formidably

destructive force capable of overwhelming cognitively driven dimensions in moments of distress, thereby prompting the perpetration of gruesome acts.

#### **4.2.6. Capacity for Emotional Investment: Individual Mean Scores**

All of the participants scored Level 2 or below on emotional investment, as can be seen in Figure 4. No significant variations occurred across this dimension and it can be concluded that all participants displayed an egocentric embeddedness (Westen, 1990d).



**Figure 4: Emotional Investment**

#### **4.2.7. Understanding of Social Causality: Mean Scores**

Scores for social causality averaged Level 3, indicating a relatively simple psychological understanding of the causes of people's thoughts, feeling and actions, coupled with a complex comprehension of behavioural causality (please refer to Figure 1). At this level, social phenomena can be logically and accurately explained. Psychological processes are understood as impacting on actions, although causality is primarily understood as an external force (Westen, 1985). Participants revealed an ability to describe internal motivations as causal factors in their narratives.

##### **4.2.7.1. TAT excerpt: Simple Internal Motivation**

Participants often elaborated on psychological causes underpinning environmental or behavioural causes. For instance, HB told the following narrative about Card 1:

*"He tried to play the violin but he failed and now he doesn't try anymore. He sits and thinks now first about his problems. He doesn't feel like going on. He's given up now. He feels he's not good enough to play. He's just given up. He feels neglected; he feels bad. He tries to break the violin or he tries to switch off everyone that's around him. He wants to be alone. He doesn't want to communicate or talk to anyone."*

In a similar vein, RB described a basic internal conflict on Card 6BM:

*"He's thinking something otherwise. He's maybe going to steal someone's stuff or maybe go*

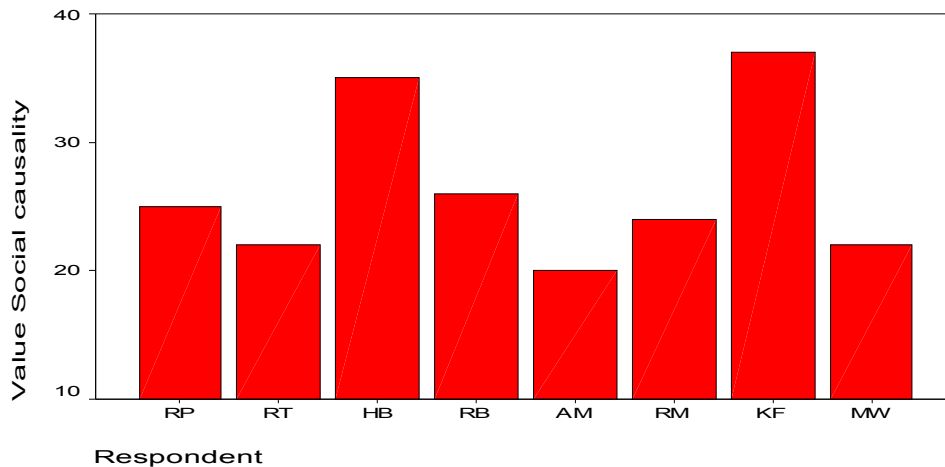
*and hurt someone. He's maybe going to hit. And he thinks now: he's going to do it now; then he also doesn't want to."*

#### **4.2.7.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Simple Internal Motivation**

Participants indicated an ability to elaborate on basic psychological tensions and causes, reflecting an average awareness of internal processes. The cause of events was not singly ascribed to external and visible behavioural causes, but acknowledged the presence of unconscious processes involving a number of conflicting internal positions. Actions were therefore not only understood as simple, unmotivated and reactive responses to external forces, but as a result of internal and intentional motivations. Participants would thus seem able to comprehend the internal antecedents of their violent behaviour, but are likely to be overwhelmed by the malevolence and narcissism of the affective dimensions. Gross deficits in the affective dimensions thus seem to underpin the enactment of violent behaviour.

#### **4.2.8. Understanding of Social Causality: Individual Mean Scores**

The overall mean score on social causality averaged Level 3, indicating a simple but logical understanding of causal processes, although individual mean scores indicated minor logic errors among half of the participants (please refer to Figure 5). Two of the participants scored between Levels 3 and 4, reflective of a basic understanding of the role of psychological events in motivating action. Six of the participants scored between Levels 2 and 3, indicating minor errors in logic. Examples of high (Levels 4 and 5) and low (Levels 1 and 2) scores will be given to illustrate the full range of responses.



**Figure 5: Understanding of Social Causality**

#### 4.2.8.1. TAT excerpt: Complex Internal Causes Interspersed with Minor Logic Errors

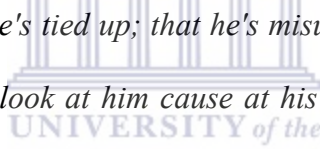
A number of participants scored high level responses on this dimension. KF, in response to Card 7BM, described a father and son acting on complex internal causes following a murder charge and the boy's appearance in court:

*"His father leans over to tell him: 'hey, don't worry you going home'. But in the meantime, by the look of the boy, he knows that he's not going home. Maybe the father thinks it's for the best for the son. The son has to learn by his mistakes and maybe he hasn't learnt yet. That's why his father has to lie. But the son doesn't understand it. Deep down inside his father's feeling bad; guilty. He knows it's wrong. He knows the consequences that his son is gonna feel bad. But it's the best for him, it is for the best. The son's feeling very bad, heartsore, cross, lot of anger. In the end the son finds out, well, what my father was doing was right. At the end the boy changes his life. The father, he becomes proud of his son."*

HB similarly demonstrated a complex understanding of the role of psychological events in his response to Card 12M:

*"Maybe the one that's now lying is busy getting a very bad dream. Cause maybe he's seeing things that make him very fearful. Maybe he did something that worries him a lot. Maybe killed someone. Or something like that. That's why he has bad dreams. His conscience troubles him."*

In stark contrast to the above, AM described actions as responses to simple feelings in his narrative to Card 14:



*"In his room are two girls that he's tied up; that he's misused. Then he dumps them. Cause why? The women don't want to look at him cause at his house, in front of his house, are very dangerous animals; dogs. He sets the dogs on people and that's why the people don't want to look at him. They just think this man is a cruel man. And he then thought that if the people think so, then I am so and he began to do so."*

AM went on to illustrate an illogical causal process in an interaction with the character's parents:

*"Its not right that a man with such an age is without a wife. That's where crime comes from."*



#### **4.2.8.1.1. Commentary on TAT excerpt: Complex Internal Causes Interspersed with Minor Logic Errors**

Much of the previous research on the understanding of causality among violent offenders has highlighted disturbances in their cognitive processes. Sugarman (1980) described idiosyncratic qualities in severely Conduct Disordered adolescents, Gacono & Meloy (1994) identified fantasy-based relational attitudes among 100 Conduct Disordered adolescents, while Gacono *et al.* (2000) noted deficits in reality testing and formal thought disorder among psychopaths, sexual homicide perpetrators and paedophiles. Porcerelli *et al.* (2001), in the only study using the TAT and SCORS, found a capacity to understand events in causal and logical ways, interlaced with logic errors and unexplained transitions.

Participants' mean scores on causality indicated an understanding of simple psychologically mediated causes, although half of the individual mean scores reflected minor logic errors. These findings suggest that violent male juvenile offenders may at times demonstrate illogical attributions and boundary confusion. The congealed deficits of a malevolent affect tone and a narcissistic embeddedness are likely to find temporary satisfaction in the projection of hated parts of the self through these illogical attributions and poor boundary definitions. Moral injunctions are likely to be overwhelmed by these primitive and archaic forces that seek sadistic control and the elimination of threatening external objects via violent means.

### 4.3. CONCLUSION

Although a case study is not within the ambit of this research study, HB's mean scores on the four dimensions will be used to conclude this chapter and illustrate one of the possible manifestations of these internal patterns. HB, a seventeen year old youth, provided a number of insightful responses in his TAT narratives, reflected in his complexity of representations mean score midway between Levels 4 and 5. This high level of functioning indicates an ability to make elaborate inferences about mental states, points of view, motivations and unconscious processes. HB's mean score on social causality averaged between Levels 3 and 4, indicating logical and accurate explanations of social phenomena and a recognition of psychological factors in mediating action. Viewed to the exclusion of these dimensions, HB would appear relatively insightful and conscious of the possible motivations and consequences of both his and others' actions. Nevertheless, HB was found guilty on a number of charges, including housebreaking, theft, robbery, armed robbery, assault (x3) and murder.

HB's performance on affective dimensions does however offer insight into the perpetration of these callous acts by an individual clearly capable of rational thought and complex inference. HB averaged Level 2 on affect tone, indicating a pathologically dysphoric, hostile, threatening and capricious view of the world. His mean emotional investment score similarly averaged Level 2, reflecting a primitive need gratifying orientation with little remorse following impulsive action. HB's pathological levels of functioning on these affective dimensions reveals the potential for cognitively driven structures to be overwhelmed and impaired in times of hyper-arousal, distress or object provocation. These

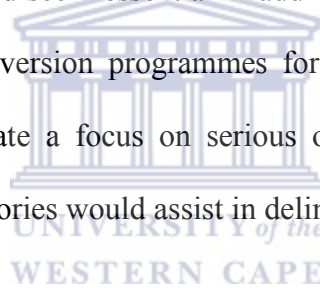
temporarily immobilised cognitive structures would seem to engender narcissistic fulfilment through the mobilisation of malevolent affective components into gross aggressive action. The inability to invest in others in meaningful ways may further serve to protect HB from threatening intrusions into his fragile internal world, as well as to create a lowering of empathy necessary to exert sadistic control over others. HB's object relational patterns thus reveal the pivotal role played by the ascendancy of dysphoric and narcissistic affective dimensions in the immobilisation of cognitively driven dimensions and the enaction of gruesome acts among violent male juvenile offenders.



## **CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Structural recommendations**

The existence of only four Youth Care Centres nationally results in the majority of juvenile offenders being located in sections of adult prisons (Blose, undated). The dearth of rehabilitation programmes for juveniles within these facilities does not augur well for attempts to address increasing levels of juvenile crime (DCS, 2005; Fagan, 2004). The creation of greater numbers of juvenile correctional facilities, coupled with well-designed rehabilitatory programmes, would seem essential in addressing a burgeoning problem. The continued implementation of diversion programmes for juveniles found guilty of minor offences would serve to facilitate a focus on serious offenders, while the provision of statistics on juvenile crime categories would assist in delineating essential areas of focus.



### **5.2. Diagnostic recommendations**

The majority of incarcerated juveniles are likely to fulfil criteria for both Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder (Dr. Koch, personal communication, 2004). As previously discussed, the movement of some 25% of childhood Conduct Disorder diagnoses to Antisocial Personality Disorder at eighteen years of age indicates the persistence of juvenile personality characteristics into adulthood, although current diagnostic criteria offer little insight into these underlying psychological attributes (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Moffit, 1993; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Current American Psychiatric Association (APA) diagnostic criteria for Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct

Disorder are primarily behavioural means of categorisation that do little to ascertain personality characteristics or individual variations among a highly heterogeneous grouping of the population (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Westen & Chang, 2000). These diagnostic limitations impact negatively on the ability to distinguish serious character problems from underlying personality conflicts, as well as the separation of adolescent-limited conduct problems from life-course persistent antisocial behaviour (Moffitt, 1993; Gacono & Meloy, 1994).

The provision of revised diagnostic categories and criteria that encompass a wide range of motivations underlying Conduct Disorder would seemingly be able to assist in the identification of adolescents at risk for developing psychopathy later in life. Diagnostic criteria could hypothetically outline a number of Conduct Disorder typologies, each with differing internal constellations and projected outcomes. Irrespective of such possible changes, projective tests will in all likelihood continue to play a vital role in the identification of violent male juvenile offender object relations due to the intangibility of personality constructs and the accompanying difficulty inherent in reducing complex internal processes to simple present/absent categorisations that lack empirical validation (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Hare, Hart & Harpur, 1999; Westen & Shedler, 1999; Westen & Chang 2000).

### **5.3. Treatment implications**

Criminological explanations linking the genesis of violence to social deprivation appear to be faltering (Legett, 2004). Attempts at diminishing violent male juvenile crime through the

amelioration of various forms of deprivation, including financial, social or familial, may not have the desired effect if interpersonal expectations of others, which have been shown to pervasively influence the current processing of social information, remain malevolently skewed (Westen, 1985). A focus on sociological explanations and interventions to the exclusion of personality characteristics contributing towards adolescent distress and dysfunction is therefore not likely to address adequately the rising levels of violent male juvenile crime.

Research findings among violent male juvenile offenders indicated higher levels of functioning on cognitive dimensions relative to affective domains. The participants were thus able to infer basic psychological states, coupled with a logical and accurate explanation of social phenomena through a simple psychological understanding of the causes of thoughts, feelings and actions. A violent, aggressive, capricious and painful view of the world accompanied a pathologically narcissistic orientation that offered limited insight into the perpetration of callous acts. It seems reasonable to presume that relatively sophisticated levels of cognitive functioning are overwhelmed by states of negative affective arousal, leading to the violent enaction of a malevolent and need-gratifying internal world.

Violent male juvenile offenders with similar object relational patterns to those identified may cognitively comprehend the potential benefits of therapeutic interventions, although the violent nature of their internal worlds may severely impair the development of a trusting therapeutic relationship. In addition, therapists may be viewed with a narcissistic contempt necessary to protect threatening intrusions into the offenders fragile internal worlds and so

permit their unempathic and sadistic control over others. Difficulty maintaining consistent boundary definition, coupled with fluctuations in logical attributions may further contribute to the projection of unwanted aspects of the self onto the therapist. Counter-transferences of rage, or a wish to abandon their clients, may emerge in an obtuse attempt by the offenders to confirm their pathological internal representations.

#### **5.4. Research implications**

Little research has been conducted on the underlying working representations of clinical or non-clinical adolescent samples (Westen & Chang, 2000). Violent male juvenile offenders appear to represent an essential area of research given the escalation of violent crime in this population grouping, as well as the extreme and unremitting frequency of crime committed by a small number of psychopathic males (DCS, 2005; Moffitt, 1993; Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Research involving a larger number of violent male juvenile offenders, as well as a control group, would permit inter-group and cross-dimensional statistical comparisons, as well as generalizability. Given sufficient resources, further research may wish to explore object relational patterns of different types of violent male juvenile offenders. Comparative research between violent male juvenile and adult offenders may offer valuable insight into the continuation of adolescent personality pathology into adulthood.

The use of TAT and SCORS in assessing object relational patterns may not however represent the most efficient tool to do such research. The extensive and labour-intensive training required by the coding manual, as well as the intricate scoring procedure, result in

an inordinate amount of time required for data analysis that may not be possible within the constraints of psychological services offered in correctional facilities. Thematic analysis of TAT responses or the creation of a computerised version of SCORS may represent viable alternatives. Failing this, less labour intensive projective techniques may need to be utilised.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

In this study, object relational patterns were ascertained through the analysis of TAT narratives using SCORS. Overall, findings indicated lowered scores on capacity for emotional investment and affect tone relative to complexity of representations and understanding of causality. Participants thus demonstrated elevations on the cognitive dimensions relative to the emotional domains. These findings suggest that violent male juvenile offenders are able to infer basic psychological states, as well as logically and accurately explain social phenomena through a simple psychological understanding of the causes of thoughts, feelings and actions. Viewed in isolation, the results on the cognitive dimensions may well be presumed to indicate an average level of general functioning.

Performances on the affective dimensions did however offer some insight into the callous acts perpetrated by the participants. The juvenile offenders demonstrated a violent, aggressive, capricious and painful view of the world entailing little expectation of interpersonal co-operation. Participants also revealed an accentuated need gratifying orientation and absence of remorse in the face of violent action. The specific combination of these object relation patterns may in all likelihood contribute towards violent action in particularly emotionally distressing moments. While folklore may imagine psychopaths as



murdering, raping and assaulting twenty four hours a day seven days a week, results indicate malevolent and narcissistic imperatives to be mediated largely by average levels of cognitive functioning. It seems that certain overwhelmingly distressful circumstances are likely to activate pathological emotional dimensions, resulting in a loss of perspective normally offered by the cognitive realms.

In addition, and consistent with previous Rorschach studies of sexual homicide perpetrators (Gacono *et al.*, 2000; Meloy *et al.*, 1994) and Porcerelli *et al.*'s. (2001) case study of a psychopathic serial sexual homicide perpetrator, variations in scores were only found across cognitive dimensions. Individual mean scores on complexity of representations indicated an ability to represent others multidimensionally while simultaneously struggling with the definition of characters in clearly bounded ways. Similarly, results on the social causality dimension indicated a number of illogical attributions. These variations, coupled with a consistently dysphoric affect tone and narcissistic orientation to the world, may in all likelihood facilitate the projection of unwelcome and tension-inducing aspect of the self, thereby eliciting responses of rage or abandonment and so confirming simple and malevolent internal representations. The confirmation of these hostile representations may serve to further enhance malevolent and narcissistic imperatives, thereby necessitating the destruction of perceived external threats in a perverse attempt to restore a delicate internal equilibrium. Certain situational contexts thus appear able to overwhelm the violent male juvenile offenders' ability to comprehend the multidimensional nature of others, as well as the basic tenets of social causality, resulting in the violent enactment of a grossly malevolent and narcissistic internal world.

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**APPENDIX A: A Brief Synopsis of Measures of Object Relations**

(From: Westen, 1991b: 56-74)

